

I. Set Up

A. We are in a series from the book of Jonah, a prophet assigned to speak to Israel's enemy, to warn them that there is a limit to what God will tolerate – and that at some point He will step in and judge them.

B. All of that seems particularly appropriate because tomorrow is Martin Luther King Day, and he served in a very prophetic way – advancing civil rights, calling for an end to unjust laws, advocating Non-violence and doing this all as a minister of the Gospel.

C. Mike will be mentioning Dr. King in his sermon, right now....

II. Introduction

A. This week I started reading *Redemption: Martin Luther King Jr.'s Last 31 Hours*.

1. I am doing this even though I am also reading *His Truth is Marching On*, the recent Jon Meacham biography on John Lewis, the late Congressman from Georgia, who was a young lieutenant working with King.

2. And I am reading about three other nonfiction works – and a novel about Cicero and – and, here is the kicker, one of my three words for 2021 is finish.

3. In one of the pastor groups I ended up in during COVID (it's a bunch of pastors from all over the country who meet weekly via Zoom to share ideas about leading a church during a pandemic, and pray for each other. I had been in other pastor groups – as a church we want to help other churches, and since I'm now the old guy, I spend an increasing amount of my time with young pastors. But a lot of that got sidelined by COVID so I got in this group). And in this group we were assigned the task of selecting three words that would help shape 2021. I choose:

a) Courage. I initially had resilience, because I like the word and I think we all need to be more resilient. 2020 – and the first part of 2021 suggests we may get knocked about a bit. And to me being resilient requires more than an attitude, it requires spiritual self-care that I have amped up since COVID. But I went with courage because it assumes resilience and goes a step further.

b) My second word was Non-Anxious Presence, because while anyone can escalate a problem – or panic - what we need right now is calm, thoughtful people who bring a sense of peace and hope with them, and remind people that we are going to be fine. Because, we are going to be fine.

c) The third word I choose was finish, because I have couple half-written books that got pushed aside when COVID changed everything. And I have a few other half-baked projects that have been pushed aside that need to get to the finish line. So, I want to focus on finishing things.

B. But I picked up the King book because I try to read something by him once a year around this time.

1. His *Letter from a Birmingham Jail* is must reading. You can find it online or I have a link to it in my Friday Update.

C. *Redemption* tells about his work in Memphis on the Poor People's campaign and the garbage workers strike, the pressure he was under and the challenges coming at him from almost every side. It also tracks James Earl Ray – and shows how he was able to get close enough to King to kill him.

D. I think we can and should learn from Dr. King. He has so many great quotes. His statement:

1. “Darkness cannot drive out darkness; only light can do that. Hate cannot drive out hate; only love can do that.” Is one I wish was shaping the thoughts and actions of all those who claim their views are moral.

2. Or, “Everybody can be great ... because anybody can serve. You don't have to have a college degree to serve. You don't have to make your subject and verb agree to serve. You only need a heart full of grace. A soul generated by love.”

E. Not because he was perfect. He was not. But he was remarkable, and I think recent events show us just how remarkable his leadership was sixty years ago.

III. I bring him up today because: 1) tomorrow is the holiday in his honor; 2) because he is a great voice for this moment; and 3) because, there is a sense in which his life – as a prophet - helps us understand the kind of challenges Jonah faced.

A. Last week we noted that Jonah was a Hebrew prophet to whom God said, “Go to your arch enemies – the Assyrians – and tell them to repent or they will be wiped out.” And in response, Jonah raced off in the opposite direction.

B. We also noted that this was surprising because what we expect to find - in a Bible story about a Jewish prophet - the Jews were God's chosen people, and a prophet is someone who is expected to be eminently upright and moral and religious and a good example in a story in which the good guys win.

1. What we expect is a story that makes the Jews look good and Jonah look great. And what we expect is to find a story that exposes the Assyrians - who were cruel, even by the standards of brutal life in 8th century BC.

2. They skinned people alive; they stacked up skulls, they raped and pillaged and bragged about it.

C. What we expect is a story in which the Jews look like good guys and the prophet looks like a great guy and we find religious lessons – one about morals.

D. And to go one step further, what we expect is that if we do not get what we expect – if the prophet isn't a good guy at the start - that he is a good guy by the end.

E. But if you read the book – as you were asked to do – you know, that is not what we find in Jonah.

1. Jonah is not a good guy. He is not a good example. The people who obey God – who set the example for us to follow, are the pagan sailors and the cruel Assyrians.

2. There is an Old Testament scholar – who teaches down the street - who does not think that when we get to heaven that we'll be able to ask Jonah what exactly went on with the fish.

a) And by the way, I got more questions about the whale.

3. makes it to heaven because he thinks his heart is so misguided.
4. I think Jonah turns. I think Jonah wrote the book. I am not sure who else might have. And that means that he had to eventually come around.

IV. Well, last week we set things up.

- A. I read all of chapter one and then we focused on verses 1-3.
- B. Today I want to pick up at verse 4 and start to pull out some of the back story that comes into focus after you read it fifty times. Or if you read it in Hebrew (there are some word plays in the original language that we miss).
- C. And then I want to underline the radical expectation that is introduced here and then further developed by Jesus – who is the true and better Jonah.
  1. Jonah is thrown into the water to die so the others can live. And he then spends three days in the belly of a fish before re-emerging.
  2. Jesus is the true Jonah, who is thrown to his death, and who spends three days in the grave before coming to life.
- D. Jesus – the better Jonah - not only tells the parable of the Prodigal Son (which we noted last week).
  1. In chapters 1 and 2, Jonah is the Prodigal. In chapters 3 & 4 he is the older brother (the self-righteous pharisee).
  2. He also tells the parable of the Good Samaritan where “the bad guys” – not the Assyrians but the Samaritans – turn out to model the behavior God’s people are called to.

V. The text will be on the screen. If you want to follow along, Jonah is between the books of Obadiah and Micah – as if that helps. You might want to try to table of contents.

VI. In Jonah 1:1-3 we established that:

- A. Jonah was a prophet instructed by God to go to Nineveh to warn them of coming judgment.
- B. Instead he got on a boat headed 1,500 miles in the wrong direction.

**VII. We pick up with V4: Then the LORD sent a great wind on the sea, and such a violent storm arose that the ship threatened to break up. <sup>5</sup>All the sailors were afraid and each cried out to his own god. And they threw the cargo into the sea to lighten the ship. But Jonah had gone below deck, where he lay down and fell into a deep sleep. <sup>6</sup>The captain went to him and said, “How can you sleep? Get up and call on your god! Maybe he will take notice of us so that we will not perish.”**

VIII. Three things to note here:

- A. The first is the play on the term “down.”
  1. Jonah goes down to Joppa, and then he goes down below deck and then he goes down into a deep sleep. There is sense that sin is pulling him down.
  2. Remember:
    - a) do not think that every storm you face is the result of your sin.

b) Nor should you ever think that God is not punishing you for your sin, because He punished Christ for your sin. He may be disciplining you, but that is a good thing.

B. The second is the play on the idea of “arise and call.”

1. In Jonah 1:3 God told Jonah to “arise and call on the people of Nineveh.” Here is verse 6 the pagan captain says to Jonah, “arise and call on your God for help.”

2. Hard to think Jonah is missing the “coincidence.”

C. The third thing to note is the irony in that the pagans are the ones with some spiritual intelligence – with a heart for God. Jonah – the prophet of God – is not. Hold on to this, because we are coming back to it.

IX. In verse 7 the sailors determine that the storm was Jonah’s fault. We pick up now in verse 8: **So they asked him, “Tell us, who is responsible for making all this trouble for us? What kind of work do you do? Where do you come from? What is your country? From what people are you?”**

A. Who are you? Tell us about yourself? You are about to get us all killed. Why? They ask some basic questions about his identity: What is your name? What do you do? What tribe are you from?

X. **V9: Jonah answered, “I am a Hebrew and I worship the LORD, the God of heaven, who made the sea and the dry land.”**

A. We’re going to focus on this in a couple weeks. It’s interesting that when they ask about his identity he leads with his ethnicity.

XI. **V10: This terrified them.** The fact that the God who was mad made the sea (so there is no escaping Him).

XII. **This terrified them and they asked, “What have you done?” (They knew he was running away from the LORD, because he had already told them so.) V11: The sea was getting rougher and rougher. So they asked him, “What should we do to you to make the sea calm down for us?”**

XIII. **V12: Pick me up and throw me into the sea,” he replied, “and it will become calm. I know that it is my fault that this great storm has come upon you.”**

XIV. **V13: Instead, the men did their best to row back to land.** Wow, what nice guys. Jonah is about to get them killed. They seem to want to help him out.

XV. **But they could not, for the sea grew even wilder than before. <sup>14</sup> Then they cried out to the LORD, “Please, LORD, do not let us die for taking this man’s life. Do not hold us accountable for killing an innocent man, for you, LORD, have done as you pleased.” <sup>15</sup> Then they took Jonah and threw him overboard, and the raging sea grew calm. <sup>16</sup> At this the men greatly feared the LORD, and they offered a sacrifice to the LORD and made vows to him.**

A. In my reading in Mark this week you see this same thing happening. There is a huge storm, the disciples are all scared that they are going to die.

B. They wake Jesus up and say, “aren’t you concerned that we are going to die?” He rebukes the storm and it grows calm, and then they are really scared. They are more scared of Jesus and his power than they were of the storm.

XVI. Last week I noted that the Book of Jonah was remarkable in many ways, including as a work of literature. One of the things you need to see is that it is divided into these two symmetrical halves.<sup>1</sup>

A. The records of Jonah’s flight from God and then his mission to Nineveh – each with three sections.

1. God speaks to Jonah in 1:1 and 3:1; He is given the message to convey in 1:2 and 3:2; he responds in 1:3 and 3:3; he gives a warning to the Gentiles in 1:4 and 3:4; we see their response in 1:5 and 3:5; then in 1:6 and 3:6 a pagan leader speaks up; in 1:7 and 3:7 we see that the pagan’s response is better than Jonah’s; and then chapter is given over to Jonah learning about grace from the fish, while chapter 4 is given over to Jonah leaning about grace from the plant.

B. The point being, on two occasions Jonah finds himself with people who are racially and religiously different from him. In both cases he dismisses them (he does not help them). In both cases their actions are more noble than his.

C. This is a big message in the book – in the book of Jonah and more broadly in the Bible. God cares how we relate to people who are different than us.

1. I did not see this as clearly the first two times I studied Jonah as I see it now.

2. Part of what I saw is our need to reach out with the Good News. There is a mission component to this book – again, the Book of Jonah and the entire Bible.

3. We must see this – and we try. This is what is fueling our ongoing efforts to start churches - in the Middle East, Ghana and India – and also new campuses, such as in Vernon Hills; and also to care for people – to serve in the schools, build homes, help start jobs. Late last year we went over our 100,000 volunteer hour goal. Last week I heard that those providing food for families in Highwood have seen their numbers grow from the 300 we started serving 9 months ago to 450 families now.

4. There are things we can point at and celebrate. Thanks to those of you who are serving. Thanks to those of you who are giving.

D. But there is more we can do and there is a broader message here not to be missed.

E. And it becomes harder to miss after Jesus updates it in a second parable. Think about it:

1. Jonah does not want to talk to pagans about God, so he flees, only to end up talking to Pagans about God.

2. Initially, he is asleep. They are the ones praying. The contrast here is:

a) Pagans praying – and concerned with the welfare of everyone.

b) Jonah sleeping – and not concerned about much.

XVII. There are several things to see here:

A. such as the fact that people outside the community of faith have a right to evaluate our actions and see how we are responding to the common good.

1. Hugh Martin – a 19<sup>th</sup> century Scottish Preacher – preached a whole sermon on this point, entitled, “The World Rebuking the Church.” He concluded his message stating that Jonah deserved it. The captain lets Jonah have it. “Hey, get up and help! We are all in this together.”
  2. And there are a lot of things we are in together.
  3. Again, the church is at its best when it is looking out to love in a wholistic way. Reaching People and Renewing Communities. We are to proclaim the Good News and Engage in Good Works.
  4. We list them in that order – putting evangelism first - because the church is the only group pointing people to Jesus, and because it deals with things that are eternal not temporal, and because if you want to care for the hurting and under-resourced, the more people who sign up to follow Jesus the more people you have serving and giving.
  5. But we list them both. We are called to both. We are called to love and care for people – not just those inside the church, but all those who are hurting.
- B. And just in case you miss it in Jonah, Jesus underlines it in the parable of the Good Samaritan.
1. We looked at the Parable of the Prodigal Son last week. Saw how it built on Jonah.
  2. This week it’s the parable of the Good Samaritan.
- C. As you may know, a parable is a simple story that is told to illustrate a spiritual truth. Jesus is the master of these. The ones he tells often catch us very much by surprise.

XVIII. In Luke 10 an expert in the law – which means, a religious leader - sets out to test Jesus.<sup>2</sup> He asks, “what must I do to inherit eternal life?” Jesus turns the question back to him. He asks: “What is written in the Law?”

- A. The lawyer answers, “‘Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength and with all your mind’; and, ‘Love your neighbor as yourself.’” He summarizes the 600 some laws found in the Old Testament. It was an acceptable answer, found in Leviticus.
- B. Jesus says, “You have answered correctly. Do this and you will live.”
- C. There are no laugh tracks in the New Testament so its easy to miss what just happened. The answer the man gave was technically accurate but not helpful.
1. The answer essentially says – be 100 percent perfect, 100 percent of the time. We cannot do this. As you may know, one of the purposes of the Law is to point out that we are broken and cannot be perfect.<sup>3</sup>
  2. The lawyer should have understood this, but he’s a self-righteous Pharisee who were experts in missing the obvious. They thought they were great.
- D. Jesus is likely winking to the crowd when the Pharisee has given his answer. “Good luck with that. I hope it works well for you.”

XIX. Remarkably, the guy appears just self-aware enough to realize that he just lost round one. He needs to save face. So he counters, “OK, but who is my neighbor?”

- A. You can see him looking around, shaking his head as if to say, “You thought he had me. I’ve been in control all along. Watch my counter punch.”<sup>4</sup>

**XX.** It is here that Jesus tells the parable. Luke 10:30: **“A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho...**

**A.** This was a well-known path that no one liked to travel – it was 17 miles long and mostly downhill, so people liked the trip there more than the trip back – but it was a windy road which gave bad guys plenty of places to hide.

**XXI.** **“A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho, when he was attacked by robbers. They stripped him of his clothes, beat him and went away, leaving him half dead. A priest happened to be going down the same road, and when he saw the man, he passed by on the other side.<sup>5</sup>**

**A.** First century Jewish culture was very structured. People didn't mix much outside their strata. The priest – who was highly educated and spoke Hebrew – was upper crust. So, he's unlikely to help a naked guy, even though he should. If the man had been dressed (or could talk) and the priest could make an assessment about his status, maybe he would have done something. But he's not going to help just anyone. And besides, the bad guys who beat him up might still be around. So, he moves on.

**XXII.** V32: **So too, a Levite, when he came to the place and saw him, passed by on the other side.**

**A.** The Levites were slightly lower than Priests – think, religious leaders second class. This guy doesn't stop either.

**B.** It's not entirely fair to pick on these two. I've read plenty of newspaper accounts – and watched video footage – of people walking past those who are hurt and bleeding. We hear these stories all the time. People walk by rather than get involved. But the religious leaders were supposed to help.

**XXIII.** V33: **But a Samaritan, as he traveled, came where the man was; and when he saw him, he took pity on him.**

**A.** The Samaritans are the Jews' enemy. They were ethnically and religiously impure.<sup>6</sup> The Jews hated the Samaritans and the Samaritans hated the Jews.

**B.** And they lived right next to each other. It would have been hard for Jesus to pick a more shocking hero for this story.<sup>7</sup> In today's vernacular he might tell it this way, “A man was beat up. First the Evangelical church pastor stepped around him, then the Catholic Priest did. Finally, a radical Muslim cleric happened by and he stopped.”

**C.** Jesus, you're not supposed to tell stories with that kind of twist. The wrong guy is the good guy. The Samaritans are half-breed heretics.

**XXIV.** V 34: **So this Samaritan: went to him and bandaged his wounds, pouring on oil and wine. (This is first century medical care – such as it is).<sup>8</sup> Then he put the man on his own donkey (which means he now has to walk) and brought him to an inn and took care of him. The next day he took out two denarii and gave them to the innkeeper. ‘Look after him,’ he said, ‘and when I return, I will reimburse you for any extra expense you may have.’**

**A.** The man had been robbed. He didn't have any money. If the Inn keeper incurred expenses taking care of him that the man could not pay for, he would have to sell himself into slavery for some period of time to avoid prison. By promising to pay the expenses, this man guarantees that this man isn't going to end up a slave.

**B.** The Samaritan is helping this guy buy clothes, food, get well – he is really going the distance.

**XXV. V36: Which of these three do you think was a neighbor to the man who fell into the hands of robbers?”**

**A.** Please note: Jesus does not ask, “So, who is my neighbor?” He asks, who should I treat as a neighbor.

**B.** And, rather than set it up with the Lawyer as the one walking down the road and having the Samaritan as the one beat up, and then entering into a discussion about whether he should help the beat-up Samaritan – which the lawyer would have fought, saying, “We can’t help everyone.” Jesus flips it and says: if you are beat up, how do you want that person thinking? How do you want them to define neighbor?

**XXVI. The expert in the law replied, “The one who had mercy on him.” Jesus told him, “Go and do likewise.”**

**XXVII.** Let me land the plane by noting three things here.

**A.** First, Jesus doesn’t miss this opportunity to speak against racism. It wasn’t an obvious part of the issue being discussed but Jesus made it one.<sup>9</sup> Jews, like the lawyer, only felt they were called to love and serve other Jews.

**1.** To Jesus way of thinking that is still way too small. He refuses to allow us to limit who we love. It’s not just those who look like us or talk like us or who move in the same social circles we do. By making a Samaritan the hero, Jesus says we have to move beyond race, politics, class and religion and help those in need.

**2.** The lawyer was looking for a loophole and Jesus said there is none.

**B.** Second, don’t miss the radical and holistic way Jesus defines the care we are supposed to have for our neighbor.

**1.** Jesus gives a big, practical, all-inclusive definition of love – meeting a person’s physical, material and financial needs.

**2.** Jesus refused to let the lawyer limit the definition of love.<sup>10</sup> He doesn’t buy the:

**a)** They brought it on themselves.

**b)** I can’t help everyone.

**3.** Jesus does not accept limits on who we help – on who God is calling us to love and serve. And He defines love very practically. <sup>11</sup>

**C.** Finally, do not miss the greater context for this story. Jesus tells this story as he is just a few weeks away from the cross. In the grand scheme of things: we are the broken, beaten up, needy ones who need rescuing, and Jesus is the Great Samaritan who stops to save us.

**1.** He enters our broken, dangerous world and does everything that is needed to do – at his own expense – to rescue us.

**2.** He is not just the Good Samaritan. Jesus is the Great Samaritan. Or, to put a sharper point on it – He is not just the Great Samaritan, He is the true and better Jonah.

D. The Book of Jonah is going to set up the Gospel. We will see more of this in a future message. Again, just as Jonah was thrown off the ship to save the sailors – and then spends 3 days and 3 nights in the belly of a fish. So Jesus – the true and better Jonah – is thrown overboard for us, for you. And he spent 3 days and 3 nights in the belly of the grave before defeating death.

XXVIII. This is a great book. So much here. I hope you are in a small group discussing it.

<sup>1</sup> Thanks to Tim Keller (The Prodigal Prophet, p. 31f) for this observation.

**The Prodigal Prophet**

SCENE 1 <i>Jonah, the pagans, and the sea</i>	SCENE 2 <i>Jonah, the pagans, and the city</i>
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**JONAH AND GOD’S WORD**

1:1 God’s Word comes to Jonah	3:1 God’s Word comes to Jonah
1:2 The message to be conveyed	3:2 The message to be conveyed
1:3 The response to Jonah	3:3 The response to Jonah

**JONAH AND GOD’S WORLD**

1:4 The word of warning	3:4 The word of warning
1:5 The response of the pagans	3:5 The response of the pagans
1:6 The response of the pagan leader	3:6 The response of the pagan leader
1:7ff How the pagans’ response was ultimately better than Jonah’s	3:7ff How the pagans’ response was ultimately better than Jonah’s

**JONAH AND GOD’S GRACE**

2:1-10 How God taught grace to Jonah through the fish	4:1-10 How God taught grace to Jonah through the plant
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<sup>2</sup> In those days, teachers sat and the students sat around them. A person asking a question stood out of respect to the teacher. It seems like the lawyer is being respectful, but there is a trap going on. We will see this later as well. Luke 20:20 reads, “Keeping a close watch on him, they sent spies who pretended to be sincere.”

<sup>3</sup> According to the Westminster Confession, there are three purposes of the Law. One is to help the entire nation of Israel survive so they can deliver a savior to the world. Sick societies do not last. They fall in some way. The law God gave them was designed to help them last. A second purpose of the law is to help people have lives that work. The moral law flows out of God’s heart and it does reflect the way the world works. Now, the world is broken so it doesn’t work perfectly. But it is our best bet. But a third, very important purpose of the Law is to help us see what God expects – otherwise we just look around, at others and often think, “Hey, I’m doing better than most people. I’m certainly better than Hitler.” ,

<sup>4</sup> Others read this differently. Phillip Johnson, who taught law at UC Berkeley for years, sees this as an effort by the lawyer to limit his exposure – which is part of the way attorneys are trained to think.

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<sup>5</sup> Ouch. There is something here to offend most everyone. I've been known to complain that pastors today are universally derided on TV shows. The best you can hope for is that they are only an ax murderers. In fact I suspect that ax-murderers now complain that they are all portrayed as pastors. Think about it, name the last thoughtful, healthy, helpful, reasonably sane pastor you've seen portrayed on TV. They are either sociopathic hypocrites or fumbling, doddering, clueless eccentrics. I whine that Hollywood makes us look bad. Here it's Jesus. He tells a story in which the religious leader does not do the simple, decent thing. The priest doesn't stop. He crosses to the other side.

<sup>6</sup> The Samaritans emerged back in 722 BC when some Jews were left behind after the Assyrians overthrew Israel. They intermarried and then came up with their own religion – which affirmed a version of Genesis through Deuteronomy, but nothing else. In 430 BC – when Ezra was trying to rally the Jews who had returned from exile and get them to rebuild the Temple, the Samaritans offered to help, but were rebuffed. So, they went and built their own, which at one point the Jews attempted to destroy. Because the Samaritans did not affirm any part of the Old Testament after Deuteronomy, they did not recognize King David, Jerusalem or the Temple. In fact, they had their own temple on Mount Gerizim, which the Jews had snuck in and destroyed at one point.

<sup>7</sup> Jesus will pick Samaritans as the good guys on several other occasions – such as in Luke 17. The only leper who Jesus heals who returns to give thanks is a Samaritan.

<sup>8</sup> This is first century medical care. Not perfect, but it's what they knew.

<sup>9</sup> Much of human history can be organized around who people have decided to look out for. There was a time when people only felt obligated to care for their immediate relatives. Every other family or clan was a competitor or a threat. Eventually, as people gathered in settlements and cities, their loyalty began to extend to their village – which was their extended family. By the time Jesus had this conversation with the lawyer, this circle of identity extended to one's entire ethnic or religious group. Leviticus 19:18 says that our neighbor is a fellow Jew. Jesus is contesting that. (See: Skye Jethani, *With God devotionals*, 9 Nov. 2014).

<sup>10</sup> Jonathan Edwards – one of the most famous preachers in this country and one of the most brilliant people ever – preached a sermon on this back in the early 1700s. It was called, *The Duty of Charity to the Poor*, and in that sermon he used the term “neighbor” almost 60 times. And he challenges all of the thinking common then – and now – about helping the poor. (See Tim Keller, *Generous Justice*, 68f).

<sup>11</sup> As God describes it, love is not theoretical. In fact, our love for God is best displayed by how we love and care for others. In I John 4, Jesus noted that if we love God we will show this by loving others. It's easy to say "I love God" who is invisible. Any tyrant can say that because we cannot see what transactions occur between him and the Lord. Loving one's neighbor, however, is practical and visible.