

Wayward Prophet, Wayward Nation

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Bible Verse: Jonah
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Well, we come this morning to a new chapter in the history of our pulpit, a new chapter in the history of the pulpit of Truth Community Church, and I am very excited to be where we're at here today in the anticipation of God's word.

Just by way of a little bit of survey, of review, during this calendar year we have completed a long study of the Sermon on the Mount, we did a topical series on legalism and another one on youth ministry, and now we come to something new here today, and just by way of reminder, by way of gratitude to God, the foundation of our church is the verse by verse exposition of Bible books, the 66 books of the Bible, teaching them in context verse by verse, and that's the foundation of what we do even though we sometimes vary that approach as we've done over the past few weeks in legalism and on the youth ministry topics that we did. But coming back to our roots today, I'm very delighted to begin a new book study that will probably carry us through the rest of the summer and even into the early part of the fall. The basic narrative of this book will be familiar to you. Some of the great events of this book will no doubt be familiar to us all, but its profound spiritual impact and the lessons that it communicates to us, the themes about the sovereignty and the compassion of God and the eyes of God upon the nations, are things that will elevate ourselves well beyond the realm of our prior familiarity as we turn to this book, the book of Jonah.

Let me remind you that even from a New Testament perspective, it commends the teaching of the Old Testament. The Apostle Paul said in Romans 15:4 that "whatever was written in former times was written for our instruction, so that through perseverance and the encouragement of the Scriptures we might have hope." He could say that as an apostle of Christ, he could say that as a minister of the new covenant because the God of the Old Testament is also the God of the New Testament. We reject the false dichotomy that some create, that some posit, as though God of the Old Testament was a God of wrath and the God of the New Testament was a God of compassion, a God of mercy, a God of forgiveness. Jonah will show us that that dichotomy is a false one because you see in the book of Jonah God being merciful to unworthy people, being merciful to Jonah, being merciful to sailors, being merciful to the city of Nineveh, all in the great depths of his compassion.

Elsewhere in the New Testament it says that "the word of God is living and active and sharper than any two-edged sword, and piercing as far as the division of soul and spirit, of both joints and marrow, and able to judge the thoughts and intentions of the heart." That's going to serve us well here as we go through the book of Jonah as we see Jonah running from his God-appointed purpose in life; as we see Jonah resenting the mercy of God on people who were his natural enemies; as we see Jonah running and resenting and in anger responding to God in rebellious and disobedient ways. All of these things will come and expose things in our own heart, will convict us as well as point us to the patient mercy and compassion of God as it is revealed and as he revealed himself to Jonah. Ultimately remembering that, Christ said that Jonah was a picture of himself; that just as Jonah was in the belly of the fish for three days and three nights, so also Christ would be in the belly of the grave for three days and three nights and yet he would rise again; just as Jonah came out of the belly of the fish, so Christ came out of the belly of death, risen, having accomplished redemption for his people.

So this is not a children's story, although children can understand it. The book of Jonah brings a message for adults, brings a message for those who would be mature in their thinking, who would see the big picture of the purpose of God among the nations. So it's with confidence in Scripture and with a great sense of hopeful anticipation to what the Lord will do in our midst through this book, I invite you to turn to the book of Jonah in the Old Testament. The book of Jonah in the Old Testament. I'm going to start by reading simply the first three verses to kind of set the context for us, to set the stage. What we're going to do today and next week is kind of do some introductory things that will give us the sense of the book as we study it in greater detail in the weeks that follow after that.

Look at these first three verses with me. Jonah 1, beginning in verse 1. It says,

1 The word of the LORD came to Jonah the son of Amittai saying, 2 "Arise, go to Nineveh the great city and cry against it, for their wickedness has come up before Me." 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.

Those verses introduce us to the story of a wayward prophet, of a prophet who immediately as soon as he received his next commission from the Lord, disobeyed. And you can see it's very interesting and we will point these things out in days to come, but it's interesting as you look in verse 3 that even as it is describing Jonah's physical descent, it is also describing a spiritual descent. Look at verse 3, it says that "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 going down more than just in a physical sense, he was going down spiritually, and when you remember that Jonah was a prophet, this is all the more startling. Where else, how often do you see a man of God in Scripture commissioned to go do something and defiantly reject the purpose of the Lord for his life? It's strange, isn't it? We're startled right from the beginning to see the man of God immediately responding in rebellion.

Now, not many realize as much as they know the story of Jonah, not as many realize that Scripture speaks elsewhere of Jonah's ministry at a better time, at another place, in another way. If you'll turn back to 2 Kings with me, the book of 2 Kings further back in your Old Testament, 2 Kings 14. It wasn't always this way with Jonah, the disobedience wasn't always the mark of his ministry, in 2 Kings 14, beginning in verse 23, we see a description of Jonah's ministry during the reign of an evil king in the nation of Israel. So in verse 23 of 2 Kings 14 we read,

23 In the fifteenth year of Amaziah the son of Joash king of Judah, Jeroboam the son of Joash king of Israel became king in Samaria, and reigned forty-one years.

This is the context of Jonah's prophetic ministry. Verse 24,

24 He did evil in the sight of the LORD; he did not depart from all the sins of Jeroboam the son of Nebat, which he made Israel sin.

Speaking of the king it says in verse 25,

25 He restored the border of Israel from the entrance of Hamath as far as the Sea of the Arabah, according to the word of the LORD, the God of Israel, which He spoke through His servant Jonah the son of Amittai, the prophet, who was of Gath-hepher. 26 For the LORD saw the affliction of Israel, which was very bitter; for there was neither bond nor free, nor was there any helper for Israel. 27 The LORD did not say that He would blot out the name of Israel from under heaven, but He saved them by the hand of Jeroboam the son of Joash.

What do you see there? What you see is Jonah ministering in his prophetic office during the course of an evil king, a king that was disobedient to the Lord and in many spiritual ways. The Scripture says that he did evil in the sight of the Lord and yet in the midst of the wickedness, God had his spokesman in the midst and even in the midst of the wickedness, God was showing favor, grace and compassion to the nation. He expanded their borders. He gave them a time of prosperity. He gave them a time of stability during the 41 year reign of Jeroboam. So we find, then, there's this seeming tension, there's this seeming inconsistency, you might say from what you might expect even during this description of Jonah's ministry, that you had a wicked leader that God was using to bring blessing to his people and that he was continuing the ministry of his word, continuing his faithfulness to his people even in the midst of it, God showing grace and compassion on unworthy people. This is the whole context.

If you step back and think about our contemporary situation today, the situation isn't that much different and without getting into the politics of everything that's going on today, listen, we are led by men who do not know Christ. We are led by men who are seeking their own desires. We are led by men who are not seeking the Lord, certainly haven't in

their past earthly lives, let's say the minimum that we could say. And yet here we are, here you and I are here in this place, in this time, in a place of comparative prosperity, a place of comparative stability as the Lord shows grace and compassion to his people even as they live in the midst of a wicked environment by people leading them who have no desire for his word.

What should we draw from that? Well, if you draw things rightly, as you know the course of things with Jonah and as he went away, we should realize that we need to be all the more diligent to prove ourselves and to examine ourselves that we might be found as those who truly belong to the Lord, not swept up in the prosperity of our day; not swept up in the politics of the moment; not swept up in some many calls for social justice to the neglect of the Gospel, to the neglect of the preaching of the word of God, to the neglect of seeking his kingdom, to the neglect of being aware that there is a life to come after our window of prosperity and earthly breath is over where matters of eternal consequence will be played out. We should not be lulled to sleep when the word of God is brought to bear on our minds, brought to bear on our hearts; being aware of the fact that there is a sovereign God working out his purposes, a sovereign God who has goals in mind, a sovereign God who has commands for his people, purposes for his people, and to not be distracted by what is in front of us in the news of the day to the neglect of what is revealed to us for all time in God's word.

So these are things that just kind of help set the context for us, to realize that the day of Jonah was not that much different from the day in which we live, a time of political and material prosperity for Israel but a time of spiritual destitution, a time of spiritual poverty. And we have to ask ourselves as broadly speaking of the church of Christ, speaking more narrowly of our own local church, speaking even more narrowly of our own lives, what is it that we desire? What is it that we desire? What is it that is first-most and uppermost in our affections and in our commitments? And it was striking that the time, providential timing of our Scripture reading brought us to the rich man and Lazarus and that parable. Oh people, oh brothers and sisters in Christ, oh friends, oh friends, what we see as we come to the book of Jonah is a man who had lost sight of the purpose for his existence and we see a nation that had lost sight of the purpose of its existence and it gives us opportunity to examine our own hearts to come back to examine our own priorities, our own affections, the direction that we ourselves want to go.

Jonah was ministering during this time of expansion. He would have been a contemporary of the prophets Isaiah, Hosea and Amos. There was a lot of prophetic ministry going on at this time but the material prosperity did not extend to the spiritual realm. The people were marked by hypocrisy, oppression, greed, bloodshed, false worship, false doctrine. Their spiritual and social life was corrupt even in the midst of the prosperity. They no doubt loved a king that brought prosperity to them and yet were blind to the spiritual decay going on in their lives. When you think about it from that perspective, knowing how Jonah departed and disobeyed the command of the Lord, you say, "He was a wayward prophet. He was a disobedient prophet." That's right, he was in this episode that is described for us in the book of Jonah, but what I want you to see is that he was simply a reflection of a greater reality that was going on around him during

the reign of King Jeroboam II who was doing evil in the sight of the Lord even while prosperity was taking place. Don't you see, beloved, don't you see that we should not confuse material prosperity with spiritual well-being? We should not assume that our lives are obedient and godly simply because they are marked by prosperity in an earthly sense?

So this was all brought out, this was all brought to bear when God commanded Jonah to go to Nineveh and Jonah responded by saying no. He spoke out of the rebellion of his heart which was a symptom of the greater rebellion in the system in which he lived. He was a wayward prophet from a wayward nation and that's what we're going to look at in the weeks to come. For today, I just want to show you something by way of broad context. There is a very real sense in which you could say that it wasn't supposed to be that way. This was not supposed to be the mark of the people of God. This was not the call of Israel from God to simply be focused on their material prosperity. They had a much higher call from God just as you and I do, and you'll understand the book of Jonah better if you have a preliminary grasp of the purpose that Israel was supposed to serve in the purposes of God.

What was that purpose, that's what we want to look at this morning. What was that purpose that Israel was supposed to serve? Well, as a nation, as a people, God had put a call on them. The first thing that we are going to look at this morning is the principle of the call of Israel, or Israel's call by nature, what it was supposed to be like. What was Israel's call, that's our first point. What was it that God had called them to do? And all of this informs what we're going to study in future weeks.

As a prophet of God, Jonah should have known the purpose for which he was serving God and by extension, the nation of Israel. Why was Jonah even a prophet? He was there to be a mouthpiece of God. He was there to declare the word of God to the people who did not yet have a completed canon like we do, and as you read and study the Old Testament, you'll see something very dramatic and important. Let me say this, let me back up: when God called Jonah to go to Nineveh, he was sending Jonah to a foreign nation. Nineveh was a city in the nation of Assyria, we'll see this in days to come, so God had called Jonah to go outside the borders of Israel and to preach to people in a foreign land and Jonah was not willing to do that, and in so doing, he betrayed the purpose of the nation that God had set upon them. He betrayed why God had set apart Israel in the first place because, you see, God had always intended Israel to be a witness to nations. They were not a nation for their own sake, a nation for their own purposes, that they would enjoy prosperity and the blessing of God and keep it to themselves. God had called them to be a blessing to the nations and you see that right from the very start of their ultimate original patriarch Abraham.

Look back at Genesis 12, if you will, and this context will help you see what a great violation Jonah's disobedience was. It was more than simply the individual call to go to Nineveh, this was a violation of the entire reason for the existence of Israel. It's stunning. In Genesis 12:1,

1 ... the LORD said to Abram, "Go forth from your country, And from your relatives And from your father's house, To the land which I will show you;

Interesting, isn't it, that it's not much different than what he said to Jonah, in effect, "Go away from your country. Go away from your relatives to your father's house to the land that I have called you to." The spirit of the call of Jonah was the same as the spirit of the call on Abram. Verse 2,

2 And I will make you a great nation, And I will bless you, And make your name great; And so you shall be a blessing;

It's not just that he will be blessed, that he himself would become a blessing,

3 And I will bless those who bless you, And the one who curses you I will curse.

And here it is at the end of verse 3,

And in you all the families of the earth will be blessed.

God calls out Abraham, promises to bless him, promises to protect him, promises to raise up a seed to him, but central to that, intricate to that call is the statement to Abraham, "in you all the families of the earth will be blessed." There is a universal perspective, a universal scope to this call on Abraham that he is to follow that is the purpose of his existence, that is the purpose of the call. "Abraham, I will take you and from your loins I will bring blessing to the nations." That's the original, that's the starting point.

You see God repeating this at the giving of the law to Moses. Look at Exodus 19:4. You know the story. God had led them out of Egypt. Now he's giving the law to Moses on Sinai and in verse 4 God says to Moses, he says,

4 'You yourselves have seen what I did to the Egyptians, and how I bore you on eagles' wings, and brought you to Myself. 5 Now then, if you will indeed obey My voice and keep My covenant, then you shall be My own possession among all the peoples, for all the earth is Mine; 6 and you shall be to Me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.' These are the words that you shall speak to the sons of Israel.

He had set them apart. He had set this nation apart to serve him and as priests to God, as priests of God, they would represent God to the nations and they would bring the nations to God. That was the whole point of their existence. They were set apart to serve God. They were not set apart simply for the ultimate final end as though their material prosperity was the reason for their existence.

Beloved, this is true of us today. God has set us apart to serve him. He has set you apart if you are in Christ, to serve him, to be a witness for him, to declare him, to defend him, to uphold his word, to seek first his kingdom and his righteousness. This is why God saves his people. You are not the end point of why he has saved you. You are not the end point of why he has blessed you. The idea is that you would take the blessing that he has given to you and mediate it to others around you, men in your homes, church, to others outside our walls. As priests, Israel was called to represent God to other nations. To nations. There is a universal scope of sovereignty and call that is at work as God separates Israel out in the Old Testament.

So when you see Jonah with a stiff neck refusing to go to another nation, realize that this is more than just a betrayal of the immediate command that God had given him in those first three verses that we read, this is a betrayal of a purpose for the nation that had been in place at that time for over a thousand years. This is high treason. This is great sin. And as you read the Old Testament, you see this international focus, you see this universal perspective of God on the nations found in the Psalms, found also in the prophets, and I want to highlight this theme so that it would weigh on your mind to recognize the significance of what we are considering.

Psalm 22, if you would turn there with me. We have to lay a foundation and that's what we're trying to do this morning. Psalm 22 beginning in verse 25. This is a Psalm of David. We studied it a few years ago on Tuesday night. Psalm 22, David says,

25 From You [speaking to God] comes my praise in the great assembly; I shall pay my vows before those who fear Him. 26 The afflicted will eat and be satisfied; Those who seek Him will praise the LORD. Let your heart live forever!

Now look at how he expands his vision. Verse 27,

27 All the ends of the earth will remember and turn to the LORD, And all the families of the nations will worship before You. 28 For the kingdom is the LORD'S And He rules over the nations.

You could multiply examples of this throughout the Psalms, of the Psalmist calling nations to bless the Lord, calling the nations to praise, calling God to bless the nations and remembering that the purpose of God extended beyond the boundaries of Israel to all of the nations; that there was an ultimate final purpose in mind that went beyond the blood descendants of Abraham to all of the earth.

Just for one more example, look to the shortest Psalm in the Psalter, Psalm 117. These are just representative of other passages that we could consider. Psalm 117. As you're turning there, even Psalm 100 says,

1 Shout joyfully to the LORD, all the earth.

Look who's being called upon here, not just the descendants of Abraham but everyone everywhere.

Psalm 117,

1 Praise the LORD, all nations; Laud Him, all peoples! 2 For His lovingkindness is great toward us, And the truth of the LORD is everlasting. Praise the LORD!

The call to all nations going out. Here the Psalmist manifesting the ideal, the purpose that God had in mind that Israel would be a sounding board for his praises going out to all peoples and that they would be called away from their own idolatry, away from their false gods to the one true God who had revealed himself to Israel and had proven his power by delivering them from Egypt at the Red Sea; had proven his power by delivering them when they crossed the Jordan; who had proven his power when he drove out nations before them as they entered into the land under the leadership of Joshua. This was great. This was vast. This was mighty. This was lofty. This was the purpose of God established for his people.

Look at Isaiah 42, a representative word in the prophets. You could look to Zechariah and its promise of how all the nations will come. You could look at Habakkuk where it speaks of the glory of God will one day be over all the earth. This is a universal sovereignty of a universal God working out his purpose so that he would receive universal praise from men in every tongue and land, and in Isaiah 42:6, the Lord speaks. Beginning in verse 5, he says,

5 Thus says God the LORD, Who created the heavens and stretched them out, Who spread out the earth and its offspring, Who gives breath to the people on it And spirit to those who walk in it, 6 "I am the LORD, I have called You in righteousness, I will also hold You by the hand and watch over You, And I will appoint You as a covenant to the people, As a light to the nations [plural],"

And so what we see is the call of Israel is that they were to be a light to the nations, that God had given them a purpose to mediate like priests to make him known to the nations around them, and for over a thousand years before the time of Jonah, God's word had pointed them to that call, God's actions had pointed them in that direction. God delivered them from slavery in Egypt so that they would declare to the nations that universal glory of a saving God.

So step back for a moment, that's Israel's call and the principle of it all, to step back from it and to start to absorb, start to see the great significance of what it is that we are considering his this morning. One true God who created the heavens and the earth. One true God who reigns over all of the nations. One true God who chose Israel from out of the nations to be his priests, to be those who would testify to him. We're talking about the whole purpose of world history being unfolded before our eyes from the word of God,

true world history as understood from the purpose of God being worked out by the one who created it. So these are high and lofty themes which we consider here today.

Well, how did that work out in practice? We've seen the call to Abraham and Moses and in the Psalms and in the prophets just in an illustrative way to see clearly that this was God's purpose, that it was more than just appointing feasts and festivals for Israel and that they would enjoy his blessing themselves, it was a means to another end. Well, how did this work out? Well, at times through the Old Testament you would find this call working out in practice. You would see the nations receiving a spillover in benefit of the blessing of God. So for example, we won't look to all of these places, in Joshua 2, Israel's spies treated Rahab the harlot with kindness before the walls of Jericho fell. Ruth the Moabite found mercy from God through the life of Naomi and later Boaz, and ultimately becoming an ancestor of King David. The Queen of Sheba in 1 Kings 10 had an audience with Solomon, saw his splendor and heard his wisdom. You see the spillover effect, you could call it, taking place. Later in 2 Kings 5, Naaman, a foreign army captain, was healed under the ministry of Elisha. And not only that, God at times included other nations in his prophecies of future blessing, prophecies that are still future to us today.

Look at Isaiah 19:23,

23 In that day there will be a highway from Egypt to Assyria, and the Assyrians will come into Egypt and the Egyptians into Assyria, and the Egyptians will worship with the Assyrians. 24 In that day Israel will be the third party with Egypt and Assyria, a blessing in the midst of the earth, 25 whom the LORD of hosts has blessed, saying, "Blessed is Egypt My people, and Assyria the work of My hands, and Israel My inheritance."

A prophecy that there would be a time of future blessing for these foreign nations, foreign from the perspective of Israel.

Think with me a little further, beloved. Remember that as Israel strayed in the Old Testament, that God used the nations to bring discipline upon his people. He brought Assyria down upon the northern kingdom, brought Babylon upon Judah, later brought Persia to bear on the scene and Persia became and King Cyrus became an instrument of deliverance to the people when they were in captivity. Nations alternately being used to discipline and to help Israel under the hand of God. And when you step back, you start to see the point, that this transcended Israel. Israel's role in the plan of God was to mediate his word and his blessing to nations outside their borders.

Let's take it another step further. Let's look to the great fulfillment of the purpose and the plan of God in this way. Who is the ultimate Israelite? Who is the perfect Jew except the Lord Jesus Christ? And why did the Lord send Jesus as a descendant of Abraham, a descendant of David? Why did he send Christ into the world? Because it was a manifestation of the love that he had planned, the love that he had purposed from before the foundation of the world. John 3:16, "For God so loved the world," people from all nations, people from all tongues, loved the world, the love of God being manifested in the

sending of Christ so "that whoever believes in Him would not perish, but would have eternal life." You see, there is just this expanding telescopic nature of the purpose of God being unfolded before our eyes, and the design of God was always that Israel would bring forth and, as it were, give birth to the one who would be the only Savior of all the nations. Yes, the Old Testament focuses on Israel but it was not to the exclusion of the other nations. Walter Kaiser says this and I quote, he says, "They were to be mediators of God's grace to the nations of the earth even as in Abraham all the nations of the earth were to be blessed."

Beloved, when we see these things, we start to get a glimpse of, we start to see the breadth of the purpose and the majesty and the compassion of the God who is the Creator of heaven and earth. We see how Christ when he came, when he was sent in love for the benefit of the nations, was a fulfillment of a great massive purpose that God had established before the foundation of the world, and we start to see, we start to feel a little bit small, you might say, as we start to see the vastness of the sovereign purposes of God in creating the earth, in calling Israel, and sending Christ, just taking that chronologically.

What does it do, in part? It lifts us out of our own selfish, self-centered, self-preoccupation with what's going on in our lives and in our own little worlds. You see that if God has called you to Christ, that he has included you in a purpose that far transcends your earthly life, for one thing, and that as he calls your life into the realm of this purpose, into this realm of Christ, as he calls you to Christ, he has given you something that transcends the affections and pursuits of your own life and world.

Scripture in the New Testament makes this clear. Look at Matthew 28, for example. Matthew 28. As you turn there, and we'll see if I can draw out a couple of words of application. Matthew 28:18. Jesus being the Incarnation of this God of whom we've spoken, being the very God of very God of whom we speak, Jesus says after his resurrection, having conquered death, in verse 18 as he contemplates his soon ascension,

18 [He] came up and spoke to them, saying, "All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. 19 Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, 20 teaching them to observe all that I commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age."

The nations in the Old Testament, the nations in the New.

Luke 24. You don't need to turn there. Christ speaking again after his resurrection says in verse 46,

46 ... "Thus it is written, that the Christ would suffer and rise again from the dead the third day, 47 and that repentance for forgiveness of sins would be proclaimed in His name to [what does it say?] all the nations, beginning from Jerusalem."

In Acts 1, Jesus says,

8 ... you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be My witnesses both in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and even to the remotest part of the earth.

And so, God has a plan for the nations. God's eye is on the nations. His compassion and his intention for blessing, his love is extended to all of the nations. Not just us, not just to you, not just to Israel, it far transcends such small and parochial perspectives on things.

So the book of Jonah shows us ultimately the overriding sovereignty of God, his ability to bring blessing to the nations despite a wayward prophet, despite a wayward nation failing to do their part. So that's Israel's call, Israel's purpose. Jonah being a prophet was designed to advance that. He rebelled against it. We'll look at that in days to come.

Let me see if I can bring out a bit of practical application from this for us here this morning. I would say this: it is humanly impossible to keep the people of God on mission, and I'm speaking not about Truth Community Church here, but just in general in terms, just in terms of what people think Christianity is about and what broadly speaking the people of God see as the purpose of Christianity. You see it played out again and again as the decades roll into more and more future decades. What you see played out in Western culture anyway, of those naming the name of Christ, is more often than not people who love their prosperity and their politics more than their purpose, more than the Christ that saved them. Why else can you explain a preoccupation in our day with areas of social justice as if the world was not fallen, and that injustice and poverty was going to be with us always until Christ returns? We can't fix all of this stuff and it's not our purpose to do that. Our purpose is to go and to make disciples, to bring the blessing of God to bear upon people, that they would repent as Jesus said in Luke 24, "Turn from sin and find eternal salvation in Christ crucified and resurrected."

Why do we get tired of that message, speaking as the church at large? Why do we get tired of that? Why is that not sufficient? Why is that not enough to enrapture our souls, I ask? Because we have our mind on earthly things. You see it in American politics, you see it played out in what leading voices, who claim to be leading voices in the church today, want to focus our minds on. Well beloved, by the mercy of God, by the grace of God, I pray not here. Not here. This will not be a pulpit, we will not be a church so emphasizing social justice. That's not why we're here. Our purpose is not to try to rectify past wrongs that have occurred in space and time. Our purpose is to be the people of God proclaiming to nations that salvation from sin can be found in the Lord Jesus Christ and in him alone. We do not preach a social Gospel. That is not our purpose and only people that are surrounded by prosperity could even think that it was.

So in coming weeks, we're going to look to the book of Jonah, trust the Holy Spirit to deliver us from such self-centered perspectives, to shape us after the word of God and to make us more into the image of our Lord Jesus Christ. In the meantime, if you're here on an individual basis and you're trapped in sin, you're trapped in guilt, you are a slave to

desires that you cannot control that lead you further and further into darkness, the call is not to reform your own life, the call is to hear the words of Christ who came to save sinners just like you, to deliver you from the bondage of your own sin, who shed his blood, who gave his life at the cross of Calvary to deliver sinners just like you. This is what is so magnificent: the love that God has for nations is extended and offered to sinners just like you on an individual basis. You in your guilt, you in your undeserving condition are extended a call, extended an offer by the Lord Jesus Christ who says, "Repent and believe in the Gospel. Come to me," Christ says, and you will find salvation in Christ and in Christ alone. You can be born again, not because you deserve it because you don't. None of us do. But because there is a love of God for nations that is extended down in a particular offer of salvation to individual sinners just like you, and if you come to Christ in faith alone, that salvation can be yours, and you and your life become an extension of this great purpose of God of which we have spoken. On a micro scale, the illustration of what God is doing in the outworking of his purposes on a macro scale. Christ is the friend of sinners and he frees them, he delivers them, he saves them not only from hell but from sin itself by virtue of his shed blood on the cross.

Let's bow together in prayer.

Our great God, we honor you. We praise you for the free and sovereign grace which you exercised and established for nations and we thank you that you have elected a people, you have chosen a people to come to Christ. We pray, Father, for the outworking of your purposes even in our midst in the lives of individual sinners who are lost and bound in sin, Father, who are in darkness and they know it but, Father, they lack the power to break their own chains. Would you send the Spirit of Christ, would you send your Holy Spirit deep upon their hearts to unveil them the glory of Christ, to impart to them a new nature that would respond to Christ in repentance and faith? God, it's to that end that we preach.

God, we pray for our own church. Father, we realize that in times of stability, times of prosperity, it's easy to fall into a self-satisfied spirit, to start to go through the motions, to start to love the things of this world and let those things choke out the word in our lives. God, we see it all the time and it seems as though it is impossible to keep people's minds focused on the central thing of Christ. We pray for your help, O God, as a church, individually, that we would not be lulled to sleep by the very blessing that you have given to us; that our hearts and lives would be alive to our purpose to seek first his kingdom and his righteousness; to go forth and make disciples; to grow ourselves in the grace and knowledge of Christ. God, help us be what you have called us to be and use the book of Jonah in the weeks to come to further that purpose. Father, I thank you that there are so many shoulder-to-shoulder in ministry with us who share that desire even though we all fall short of it. Father, strengthen every desire for obedience, strengthen every desire for godliness, strengthen every affection for Christ that lurks in our hearts. Blow on the embers that it might become a great flame that would mark us all and that would mark this church.

Father, we pray for your work in the broader body of Christ preoccupied with earthly things that are passing away, preoccupied with things that will only end in destruction. God, do they not know, have they not read your word that you will end this world in a flame of fire and establish a new heavens and a new earth where righteousness dwells? Have they not known, have they not heard, have they been so blinded by the things around them that they've lost sight like Jonah of what our purpose is? God, have mercy on your church. Have mercy on your people. Strengthen those who are faithful to your purpose, faithful to your word. Expose and diminish and set aside those who are not. Father, we ask this not for our sake, it won't make any difference to us on a daily basis. We ask it for the sake of your glory, for the sake of the Gospel. For the glory of Christ we pray these things, Father, and for the well-being of souls who are already lost in too many things of materialistic origin that have no eternal value. Father, how will the world hear if we are preoccupying our minds and attentions and message on worldly things?

Father, to the extent that we as individuals, even we as a church to the extent that we have somehow contributed to that misguided function, we repent and ask your forgiveness. To the extent that we as individuals have loved this world and our earthly pursuits more than your word, that we have neglected your word, we have neglected prayer, we have neglected fellowship with your people just because of our earthly preoccupations, Lord, forgive us and changes so that we would not be met with a fate similar to the rich man had in Luke 16. Be merciful to us, Lord. You sent Christ for the sake of mercy, you sent Christ in compassion, have mercy and compassion on our easily misguided souls and lead us in the way everlasting that we might fulfill the purpose for which you have appointed us as individuals in our families, in our lives and our circle of influence, that this church might fulfill the purpose for which you have raised it up, Father. Let courage and commitment rise to the opportunity. May your grace energize our feeble efforts to be what you have called us to be.

Father, for our young people, for those beautiful children that sang before us here earlier this morning, have mercy on their souls, O God. Save them. Lead them to saving faith in Christ. Help us to be a place, to be a people where the Gospel of Christ is readily available to their listening ears. All these things, our God, we pray in the name of Christ our Lord. Amen.

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