

Jonah 1; Jonah 3; II Kings 14:24-27; Jonah the Reluctant Prophet I. Jonah's Rebellion II. Jonah's Prayers III. The LORD's Compassion

Congregation of our Lord Jesus Christ, have you ever been reluctant to do the work set before you? I

imagine that most of us have looked at a job- a task- or a responsibility with a sense of disdain. You are not looking forward to it, so you postpone and delay- hoping someone else will do it. Like saving your vegetables until all the other good food is consumed- in the hope that you will not have to eat them. Or postponing the cleaning of toilets- in the hope that someone else will do that work. Well, today we find a prophet who postpones- even tries to run away from his calling to preach the gospel in a foreign land. Now Jonah was a prophet of the Northern tribes of Israel- as we read from II Kings 14. He had a good news message for the Israelites- even though their king was one of the most wicked- God had mercy on the nation for the sake of His name. The covenant people were not wiped out- they were saved by the LORD as he used the hand of wicked king Jeroboam. So the Israelites as a whole and Jonah in particular has witnessed the undeserved mercy and kindness of God- but the question is- will this mercy and kindness of God be extended to others? Last week we considered the prophet Obadiah and His message of impending doom and destruction of the nations. Now we come to Jonah- and we find out that there is more than one-way God can overturn the nations! In fact, Jonah gives us a proper balance- God will bring down and overthrow all of His enemies- either by changing their hearts and turning them into His people- or by hardening their hearts and overthrowing them with destruction. If Obadiah was perhaps the least known prophet- Jonah is likely one of the best or well-known prophets. But beyond the whole fish episode, do we really know what this book is about. Well, Jonah is unique as a minor prophet. Most of the minor prophets focus on a message and say little about the prophet themselves. While in this book, the message is the person- the whole focus is on the life and actions of this reluctant prophet. Jonah lived around 750 BC- or about 30 years before the destruction of the Northern tribes by the hand of the Assyrians. His name means dove- and his father's name means truth. So we have the son of truth whose name means dove called to preach to a foreign land. We consider this theme: God uses a reluctant prophet to display His own compassion and mercy to the nations.

I. Jonah's Rebellion

In our first point we consider the various stages of Jonah's rebellion- what did he do and why was he so hesitant to go to Nineveh? Well, the first reason why Jonah was less-inclined to go to Nineveh is because Nineveh was not located within the nation of Israel- it was outside the bounds of the covenant tribes- these were not Abraham's descendants. You will note that Jonah was happy and willing to bring a message of peace and prosperity to a wicked king in II Kings 14- because that king ruled over Israel. But he was not even willing to bring a message of woe and warning to this foreign land. If Isaiah was known to say in Isaiah 6- here am I, send me! Jonah would be known to say- I am not here- do not set me! Added to this fact, the Assyrians were a mortal enemy to the nation of Israel. This was not a far-flung country that had no connection to the Jewish people- it would be this very nation that would encamp against the Northern tribes and conquest the capital of Samaria in 722. Having received the word of the LORD in 1:2- arise and go. Jonah arises and goes the other way! In v. 3, he rose to flee- going West instead of East- and he lays down to sleep in the boat instead of rising to preach! He tries to hide from God- tries to thwart God's plan- and buys a ticket to Spain instead of going to Iraq! He is cold toward the lost and shows no concern for the ignorant nations. And when the wind and the waves rise up against him- he still rebels. He says to the sailors in 1:12- throw me into the sea. Was Jonah choosing death- kill me by drowning me in the sea. We know that Jonah does ask for death in 4:8- where he is angry enough to die. But after being thrown into the Mediterranean Sea, God appoints a big fish to swallow him and bring him to the proper shore. Given another opportunity in 3, Jonah does obey- but even now his heart is not in it! He goes- under duress! He may be obeying on the outside, but on the inside, he is still rebelling. We can see this from his response in ch. 4. It displeased Jonah greatly- and he was very angry. Even when he does what he is supposed to do- he only does the minimum and he does it with a sour attitude. And when the Ninevites respond, he gets angrier still. For Jonah, God's mercy is all good and fine if it is given to my people. He has received mercy, but he refuses to show mercy to others. This is a reminder to us all- for us we do not normally sin because we do

not know what to do- but rather we sin because we don't want to do what we should! Our desires- like Jonah's are all wrong! We are selfish and lazy- we whine and complain like children in our own ways.

II. Jonah's Prayers

In our second point, we find that this book contains 2 prayers- the first one is a sort of confession and gratitude, while the second prayer is of bitter anger. The first prayer of Jonah makes up chapter 2- and it takes place in the belly of this great fish. In this chapter, we find notes of praise and confidence. I called to you- and you heard me. I was driven away, but I will yet see you. I was covered in a watery grave, but I will be brought up. There are some very interesting, resurrection images that Jonah brings to light. There is a definite motif of descent into hell and ascent unto life. And as you know, Jesus references the sign of Jonah in Mt. 12 to describe His own burial and resurrection from the grave after 3 days. But what is missing is a confession of sin- and any consideration of others. Note that Jonah does not repent of his deeds that brought him to this point, he does not pray for the safety of the sailors whose life was in danger because of his actions, nor does he pray for success in his missionary journey to the Ninevites. All of Jonah's words are concerning his own predicament and his gratitude for God's mercy which he is enjoying! Now there is nothing wrong with praising God for His mercies and benefits which He has shown to you- giving thanks for the blessings that He has given to you personally and specifically. But as we will see in our second prayer, Jonah still has much to learn about God's nature and the extent of His mercy! Jonah's second prayer is found in ch. 4:1-4. Here we get true insight as to why he did not want to go to Nineveh in the first place. Seeing the repentance in Nineveh- noticing how the 40 day window came and went- failing to see the fire and brimstone that he had longed for- Jonah cries out in an angry prayer. I knew you were so gracious and merciful- how you were slow to anger- and that is why I did not want to come here. Here Jonah uses the very words of God from Ex. 34- he uses the very attributes of God as a reason to be angry with God! Jonah goes so far as to rebuke God for showing mercy! In fact, it was literally evil in his sight! It was a bad thing- an evil event- that God would show mercy to this people group! Even though his own people- the Israelites had long received this same mercy- and added to that- he himself was the recipient of God's mercy at that

present moment- even now Jonah was still sullen! When Jonah received compassion in ch. 2- he was thankful to God. When others receive this compassion, Jonah becomes angry and he rebukes God. Such hypocrisy- foolish pride fills the heart of this prophet. Where before Jonah was thankful that his life had been spared- now Jonah asks God to end- to terminate his life because God has shown mercy to these barbarians.

III. The LORD's Compassion

As I said before, this book is unique because it focusses in on the person of Jonah- his life is the message. But when we take a larger view, we see that it is really about God displaying His characteristics to Jonah- and thus we see what God is like as He reveals Himself to Jonah and the nations in this book. There are three words that really get to the heart of this book, those words are appointment, overturn and compassion. The appointment of God is evidenced is how everything works out just as God designed- from the sending of the wind and waves, to the sending of the fish, to the sending of the plant and the little worm that killed the plant. The overturning or overthrowing nature of this book is seen in how God overturns nations- overthrows kingdom by humbling the hearts of the pride as seen in 3:4. God does overthrow this city- but not as Jonah wanted. He overthrew the city by humbling the people- by softening their hearts by His Spirit. And the third, theme word is that of compassion. Now the first example of the LORD's compassion is evidenced in His patience with Jonah! How long didn't the Lord show His compassion to this reluctant and rebellious prophet? How many opportunities didn't the LORD give him- calling him back to obedience? Sparing his life from the water and from the fish- refusing to strike him down even when he asked for death. In Jonah's anger he sinned, but God relented and did not destroy his servant. Patiently He taught Jonah- and teaches us- about true compassion! That He is longsuffering- gracious and merciful as Psalm 145 says- slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love. But God's mercy is also evidenced by the sailors in ch. 1. These men on the ship also testified to God power- but also His tenderness in sparing their lives. They came to know the one, true God by way of this reluctant prophet. They ended up fearing the LORD- and offering pleasing sacrifices and vows to Him. God uses this rebellious prophet- to bring a ship full of sailors- into His

presence so that these men too might know and worship the one true God. And let us not forget the entire city of Nineveh- how this great city- full of people and animals- how these also came to experience God's mercy.

Not only do we see compassion in God's dealing with Jonah- we have the two groups of gentiles that also hear Jonah's words. The second example of God's mercy is seen in His kindness to the Gentile sailors.

The third proof given in this book of God's compassion- now on the nations- is seen in His persistence in getting a message to the Ninevites.

It seems that whenever Jonah opens his mouth, people are converted! They all believe him, and respond to his message with repentance and fear- sorrow for their sins! Jonah is the most successful prophet- and yet he hates every minute of it! Whenever he speaks, people are saved from destruction- and he can't stand it! This little book is also a warning for us- for those who are inside the circle of the covenant. We, like Jonah, can have a cold faith. We know the promises of God are for us and our children- but we think little of those who are lost. Jonah reminds us- His mercy, love and compassion are not just for us but He is also concerned about them! Those over there- their plight is also His focus. We note how this book ends- in 4:11 God asks a question- should I not pity- should I not have compassion on a great city- thousands of people- and all those animals? Jonah had plenty of pity and compassion for His own people- He pitied himself most of all. Jonah even had pity on that plant that died in v.10. But shouldn't God have pity- compassion- concern on His people- men and women created in His image? Shouldn't he have concern for their wellbeing and spiritual state? This is a chastisement on the church- do we really care that people are rushing to the grave with no hope? Jonah is a warning to us all- dare we limit God's compassion to us while thinking little of those who are lost. May we never be accused of doing nothing and caring less about our lost neighbors. Pray for them- and reach out as God gives opportunity.

Added to this, Jonah's message warns against presuming God's mercies without responding in faith. As Jesus warns in Mt. 12:41, the men of Nineveh will rise up in the last day to rebuke those who heard the message of the gospel while refusing to repent! I mean, think of it! The whole city was set on fire- their world turned upside down- by 1, short sermon. 40 days, and Nineveh will be overthrown. This 5-word sermon in the Hebrew was short and to the point- leaving little room for misunderstanding. And the people of this great city believed- repented- and were spared! How much more we who have heard the full revelation- the steady diet of pure milk of God's Word- how much more should we believe and repent of our sins!