

AN ANGRY MAN

JONAH 1:1-3

Now the word of the LORD came to Jonah the son of Amittai, saying, "Arise, go to Nineveh, that great city, and cry out against it; for their wickedness has come up before Me."

But Jonah arose to flee to Tarshish from the presence of the LORD. He went down to Joppa, and found a ship going to Tarshish; so he paid the fare, and went down into it, to go with them to Tarshish from the presence of the LORD.

Anger can make you do some pretty silly stuff...

Just ask Phil Wellman - former manager of the Mississippi Braves. In a game several years ago, Phil stormed the umpire and started screaming over a call.

Second, he covered home plate with dirt... Third, he pulled up third base and threw it into centerfield...

That's when it really turned crazy... Phil imitated a commando. He dropped to the ground and crawled through the grass to the pitcher's mound. Pretending the rosin bag was a grenade, he lobbed it toward the feet of the plate umpire who's call he had questioned.

Coach Wellman's tirade earned him a three game *suspension*, and some unwanted *attention*.

His embarrassing antics were shown repeatedly on national television. Phil Wellman became a laughing stock to adults - and a poor example to younger fans.

Anger can make you do some pretty silly stuff...

Just ask Jonah - the former prophet in Israel. Jonah lived in the 8th century BC. And in comparison, his antics were as silly and stupid as those of the coach.

Jonah also got angry with a call. He argued with God and got ejected. In the end, Jonah also earned a three day suspension... *in the belly of a great fish!*

And Jonah's embarrassing behavior has been replayed countless times for God's people as they've read about him in the book that bears his name.

For the next few weeks we'll be studying the book of Jonah, and we'll learn from **The Angry Prophet**, that ***anger can make you do some pretty silly stuff.***

But to **understand why a man does what he does** you first have to try and **understand the man.**

Jonah began as a faithful prophet - called by God - a servant to God's people - with a rich spiritual heritage.

It's interesting, that none other than our Lord Jesus made several references to Jonah... The most obscure is where I'll start. In Luke 4 Jesus had just returned to his hometown of Nazareth, when on the Sabbath He entered the synagogue. He came that day to reveal *His intentions - set out His plan, His mission, His agenda.*

And His words constituted a dream come true for people who had been battered and beaten by sin.

Jesus said, "The Spirit of the LORD is upon Me, because He has anointed Me to preach the gospel to the poor; He has sent Me to heal the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the

captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to set at liberty those who are oppressed; to proclaim the acceptable year of the LORD.”

What a campaign platform - **good news, healing, freedom, vision, peace, hope.** Jesus would've earned my allegiance, and gotten my vote right then and there.

But that wasn't the crowd's reaction. A scoffer in the room put pride before faith. He knew this was a promise only God could fulfill... Jesus had quoted a passage that spoke of the Messiah - and as far as this cynic was concerned, *Jesus was just a home-boy.*

The doubter shouted, *“Is this not Joseph's son?”* His skepticism sucked hope and faith right out of the room!

Jesus went on to describe how God had met this kind of prideful resistance before. In the days of Elijah the unbelief had gotten so great in Israel that God had to go beyond the Jewish border to find real faith.

He worked deliverance in a Phoenician outpost known as Zarephath. The Prophet Elijah was sent to a Jewish widow and her son living outside the territory of His people, and God worked two miracles...

First, He caused her flour bin to *never run out*, and her jar of oil *to never run dry*. Throughout the famine this woman and her son had a continual supply.

And then when the boy died unexpectedly, Elijah worked another amazing miracle. He stretched himself out on the child's corpse three times, and he cried out to God. We're told

in 1 Kings 17, “The LORD heard the voice of Elijah; and the soul of the child came back...”

It might sound a little fishy to you, but according to Jewish tradition, the boy Elijah resurrected was **Jonah**.

Now, if we believe the rabbis we can make two assumptions... **First, Jonah knew God’s love reached beyond the borders of Israel.** Yes, Yahweh is the God of the Hebrew nation, but He cares about people in other countries as well. God is *the God of all the earth*.

It’s interesting that Jonah is the only prophetic book that doesn’t mention “Israel” or “Judah.” Obviously, this story is God’s attempt to enlarge the heart of the Jews, but in doing so it stresses His great love for all people.

If God loved a widow living in Phoenicia He was willing to show mercy to anybody, anywhere. It should have been no surprise God offered mercy to Nineveh.

And **second**, apparently, **Jonah was acquainted with resurrection** - *and this won’t be the last time he’ll experience it...* Later in the book we’ll discuss the idea that Jonah actually died in the sea, and his body was preserved for three days in the belly of the fish, until he was resurrected and vomited up on dry ground.

When Jesus says in Matthew 12:40, “For as Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of the great fish, so will the Son of Man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth” - it could be the symbolism was meant to be taken very, very literally.

We know for certain that Jonah was a contemporary of Elijah and his successor, Elisha. It's possible he was an understudy - maybe a participant in the *school of the prophets* started by Elisha. Was Jonah there the day they were chopping trees by the Jordan River?

They were building an addition to the school when an ax-head flew off a handle and sunk into the river.

Elisha threw in a stick and the iron ax-head floated to the surface. The miracle could've been just for Jonah. God wanted Jonah to know He has ways to retrieve what *gets tossed in the water and sinks to the bottom*.

Verse 1 begins, **“Now the word of the LORD came to Jonah the son of Amittai.”** The word **“Jonah”** means **“dove”** - but by nature this man was more of a *hawk*.

Jonah was extremely nationalistic - very alt-Israeli.

He believed strongly, and rightly, that the Hebrews were God's chosen people - destined to rule the world.

And Jonah's first prophetic assignment had been a great joy. 2 Kings 14:25 says of King Jeroboam, **“He restored the territory of Israel from the entrance of Hamath to the Sea of the Arabah, according to the word of the LORD God of Israel, which He had spoken through His servant Jonah...”** Jonah had predicted victory for Israel, and the expansion of her borders.

Judgment on the Gentiles, and blessing on the Jews...
this was a prophecy right up Jonah's alley.

But Jonah's next assignment was a shocker! The next words in verse 2 threw the prophet for a loop. "Arise, go to Nineveh, that great city, and cry against it; for their wickedness has come up before Me."

This meant God loved Assyrians. If God didn't love people, He wouldn't care when they disobeyed Him. This was why God was upset with their wickedness.

It's interesting, later in 4:2, after Jonah preaches in Nineveh, the evil Assyrians repent, and God forgives them, Jonah reveals what he was thinking when God first called him... "Ah, LORD, was not this what I said when I was still in my country? Therefore I fled previously to Tarshish; for I know that You are a gracious and merciful God, slow to anger and abundant in lovingkindness, One who relents from doing harm." In short, "*I knew this is what You'd do!*"

Jonah knew His Bible. He knew God's nature. He even knew from his own experience that God is rich in mercy - He's willing to reach beyond the borders of Israel to show love on people who don't deserve it.

Here's why Jonah refused to go to Nineveh... He *loved God*, but he *hated Assyrians*. And he knew God all too well... His mercy and love are inexhaustible.

God likes the unlikely - He loves the unlovable.

Jonah knew if he preached to Assyria, and they repented - it was just like God to forgive them, and cleanse them, and make them as His own people.

And this was just more than Jonah could stomach!

And there are a couple of reasons why...

First, I believe Jonah was just plain **prejudice**. Somewhere along the line he'd copped the attitude that the Jewish people were better than everyone else.

You may've heard the old joke... **Question:** "*Why did God create the Gentiles?*" **Answer:** "*Somebody has to pay retail.*" The rabbis of Jesus' day taught that God created Gentiles as kindling for the fires of hell.

They hated anyone who was not a Jew.

I'm not sure Jonah was prejudice against Gentiles in general, but he certainly despised the Assyrians.

The people of Nineveh represented everything Jonah hated. They were savage, and cruel, and bent on world domination. For the next 100 years the nation of Assyria would be the main threat to Israel's security.

To ask Jonah to preach salvation to the Ninevites of Assyria would be like asking a Holocaust survivor to love the Nazi commander of a death camp... Or like asking an African-American to share Christ with a white supremacist... *Or like asking an Atlanta Falcons fan to pray for a New England Patriot's victory...*

Jonah wanted to see Assyria slaughtered, not saved. He prayed for Nineveh's destruction, not deliverance.

Jonah was a spiritual bigot. He refused to believe that though Israel was God's *chosen people* - there was room in God's heart for *other people* as well.

Hey, Jonah was **the prejudiced prophet**.

It reminds me of the Chinaman and Jew eating lunch at the same deli. With no provocation at all, the Jew walks over and punches the Chinaman in the mouth.

The Chinese fellow asks him, *“What’s that for?”* The Jew answers, *“That’s for Pearl Harbor.”* The Chinaman can’t believe it, *“We had nothing to do with Pearl Harbor. That was the Japanese.”* The Jewish man shrugs, *“Hey, it doesn’t matter. Chinese, Japanese, Taiwanese - they’re all the same to me.”* He sits down.

Moments later the Chinese man walks over, and cold-cocks the Jew. He picks himself up off the ground and asks, *“What was that for?”* The Chinaman answers, *“The Titanic.”* The Jew scratches his head, *“I don’t get it. What did the Jews have to do with sinking the Titanic?”* The Chinese man tells him, *“Goldberg, Feinberg, Iceberg - they’re all the same to me.”*

Realize, all prejudice is as irrational as the exchange in the deli. That’s why I started with the premise - *anger makes you do and say silly, stupid, illogical stuff.*

And nothing is more illogical than *racial prejudice.*

Bigotry is an affront to God. It narrows, and restricts, and puts limits on God’s love. It shrinks God’s heart to one group - *my group.* It’s the ultimate selfishness.

I once had a lady in our church tell me, *“Prejudice is not a skin problem, it’s a sin problem.”* And it’s true.

Prejudice is the pinnacle of pride. Because you’re not just like me, you must be inferior - *what heresy.*

Prejudice a sin against God’s love and creativity.

But let me suggest there was more to Jonah's hatred than just racial prejudice. When Jonah gets mentioned in 2 Kings 14:25 we're told he "was from Gath Hopher."

This was a Galilean village two miles northeast of Nazareth. Could it be the widow from Zarephath remarried and moved back inside the borders of Israel, to the region of Galilee and the town of Gath Hopher?

This is important for during the reign of Jeroboam's predecessors, King Omri, and Ahab, and Jehu - Sidon and Galilee became the site of terrible atrocities. The army of a militaristic monster, the nation of Assyria, had turned Galilee's pleasant grasslands into *killing fields*.

The Assyrian army was the most heinous, and brutal, and bloodthirsty to ever roam the earth. They lived by the creed, "might makes right." They were a sword with no conscience - merciless and on the march...

Several Assyrian inscriptions speak of forays into the Galilee and northern Israel. War parties pillaged and raided - just enough to intimidate the king in Samaria.

Israel would then pay tribute - buy a few more years of protection. Hosea, a contemporary of Jonah, predicted God would ultimately use Assyria to bring judgment on Israel. Samaria was toppled in 722 BC.

Several years ago, while in Germany, I visited the town of Rothenburg - which has a *Torture Museum*.

Now a Torture Museum isn't something you see everyday. I decided to check it out. And I saw multiple methods of torture

used in Medieval Europe - stocks, gallows, guillotines, stretching devices,, etc..

But nothing I saw in that museum was as barbaric, bloodthirsty, and brutal as was Assyrian-style torture...

They not only committed shameful atrocities, they bragged about it afterwards. Throughout the ruins of ancient Nineveh archeologists have found inscriptions of the boasts of Assyrian kings. Here's a sampling...

“Three thousands captives I burned with fire.”

“I cut off the limbs of the officers, the royal officers who rebelled...” “From sons I cut off their hands and their fingers, and from others I cut off their noses, their ears, and their fingers - of many I put out their eyes.”

“I bound their heads to posts round about the city.”

“I cut off their heads and formed them into piles.” A mound of skulls outside the cities gates was a warning to the neighbors, *they better not mess with Assyria!*

Assyrian kings also liked to bury their enemies alive in the walls of their buildings... Defeated kings were led around on dog collars, and housed in kennels...

They often held their captives on the ground, and ripped out their tongue by the root... They would burn their enemy's wife and kids before their very eyes...

One Assyrian king boasted, “Many within the border of my own land I flayed, and spread their skins upon the walls.” The torturer would strap a man to the ground, and make an incision in his fingertips. From there he'd begin to peel back his skin slowly and methodically. His skin was used as

wallpaper. And what was left of the man baked to death in the sun.

One of the most famous Assyrian tortures was to take a javelin, thrust the sharp end through a man's ribcage, and out the top of his head. The other end they stuck in the ground. The victim was left to squirm in pain on the end of the spear until he died. This was the precursor for what later developed into crucifixion.

Imagine, watching this happen to your father, or brother, or son - or a friend with whom you'd grown up.

In the days of Jonah, Assyria was not the threat to Israel they would become, but Assyria was growing in power and aggression. And they were perfecting their methods of war and intimidation. Apparently, they practiced occasionally on random villages south of Iraq, in Syria - even as far-away as Israel and Galilee.

I have no idea... I'm just speculating now...

But what if you lived in Gath Hopher... On a green, grassy hillside your family grew some crops and grazed a few sheep. Then one day, a band of Assyrian warriors rode up and set fire to your fields, impaled your father on a spear, flayed your brother with a knife, and burned your two sisters before your very eyes.

God says, "**Love your neighbor...**" *would you love these Assyrians? Really, would you love them?*

In 2002, Don Gilliam's 18 year old daughter, Suzy, was a victim of a date rape. Suzy was an 18 year old college

freshman. After the incident she refused to talk, even to her family. She switched schools - tried to get on with her life. But the scars of the trauma festered.

Suzy withdrew from everyone. She developed an eating disorder and lost weight. Finally she was confronted by her mom. Suzy told her what had happened. It took a year of prayer and support, but Suzy overcame the pain and regained a normal life.

But her father, Don, fought a battle of his own. He wanted revenge at any cost. Don even developed a plan to kill the man who'd wounded his daughter.

Don also withdrew into his own private world. He would get up - go to work - think about his plan - try to forget - go home - try to sleep - dream about his plan.

He later remembered thinking, "I plotted to drive through the campus and use my Smith and Wesson 243 caliber, bolt-action rifle. I'd sit in the parking lot as long as necessary until he walked by. *Then I'd get it out of my head, and Suzy could start eating again.*"

One night at dinner, Don couldn't take it anymore. As he watched his daughter sitting in despondency, he got up from the table, and headed down to the basement.

There he started cleaning the rifle he planned to use.

That's when Don's youngest son, Jeffrey, came trotting downstairs. "*Whatcha doing, Dad?*" Don kept cleaning his gun. He never looked up. "*Can I help you clean?*" Don sat there in silence. "*You going hunting?*"

By this time Jeff was standing inches in front of his dad. Don finally looked up at little Jeffrey. He recalls, "Our eyes met. Jeff's eyes brimmed with tears... *He knows. Dear, God. I think my son knows my plan.*"

Don stopped polishing his gun and laid it on the floor. "Come here, boy. Give your daddy a hug." Jeffrey wrapped his arms around Don as tight as a cobra.

Don said later, "Jeffrey's love was somehow stronger than my hatred. His hug began to crumble my rage like a sledgehammer breaking a wall. Chip by chip... *Sweet Jesus, what have I been thinking? My job's not finished. Forgive me, Lord. Jeffrey isn't raised. If I go to jail, he won't have a father. God, help me.*"

As Don locked his gun away *he made a choice to forgive.* He said, "The decision started in my head, not from any feeling. I had to let go of the hate. It was killing me." Choking back tears, father and son walked upstairs. In the interview where I read his story, Don's final words were, "I came so close. I came so close."

And as with Don's hatred, I believe some incident fueled Jonah's deep down animosity. Prejudice - even racial prejudice - often stems from a personal hurt.

You're victimized by someone of a different group, and you take out your anger on other members of that group. I believe Jonah was somehow violated by Ninevites. Either he felt firsthand - or saw - or heard of a horrible atrocity. Jonah felt victimized by Assyrians.

Now he hated them... *to hell with Ninevites!*

Once a married couple were struggling to find harmony in their relationship. There was constant friction. They finally decided to talk to a counselor...

As they discussed their problems, the exasperated wife blurted out, **"We have absolutely nothing in common. In fact, we don't even hate the same people!"**

This was the Prophet Jonah's problem in his relationship with God. *He hated the people God loved.*

Once, I got a phone call from a lady who had been a victim. She described for me the crime that had been committed against her and her husband. She was mad. You could sense the anger boiling up inside her.

When I told her God wanted her and her husband to seek peace, and be willing to forgive, and be reconciled - it was more than she could stomach!

She got angry up at me for the suggestion. *Hey, in this lady's mind I needed to hate the people she hated.*

This was Jonah. Rather than risk the Ninevites repenting and turning to God, he'd rather flee to the ends of the earth than become a brother to Assyrians.

I hate to go here, and I wouldn't if it wasn't absolutely necessary... But who do you hate with this same toxic strain of malice? An ex-spouse? A dad who was a drunkard? An uncle who abused you sexually?

Perhaps, a boss or co-worker who doesn't like you, and seeks daily to make your life miserable?

What if God called you to share the Gospel with this person you hate? *To bring to heaven - the very person you've sent to hell, a million times under your breath?*

Jonah decides he doesn't want to cooperate with God's missionary efforts to Nineveh. He declines the assignment. He had a few sick days stored up so he decides to cash them in. Jonah is taking a vacation.

He's shutting off the email and turning off his phone. God will just have to find another prophet for this one.

Jonah walks twenty miles to the Israeli port of Joppa, and buys a one-way ticket to the farthest destination scheduled... *Tarshish*. Jonah is now a man on the run.

An angry, hate-filled Jonah does a very, very silly thing... Verse 3 **“Jonah arose to flee to Tarshish from the presence of the LORD. He went down to Joppa, and found a ship going to Tarshish; so he paid the fare, and went down into it, to go with them to Tarshish from the presence of the LORD.”** This is dumb as it gets...

Jonah tries to flee from a transcendent, omnipresent God. It's been said, **“Anger is a wind which blows out the lamp of the mind.”** *Jonah, what in the world is going on in your gray matter? Nobody can shake God!*

How Jonah planned to run from God's presence is a silly thought indeed! God is everywhere at all times.

In fact, running from God is like running from the air. Acts 17 tells us in God we **“live and move and have our being...”** God

is all around us at all times. There is no corner of the universe that God doesn't occupy.

If Jonah's boat had actually made it to Tarshish, God would've been standing on the dock helping to tie off the ship to the moorings. Our God is inescapable.

The afternoon Hurricane Irma blew through Atlanta I headed to the airport that morning for a flight to Pennsylvania. I got out of town in the nick of time.

But in the Park-n-Ride shuttle from my car to the airport I met an elderly man named Jimmy Jones from Moultrie, GA. I was just making conversation, when I asked this fellow if he was running from the hurricane.

Little did I know my question would set him off. He sat up straight, and challenged me, "Have you heard of man named Jonah? He tried to run from God and got swallowed by a great fish. You can't run from God."

I didn't argue with him. I agreed. Then when I got to the Chick-Fi-la I saw the morning paper. The headline read, "Nowhere To Hide." Both the USA Today and Jimmy Johnson from Moultrie GA reminded me of the same truth. You can't run from God. He'll find you.

The Honorable Marks Moore is a British judge. He sits on the bench in a court in southeast London.

Judge Moore seems to be your prim and proper English jurist. In typical British fashion he wears a wig and long robes - *but there's another side to Moore.*

Recently, a sex offender on trial, tried to make a break for the door. Only one thing stood between the defendant and freedom... and that was Marks Moore.

The main doors of the courtroom were barricaded, but the judge's corridor had been left open. When the defendant sprinted for the door, the Judge met him in the hallway. He grabbed him around the neck to bring him down. The two men tumbled down several steps.

The bad guy jumped up and continued to race down the corridor. Judge Moore stayed in hot pursuit.

When the sex offender stopped to push open a fire door the Judge caught up to him and tackled him.

Moore held him until the prison officials arrived.

Proving, **you can't outrun the long legs of the law!** And neither can you **outrun the long legs of the Lord.**

This is what the Psalmist experienced. In Psalm 139 he writes, "Where can I go from Your Spirit? Or where can I flee from Your presence? If I ascend into heaven, You are there; If I make my bed in hell, behold, You are there. If I take the wings of the morning, and dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea, even there Your hand shall lead me, and Your right hand shall hold me."

Often, a convicted felon is ordered by the court to wear an electronic tracker around his or her ankle.

But understand you and I are wearing one too. For everywhere you go - everyone you're with - everything you do - God *knows* where you goes. *He is tracking your whereabouts.* God wants you to walk in His will.

We're told Jonah bought a ticket to Tarshish. Where Tarshish was located, we're not sure. There are all kinds of theories - Carthage in Northern Africa, Italy, Spain, Great Britain, India, even the New World...

Wherever it was, the Phoenicians traded regularly with the city. Most scholars think it was the western-most tip of the Mediterranean, on the coast of Spain.

But here was Jonah's strategy...

God called him to arise and go east - 500 miles *over land* to Assyria... Jonah arose alright, but he headed west. He boarded a slow boat with the intention of sailing the seas 2500 miles in the opposite direction.

I once heard that **"A heart specialist can check the condition of a patient's heart by just sending him the bill..."** *The patient sees his cardiologist's exorbitant fees and he can have another heart attack.* Well, God sent Jonah instructions that immediately tested his heart. *Will Jonah trust God, or hold on to his prejudice?*

Let me ask you today, **"What's your Nineveh?"**

The one place you said you just wouldn't go? The thing you said you could never do? The person you said you would never love. What's your Nineveh? Is your prejudice more important than God's purpose?

It's interesting, no matter what the Assyrians might have done to Jonah - one thing is for sure, they didn't harm him to the degree they had sinned against God.

And if God could love the Ninevites, Jonah could at least deliver God's warning and extend His mercy.

We should always remember, **there is one force more powerful than *our hate*, and that's *God's love*.**

Which one will win out in your heart... *hate or love?*

Don't be a Jonah - be like Jesus - Who even while they crucified Him, prayed for His executioners, **"Father forgive them, for they do not know what they do."**

Here's what we'll learn next week. **"Anger is just one letter short of danger."** Jonah's anger, His hatred, His prejudice caused him to do something very, very silly...

He rejected God's call. He tried to flee from God's presence. Jonah thought He could stiff-arm God's will, and still score. Jonah was wrong. God tackled Jonah.

Whatever God's calling you to do today, don't run!

Don't try to escape? Don't think life will be better if you avoid God's will. *That's a lie from the pit of hell.*

I'm not telling you God's will is always easy - to the contrary, it's often extremely difficult. The will of God can mean staying in a difficult marriage - or raising a difficult child - or sticking in a difficult job - or loving a difficult neighbor - or enduring a difficult illness.

But even if God's will is hard there is no better way for you to spend your life than to embrace it, obey it, and live it out in faith, and love, and perseverance.

God's will plus a thousand hardships is infinitely better than my own ease and comfort in Tarshish. Jonah has important lessons to learn - *and so do we!*