

- Welcome to our study of the prophet Jonah
 - When we open our Bibles to study the stories of great men and women of faith, we expect to find stories of faith and obedience
 - Today on the other hand, we find a story of faith and disobedience
 - A story where the victim is guilty of the crime, the hero is a fish, and the moral of the story is less like God's man and more like the villains
 - The book of Jonah is familiar to almost every Bible student, if only in a passing way
 - In fact, though it is a historical account, it is structured in many respects like a long parable...only 48 verses long
 - But the story packs so much wisdom in four short chapters, and the action begins immediately as the Lord brings Jonah a new mission

Jonah 1:1 The word of the LORD came to Jonah the son of Amittai saying,

Jonah 1:2 “Arise, go to Nineveh the great city and cry against it, for their wickedness has come up before Me.”

Jonah 1:3 But Jonah rose up to flee to Tarshish from the presence of the LORD. So he went down to Joppa, found a ship which was going to Tarshish, paid the fare and went down into it to go with them to Tarshish from the presence of the LORD.

- Jonah was one of the last prophets to the Northern Kingdom of Israel in the final years prior to their exile in 722 BC
 - Jonah was from a small town in the Galilee
 - And he prophesied under the reign of King Jeroboam II, another in the long line of evil kings that ruled over the Northern kingdom
 - Jonah is described as the son of Amittai, whose name means truthful – a man we know nothing more about
 - But the fact that Jonah's father is named in the story is important because it adds weight to the view that the story of Jonah is literal, historical fact
 - We live in relativistic and cynical times
 - So many Christians will dismiss as fiction any part of the Bible that presents supernatural workings of God
 - And this kind of cynicism has established itself in many of today's seminaries and Biblical training institutions
 - Rising out of this movement was the conclusion that Jonah was not historical fact but simply allegory or metaphor
 - One of the casualties of this trend is the historical view of Jonah
 - Today, you can find many seminaries and churches teaching Jonah as little more than a fable told for the purpose of teaching some kind of moral
 - Prior to the rise of Biblical criticism, the story of Jonah was always considered to be

literal fact

- Both early Christian fathers as well as Jewish rabbinical leaders had never questioned the literal historical accuracy of the text
- Even more important, Jesus Himself made reference in Luke 11 to the Book of Jonah as a literal historical work
 - Drawing a comparison that the generation in Jesus' day would receive no more revelation than the generation living in Nineveh
 - Such a comparison would be nonsensical if the story of Jonah was merely metaphor rather than a historical fact
 - So if you are prepared to accept Jesus as Lord and Christ, then you must be equally prepared to accept His view of Jonah as real and factual
- Similarly, we should note that the book itself opens with a reference to Jonah's father, which adds weight to the conclusion that Jonah was a real man
 - And the events of his story therefore are real events
- Nineveh was the last capital city of the Assyrian kingdom
 - It occupied about 1800 acres along the eastern banks of the Tigris river in Mesopotamia
 - Today, the ruins of Nineveh stand opposite Mosul in present-day Iraq
 - Nineveh's history goes back to the earliest days after the flood
 - It was established by the first great city builder, Nimrod
 - Nimrod also established Babel, which is south of Bagdad
 - The city was surrounded by a great wall for protection
 - The walls were 100 feet high and 50 feet thick
 - One stretch of the wall ran for 7.5 miles and had 15 gates
 - Living inside and around the city were about 600,000 people, making it one of the great ancient cities
 - The people of Assyria were enemies of the nation of Israel
 - They were idol worshippers and were a warring people
 - At the time Jonah is being sent to Nineveh – around 780 BC – the Assyrian nation was at a weak point in its power
 - The kingdom had given way to invaders from the north such that their border reached barely 100 miles away from their capital city
 - It wasn't until a new king rose to power in 745 BC that the kingdom began to regain its former glory, ultimately leading to their defeat over Israel in 722 BC
- Nineveh's history as an idol worshipping nation and an enemy of God's people was cause for God's command to Jonah
 - Jonah hears from God that he should rise and go cry against Nineveh because of its wickedness

- This is God's pattern with all His prophets
- Like Isaiah who told God, "Hear I am, send me" to the rebellious Southern Kingdom
- Or Ezekiel who heard God say

Ezek. 2:4 "I am sending you to them who are stubborn and obstinate children, and you shall say to them, 'Thus says the Lord GOD.'

Ezek. 2:5 "As for them, whether they listen or not—for they are a rebellious house—**they will know that a prophet has been among them.**

- So God would often send His prophet to proclaim – to cry out – to a people
- Sometimes for the purpose of bringing about repentance
- And sometimes for the purpose of being a witness against them before they receive God's judgment
- Jonah's call here is unique in scripture
 - It was the only time that an OT prophet was sent specifically to a Gentile nation with a call to repentance
 - Never before had God taken note of a nation of Gentiles with a merciful cry for repentance
 - Individual Gentiles were known to receive God's mercy and leave behind their idol worship
 - But an entire nation? No.
 - Much less an enemy of Israel
 - Why did God want Jonah to go to Nineveh?
 - The words for cry against are *qara al*
 - They have a wide range of meanings, including call out or proclaim over
 - There is a distinct sense of proclaiming with an expectation of a positive outcome
 - We'll examine the ultimately prophetic picture of Jonah's call as we reach the fourth chapter
 - But for now, the answer is simply because God desired to show mercy on the city of Nineveh
 - And He selected Jonah as His instrument to accomplish this purpose
 - In response to this call, we see Jonah's bizarre response in verse 3
 - Jonah jumps up immediately, and promptly disobeys God
 - Immediately upon hearing God's instructions, Jonah leaves for Joppa to find a ship headed to Tarshish
 - To fully appreciate what Jonah did here, you have to consult a map

- If you were to draw a line from Nineveh to Joppa, it would almost run directly through the heart of Gath-hepher, Jonah's hometown in the Galilee
 - In other words, Jonah chose to travel in haste to Joppa, a point 180 degrees away from Nineveh
- And he's not content to simply place himself a little farther away from Nineveh
 - When he reaches Joppa, he then looks for a boat headed to Tarshish
 - Tarshish is the name for several ancient cities, but most likely the one in view here is the region in present-day Spain
 - Which represented a place about as far away from Israel as any man could go in that day (2,400 miles away from Joppa)
- What Jonah did was try to place himself as far from Nineveh as he could
- And why? What is Jonah trying to accomplish?
 - Think about it...if Jonah simply didn't want to obey God's command to preach to the Assyrians, he could have just stayed where he was
 - His hometown was already hundreds of miles away from Nineveh
 - If Jonah simply wanted to be disobedient, then sitting put in Gath-hepher would have been just as effective as running to Tarshish
 - And it can't be that Jonah was upset at the prospect of a long trip to Nineveh
 - Because he just set out on a journey even farther than the one God asked him to take
 - So why take off in this way?
- Verse 3 tells us: To leave the presence of the Lord
 - This term is a common one in scripture, and it refers to God's localized physical presence in the Temple or elsewhere
 - The same phrase is used when Adam and woman hid from God in the garden
 - Or when Cain left when he was banished following the murder of Abel
 - And we're told that Mt. Horeb quaked from the presence of the Lord
 - It can also refer to how Jonah personally experienced the Lord's presence in Israel
 - Jonah had heard from God on numerous occasions in the Land of Israel
 - And Jonah associated the land in which he lived as a place God dwelled and interacted with His people
 - So knowing that he wasn't prepared to obey God's voice, Jonah determines to leave God's presence
 - It doesn't mean that Jonah thought he could run so far that God couldn't find him or know his whereabouts
 - Jonah, like any prophet, would have understood that God was omnipresent and always aware of his thoughts and actions and whereabouts
- There were essentially three reasons for why Jonah is running so far away

- First, he assumed that if he went far away, then God would have to use another man to do His will
 - It was an issue of availability
 - If Jonah wasn't available, then he wouldn't be the one that would go to Tarshish
 - This is a disobedience calculated to force God's hand into accomplishing His purpose through a different means
- Secondly, Jonah was trying to run down the clock
 - We learn later in Chapter 3 that the message God gave Jonah to deliver to the Ninevites said that unless the city repented, the city would be destroyed in 40 days
 - So, presumably Jonah was trying to get so far away that the clock would run out before the city heard the proclamation
- The final reason is one we all share with Jonah
 - The natural thing for any of us to do whenever we decide to disobey God's direction is that we instinctively run from His presence
 - There are times for each of us when we know what God would have us do in a particular situation
 - Like Jonah, we've all heard from God in some way
 - Perhaps by an impression God leaves on our heart
 - Or by the counsel of a godly friend
 - Or through the clear teaching of scripture as revealed to us by the Holy Spirit
 - And like Jonah we clearly understood it was a word from God, yet it wasn't the word we wanted to hear
 - It didn't suit us
 - And so we turned and went our own way
 - And like Jonah, this wasn't the kind of disobedience that used to come naturally to us as unbelievers
 - This is the kind of disobedience unique to a child of God
 - This is a sin of rebellion that defines all of us from time to time
 - And when the believer makes a choice to disobey God, we naturally run from God
 - Like Jonah, we felt compelled to leave God's presence
 - For Jonah, that meant fleeing Israel
 - For us it may take the form of forgoing the company of that friend through whom God has been speaking
 - Or perhaps we avoid speaking with the Bible teacher or pastor who taught us God's word

- Or, perhaps it means forsaking the gathering by stopping attending church altogether
- One way or another we run from God, because of the conviction and the shame and stubbornness
- Sin separates us from God
 - As an unbeliever it separates us eternally
 - But even after we become a believer, it can separate in the sense of cutting off fellowship
 - Not because God forsakes us over our sins, but because our sinful choices bring conviction and shame that drive us away from His presence
 - And so we compound our own mistake
 - We disobey and grieve the Spirit in us
 - And then unless we repent and turn back to God, we often experience a diminished willingness to seek His presence in worship, in study and in prayer
 - It's no coincidence that many people drift away at times of crisis brought about by their own disobedient choices
- But we still haven't addressed the fundamental question here
 - Why is Jonah so determined not to obey, in confidence that God would accomplish His purpose for Nineveh through him?
 - God would bring repentance to the Ninevites and forgive them
 - In fact, if you read ahead to the end of the story, then you know that Jonah's concerns were well founded
 - But even at this point in the story, I want you to consider that this man's disobedience to God's call was not one resulting from a lack of faith
 - When we study Chapter 4 in a few weeks, we'll study this in more depth
 - But even now, take note that what Jonah is doing is running because he has faith
 - Because he knows and trusts in God's power and ability to accomplish His purpose, Jonah is determined not to go to Nineveh
 - What Jonah feared most was that the word of God would have its natural effect and that Jonah would be a party to it
 - It would bring repentance and mercy, resulting in a pardon for the city and its people
- Dr. Thomas Constable uses a powerful analogy to explain how difficult it would have been for Jonah to consider this prospect
 - Imagine God spoke to a Jew in 1944 living in a Polish concentration camp, and instructed the Jew to travel to Berlin to proclaim a call for repentance
 - And imagine the Jew knew that God was prepared to pardon the entire German leadership and nation for their crimes against the Jewish people during WWII

- How difficult would it be for that Jew, as he looked upon the misery and death all around him in the camps, to gather himself up and head to Berlin with that message
 - A message he knew would result in the saving of these people
 - Could he bring himself to do it?
- Or instead, would he flee from that calling, and refuse to participate in God's plan?
 - You can understand, perhaps, why Jonah has the reaction he has
- So Jonah begins his walk toward Joppa, finds his ship, and boards it for Tarshish

Jonah 1:4 **The LORD hurled a great wind on the sea and there was a great storm on the sea so that the ship was about to break up.**

Jonah 1:5 **Then the sailors became afraid and every man cried to his god, and they threw the cargo which was in the ship into the sea to lighten it for them. But Jonah had gone below into the hold of the ship, lain down and fallen sound asleep.**

Jonah 1:6 **So the captain approached him and said, "How is it that you are sleeping? Get up, call on your god. Perhaps your god will be concerned about us so that we will not perish."**

- As the ship gets underway, the Lord takes steps
 - He brings a great wind against the ship
 - And the force of the storm was so great, it put the ship at the breaking point
 - The greatest danger to a ship in high seas was not the threat of capsizing but the threat that the keel might snap in tow
 - If the waves are too violent, the ship could end up perched on the edge of a wave so that the keel of the boat would be suspended in the air and then snap downward under its own weight
 - This storm was so strong that the crew felt that such an event was possible
 - These are experienced seamen, so their fear suggests just how dangerous the conditions were
 - It's fascinating to watch as God pursues Jonah
 - The scripture tells us that God brought the storm upon the ship
 - And we know immediately that God is doing this to force Jonah's hand...but in a particular way
 - Why is God pursuing Jonah in this way?
 - God called Jonah to this mission, but we know that God is not dependent on Jonah
 - Why not leave Jonah alone and find someone else?
 - And on the other hand, if God wants to bring Jonah to Nineveh, why go about it in this way? Why not just pluck Jonah up and transport him to Nineveh?

- Or better yet, bar him from ever entering the boat or leaving for Joppa?
- It's as though he gives Jonah just enough rope to hang himself, doesn't it?
- The answer is simple and yet not so simple
 - The simple answer is that God has determined to work through Jonah, and God does not change His mind
 - God purposed to work through Jonah to bring a message of repentance to Nineveh
 - For this was the purpose God had in calling Jonah as a prophet in the first place
 - And Jonah wasn't going to change God's decision by changing location
 - Paul puts it this way in Romans 11

[Rom. 11:29 for the gifts and the calling of God are irrevocable.](#)

- God called Jonah and gifted Jonah, and these were sovereign decisions
 - And they are irrevocable because God, being God, knows the future and therefore He already has all the information He needs to determine the proper course for His plans
 - Moreover we can't run far enough to escape that call
 - Jonah is the man who will bring God's word to Nineveh and if so, then Jonah has two choices
 - He can go to Nineveh the easy way or he can go the hard way
 - So when He places a calling on a man's life, it will never end
- The second answer is a more complex
 - God's purpose here goes far deeper than merely saving the city of Nineveh
 - God is working to teach Jonah a lesson
 - If God's purpose was merely to save Nineveh, He could do it far more effectively and efficiently without Jonah
 - Even if Jonah obeyed God from the start, it would still have been easier to send an angel or to appear as a pillar of cloud
 - But yet God desires to work through Jonah to make a point – both to Jonah and to us today
 - God is going to paint a powerful picture of His mercy and compassion, so He can contrast that with Jonah's selfishness and cold disregard for those who don't know God
 - And the fullness of this picture won't come together until the very end of the book
 - But for now, we need to acknowledge that one of the central themes of this book is the unchallenged sovereignty of God over all things

- Including in His command of His creation
- And His supreme authority in dispensing mercy
- Now returning to the details of the scene we just read in verses 4-6
 - The ship is being tossed to the point of breaking up
 - And the men begin to throw out cargo, because the lighter the ship, the higher it sat in the water and the less chance that it would snap as it crested over the top of a wave
 - Then the crewmen began to cry out to his respective god
 - Now these were pagan men, each praying to some pagan god that existed only in their minds
 - But their desperation and fear of death left them with no hope
 - And as they pray they continue to make trips into the ship's hold to bring up more cargo to toss overboard
 - Evidently the ship's captain takes note of Jonah sleeping in the depths of the ship
 - And this is no light sleep
 - The Hebrew word translated as deep sleep is *radam*
 - It's the same word used to describe the deep sleep that came upon Adam when he had a rib removed
 - The same sleep that Abram experienced when God made His covenant with Abram
- How does a man sleep through a storm like this?
 - It should remind you of a similar story in the Gospels when Jesus fell asleep
 - In Luke 8 when the storm came upon the Sea of Galilee and Jesus slept soundly in the hold of the boat
 - When we studied the scene in Luke, we understood that Jesus' ability to sleep resulted from His confidence that they would reach the other side as He intended
 - The storm wasn't going to harm them because God's purpose was that they make it to the other side
 - The disciples just didn't appreciate that fact, so they feared the storm
 - Likewise, the pagan sailors panicked because to their understanding, the storm represented an angry god intent on destroying them all
 - But Jonah knew better
 - He knew that God was angry with him
 - More importantly, Jonah knew that God wanted to bring Jonah to Nineveh to preach
 - And this Jonah didn't want to do

- So, what does Jonah have to fear? Nothing really
 - Jonah probably reasoned that one of two things was true under the circumstances
 - Either God was using the storm to force Jonah to go to Nineveh, in which case it's clear that God wasn't going to kill Jonah in the storm
 - Or God was intent in using the storm to kill Jonah as punishment for disobedience
 - But either way it makes no difference to Jonah
 - And as we read through this story, it becomes increasingly evident that Jonah was perfectly content with facing death
 - Death doesn't bother Jonah, as a man of faith in the living God
 - Just as every Christian should have no fear of death, and even look forward to it because of the promises that come with it
 - In other words, Jonah would rather die than participate in God's plan for Nineveh
- Consequently, while all the other sailors are panicking over the storm, Jonah is so much at peace, he can enjoy the deepest sleep
 - He has no reason to pray to God, for he has no interest in deliverance
 - He will not be persuaded by the storm, and should God destroy him, he will have won the battle in a sense, having avoided preaching in Nineveh
- So when the sailor lays eyes on the inexplicable sight of Jonah sleeping through the storm, he admonishes Jonah for not participating in the crew's efforts to pray for help
 - What a remarkable picture...I mean really
 - Jonah understands what's going on here
 - But he won't seek God, if not for himself, at least for these poor men he has subjected to his circumstances
 - In fact, he won't even take the time to explain to them what's happening, not yet anyway
 - And the pagan captain...
 - A man who doesn't know the true God
 - Who isn't to blame for the circumstances
 - This man has to order Jonah, the prophet of the living God, to participate with the crew in prayer
 - Consider what this tells us about Jonah
 - Already, we can see his stubbornness
 - But now we're beginning to appreciate Jonah's selfish and uncaring heart, particularly toward Gentiles – a group that largely didn't know the Lord God in Jonah's day
 - Remember, the entire story of Jonah exists because the prophet was unwilling

to be used by God to bring repentance to a Gentile people that he hated

- And now he has so little regard for the men on this ship that he shows complete apathy for their circumstances
 - He thinks only of himself
 - And the last statement in the verses I read is really the most memorable statement from our first week in our study
 - “Perhaps your god will be concerned about us so that we will not perish”
 - By its tone it implies a degree of sarcasm
 - Perhaps your god will be concerned about our predicament, because obviously you aren’t, Jonah
 - You don’t seem to care about anyone but yourself
 - There are few character flaws that handicap us more in our service to and usefulness to God than selfishness – perhaps second only to pride
 - When we are selfish in our time, our service, our finances, our relationships, in our love...
 - We become virtually useless to God, except to made an example of
 - As you may remember from our teaching in Luke Chapter 8 on the sower and the seed
 - The parable’s point was to emphasize how pointless, how sad it is, to see a man or woman raised up by God for the purpose of bearing fruit...
 - Only to have that man or woman live merely for themselves, caught up in the cares and concerns of this world, like the plant choked off by weeds
 - Because just like a farmer who raises up crops in order that they might bear seed
 - God raises up men and women so that they might bear fruit unto Him in this world
 - Because while the gifts and calling of God are irrevocable, the blessings that accompany our obedience are not
 - I hope this introduction to Jonah has piqued your interest in the meaning of the story of Jonah and for what we will learn in the coming weeks
 - Though the story of Jonah is short, it’s loaded with meaning
 - And it’s aimed squarely at an audience of believers, almost like a mirror held up before us
 - And as we study, we’ll be taking note of how it reflects on our own behavior and attitudes as men and women called by the living God to be His messengers
 - To a world that does not know our Lord and is the object of His compassion

- Welcome back to our second week in the story of Jonah, a man who refused to obey God's call
 - And when we last saw our hero, he was sound asleep in the steerage of a Phoenician sailing vessel
 - All the while being tossed in a storm so violent, that the captain and crew were certain they would die without supernatural intervention
 - The storm was a result of God's determination to bring Jonah to Nineveh as He had ordered
 - But Jonah was determined to thwart God's plan, or at the very least not participate in it
 - And as we ended on verse 6, we heard the pagan ship captain rather sarcastically ordering Jonah to pray to his God for relief
 - It became our best picture yet into Jonah's heart
 - A selfish man concerned only with himself, uncaring for the fate of these sailors caught up in his spat with God
 - And moreover, as Jonah flees from God we are reminded that it's hatred for the Ninevites in the first place that led him to disobey God
- As we prepare to return to the text tonight, it's worth mentioning that Jonah probably didn't jump up and begin to pray as the captain requested
 - After all, what would Jonah say to God?
 - Jonah knew why there was a storm and he knew precisely how to stop it
 - What kind of prayer from Jonah would God hear except "forgive me, I'll go to Nineveh"?
 - There is a time for prayer, and then there is a time to get off your knees and do what God has told us to do
 - So as Jonah continues to ignore the crew's plea for help, we see them take matters into their own hands

Jonah 1:7 Each man said to his mate, "Come, let us cast lots so we may learn on whose account this calamity has struck us." So they cast lots and the lot fell on Jonah.

Jonah 1:8 Then they said to him, "Tell us, now! On whose account has this calamity struck us? What is your occupation? And where do you come from? What is your country? From what people are you?"

Jonah 1:9 He said to them, "I am a Hebrew, and I fear the LORD God of heaven who made the sea and the dry land."

Jonah 1:10 Then the men became extremely frightened and they said to him, "How could you do this?" For the men knew that he was fleeing from the presence of the LORD, because he had told them.

- The crew decides that the god of the seas must be angry at someone on the boat
 - So they decide to determine who that person must be
 - They throw lots (dice)
 - Throwing lots to learn who was to blame
 - And the belief was that the god the men worshipped would intervene supernaturally to produce a certain result on the dice
 - And by that result, the men could know the answer to a question
 - So before the dice were thrown, the men would arrange the question so that the throw on the dice could make a sensible answer
 - This was a practice common among pagans, but it was also a technique that God permitted with the camp of Israel

**Prov. 16:33 The lot is cast into the lap,
But its every decision is from the LORD.**

- God gave the practice to the nation of Israel as part of the Day of Atonement
 - In Leviticus 16 He told the priests to cast lots to determine which goat was set free as the scapegoat and which one was sacrificed on the altar
 - Signifying that God is the one to choose what sacrifice will satisfy Him
- In 1 Samuel, Saul cast lots to determine whose sin was responsible for God's silence before a battle against the Philistines
- In the case of Lev. and 1 Sam., these men were truly seeking God's revelation through the dice
 - But a pagan culture turned to the dice more as superstition or merely as chance
 - As when the Roman soldiers cast lots over Jesus' clothing
- Here I believe the sense is that these men sought divine revelation, even though they didn't know the true God
 - And the lots fell on Jonah
 - Though the text doesn't say this, I think it's clear that they fell this way as a consequence of God's intervention to ensure the guilty party was correctly identified
 - It's as if God is standing nearby pointing at Jonah
 - As if they couldn't figure that out on their own
 - Jonah's already a trouble-maker
- When the lot falls to Jonah, they begin to interrogate him
 - They ask a series of questions
 - Amidst the storm, the roaring wind, tossed, soaked
 - Before looking at the questions, did you notice something else about these men

that distinguish them from Jonah?

- We already talked about how Jonah – the man who knew the true living God – was unwilling to pray
 - But a bunch of pagan men who didn't know God were willing to pray
- The one who had received God's compassion and mercy was unwilling to show any himself
- And now we see the contrast continue
 - After these ungodly men sought divine instruction and received it, they heeded it
 - The lots said Jonah was to blame, and they immediately began to act on what had been revealed
 - In contrast to Jonah who, when he received God's revelation, chose to disregard what he was told and fled from God's presence
 - The contrast between what the prophet of God did and what these heathens do will continue to build as we move through the rest of this chapter
- They ask on whose account has this calamity (or evil) struck us?
 - Their first assumption is that Jonah is the recipient of a curse sent against him by some enemy
 - In other words, they ask Jonah who do you know who would do something like this against you?
 - Who did you upset?
 - They follow that question with what do you do? Where are you from? What people are you from?
 - Tell us about you so we can begin to solve this puzzle and correct our circumstances
 - After battling this storm helplessly for so long, these men must be excited over a glimmer of hope presented by the lots
 - Maybe they have an answer here, something they can use to appease the gods or break the spell
- We don't know whether Jonah gave any answer to the earlier questions, but he finally answers the last question
 - I am a Hebrew
 - This part of his answer was probably not very newsworthy to these sailors
 - The picked Jonah up in Joppa, which was a Jewish seaport
 - So Jonah's origins were hardly a surprise
 - But his next statement probably got their attention
 - He said I fear the God that controls the sea and dry land
 - The word in the Hebrew that Jonah uses here is *yare*, which is translated fear

- It is used to mean both afraid and reverence
- So it's likely that what these men thought Jonah said, was that he was afraid of his God – the one that controlled the sea and land
 - So these men, we're told, became extremely afraid
 - The word there is *yirah*
 - Extreme fear or reverence
- More irony
 - Here's the prophet of God, who knows God and knows His power, saying calmly that He "fears" the God of the sea, while doing his best to ignore the storm
 - Meanwhile, pagan men who don't know this God personally show great fear of him and concern
 - Who really fears God? Who is truly prepared to show Him due reverence and respect?
- It probably worried these men all the more that this was the God of the land and sea
 - The god the Phoenecian culture worshipped was Baal, a pagan god of the sky
 - So when they hear that Jonah worshipped the god of sea and land, it was a real breakthrough for these men
 - They finally could make sense of their circumstances
 - On the other hand, they now knew the real reason to fear – the god of the sea was angry with one of their passengers
 - So naturally, they ask Jonah the question that we have all been thinking since verse 2
 - Jonah, how could you do this?
- Again, here's irony
 - What Jonah had refused to accept, these men understood immediately
 - If you make the God of the sea angry, don't try to escape from him by getting in a boat and heading out to sea
 - It's even worse than they imagine, of course, because what they didn't know was that Jonah's God is the God of everything and everywhere
 - Therefore, there was nowhere Jonah could run. Period
 - How ironic that the man who knew God far better than these pagan Phoenecians couldn't appreciate the futility of his actions as well as they could

Jonah 1:11 So they said to him, “What should we do to you that the sea may become calm for us?”— for the sea was becoming increasingly stormy.

Jonah 1:12 He said to them, “Pick me up and throw me into the sea. Then the sea will become calm for you, for I know that on account of me this great storm has come upon you.”

Jonah 1:13 However, the men rowed desperately to return to land but they could not, for the sea was becoming even stormier against them.

- At the point that these men finally discover the source of the trouble, they realize they have a different problem
 - If the god of the sea is angry at Jonah, what can they do to solve the problem
 - If the problem had simply been that Jonah had failed in some kind of prayer or ritual, then he could have simply performed the act now and placated the angry god
 - Or he could have made a sacrifice or prayer
 - But Jonah's problem was he was running away from a god who was pursuing Jonah
 - So they ask Jonah – what do we do now to appease your angry god and calm the seas?
 - In response to their question, Jonah makes a suggestion that sounds very self-sacrificial, very selfless
 - He says throw me overboard and the seas will calm, because God wants me
 - Jonah explains his answer by admitting that the storm has come upon them because of his disobedience
- While it's nice to see Jonah finally own up to his responsibility for the ship's predicament
 - But don't be fooled
 - Jonah isn't having a change of heart here
 - Jonah didn't say the obvious answer
 - The obvious answer was take me back to Joppa
 - Surely that answer would have calmed the storm
 - God wouldn't have impeded their travel back to Joppa if Jonah was intent on returning so as to obey God
 - That would have certainly brought an end to the storm
 - No, Jonah is still as obstinate as he's been from the beginning
 - He would rather die than see the Ninevites receive God's mercy
 - This confirms what we said last week, that Jonah could sleep in the ship because he wasn't bothered by God's efforts to swamp the ship
 - Death was an acceptable outcome to Jonah
 - Jonah's answer also confirms what we've suspected all along...Jonah has nothing but callous disregard for the welfare of these men
 - He knew what was going on, but up till now he's done nothing to stop it, nothing to help, not even willing to inform the men of what he knows

- He's shown absolutely no love nor respect for these men
- Can it be that someone who knows the God of love, the God of mercy and grace, could stray so far from mercy, grace and love in his own life?
 - I'm certainly willing to answer that question about Jonah, but please don't make me answer for myself?
 - Can I get an Amen?
 - Isn't the power of God's word that we might look upon a man like Jonah as we see him at his worst
 - And perhaps see something of ourselves reflected in his life?
 - And as a result, we experience a little conviction?
 - Because if Jonah is different from us, it's only a matter of degree
 - We may never have taken such dramatic steps as Jonah to avoid showing mercy and forgiveness to God's enemies
 - But Jonah's selfishness and lack of compassion for unbelievers are probably mirrored in our own lives more than we even realize, at least on some days
 - The story of Jonah should be a reminder to us that before we know it, we can become smug and self-centered in our faith
 - And without patience for those who yet remain outside God's grace
- But if Jonah is self-centered, the crew is a picture of mercy
 - Because look at how they respond to Jonah's suggestion
 - They decide that Jonah's answer is bizarre
 - And they immediately recognize that the obvious solution is to take this loser back to port and leave him to his angry God
 - But the storm won't allow them to proceed
 - Isn't this fascinating?
 - The prophet of God, who knows the love and mercy of God, stands resolved to commit suicide rather than obey
 - While a crew of pagan worshippers are so afraid and respectful of this unknown god that they are trying desperately to obey His wishes
 - The prophet of God caring nothing for the welfare of these sailors nor for the welfare of an entire city
 - While heathens who live according to their sinful hearts would rather embark on a difficult and dangerous trip back to Joppa before taking responsibility for the death of this troublemaker
 - Again, irony everywhere you look in this story
- And then in verse 13, a very curious detail
 - As they make every effort to bring Jonah back, the storm gets worse
 - This seems strange doesn't it?

- Wouldn't we expect that as the men make an effort to return that God would make the storm subside, not increase?
- Isn't the purpose of the storm to bring Jonah back?
- Consider something I mentioned last week
 - I asked the question why was God so intent on using Jonah to deliver His message rather than just finding someone else
 - And the answer I gave was that the calling of God is irrevocable
 - But that was only half the answer
 - The other half of the answer is that God was at least as interested in changing Jonah as He was in changing the city of Nineveh
- This is God's pattern throughout scripture
 - We read about God at work but overlook that God's primary purpose is often different than we assume
 - In this case, God desires to bring repentance to Nineveh, yes
 - But even more importantly, God wants to bring repentance to Jonah
 - God is working on Jonah's heart every bit as much as He is on the Ninevites' hearts
 - To help explain how God does a work in us through His call on our lives, I've used an analogy of a father working with his son
- So here we see God intent on working in Jonah's life by how He calls Jonah alongside Him to perform a work in Nineveh
 - And if God were to allow these men to return to Joppa with Jonah on board, then no work could have been accomplished in Jonah's heart
 - Jonah would have arrived in Joppa
 - And maybe Jonah would have been forced to reach Nineveh in some other way
 - And perhaps he would have been forced to declare what God wanted declared
 - But Jonah's heart would have remained unchanged through it all
 - And what's more, those like Jonah in the nation of Israel and in the church today would have lacked the opportunity to learn from this stubborn prophet
 - So God opposes the sailors' efforts to reach Joppa, leaving everything at an impasse
 - The storm threatening their lives
 - An angry God unwilling to accept the sailors' return as long as Jonah's heart remained disobedient
 - And a stubborn prophet who would rather face death than obey God for the sake of a city of Gentiles
 - And so they did the only thing they could do

Jonah 1:14 Then they called on the LORD and said, “We earnestly pray, O LORD, do not let us perish on account of this man’s life and do not put innocent blood on us; for You, O LORD, have done as You have pleased.”

Jonah 1:15 So they picked up Jonah, threw him into the sea, and the sea stopped its raging.

Jonah 1:16 Then the men feared the LORD greatly, and they offered a sacrifice to the LORD and made vows.

- These men lift their voices to a God they’ve never worshipped or even heard of before, and they ask Him for mercy and forgiveness
 - Because they recognize they have no option but to give in to Jonah’s request
 - And they worry about the reaction of this powerful God to their decision to put innocent blood to death
 - They count Jonah as innocent simply because Jonah hadn’t committed any offense for which men are normally condemned to death by other men
 - Jonah was guilty of no crime as far as they knew
 - Maybe we should ask at this point why Jonah didn’t just jump overboard himself?
 - If he knew that was the answer and preferred death to obedience, then why not commit suicide?
 - Probably the easiest answer was he lacked the courage
 - In some ways, it takes more courage to jump overboard yourself than to allow others to do it for you
 - And even in this decision, he shows a lack of compassion for these men
 - These men are so troubled by the prospect of tossing an innocent man to his death, that they say this prayer in advance of the act
 - Which itself reflects a true fear of the living God that they are concerned about His view of their actions
 - But it also illustrates once again how selfish Jonah truly was and how little regard he had for these men
 - [Story of friend in car...]
- So the men pick up Jonah, throw him into the sea and the sea stops raging
 - This scene reminds me so much of the calming of the Galilee by Jesus in the boat with the disciples
 - One word from Jesus and the wind obeys
 - Likewise, the moment Jonah drops in the sea, and the sea stops raging
 - Such a striking display of God’s power and sovereignty over His creation
 - One scholar wrote "The book of Jonah contains within its few pages one of the greatest concentrations of the supernatural in the Bible. Yet it is significant that the majority of them are based upon natural phenomena."

- Though we sit here trying to imagine it, what would it have been like for these men to witness it?
 - Well the text gives us a glimpse into what it did
 - The men see the result of throwing Jonah into the sea and they are struck by fear of the Lord again
 - They offer a sacrifice to this God and make vows
 - We can't be sure what happened in these men's hearts
 - But it's certainly possible – and given the focus of the narrative I think it's likely – that these pagan men came to a faith in the living God
 - Their vows being vows to put aside other gods in order to follow the God of Jonah
 - That outcome certainly fits the overall theme of the book
 - And then one of the most famous and loaded verses in all the Bible

Jonah 1:17 And the LORD appointed a great fish to swallow Jonah, and Jonah was in the stomach of the fish three days and three nights.

- Chapter 1 ends with this amazing, incredible, unbelievable and downright weird turn of events
 - Up to this point, if you didn't know where the story was going, you could go along with all that has happened
 - The story has a certain sense to it that fits
 - Man hears from God
 - Man disobeys God
 - God gets angry and strikes man
 - And then just as the story climaxes, Man is swallowed by a large fish only to remain alive for three days and nights
 - I can't help but imagine a Monty Python cartoon skit
 - It seems like the entire story just took a turn from the sublime to the ridiculous
 - And all by itself, this verse raises so many questions, and for some, so many doubts
 - We'll explore some of those questions briefly tonight, but we're going to save most of our discussion for next week
 - First, what kind of fish can swallow a man?
 - Is this a natural event or a purely supernatural animal created specially for Jonah?
 - Well, let's start with the text
 - The words for great fish in Hebrew are *gadol dag*
 - Which means big fish

- It's used 18 times in the Bible and it always means fish
- There is no Hebrew word for whale used in the Bible
 - And this is not the same word as used for sea monsters or dragons as used in Job
- So it's probably just being used here in the generic sense of a swimming sea creature
 - So it could be a shark or a whale or even some kind of extinct sea creature
 - There are examples of sharks and whales swallowing men whole
 - Though it's probably not possible for a man to exist alive in the fish for days on end apart from God's supernatural intervention
- So as we said earlier, God is working throughout this book in supernatural ways, yet He's largely employing natural phenomenon to accomplish His work
 - And the fish is the natural instrument to capture and preserve Jonah if the alternative is allowing him to drown in the ocean
 - Plus the belly of a fish is also a great place to keep Jonah if you are trying to make a point about the consequences of disobedience
- So, the fish is an unidentified species of sea creature large enough to swallow a prophet whole, and suitable to God's purpose of applying a little pressure to Jonah
 - Jonah jumped out of the frying pan and into the fire
 - When Jonah asked to be thrown overboard, He made a halibut decision
 - Now he must flounder in the belly of this fish, carping over his circumstances, without a sole nearby to comfort him
 - Without a perch to rest upon in a space tighter than a drum
 - Just guppy to be alive
 - Sorry...I just got carried away there for minnow

- Our final verse from last week was one of the climatic moments of this brief book

Jonah 1:17 And the LORD appointed a great fish to swallow Jonah, and Jonah was in the stomach of the fish three days and three nights.

- Last week we explored how God might have accomplished this act
 - And it came down to a supernatural preservation of Jonah
 - But in the midst of trying circumstances
 - Basically, it was better than death, but only barely
 - And as such, it became a convenient way to hold Jonah safe while at the same time placing him in a situation where he could contemplate his circumstances
 - And this week, I'll add one additional consideration
 - God's choice for how to save Jonah included a bonus advantage
 - Fish can swim
 - And a swimming fish can cover significant ground
 - Some species of whale are known to traverse half-way around the globe when migrating
 - So about the time Jonah is ready to leave his fish prison, he will find himself returned back to the shores of Israel
 - A one way ticket to obedience
 - What an awesome display of God's power over His creation to accomplish His will
 - And a sober reminder that when God is determined to accomplish His will through us
 - He can do it the easy way or the hard way

- Verse 17 may have reminded you of a verse we studied from Luke's gospel, which is also in Matthew's gospel
- There comes a moment in both gospels where Jesus is rebuking the Pharisees
- And Jesus draws a comparison between Himself and Jonah
 - Specifically, here's what Jesus says:

Matt. 12:38 Then some of the scribes and Pharisees said to Him, "Teacher, we want to see a sign from You."

Matt. 12:39 But He answered and said to them, "An evil and adulterous generation craves for a sign; and yet no sign will be given to it but the sign of Jonah the prophet;

Matt. 12:40 for just as JONAH WAS THREE DAYS AND THREE NIGHTS IN THE BELLY OF THE SEA MONSTER, so will the Son of Man be three days and three nights in

the heart of the earth.

Matt. 12:41 “The men of Nineveh will stand up with this generation at the judgment, and will condemn it because they repented at the preaching of Jonah; and behold, something greater than Jonah is here.

- So what is the comparison Jesus is making here in Matthew?
 - First, let's understand the circumstances in which Jesus made this statement
 - He is under assault from the Pharisees
 - They considered Jesus to be a fraud and a threat to their authority among the people
 - Jesus had just healed a demon-possessed man who was mute
 - This gets the crowd asking if Jesus could in fact be the real Messiah
 - So at this point, the Pharisees ask Jesus for a sign
 - Asking for a sign meant seeking tangible evidence that the word of the prophet could be trusted
 - It was a test born out of disbelief
 - They needed a sign in order to believe
 - Different from a sign to bolster faith ie. Gideon
- Jesus responds that eagerly seeking (or craving) for a sign was characteristic of an evil and unbelieving generation
 - And to that kind of disbelief, the only sign given would be the sign of Jonah
 - Jesus goes on to quote Jonah 1:17 and then makes a comparison to His own coming death and resurrection
 - So immediately I'm struck by the fact that Jonah's experience in the fish was orchestrated by God so that it could be useful as a picture of Christ
- So again, how is Jonah's experience similar to the sign Jesus would give through His death and resurrection?
 - Let's start with the obvious part of the comparison – the part that Jesus Himself gives us
 - When Jonah comes out of the fish, his return is as if from the grave
 - Having been buried in the sea for three days and nights
 - And the picture of death is magnified even further when we remember that the Jews saw the deep of the ocean as a picture of the abyss
 - The word for abyss is often used to describe the deep sea in the New Testament
 - So for any Jew, Jonah's return from the fish would be an obvious picture of death and resurrection
 - And Jesus' comparison makes that connection all the more obvious for us

- Jonah's experience in the fish was to be a picture of Jesus' time in the grave
 - Of how Jesus went down into the depths of death and returned again
 - But in what way is this a sign to this evil generation facing Jesus in Matt. 12?
- Well consider Jonah's experience a little more in detail, even knowing just what we've learned in Chapter 1
 - Like Jesus in His day, Jonah lived during an evil and unbelieving generation within the northern kingdom of Israel
 - In fact, in Jonah's day, there was another prophet who declared God's word to the rebellious nation of Israel
 - Hosea declared God's coming judgment on Israel

Hos. 5:1 Hear this, O priests!

Give heed, O house of Israel!

Listen, O house of the king!

For the judgment applies to you,

For you have been a snare at Mizpah

And a net spread out on Tabor.

Hos. 5:2 The revolters have gone deep in depravity,

But I will chastise all of them.

Hos. 5:3 I know Ephraim, and Israel is not hidden from Me;

For now, O Ephraim, you have played the harlot,

Israel has defiled itself.

Hos. 5:4 Their deeds will not allow them

To return to their God.

For a spirit of harlotry is within them,

- So we have this interesting situation in Jonah's day
 - Where on the one hand we have Hosea sent to the nation of Israel with a message of judgment
 - And on the other hand, we have Jonah sent through Israel
 - He will be deposited on the Israeli shores and will then proceed to walk through the nation toward Nineveh
 - So in literal terms, Jonah passes by Israel in order to declare mercy to a foreign people – people who were enemies of Israel
 - And though Jonah was a prophet to that kingdom, there is no record of Jonah's ministry produced converts in His own nation
 - Certainly not on the scale as those in Nineveh
 - Though there is no evidence that God ever used Jonah on a large scale to bring the nation of Israel back to Himself
 - Yet here we are watching God go to tremendous effort to bring a Gentile nation

to repentance

- My point here is that God could have done all the same things for His people had He desired to do so
 - But instead, God sent Jonah to a foreign people in order that they might be saved
- So now we have another piece of the puzzle for how Jonah is a sign to the evil generation in Jesus' day
 - Jonah was a man brought back from the grave having been buried for three days at sea
 - And when he returns, he passes over Israel to bring a message of repentance to a foreign people
 - Likewise Jesus, after spending three days in the grave, will bring a message of repentance that passes over the nation of Israel and is received by a foreign people

Rom. 10:19 But I say, surely Israel did not know, did they? First Moses says, "I WILL MAKE YOU JEALOUS BY THAT WHICH IS NOT A NATION, BY A NATION WITHOUT UNDERSTANDING WILL I ANGER YOU."

Rom. 10:20 And Isaiah is very bold and says, "I WAS FOUND BY THOSE WHO DID NOT SEEK ME, I BECAME MANIFEST TO THOSE WHO DID NOT ASK FOR ME."

Rom. 10:21 But as for Israel He says, "ALL THE DAY LONG I HAVE STRETCHED OUT MY HANDS TO A DISOBEDIENT AND OBSTINATE PEOPLE."

Rom. 11:7 What then? What Israel is seeking, it has not obtained, but those who were chosen obtained it, and the rest were hardened;

Rom. 11:8 just as it is written, "GOD GAVE THEM A SPIRIT OF STUPOR, EYES TO SEE NOT AND EARS TO HEAR NOT, DOWN TO THIS VERY DAY."

Rom. 11:9 And David says, "LET THEIR TABLE BECOME A SNARE AND A TRAP, AND A STUMBLING BLOCK AND A RETRIBUTION TO THEM.

Rom. 11:10 "LET THEIR EYES BE DARKENED TO SEE NOT, AND BEND THEIR BACKS FOREVER."

Rom. 11:11 I say then, they did not stumble so as to fall, did they? May it never be! But by their transgression salvation has come to the Gentiles, to make them jealous.

- In Jonah's day, the jealousy would be provoked by God's relationship with the Assyrian nation
 - In the days following Jesus' coming, the jealousy is provoked because of the Church

- We are the Gentiles that have received what Israel has rejected
- We are the ones being received like those Ninevites while the nation of Israel stands temporarily outside, looking in
- But there is still one more piece to this puzzle
 - The sign of Jonah is not just a sign that Jesus is God's prophet sent to save Gentiles
 - Look at the last verse in that passage we read out of Matthew

[Matt. 12:41](#) “The men of Nineveh will stand up with this generation at the judgment, and will condemn it because they repented at the preaching of Jonah; and behold, something greater than Jonah is here.

- From Jesus' statement, it's clear that the sign of Jonah is ultimately a sign of judgment
 - God is prepared to save Gentiles
 - But He is also going to bring judgment to Israel
- Consider the parallels between Jonah and Jesus again
 - In Jonah's day, the judgment against Israel was declared by Hosea

**[Hos. 11:1](#) When Israel was a youth I loved him,
And out of Egypt I called My son.**

**[Hos. 11:2](#) The more they called them,
The more they went from them;
They kept sacrificing to the Baals
And burning incense to idols.**

**[Hos. 11:3](#) Yet it is I who taught Ephraim to walk,
I took them in My arms;
But they did not know that I healed them.**

**[Hos. 11:4](#) I led them with cords of a man, with bonds of love,
And I became to them as one who lifts the yoke from their jaws;
And I bent down and fed them.**

**[Hos. 11:5](#) They will not return to the land of Egypt;
But Assyria—he will be their king
Because they refused to return to Me.**

**[Hos. 11:6](#) The sword will whirl against their cities,
And will demolish their gate bars
And consume them because of their counsels.
And they do not know the LORD.**

- In an fascinating twist, God is preparing to bring judgment against Israel for its unbelief by using the very same people who received His mercy as Israel's conquerors

- Hosea says the Assyrians will become Israel's king, Israel's dominator and oppressor
- These Assyrians are the Ninevites
 - The same people Jonah has been sent to save, albeit a couple of generations later
 - Because one greater than Jonah has come
- Jesus will send His apostles to the Gentiles of the Roman empire
 - These Gentiles will receive mercy while the nation of Israel persecutes the church
- Later it would be this very same nation of Gentiles who God will use to destroy the nation and the temple in AD 70
 - A judgment God declared beforehand through Jesus as a consequence for their rejection of the Messiah
- Therefore, the unbelieving generation in Jesus' day will receive a sign – the sign of Jonah
 - And the sign of Jonah is that of a prophet brought back from the dead to declare mercy to a foreign people
 - Even while that prophet's own people reject the message, it is delivered to a foreign people who receive it joyously
 - And when this happens, it is a sure sign that God is preparing to judge His people for their unbelief
 - So, Jesus tells the unbelieving generation before Him that the only sign they are deserving is a sign of judgment
 - Now back to Jonah in the fish

Jonah 2:1 Then Jonah prayed to the LORD his God from the stomach of the fish,
Jonah 2:2 and he said,

**“I called out of my distress to the LORD,
And He answered me.**

**I cried for help from the depth of Sheol;
You heard my voice.**

Jonah 2:3 “For You had cast me into the deep,
Into the heart of the seas,
And the current engulfed me.

All Your breakers and billows passed over me.

Jonah 2:4 “So I said, ‘I have been expelled from Your sight.
Nevertheless I will look again toward Your holy temple.’

Jonah 2:5 “Water encompassed me to the point of death.
The great deep engulfed me,

Weeds were wrapped around my head.

Jonah 2:6 “I descended to the roots of the mountains.

**The earth with its bars was around me forever,
But You have brought up my life from the pit, O LORD my God.**

Jonah 2:7 “While I was fainting away,

I remembered the LORD,

And my prayer came to You,

Into Your holy temple.

Jonah 2:8 “Those who regard vain idols

Forsake their faithfulness,

Jonah 2:9 But I will sacrifice to You

With the voice of thanksgiving.

That which I have vowed I will pay.

Salvation is from the LORD.”

Jonah 2:10 Then the LORD commanded the fish, and it vomited Jonah up onto the dry land.

- For the first time in the book, we see Jonah praying
 - More than even the content of the prayer, just the fact that Jonah prays is significant
 - Finally, Jonah has been brought low enough, his pride diminished enough, that he's ready to turn to God
 - We all know how Jonah feels, at least a little
 - When everything else fails, then we turn to God
 - When our own efforts fail, we look to God
 - He's the safety net rather than the our first option
- What's even more significant is that Jonah waited three days to pray
 - We don't know how long Jonah tossed in the sea before being swallowed, but it probably wasn't long, since Jews usually couldn't swim
 - But it must have taken some time for Jonah to realize that he wasn't going to drown
 - Instead he was going to be slowly digested by a fish
 - This wasn't what he planned.
 - I think of everything in this amazing story, perhaps this is the most striking detail of the story
 - Jonah tosses and turns in a pitch black slimy, stomach of a fish for three days before resorting to prayer
 - I think I would be praying about the time I passed by the fish's tonsils
- But then we consider the content of the prayer
 - The first thing to notice is it is expressed in the past tense
 - Which suggests that the author – who is likely Jonah himself – is recounting what he prayed looking back on the moment

- This is Jonah's memory of what he prayed while he was in the fish
- But as we consider the content of the prayer, it becomes clear that at the time Jonah was suffering in the fish, he didn't know that he was in a fish
- And the past tense viewpoint helps make clear to the reader what was going on in Jonah's mind at the time, as he did not yet understand where he truly was – in a fish
- Look at the content of the prayer – it's not a prayer to be rescued from a fish
 - Scan the prayer
 - First, there are no direct or even indirect references to a fish
 - No promises to go to Nineveh
 - If you let me out of this fish I will be good
 - Like a child locked in a room
 - Instead, there are only repeated references to Sheol, to the place of the dead
 - Coupled with statements of how God is our salvation from the judgment of death
- Now place yourself in Jonah's mind for a moment as he prays this prayer
 - Verse 2
 - Jonah fell into the water and expected to experience death
 - Now he's been alive for some period of time, probably not realizing that three days had passed until he emerged from the fish
 - So he calls out from the depths of Sheol
 - And God heard his voice Jonah says
 - Verse 3
 - He was in the deep or depths
 - He was engulfed by the water
 - Verse 4 & 5
 - Water engulfed him, seaweed entangled him
 - He expressed how he had been expelled from God's sight
 - Presumably having died and now being held in Sheol awaiting the day of his resurrection with the Messiah, to be with God in His temple
 - Verse 6
 - As he was at the root of the mountains, a reference to the supposed location of Sheol in the depths of the earth below the mountains
 - He was in a prison with bars holding him
 - The pit of the fish's stomach acting in that way
 - Verse 7

- And as he was fainting away in that terrible environment, he credits the Lord with bringing him his prayer
- And he knew God heard it
- Verse 8 & 9
 - While the unrighteous worship idols and forsake God
 - Jonah says he will sacrifice to God, give thanks, and give gifts (that which I vowed I will pay)
 - These are the classic signs of repentance and a renewed commitment to walk with God
 - For salvation is from the Lord
- Jonah assumes he has died and is suffering for his unfaithfulness in Sheol
 - And in his distress he feels God's presence and sends up a prayer of repentance
 - And he trusts God to hear it
 - And as God hears it, Jonah feels certain that God receives it
 - What has happened, in a sense, is God has allowed Jonah to experience the world that awaits unbelievers
 - And in that horrible experience, Jonah has come face to face with what it means to experience God's judgment
 - He's allowed Jonah to walk in the shoes of the unbeliever
 - This scene is so reminiscent of the story of Scrooge in A Christmas Carol
 - A man on the road to ruin is given a chance to see what his hard heart could provoke from God
 - And though Jonah was never in jeopardy because he was saved by his faith
 - He has been disobedient in his unwillingness to go to a people God has determined to save
 - And his disobedience is born out of a lack of compassion for what these people could experience if they were to go to their graves as unbelievers.
 - God not only showed Jonah what the Ninevites needed, but used the experience on the boat to draw a comparison to what he put those men through.
 - Parallels in Chapter 1 and 2
 - Crisis on the sea/Crisis in the fish
 - Sailors praying to Yahweh/Jonah praying to God
 - Sailors delivered from the storm/Jonah delivered from drowning
 - Sailors/Jonah made sacrifices and vows to God
 - God's pattern for sin seems to be that the way in which we prefer to sin, He will turn around on us, such that the same kind of sin becomes the punishment by which he will discipline us

- Where you choose to fall the most, you may see the most consequence coming back in like manner
- Shows us our own faults by letting us look in a mirror
- So are we thinking that Jonah is past the bad point? Well let's keep reading and studying next week ...

- We rejoin Jonah having come up from the fish at the end of Chapter 2
 - As we studied last week, Jonah hadn't prayed for release from the fish
 - Rather he assumed he had died, expelled from God's presence, as he says in verse 4
 - And in the midst of his uncomfortable circumstances he praises God and commits to faithfulness
 - Had Jonah actually been in the after-life, outside God's presence, then this kind of petition would have had no effect
 - Jonah's opportunity would have been lost
 - But now, he has been deposited on the shores of Israel
 - Can you imagine what must have gone through his mind in the moment
 - Again, I am reminded of the scene from Charles Dickens' A Christmas Carol, where Ebenezer Scrooge awakens to discover that he hadn't died after all
 - And upon his resurrection from his final vision, he is a new man
 - He excitedly sets about making amends for his callous and uncaring life
 - I wonder did Jonah lie there for a while trying to make sense of it all?
 - Did he immediately rejoice over his return from the dead?
 - Did he run excitedly toward home in Gath-Hepher to tell everyone of what had happened?
- Well, if he had made it home, I suspect Jonah wouldn't have received quite the welcome he expected
 - Remember, he's spent 72 hours in the stomach of a fish
 - And though we understand that Jonah was protected supernaturally in that situation, don't assume it was a consequence-free experience
 - If you subject a person to that kind of environment for that length of time, it's likely certain things happen
 - For example, his body was exposed to the chemicals of the fish's stomach
 - Those chemicals are designed to dissolve organic matter and digest it
 - Like any acid, they would likely have begun to dissolve body hair first
 - And bleached the skin white
 - Given the violent nature of the storm, it's also possible that Jonah may have lost some or all of his clothing in the waves
 - And what was left probably wasn't in good shape after leaving the fish
 - So imagine if you can, a hairless, bleached white, stark naked man walking up from the beach
 - Except this isn't California
 - This was ancient Israel

- Not only will Jonah likely not be well-received at home
- He will present a striking image to the city of Nineveh
- Speaking of Nineveh, God hasn't forgotten that this is why He gave Jonah the reprieve

Jonah 3:1 Now the word of the LORD came to Jonah the second time, saying,

Jonah 3:2 “Arise, go to Nineveh the great city and proclaim to it the proclamation which I am going to tell you.”

Jonah 3:3 So Jonah arose and went to Nineveh according to the word of the LORD. Now Nineveh was an exceedingly great city, a three days' walk.

- Very pointedly, the author says the word of the Lord came a second time
 - This is the second time God has given Jonah instructions, and you can't help but get the point
 - In light of what has just transpired in the previous chapters, we're reminded that this is the second time Jonah has been given to get it right
 - The first time the word came to Jonah, he fled and all the misery of Chapters 1 and 2 were the result
 - Even the symmetry with 1:1 reinforces the picture...
- The instructions this time were substantially the same as what God gave Jonah the first time
 - Arise and go to Nineveh and proclaim what I tell you
 - Specifically, that judgment would come upon the city unless they repented
 - The way Chapter 3 begins reminds me of a practical Biblical principle for godly obedience
 - If you want to be obedient to God's will in your decision-making, but you don't know what God's will is in a particular situation
 - Do the last thing God told you to do, until He gives you new instructions
 - Jonah heard God tell him to go to Nineveh
 - And now after traveling a long distance by foot over land and then spending days tossed on a sea and in a fish
 - Then back on the land
 - Jonah might have asked the question what does God want me to do now?
 - And the answer is clearly to do the last thing God told him
 - Although I wouldn't call this a law or Biblical certainty, I do believe that God generally doesn't give you new direction until you first obey the direction you've already received
 - God seeks obedience more than anything

[1Sam. 15:22](#) **Samuel said,**

**“Has the LORD as much delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices
As in obeying the voice of the LORD?
Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice,
And to heed than the fat of rams.**

- Until He has our obedience, I don't believe He's inclined to move us forward in His plan
 - Jonah knew everything he needed to know from God's original command
 - God just gives Jonah the courtesy of repeating it here
- And with the experience of the fish fresh on Jonah's mind, he obeys and leaves for Nineveh
 - The end of verse 3 raises a bit of a puzzle for us though
 - At first reading, we might conclude that Nineveh was three days walk from where Jonah found himself
 - But that interpretation doesn't fit for at least two reasons
 - First, Nineveh was much farther than three-days walk away from anywhere in Israel
 - Secondly, the description was included at the end of verse 3 as a way of explaining the “greatness” of Nineveh
 - And telling us Nineveh was 3-days walk away doesn't say anything about how great it was
 - It's a description of how big it was
 - The answer is found in the verse where we first hear of Nineveh in Genesis

Gen. 10:11 From that land he went forth into Assyria, and built Nineveh and Rehoboth-ir and Calah,

Gen. 10:12 and Resen between Nineveh and Calah; that is the great city.

- When Nineveh was founded by Nimrod in the years after the flood, it was actually a large city called Nineveh and three smaller surrounding cities or suburbs
 - Taken together they are called the great city
 - And it was so great, it took three days to walk from one end to the other
 - And since the average man could walk 20 or more miles in a day, it was a very large city
 - Almost the distance between San Antonio and Austin
- This is a huge area
 - Think about your challenge to convert such a city, if you were Jonah
 - No radio, no phone, no cars, no bull horns

- How could we hope to accomplish what God demanded?
- If you thought that, though, then you were already on the wrong track
- Because you're already thinking that your success or failure is dependent on your human physical abilities
 - But declaring God's truth to men is not a function of men's ability – it happens by God's power whether on foot, by car, with a satellite or just one man's voice

Jonah 3:4 Then Jonah began to go through the city one day's walk; and he cried out and said, “Yet forty days and Nineveh will be overthrown.”

Jonah 3:5 Then the people of Nineveh believed in God; and they called a fast and put on sackcloth from the greatest to the least of them.

- Jonah sets out in this city and makes it one days' walk
 - And he cries out with the words that God gave Him
 - What Jonah says is that in 40 days the city would be overthrown
 - The Hebrew word for overthrown in *haphak*
 - In the days since Moses wrote the Torah, the word *haphak* gained a new unique meaning
 - Think of it like the phrase “9-11”
 - Before September 11, 2001, the phrase 9-11 probably had little or no special meaning to anyone
 - But since that date, the phrase 9-11 is loaded with meaning
 - If a person were to walk into an airport today and announce to the guards at the security checkpoint that before today was over, there would be another 9-11, what do you think would happen?
 - Well this word, *haphak*, was the word God used repeatedly in His conversation with Abraham in Chapter 19 of Genesis, as He disclosed his plans for Sodom and Gomorrah
 - And ever since Moses recorded those words, they had become synonymous with the destruction of those two cities
 - So what Jonah had actually declared to the inhabitants of Nineveh was that in 40 days, your city is going to experience the same judgment as Sodom and Gomorrah
- If you don't know much about that story, you should know that S&G were utterly destroyed by God for their wickedness
 - Nothing was left
 - They were wiped off the face of the earth
 - And their destruction was so complete and so obviously supernatural, that they became legend

- Think about it?
- We're still talking about them today
 - Even people who have never read the Bible know about Sodom and Gomorrah
 - We even have a term - sodomy - to remind us of the depravity of that city
- And just like today, Gentiles like the Ninevites knew of the story of Sodom and Gomorrah and knew that a powerful God had been responsible for their destruction
 - And Jonah said that in 40 days they were going to be recipients of a similar outcome
- It's also interesting to note that Jonah walked just one day's walk
 - It's not clear whether that means he only walked one day because the city responded so quickly that he didn't need to walk farther
 - Or perhaps it's a sign of his half-hearted effort at his ministry to that city
 - We've said before that Jonah had little interest in seeing the city repent, principally because of their longstanding conflict with Israel
 - But as I alluded to on the first night, there is more to Jonah's opposition than first meets the eye
- Jonah's ministry took place during the reign of King Jeroboam II of the northern kingdom of Israel, around the years of 780-770 BC
 - There was another prophet in Israel at the same time, a man called Amos
 - Amos was a farmer called by God to pronounce God's word to a wicked nation and many of the surrounding countries
 - As a contemporary of Amos, Jonah would have been well aware of Amos' prophetic words to the nation
 - And what Amos told the nation of Israel was quite disturbing
 - It declared that God had lost patience with the Northern Kingdom and hope was lost
 - They were going to be judged harshly and there was no reprieve
 - No amount of appeals nor requests for mercy were going to stop the judgment
 - In fact in Amos says:

Amos 4:11 “I overthrew you, as God overthrew Sodom and Gomorrah, And you were like a firebrand snatched from a blaze; Yet you have not returned to Me,” declares the LORD.

Amos 4:12 “Therefore thus I will do to you, O Israel; Because I will do this to you, Prepare to meet your God, O Israel.”

- And at one point in Amos' book, he tells the nation that they will be taken into captivity to a place called Kir
 - Kir is an ancient name for the region of Mesopotamia, the land of Assyria, whose capital was Nineveh
 - So here's Jonah, walking through the capital city of the nation he knows God said will be the country He will use to destroy Israel
 - In fact, Amos' prophecy included references to Sodom and Gomorrah
 - And now here's Jonah given word to proclaim the judgment of Sodom and Gomorrah upon Nineveh
 - What a paradox for Jonah
 - On the one hand, his own beloved people stand in jeopardy to God's wrath with no hope of a reprieve
 - And on the other hand, God brings a similar message of judgment upon a nation designated as Israel's destroyer, but this time the opportunity for repentance is included
 - And to add insult to injury, A prophet to the nation of Israel has been designated as the one to deliver the message to Israel's enemy
 - Now we have an even better understanding of why Jonah worked so hard to avoid obeying God's call
- It seems to me there is a clear message about the nature of our ministry in service to God, hidden in the story of Jonah and Amos
 - God calls men to serve Him and His call is unqualified
 - It is unqualified in that he may call a trained religious servant like Jonah or a farmer like Amos
 - He may call us to minister to our own people in our own neighborhood, or a foreign people thousands of miles away
 - He may call us to deliver a message that people want to hear, or a message they refuse to hear
 - He may call us to a ministry that agrees with our personal desires and goals, or to a ministry that offends our pride and frustrates our plans
 - He may call us to witness for people, or to witness against them
 - But above all and regardless of which place we find ourselves, God calls us to obey Him and trust Him for whatever purpose He has in mind
 - Though they were contemporaries serving the same God, Amos and Jonah had very different ministries
 - And though we are of one Body and united in one Spirit, we will have different ministries with different purposes and different results
 - Our ministries will often intersect
 - And at least for a time may align to work together toward a common purpose

- But ultimately we must all be true to our own calling
 - Or be prepared to suffer “the fish”
- Finally, the people of Nineveh responded, we’re told in verse 5
 - Jonah didn’t ask them to repent
 - He didn’t even offer the option
 - The message was strictly one of coming judgment
 - And the people react by believing God, calling a fast, and putting on sackcloth
 - The statement about belief speaks for itself, and it’s a dramatic turn of events
 - First, Jonah hasn’t exactly been a persuasive speaker in this ministry
 - Think about it
 - He’s not exactly the most motivated guy when it comes to seeing his message embraced
 - He hasn’t even reached the majority of the city
 - Yet his proclamation is a big hit
 - The people are professing belief and showing obvious signs of repentance
 - How did they know to show repentance?
 - Or why did they think it would work?
 - Well, if there’s an answer for that (beyond the obvious answer that God brought about repentance) it’s the fact that they received a warning at all
 - One of the notable aspects of the Sodom and Gomorrah story was the suddenness of the cities’ destruction
 - There was no warning, no prophet sent to spare the city
 - Only the righteous Lot and his immediate family received mercy on the basis that they were already righteous by faith

Luke 17:28 “It was the same as happened in the days of Lot: they were eating, they were drinking, they were buying, they were selling, they were planting, they were building;

Luke 17:29 but on the day that Lot went out from Sodom it rained fire and brimstone from heaven and destroyed them all.

Luke 17:30 “It will be just the same on the day that the Son of Man is revealed.

- Those cities were destroyed in a moment without prior warning
 - And they became an example in that way
- So when a prophet strolls into town with this message, it leaves hope that the end is not pre-determined
 - And they respond with acts of repentance obviously hoping to forestall the

destruction

- Ultimately the real answer for why the people do what they do, is that God purposed to save the city and His Spirit brought this response to God's word
 - And if there were any doubts, we can know this from two details in the description
 - First it was all people in the city, not just some or just those who heard Jonah
 - Secondly, it was the least to the greatest
 - It wasn't limited to a certain group, or a certain age
 - This was universal acceptance
 - Take a comparison with Billy Graham, about to step into Yankee Stadium, full of people
 - And beforehand I asked you to predict how many would respond
 - How many would you guess?
 - What about the entire stadium?
 - And then the entire City of New York?
 - But instead of Billy Graham it's a very irritated and impatient New York cabbie giving the invitation
 - Now when you get that response, who do you credit
 - It's a supernatural response
- It's time we in the church lived what we say we believe – faith comes by hearing and hearing by the word of Christ
 - We think too small when we say people will not listen to us unless we can sit down and talk with them in a certain way, on a certain level
 - Jonah was about as unlikely an evangelist as you can imagine, and not even Pentecost can compare with the response he received to God's word

Jonah 3:6 When the word reached the king of Nineveh, he arose from his throne, laid aside his robe from him, covered himself with sackcloth and sat on the ashes.

Jonah 3:7 He issued a proclamation and it said, “In Nineveh by the decree of the king and his nobles: Do not let man, beast, herd, or flock taste a thing. Do not let them eat or drink water.

Jonah 3:8 “But both man and beast must be covered with sackcloth; and let men call on God earnestly that each may turn from his wicked way and from the violence which is in his hands.

Jonah 3:9 “Who knows, God may turn and relent and withdraw His burning anger so that we will not perish.”

- Having reached everyone else in the kingdom, naturally it also reached the king

- And like the people, the king displayed repentance in response to the message
 - This was probably King Adad Nirari III, who according to ancient Assyrian records was monotheistic – a rarity in that culture
- He did three things to demonstrate humility before this God
 - He left his throne, signifying that God was the authority in this matter
 - He took off his robe and put on sackcloth like the people
 - A rough cheap material identified with mourning
 - Finally, he sat in ashes, another sign of public mourning and repentance
- Then he ordered that all men and cattle should be in sackcloth as well
 - The reason for including the livestock was not because they needed, much less felt, repentance
 - It was an expression of what the owner felt and a sign of the entire nation joining in a common response
- The king also decrees that no one eat or drink anything
 - Though this seems harsh, it's probably the clearest example of how surely the King believed Jonah
 - He was so sure that the entire city was going to be destroyed in 40 days, that he was willing to risk leading the city to death by dehydration if it could alter God's plans
 - It seems a sure sign that he was convinced that the death was coming one way or another unless God relented due to their earnest appeals
 - It was an all or nothing strategy that could only make sense if it was based on a true faith in God's prophetic word
- Finally, the king orders everyone to turn from their evil deeds
 - It's important to note that repentance isn't true repentance if it isn't accompanied by a turning away from the sin that prompted the repentance
 - And now the King says perhaps we will have persuaded this God to turn away from His anger
- And in verse 10 we read

Jonah 3:10 When God saw their deeds, that they turned from their wicked way, then God relented concerning the calamity which He had declared He would bring upon them. And He did not do it.

- God relented or changed His mind regarding His plans
 - This kind of summary statement always carries with it confusion over how it is that God could essentially change His mind
 - The language suggests that kind of outcome, and yet the reality in scripture is that God doesn't change His mind

- His purposes are known and set before the foundation of the world
 - And in fact, the conversion of Nineveh could have only happened by God's hand in the first place
 - And even before that, it was God who worked so hard to bring Jonah to Nineveh
- Clearly God intended Nineveh to respond in the way they did, and therefore God relented as He planned
- But in the normal ordinary language of the author, the best way to characterize God's response is to say He relented or changed His plan
 - It's a natural way to present the narrative, but it isn't meant to be a theological thesis on the nature of God's mind or His ability to plan for the future
- But from the perspective of the men of Nineveh, their repentance had the effect of appeasing God and causing Him to spare the city, which it did, as He intended

- It's been two weeks since we last met to study Jonah, so it's probably good that we take a moment and review what we were covering when we ended Chapter 3
 - Nineveh, the capital city of Assyria, underwent a miraculous response to the tepid preaching of Jonah
 - A reluctant prophet to this Gentile nation, the enemy of Israel
 - When presented with the opportunity to bring this country a message of repentance, Jonah had first run away, then attempted suicide
 - Finally, relenting in the stomach of the fish, Jonah went to Nineveh
 - And He preached God's word, though without much enthusiasm, knowing that God is faithful to save those who repent and seek His mercy
 - As we learned last time, Jonah's lack of enthusiasm was due – at least in part – to his awareness that Assyria was the nation Amos said would eventually destroy the nation of Israel
 - Yet despite Jonah's lack of enthusiasm, we find at the end of Chapter 3, this giant city repenting
 - A city that spanned a distance equal to the distance between San Antonio and Austin
 - From the text, it appeared that only a fraction of the city actually heard Jonah's voice, yet his message spreads like wildfire
 - Clearly, it was a supernatural result
 - A Gentile city responding to the true living God seeking mercy, hoping to avoid His fierce judgment
- That brings us to the beginning of Chapter 4
 - And before we even read the verses for tonight, let me just prepare you
 - If you had assumed that our stubborn Jewish prophet had learned his lesson in the stomach of that fish...
 - Well, I'm sorry to say that though Jonah may have become obedient to God's word, he has yet to accept it
 - To prove my point, I want to begin Chapter 4 by reading the last verse of Chapter 3 and moving forward

Jonah 3:10 When God saw their deeds, that they turned from their wicked way, then God relented concerning the calamity which He had declared He would bring upon them. And He did not do it.

Jonah 4:1 But it greatly displeased Jonah and he became angry.

Jonah 4:2 He prayed to the LORD and said, “Please LORD, was not this what I said while I was still in my own country? Therefore in order to forestall this I fled to Tarshish, for I knew that You are a gracious and compassionate God, slow to anger and abundant in lovingkindness, and one who relents concerning calamity.

Jonah 4:3 “Therefore now, O LORD, please take my life from me, for death is better to me than life.”

Jonah 4:4 The LORD said, “Do you have good reason to be angry?”

- Jonah is upset at God, clearly
 - The Hebrew in verse 1, if translated perfectly literally, would say
 - “It was evil to Jonah with great evil.”
 - And why?
 - Well, consider the facts
 - Jonah, the evangelist, just witnessed the largest single conversion moment the world has yet seen
 - Somewhere around 120K people came to faith in the span of a day or so
 - All on the basis of one man’s preaching
 - Their conversion was most unlikely
 - A group of committed pagan worshippers, enemies of Israel
 - They hear a hard, threatening message spoken by a citizen of that hated nation
 - And the result is the entire nation agreeing with the prophet and choosing to seek mercy from this foreign nation’s God
 - So, in response to this miracle, Jonah gets upset at God
- There’s a phrase we can use to describe what’s going on with Jonah here
 - It’s a pity party
 - Jonah is feeling self-pity over his circumstances
 - He feels like the one who has single-handedly destroyed Israel by rescuing their enemy
 - And when he expresses his anger to God, he does so with remarkable honesty, nevermind hubris
 - Jonah says didn’t I tell you this would happen?
 - That’s why I fled to Tarshish, to forestall this, to prevent it
 - Now what does this tell us about Jonah?
 - He says what he says almost as if to justify running away
 - He feels that since he was correct in guessing that God intended to save these people
 - Now that it has happened as he predicted, he feels it justifies his previous behavior
 - Which simply tells us that Jonah’s willingness to go to Nineveh may have been the form of obedience, but it wasn’t the substance

- The body obeyed, but the heart was still in rebellion to God's plan to save the Ninevites
- Even more telling is the way Jonah lists God's character traits as if they were negatives
 - In verse 2, Jonah says that I knew you were a kind and good God
 - I knew you were patient and I knew you were forgiving and I knew you would receive those who repent
 - That's why I had to run...it's all your fault
- Where do you begin with someone who thinks like that?
 - I want to spend a moment examining the consequences of Jonah's statement
 - There's so much irony in his statements, that it's difficult to know where to begin
- And actually, God Himself gives us the big picture in his single, simple response in verse 4
 - God's response nails the issue
 - God asks, Do you have good reason to be angry?
 - Another way to express it is "Are you right to be angry?"
 - It's a rhetorical question
 - He's really saying two things at once
- First, let's start with the most obvious observation
 - We can't fault God for being Who He is
 - His nature and character defines good in the absolute sense
 - Nothing God does nor what He refrains from doing is bad
 - Nothing He commands nor anything He permits is wrong
 - Nothing He upholds nor anything He brings low is unjustified
 - Nothing He speaks is in error and nothing He purposes is other than as it should be
 - For any man, God's creation, to stand before the Creator and to make accusations that God's perfect nature is somehow imperfect is the definition of blasphemy
- Jonah tells God that His graciousness and mercy were reasonable justification for Jonah to oppose Him and to work to thwart that plan
 - If you've ever had one of your children react with anger because you dared show mercy and grace to a sibling because of some offense, then you know a little of what God felt in this moment here
- But the irony deepens
 - If Jonah could have his way, God wouldn't have shown Nineveh grace
 - Based on Jonah's comments, the only way he would have been happy would have been if God turned a deaf ear to the Ninevites' repentance

- Jonah's preferred God was a god that turned a deaf ear to cries for mercy and forgiveness, at least in the case of these people
- Now, there is probably not another a person on earth in this moment who was less qualified than Jonah to make such a demand of God
 - Jonah was the man who prayed to God from the belly of the great fish, seeking God's mercy
 - Praising God because He was a God who heard his prayer
 - The God Who Jonah declared was the one responsible for salvation
- It's this same Jonah who is now complaining because God is doing the very same thing for others that He had done for Jonah just a few weeks earlier
 - How quickly he forgets
 - The irony is that the only reason Jonah was able to stand before God in this moment and make these complaints was because God has been willing to hear him earlier and respond to him in mercy
 - And how ironic that Jonah would criticize God for doing the same thing for the Ninevites
- And then the final irony
 - Why is Jonah so angry that God saved the Ninevites after they repented?
 - Well, principally because the Ninevites were one day destined to destroy the northern kingdom of Israel
 - But why did God assign Israel that terrible future?
 - Because the nation hadn't repented of their sin before Him
 - Yet Jonah is angry at God because God is orchestrating the destruction of his country and his people by sparing the Ninevites
 - You can see Jonah's emphasis even in his language in verse 2 – own country
- So Jonah's demand that God not show mercy, is designed to save Israel from destruction
 - But if God were the kind of God to overlook the Ninevites' pleas for mercy, then how would He have responded to an Israel that wouldn't repent?
 - Remember the prophet Amos, Jonah's contemporary who prophesied to the nation of Israel about their coming destruction while Jonah preached repentance to Nineveh
 - Here's what Amos had to say about what would happen to Israel in the end

Amos 9:3 “Though they hide on the summit of Carmel,
 I will search them out and take them from there;
 And though they conceal themselves from My sight on the floor of the sea,
 From there I will command the serpent and it will bite them.
Amos 9:4 “And though they go into captivity before their enemies,

**From there I will command the sword that it slay them,
And I will set My eyes against them for evil and not for good.”**

...

**Amos 9:8 “Behold, the eyes of the Lord GOD are on the sinful kingdom,
And I will destroy it from the face of the earth;
Nevertheless, I will not totally destroy the house of Jacob,”
Declares the LORD.**

...

**Amos 9:14 “Also I will restore the captivity of My people Israel,
And they will rebuild the ruined cities and live in them;
They will also plant vineyards and drink their wine,
And make gardens and eat their fruit.**

**Amos 9:15 “I will also plant them on their land,
And they will not again be rooted out from their land
Which I have given them,”
Says the LORD your God.**

- Ultimately, God was showing Israel mercy by bringing the nation of Assyria against them
 - Preventing worst outcome which would be their ultimate demise
 - Were God the kind of God Jonah wanted, it would have not only meant the end of a repentant Nineveh but also of Israel
 - Compassion, graciousness, slowness to anger, abundant lovingkindness
 - They were the very same traits that God ultimately plans to draw upon in saving Jonah's beloved Israel
- In verse 3, Jonah asks to die again
 - This guy has a real death wish doesn't he?
 - First he asks to be thrown overboard in the storm
 - And now he asks God directly to kill him
 - If you've ever wanted an example in scripture of why it's good that sometimes God answers our prayers with a no instead of a yes, here's one
 - God graciously ignores Jonah's request for death
 - And Jonah's reason for asking is more of the pity party
 - He's playing the martyr
 - He says I would rather die than live
 - Which refers to the prospect of seeing these heathens saved only to live long enough to destroy Israel
- Then God gives His response, which we have already discussed
 - And then watch Jonah's reaction

Jonah 4:5 Then Jonah went out from the city and sat east of it. There he made a shelter for himself and sat under it in the shade until he could see what would happen in the city.

- So what's Jonah doing?
 - Well, at first glance it seems as though Jonah's just sitting up on the hill pouting over his circumstances
 - And there's probably some resentment mixed in here, to be sure
 - But the text itself suggests another motive as well
 - In verse 5 we're told that Jonah went up to a hill so he could see what would come of the city
 - This verse can only make sense if there was still some doubt in Jonah's mind about whether God would show mercy to the city?
 - Only if he has reason to hope that God will yet destroy the city would he take this step
 - It's clear that Jonah has picked a seat from which to watch the fireworks when the Sodom and Gomorrah judgment comes
 - What gave him that kind of hope?
 - I think it may have started with God's comment in verse 4
 - God asks do you have a good reason to be angry?
 - Maybe Jonah heard those words and thought God was suggesting that the end wasn't decided yet
 - That Jonah didn't yet have reason to be angry
 - So, Jonah regains a little hope that the end isn't certain, that perhaps the Ninevites' repentance wasn't sincere or maybe they will revert to their old ways
 - And considering how often the nation of Israel did exactly the same thing over their history, it seems logical to assume that he would expect that
- He builds himself a little booth on this hill
 - The name for shelter here is the same Hebrew word for booth, so it's reminiscent of the booths built by the Jews in the desert

Jonah 4:6 So the LORD God appointed a plant and it grew up over Jonah to be a shade over his head to deliver him from his discomfort. And Jonah was extremely happy about the plant.

- Despite the fact that Jonah had built a little shelter for himself, God gives Jonah even more shade
 - The temperature in the desert probably reached 120 degrees or more, so every little

bit of shade was important

- And now for the first time in the story Jonah was happy
 - The Hebrew says greatly happy, ecstatically happy
 - For a guy who's pretty hard to please, why is he so excited about a little shade?
 - In fact, he already had some shade, so it makes his excitement all the more puzzling
- Now the text doesn't tell us this specifically, but I think there's more to his excitement than the fact that a little shade has come up
 - First, how often do you see a huge plant large enough to shade a man grow out of the desert in a matter of minutes or hours
 - Without rain, without seed, out of nowhere?
 - Obviously, it was supernatural
 - The text even tells us that God made the plant grow
 - So, from Jonah's perspective, what did he see and what did it make him think?
 - Well, he's already heard God say that he doesn't have a reason to be upset
 - Then as he sits on this hill to see what God plans to do with this city, he witnesses this amazing sight of a huge plant appear out of nowhere next to him
 - He immediately recognizes it to be a miracle sent by God
 - And God didn't send a lion or bear, he didn't send a plague or hail storm
 - In other words, God sent something comforting, something that seemed to be an encouragement to wait and watch
 - So if we put all these things together, from Jonah's perspective it seemed as if God was affirming Jonah's hope that something is going to happen
 - Something as in something Jonah will like to see
 - So when Jonah sees the plant, he grows very excited because he believes it's a sign that perhaps God is preparing to destroy the Ninevites after all
 - After all, why send Jonah a comforting plant in such a miraculous way unless it was a sign that his waiting was going to lead to a satisfying conclusion?
 - But there is another reason to send this plant
 - To teach a lesson that Jonah dearly needs to learn
 - So exactly one day after receiving the plant and enjoying its company, God brings the second half of the lesson

Jonah 4:7 But God appointed a worm when dawn came the next day and it attacked the plant and it withered.

Jonah 4:8 When the sun came up God appointed a scorching east wind, and the sun beat down on Jonah's head so that he became faint and begged with all his

soul to die, saying, “Death is better to me than life.”

- On the very next day, God appoints a worm
 - The word for appoint means destined or ordained
 - We've seen good appoint a fish, then a plant, now a worm and soon a scorching wind
 - And in the preceding verse there was an important switch in the name given to God in this story
 - In verse 6 there is an occurrence of the term Lord God
 - *Yahweh Elohim*
 - The term is a formal term, reserved for times when scripture is emphasizing God's supreme authority and divine sovereignty over all His creation
 - You see it commonly in the first four chapters of Genesis
 - Or when God is making covenants or showing His power in Exodus
 - Why is it being introduced here?
 - Well, you get the sense that the narrative is building toward a point where God's sovereignty and Jonah's selfishness are going to collide
 - So it's time to begin reminding Jonah and the reader of whose perspective matters most
- Just as quickly as God brings the plant up, He takes it down
 - It's just as supernatural to see a large plant like this one brought down entirely in a single day, as it was to see it rise up
 - In other words, everything about these circumstances has been orchestrated by God to make clear to Jonah that it's God behind the scenes making it all happen
 - Jonah is not the least bit confused by it
 - He's not thinking that it's bad luck, or coincidence that these things are happening
 - He is fully aware of how God is working here
- And as the plant withers, God takes yet another step to communicate with Jonah
 - He sends a scorching wind, we're told
 - This hot east wind is a well known phenomenon in the Middle East even today
 - It's called the sirocco
 - Here's a description I found of that wind and its effects on those who experience it

"During the period of a sirocco the temperature rises steeply, sometimes even climbing during the night, and it remains high, about 16-22F above the average . . . at times every scrap of moisture seems to have been extracted from the air,

so that one has the curious feeling that one's skin has been drawn much tighter than usual. Sirocco days are peculiarly trying to the temper and tend to make even the mildest people irritable and fretful and to snap at one another for apparently no reason at all."

- There are days in my home when I think we're experiencing a sirocco
- This was the experience that Jonah had in the hill that day
 - And then Jonah reverts to his natural state – anger and disappointment
 - First, he's just upset over the uncomfortable conditions
 - But it's probably also apparent to him that what he had hoped to see happen in Nineveh wasn't going to happen after all
 - The plant hadn't been a hopeful sign but rather it seemed to mock him
 - As the plant withers and the hot wind blows, Jonah realizes that God wasn't planning to destroy the city
 - And now he's not only mad, he's miserable
 - And again, Jonah's death wish re-emerges
 - God, just kill me
 - Why does this keep coming up for Jonah?
 - Who wishes to die but someone who believes that death leads to something better than what's on earth
 - Those who believe that death leads to something scary don't generally wish to die
 - They fear death
 - But Jonah keeps asking to die because it's better than living under these circumstances
 - Why is it that Jonah can feel comfortable asking God to kill him?
 - Only his trust and dependence on God's mercy
 - Were God not merciful, then Jonah could never have asked for death with positive expectations
 - God's response mirrors perfectly His earlier statement
 - He asks again if Jonah had good reason to be angry
 - And now the question just frustrates Jonah
 - Jonah didn't answer God the first time, but now he answers back sharply that He was right to be angry to the point of desiring death
 - In other words, he was right to seek death rather than live through the consequences of seeing the city saved
 - And then God turns the tables

Jonah 4:10 Then the LORD said, “You had compassion on the plant for which you did not work and which you did not cause to grow, which came up overnight and perished overnight.

Jonah 4:11 “Should I not have compassion on Nineveh, the great city in which there are more than 120,000 persons who do not know the difference between their right and left hand, as well as many animals?”

- God makes a comparison designed to get Jonah to see things from His perspective
 - First, God says Jonah had compassion on the plant, but really the word doesn't communicate well what God intended here
 - Rather than compassion, God is reminding Jonah that he felt justified to be angry in the face of the plant's destruction
 - Why?
 - First, because the plant was useful
 - It served a useful purpose, so Jonah had compassion upon it
 - Second, it was a sign to Jonah of hopeful things to come
 - To Jonah it meant that he could expect a positive outcome in his waiting and watching over a sinful culture in the city before him
 - Then when the plant died, hope was lost
 - All that remained was disappointment and the discomfort of the hot wind
 - But Jonah had no investment in that plant
 - He never asked for it, he didn't plant it, he didn't water it
 - And it was just a dumb plant God gave him as a matter of pure grace
- Then God asks Jonah to see the world with the same eyes – the way God sees the world
 - Why doesn't Jonah have the same anger over the destruction of Nineveh?
 - A city with 120,000 people who didn't know the truth
 - The phrase about left and right refers to their ignorance about God
 - They weren't innocents, but they were without hope apart from God's message through Jonah
 - Shouldn't Jonah be equally angry over their demise?
 - After all, Jonah did have something to do with their new (spiritual) birth
 - As God gave Jonah opportunity through the preaching of the Word
 - So in contrast to the plant, Jonah should feel some investment in that city's future
 - Secondly, Jonah found hope in the emergence of the plant – life from nothing
 - But yet he found nothing but despair in the emergence of the new life within the city

- Yet the fact that God could bring a people back to life in this way should have been the foundation of hope in Jonah for his own people
- He knew what God was saying to them through Amos
 - And though it was a hard message, ultimately it arrived as a renewed Israel brought back to life by God's hand
 - Because of God's mercy and willingness to respond to repentance
- So rather than anger at the loss of the plant, God demands that Jonah understand where his compassion should reside
- There are two dominant themes in this book, and the first has been clearly reinforced in this final chapter
 - First, the unlimited Sovereignty of God over His creation
 - Consider all that God has done in this short book
 - He has set a plan before men for the salvation of a people
 - So God is the author and perfecter of our faith
 - He gave His word to men through a prophet to carry out this plan
 - So God is actively communicating to His creation
 - He commanded the sea and wind to obey His purpose
 - So the weather and physical elements respond exactly to His desires to suit His purposes
 - He controlled the outcome of lots (dice) on the ship
 - Even the smallest events will play out according to His will to ensure the outcomes He determines
 - He commanded the fish to swallow Jonah
 - So even the animals obey God's will
 - Yet Jonah survived the experience
 - So our physical life is under God's control
 - Our eventual death is merely a part of God's larger plan for the creation and it happens at a time and in a manner prescribed by Him
 - The city of Nineveh responds supernaturally to a simple phrase spoken by Jonah
 - So even the response by men in faith to God is a supernatural act of grace under God's control
 - Finally, many of these same displays of sovereignty come together in the end as God uses plants, animals and weather to reinforce a point to Jonah
 - If you come away from Jonah with nothing else, let it be a renewed respect for God's sovereignty over the world and everything in it
 - And we can't allow our limited understanding of God's purpose in a given situation define what is right or good

- The second theme is the compassion of God upon the undeserving should bring us cause for hope, not anger or resentment
 - First, it was the reason we can look forward to heaven as Jonah obviously did
 - Secondly, it was the compassion of God that even allowed us to be witnesses and perhaps participants in His divine plan of redemption
 - How can we take that privilege and turn it into a liability by complaining over who God may show His mercy to?

Rom. 9:15 For He says to Moses, “I WILL HAVE MERCY ON WHOM I HAVE MERCY, AND I WILL HAVE COMPASSION ON WHOM I HAVE COMPASSION.”