

Jonah Chapters 3 & 4

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Date: 02 April 2017

Preacher: Peter Robinson

[0 : 00] Thank you.

Thank you.

Thank you.

Thank you. Thank you.

Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you.

[2 : 14] Thank you.

Thank you. In Christ alone my hope is found. Number 647. We'll stand as we sing together to the praise of Jesus.

In Christ alone my hope is found. He is my life, my strength, my soul.

He is born as stone, his solid ground. Left with the fiercest crown and stone. For the times of love, for the depths of peace.

When fears are still, when strivings cease. I come, Father, my only Lord.

[3 : 54] Here in the love of Christ I stand. Your fears in life, your fear in death.

This is the blood of Christ in me. From lifeless pride to final breath. Jesus commands my destiny.

No power of hell, no steel of man. Can ever part me from his hand. Till he returns, of those we know.

Here in the power of Christ I stand. The wonderful truth of which we've been singing is that we now have a right relationship with God.

And can come to him. And speak with him. And know that he receives us as his children. So let's do that as we pray together. Let us all pray. The words of which we've been singing, O Lord our God, we know are true.

[5 : 18] Because they are words which reflect your truths found in the Bible. The truths that you are the only God, the living God. That you are the God who is our maker and creator.

That you are the God who is the one who has, in his eye as it were, every single one of us. The one who is concerned, who is interested, who takes account of every single life, every single person.

Whatever their age or background or race or color. We thank you, O Lord our God, that you are the one who has a love towards us. A love which is powerful and effective.

A love, O Lord, which is life transforming. Life affirming. And that love, O Lord, is real. And we know it is real. And we know it is genuine.

Not simply because and only because you say so. But because you have proven your love in demonstrative ways. You have shown your love in the person, the life, the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

[6 : 22] Who is God himself. Who came into this world for our sake. Who gave himself, as we read, to rescue us from this present evil age.

To give himself for our sins and to die in our stead. We thank you, O Lord our God, that when we trust in Jesus. We not only know that love in our heads, but we know it in our hearts and our lives.

When we see the wonder of his forgiveness in the cross. And we receive of that free gift of life everlasting. So we are born again.

And so we are those who receive that newness of life. That newness of vision. That newness of purpose. Which is found in living for you. The God who died for us.

For we thank you that, Jesus, you didn't remain dead in the tomb. But you rose again, as we read. You are the living one who ever lives. And who gives everlasting life. We ask that this morning, as we come to you.

[7 : 23] That those of us who know that everlasting life. Those who know that forgiveness of sins. Those who know you as our God. May worship and praise and rejoice and delight in you. And know you speaking to us.

And changing us. And transforming us. And for those of us here this morning who have never tasted. Never experienced. Never known the wonder of the love of God in Christ. Oh Lord, open our eyes to see and our hearts to receive.

Give us that faith, Lord, to see you for who you are. And that repentance to turn away from the way we've lived. Which is in opposition to you. Oh, come amongst us by your Holy Spirit.

Meet with us, oh Lord our God. That we may know deep down like we've never known before. That this God is my God. And may our lives, oh Lord, be lived in the joy and the power of the cross of Jesus.

And his resurrection. For we ask these things, oh Lord our God, in and through him. For in Christ alone we come and worship you. Amen. Amen.

[8 : 28] Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. If those who'd like to make use of the creche. And the children like to go down to their Sunday school classes. Please could they do that now. Thank you. I think they're in for a bit of a shock, aren't they?

The Sunday school teachers who prepared usually for three or four children. And now I've got a little bit more than they bargained for. But again, a welcome to those of you visiting us and with us.

Would you turn with me please to the prophet Jonah. And if you've got one of the church Bibles, one of the red church Bibles. That's page 929, 928, page 929.

928, 929. We're going to have a little bit of an overview of Jonah. What we've been doing, because we didn't mention the notices, because there's lots of notices. But in about seven weeks we've got a week of mission, evangelistic mission.

We mentioned those real lives invitations. And we've been looking over the past several weeks at our part in evangelism. Our part in witnessing, sharing, inviting, talking to people about Christ.

[9 : 38] Recognizing that there are many barriers to us doing that as Christians. Finding it hard at times, fearful at times and so on. We've been looking at the sort of people that God has been using in the past.

And we're going to look at Jonah. Particularly chapters 3 and 4. But just to pick up the picture, for some of us who may not be familiar with it. We're going to read almost a couple of verses from each chapter.

So first of all, chapter 1, verses 1 to 5. Okay, I'm going to read that. And then I'll tell you where we go after that. The word of the Lord came to Jonah, son of Amittai. Go to the great city of Nineveh and preach against it, because its wickedness has come up before me.

But Jonah ran away from the Lord and headed for Tarshish. He went down to Joppa. He found a ship bound for that port. After paying the fare, he went aboard and sailed for Tarshish to flee from the Lord.

Then the Lord sent a great wind on the sea, and such a violent storm arose that the ship threatened to break up. All the sailors were afraid, and each cried out to his own guard.

[10 : 47] And they threw the cargo into the sea to lighten the ship. I'm going to move over then to the end of chapter 1 and verse 15. Okay, so the end of chapter 1, verse 15. Then they, that's the sailors, took Jonah and threw him overboard.

And the raging sea grew calm. At this the men greatly feared the Lord, and they offered a sacrifice to the Lord and made vows to him. Now the Lord provided a huge fish to swallow Jonah, and Jonah was in the belly of the fish three days and three nights.

Then over to the end of chapter 2, verse 10, the very last verse of that chapter. And we're going to read from now through to the end of the book itself. Verse 10.

And the Lord commanded the fish, and it vomited Jonah unto dry land. Then the word of the Lord came to Jonah a second time. Go to the great city of Nineveh and proclaim to it the message I give you.

Jonah obeyed the word of the Lord and went to Nineveh. Now Nineveh was a very large city. It took three days to go through it. Jonah began by going a day's journey into the city, proclaiming.

[11 : 54] Forty more days and Nineveh will be overthrown. Ninevites believed God. A fast was proclaimed, and all of them from the greatest to the least put on sackcloth.

When Jonah's warning reached the king of Nineveh, he rose from his throne, took off his royal robes, covered himself with sackcloth, and sat in the dust. This is the proclamation he issued in Nineveh.

By the decree of the king and his nobles, do not let people or animals, herds or flocks taste anything. Do not let them eat or drink, but let people and animals be covered with sackcloth.

Let everyone call urgently on God. Let them give up their evil ways and their violence. Who knows? God may yet relent and with compassion turn from his fierce anger so that we will not perish.

When God saw what they did and how they turned from their evil ways, he relented and did not bring on them the destruction he had threatened. But to Jonah, this seemed very wrong.

[12 : 56] And he became angry. He prayed to the Lord. Isn't this what I said, Lord, when I was still at home? That is what I tried to forestall by fleeing to Tarshish.

I knew that you are a gracious and compassionate God, slow to anger and abounding in love. A God who relents from sending calamity. Now, Lord, take away my life.

For it's better for me to die than to live. But the Lord replied, Is it right for you to be angry? Jonah had gone out and sat down at a place east of the city.

There he made himself a shelter, sat in its shade and waited to see what would happen to the city. Then the Lord God provided a leafy plant and made it grow up over Jonah to give shade for his head to ease his discomfort.

Jonah was very happy about the plant. But at dawn the next day, God provided a worm which chewed the plant so that it withered. When the sun rose, God provided a scorching east wind and the sun blazed on Jonah's head so that he grew faint.

[13 : 57] He wanted to die and said, It would be better for me to die than live. But God said to Jonah, Is it right for you to become angry about the plant? It is, he said, and I'm so angry I wish I were dead.

The Lord said, You've been concerned about this plant, though you did not tend it or make it grow. It sprang up overnight and died overnight. And should I not have concern for the great city of Nineveh, in which there are more than 120,000 people who cannot tell their right hand from their left, and also many animals.

We'll come back to these events after we sing our next hymn together. We're going to be looking together then in Jonah.

Jonah, well, mainly chapter 3 and 4, but we read a little bit of each chapter just a moment ago. But if you turn back there, that's page 929.

Page 99 if you've got the church Bible. And chapters 3 and 4. One of my comedy heroes are Laurel and Hardy.

[15 : 10] Those of you perhaps a bit younger don't get the joy of enjoying Laurel and Hardy. But they were my great delight. And I've got various DVDs and even videos, I think, and so on.

But one of the cornerstones of their comedy, and in fact the cornerstone of nearly all comedy, is them getting things wrong. They were bumblers and bunglers, and they messed things up, whether it was cleaning somebody's chimney, or whether it was fixing a boat, or whether it was moving a piano.

They just got it wrong every time. Everything they touched went wrong, and that was the fun of that. And in fact, even if we look into comedy today, sitcoms and so on, there's always somebody or one or two people who are the bunglers, the people who get it wrong, the people who just can't function properly in a particular setting, in a family or in a workplace, and so on.

And of course, many of us find it very humorous to see people falling over and making a mess of things, which is why we have constant repeats of you've been framed, haven't we?

Again and again and again. And for some reason, people still enjoy them. Doing things badly is seen as humorous. But when we come to evangelism, that is the sharing of the gospel, and the making known of Jesus Christ, doing evangelism badly is anything but funny.

[16 : 36] It is quite the opposite. It is grievous and sad. As I said, by way of introduction to this passage, we've been looking over the last several weeks at particularly the great commission of Jesus given to his disciples in Matthew 28.

He said this, All authority on heaven and earth has been given to me, therefore go and make disciples of all nations. That was his declaration, his commission, his command.

And you may remember that I said that for many, this is the 11th commandment that God gives us, to take Christ and make him known. And we looked at how God has used very insignificant people.

He used a young girl. He used four lepers. And we saw last week, particularly brought that together, how God uses us as parents, Christian parents, Christian grandparents, to be his means of leading those to Christ.

This week, I want us to look at somebody, and you may have guessed who he is by now, but somebody who got it wrong, who went around about evangelism in a wrong way.

[17 : 43] And yet, somebody who in spite of his failings, his faux pas, his faults and his sins, God used in a wonderful way to rescue and to save 120,000 people from death.

And that person is Jonah. And in Jonah in chapters 3 and 4 particularly, we have Jonah's attempt at evangelism, his attempt at taking the message of God to these people, and how he did everything just about, though one thing he got right, many of the things he did, he did wrongly, and he failed, and he blew it in lots of ways, and yet his efforts were taken by God and made effective for the salvation of a city.

And so we read, don't we here, even in verse 5, that when Jonah's warning reached the king, they believed God's word through him, and they turned in repentance to the Lord, and they received God's forgiveness and salvation.

And in fact, if we count up 120,000 people turning to God, and compare that with the day of Pentecost, when 3,000 were converted, it's a massive revival. It's the greatest, in one sense, revival, the greatest turning of a number of people to the living God in the Bible's record of people's lives.

The great work of God done through a very poor and a very failing man. Now one of the reasons why many of us find it hard to tell people about Jesus, or to share the gospel with people, or to even talk about God, or even perhaps even to say to someone, I'm a Christian and I follow Christ, is because we think they're going to make a big mess of it.

[19 : 32] We think that if we say anything about Jesus, then we're going to ruin it. Instead of helping them to see their need of Christ and put their trust in him, actually we're going to put them off. We're going to put them off Christianity, and we're going to fail to help them altogether.

In fact, we feel we'll be more of a stumbling block than a step up. But I want us to look at the efforts of Jonah. Efforts that God used, and I hope that in looking at Jonah and the mistakes he made, the failings that he made, that we might draw great encouragement ourselves.

Encouragement to have a go at sharing Christ and speaking of him. Encouragement, particularly as we draw near to this week of mission, to take some of those invitations and to begin to ask people to come along and to hear the things of Christ.

I want us to be encouraged because the first thing that we see that Jonah got wrong, it's one sense that the whole of the first half of the book, is that Jonah failed at the very first attempt.

He failed at the very first attempt. And when we get to chapter 3, verse 1, we're told, the word of the Lord came to Jonah a second time. In other words, the first time was a failure.

[20 : 51] It was the second time that actually as he took the gospel, it took God's word, that things began to happen. And we know what happened, don't we? We read just briefly, and many of us will know the story, either from Sunday school days or from other occasions, what happened with Jonah.

God spoke to him in chapter 1, verse 1, go, take my message to this city, this great city of Nineveh, that judgment is coming against them, they're wicked people. And we know what happened.

Jonah ran away in the opposite direction. He chickened out. He disobeyed God's great commission. He turned his back on God. He turned his back on what God was telling him to do, and he ran away as fast as his legs could carry him, down to the coast, got on a ship, and tried to sail away in the opposite direction towards the west.

And how did that work out for him? Well, we read there, verse 4, the Lord sent a great wind and sea in such a storm that the ship was about to sink. And then through the events of that, eventually, the men on the ship say to Jonah, what have you done?

And he said, well, I've disobeyed God and I've run away from him, and you'll have to throw me into the sea to save yourselves. And they were, of course, reluctant to do that, but eventually they do that. So there's Jonah.

[22 : 05] He's gone from God's land, Israel. He's gone to sea. Now he's in the sea. He's drowning. And we know what happened then. Verse 17, the Lord provided a huge fish to swallow him up, and he's in the belly of the fish for three days.

And eventually, we find in verse 10, he becomes the fish's regurgitated breakfast. Vomited up. It's not a pleasant picture, is it? Vomited up onto the beach or wherever he was.

So it didn't work out well, did it? Running away from God. Didn't work out well, disobeying God. He completely blew the first attempt. The first call of God, he made a mess of.

Absolutely. I want to say this to you. Even if you've tried to speak about Jesus with anybody, and you felt it's been a complete failure, let me assure you of this.

You've done better than Jonah already. Okay? If you've tried and failed, you've done better than Jonah already. He didn't even try. You've got a lot further forward than Jonah did, this prophet of God in the Old Testament.

[23 : 14] Perhaps you, when you were first a Christian, when you first came to faith, and there's a bit of excitement about being a Christian, it was something that really, you were bubbling with.

And whenever you went, perhaps you spoke to people and told them about your newfound faith. Perhaps it was your family or some of your best friends or mates. But when you did that, you crashed and burned. It just went horribly wrong.

They started asking you lots of questions about evolution or about God or about Jesus or about the Bible. And you were just new in the faith. You'd only just come to trust in Jesus.

You didn't have all the answers and you sort of tripped over your words and felt as if you'd failed. Or perhaps when you spoke to your family about becoming a Christian, a family who thought that perhaps they always were Christians because they had you christened when you were a baby and they were married in a church or whatever it may be.

They were aggressive towards you. As if you were saying to them that they hadn't brought you up properly to be a Christian, that they'd let you down in some way, or that they weren't real Christians because you were suddenly a Christian.

[24 : 22] And because it all went so badly and because it all failed and it all flopped and you felt like you made a mess of it then you decided from that point I'm not going to say anything. I'm just going to keep quiet now.

I failed the Lord. I dare not open my mouth because I'm going to get it wrong. But let me encourage you, the fact that you did it is a wonderful thing.

The fact that you tried, even if you got it wrong, is a wonderful thing. And let me say this as well, in fact, you didn't get it wrong. You didn't get it wrong. Because you see, all of us have to start somewhere.

We have to start at the beginning. We don't all have all the answers. We don't all have all the ways of articulating what we've experienced and felt to people. Nobody does.

But as you've grown as a Christian, then you've become more and more certain of what you believe. You are able to have something to say to some of those questions that they bring. You are able to share and to talk about Christ in a more lucid and interesting way.

[25 : 33] Let me give you just one thing to take away. If there's nothing else that you take away this morning, dear friends, from this event in the life of Jonah, it's this. Our God is the God of the second chance.

Our God is the God of the second chance. He doesn't give up. He doesn't wash His hands of us. He doesn't say, well, you had to go. You made a mess of it. Now just keep quiet and keep out of the way. That is not how God works.

Here is Jonah, a prophet of the Lord. We know he is because he is referred to elsewhere in the Old Testament. A man who walked with God and knew God speaking through him and yet who disobeyed God and ran away from him in a most sinful way.

Not just, as we'll see, out of fear, but for something worse than that. And God did not write Jonah off. And he will never write you off either.

No matter how you've mucked up, no matter how you've failed, no matter how many mistakes you've made. Do you remember in Matthew in chapter 18, Peter asked Jesus, if my brother sins against me, should I forgive him seven times?

[26 : 38] And what does Jesus say? Not seven times, but 70 times seven. That doesn't mean I can't do the maths. Whatever 70 times seven is, some brainy spark will shout out in a minute what it is.

But it means, in other words, you just keep forgiving. You just keep giving second chances. You just keep reconciling. That's the God that we worship and adore.

You see, in reality, God is not the God of the second chance. He's the God of the third, fourth, fifth, sixth, seventh, eighth, and you can keep going chances. God is not the God whose patience runs out with us.

God is not the God who eventually gets to the point of saying, I've pulled all my hair out, I cannot stick, you keep on letting me down so many times, I'm going to walk away. He is the God who refuses to give up on anyone, whoever they are.

And that doesn't just mean for us as Christians. If you're a Christian and you feel like as you've tried to share the gospel, you've failed and made a mess of it, and so God can't possibly use you again, or you've sinned in some way in your life and things have broken apart and God can't use you again, no, that isn't the case.

[27 : 52] Even if you've fallen into the sin like Jonah, running away and turning your back on God and backsliding, God still restores and brings back. And God can and will use any one of his children who is willing to be used, any one of us, whatever our abilities, disabilities, skills, or problems.

He's never finished with you. You may feel that God has finished with you because you're too old and you can't do the things you used to do, so God can't use me.

What's the point of me even being here? The reason that you are not in heaven, dear friend, is because God is still wanting to use you. He still has a work for you to do.

He still has a purpose for your life. He still is depending on you to take the gospel to the people that you meet with and share with, perhaps that nobody else speaks with or shares with.

But let me put this again in another way as well. Perhaps you're somebody who's not a Christian this morning, but you've heard God speaking to you, you've heard him calling you to repentance, you've heard him speaking about the need for you to trust, and you've got close but then you've run away.

[28 : 59] And then you've got close and you've run away. And you've got close and you've run away. Let me say to you, as long as you are alive, it's never too late. You may have felt that you couldn't possibly be a Christian now.

It would be impossible for you to come to Christ now because you've had so many chances and you've blown those chances. Let me say again, as long as you're alive, that God is willing to forgive and to receive and accept you.

But do not test him because you just don't know how long you've got left on the clock. Do not test him.

Yes, come to him. He's still willing. He will accept. He will forgive. He will make you a child of his. So Jonah blew it. The first time, he made a mess of it and God called him back.

There's a second reason why Jonah did it so wrong in evangelism. And this is far more serious, if I can put it that way. It seems as we read, particularly through chapters 3 and into chapter 4, that Jonah has no love for those in need.

[30 : 07] He felt no love. He felt no compassion for those people in Nineveh. You see that in chapter 1, sorry, chapter 4, verse 1. After God forgives them and relents from destroying them, Jonah, this seemed very wrong.

In fact, the word is evil. Jonah thought it was evil of God to forgive them. It was wrong of God to let them off the hook. And as we go down to the bottom, and that's why we read through the chapter 4, because in chapter 4, we have this comparison between Jonah and God.

Jonah is concerned for himself. He's concerned about his own comfort and his own security. He's concerned about this plan that God gives him to give him a bit of shade from the sun and its death.

God is concerned for the people. This is the biggest failure of Jonah.

He felt no compassion for those who were doomed to destruction. In fact, he tells us that's the very reason he ran away at the beginning, verse 2 of chapter 4.

[31 : 17] He prayed to the Lord, isn't this what I said, Lord, when I was still at home? That's what I tried to forestall. That's what I tried to put off. I tried to prevent you forgiving these people when I fled to Tarshish, for I knew that you are a gracious and compassionate God, slow to anger, drowning in love, God who relents from sending calamity.

He knew that God would forgive these people if they heard the message and turned to him. And he didn't want them forgiven. He didn't want them to be let off the hook. He wanted them to be judged.

He wanted God to destroy them. It wasn't because he was afraid to go to Nineveh with the gospel. It wasn't because he felt ill-equipped to tell them the truth of God. It's because he did not want God to have mercy on them.

Now, to be fair, to put the other side of the story, to be fair to Jonah, he had good reason not to wish for the Ninevites to be let off the hook.

He had good reason not to feel any concern for them. Nineveh was the capital of the Assyrian Empire. It was an empire that was amazingly powerful. It was a superpower of its day. It was all conquering and it was extremely cruel.

[32 : 31] Any nation that stood against the Assyrians, they blotted out with no mercy. They didn't take any prisoners. So Jonah had, he knew that and he knew what they were like, that they were sinful, wicked, evil people and so he thought they don't deserve God's forgiveness.

But that doesn't exempt God the hardness of heart in Jonah because ultimately what he was saying in one sense is this, God, actually, I'm better than they are. I'm more deserving of your forgiveness than they are.

I'm a good person and they are bad people. He'd forgotten the very simplest basic truth that there is that the Bible teaches that every single person, every single one of us is a sinner before a holy God and not one of us is better than any other and not one of us is deserving of God's grace than any other.

Whatever we have done, whoever we are, we are an eternal soul for which God has concern, eternal soul which needs to be rescued from eternal judgment that needs the mercy and forgiveness of God.

And how can anybody know the mercy and forgiveness of God unless they are told of it? Jonah wanted to prevent them from hearing God's message. We've turned to these verses in Romans 10.

[34 : 04] We don't need to look at them maybe another time. We've looked at them again and again in the weeks as we've thought about evangelism. In Romans 10, this is what the Word says. How then can they call on the one they've not believed in?

How can they believe in the one of whom they've not heard? How can they hear without someone preaching to them? How can anyone preach unless they are sent? As it is written, how beautiful are the feet of those who bring good news.

The lovelessness, the compassionlessness, the hardness of the heart of Jonah stands in stark contrast with the heart of God in this story.

His blackness illuminates the light of the love of God where he, we're told there, relented and did not bring on them the destruction he'd threatened. Where he declares, should I not have concern?

The word there is compassion, mercy, pity, love for these people. 120,000 who cannot tell their right hand from their left. In other words, they are ignorant of God. They don't know right and wrong with God.

[35 : 15] And God has mercy upon them. The very fact that Jonah was sent by God is evidence of God's grace. The fact that he sent Jonah to this wicked and evil city shows that God has a concern and care for them and an interest in them.

We see the warning that Jonah was given there in verse 4. 40 more days and Nineveh will be overthrown. Now this is the one thing I believe that Jonah did right.

He faithfully preached God's message. We're told that that he obeyed the word of the Lord in verse 3. We've got no reason to think that he gave a different message or a wrong message.

And it had the desired effect. 40 more days and Nineveh will be overthrown or destroyed. It had the effect. Those who heard it, those who heard about it, immediately believed it was a message from God and they acted upon it.

You see the wonderful thing is for us today we have a better message than that. Yes it was true and it is true that God is a God who proclaims judgment against wickedness.

[36 : 22] That God is a God who does not put up with evil in the world and stands in opposition against it. But we have a fuller message than that. We have a message which we call the gospel. A gospel which warns of judgment but also tells us of the way of forgiveness.

In Romans 6, 23 we can sum up really what the gospel is for it says the wages of sin is death but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus.

In other words the way that we live we earn our wages which is death, eternal death, eternal separation from God. But the free gift of God, something that we cannot earn, something that we cannot deserve and do not deserve, is given to us in Jesus Christ who suffered and died in our place.

At the very beginning of our series of looking at evangelism we saw the imperative, the imperative of warning people that judgment is upon them. Warning people that the God who is truly God is a God who is angry with sin.

We must warn them. We don't know how long they've got. Jonah was told they had 40 days to put things right with God and get right with God. The people that we meet with and speak to we don't know if they've got 40 days.

[37 : 39] They may not have 40 days. They may have just four days or four years. Or they may even have 40 years. But without exception whatever the length of time if we are without Christ and every one of us is under the judgment of God every one of us without exception has angered the holy and just God and must stand before his judgment seat one day when we die.

But we fail our hearers we fail the people that we are sharing with if we only tell them of judgment and not of mercy. If we only tell them of that condemnation without hope.

In Christ Jesus we declare there is forgiveness for sins. This is what Jesus told his disciples at the end of the Gospel of Luke. He said this is what is written the Messiah himself will suffer and rise from the dead on the third day and repentance and forgiveness of sins will be preached in his name to all nations.

God's justice and God's mercy are two sides of the same coin. They are both equal parts of his character in his nature. Only when we understand that God is just will we be able to appreciate that he's merciful.

God judges sin because he is pure and he is holy. He hates evil. He hates wickedness. It's in his very nature to withdraw himself from those things and surely that should make us glad.

[39 : 22] God. What sort of God would we want who's indifferent to evil? What sort of God would we want who doesn't care whether wicked men perform wicked acts? What sort of God would we want the God who turns a blind eye to those things which make us cringe and angry?

Our God is much more angry than we are with wickedness in the world and much more upset if I can put it that way about the sinfulness of our own hearts than we are ourselves.

But he is by nature gracious. He is by nature merciful. Look at what Jonah has to say about him. I knew that you are a gracious, compassionate, slow to anger, abounding in love, a God who relents from sin and calamity.

That's true. He hates sin but he has compassion for the sinner. He's not a God who delights for the wicked to be punished. He's not a God who takes pleasure in the death of evil people.

Instead his delight is when people turn to him and receive from him forgiveness and life. Ezekiel the prophet was spoken to by God in this way.

[40 : 32] Do I take any pleasure in the death of the wicked declares the sovereign Lord? Rather am I not pleased when they turn from their ways and live? The delight of God was to forgive these Ninevites.

The anger of Jonah was that God forgave them. Is this the same with us? Do we find ourselves motivated to share Jesus out of compassion for those around about us?

Love for those who are lost? Those who are unaware of God's judgment upon them and that condemnation that must await them? Are we not moved with love for them?

Do we not find our hearts yearning and crying out to God? So what if you fell flat on your face when you tried to share Jesus the last time?

So what if you failed to get across the gospel in just one sentence, in one occasion? Does your heart long for people to know the joy of the salvation you share?

[41 : 44] Does your heart cry out to God in prayer with tears at times for those that are still in darkness and are going to hell? Then surely, dear believer, you're the right person for the work and for the place where God has put you.

Surely you're the right person. Whatever your failings and faults, however you get it wrong and mixed up, however uneducated you may feel yourself to be, you're the one that God will certainly work through and in because your heart reflects his heart and that is much more important than anything else.

Paul writes in 2 Corinthians about himself and about all believers. We are therefore Christ's ambassadors as though God were making his appeal through us.

We implore you on Christ's behalf, be reconciled to God. We can't be indifferent.

We can't be unmoved. We can't be like Jonah without a love for the lost because if the love of God has been poured into your heart and mine, if we are truly born again of his spirit, then we share in that love.

[43 : 03] And though we fail and fall and are fearful, we cannot help but telling others, appealing to others, be reconciled to God for he is willing to be reconciled to you.

Let's just take a moment, quietness of our own hearts even now, to pray for those who we long to see saved, who we long to turn to Christ and receive his grace.

Let's just bring before the Lord in our own hearts those ones that are dear to us. Amen.