

Title: **THE HAND OF GOD**
 IN THE LIFE OF JONAH

Text: Jonah 1:1-3

Reading: *Psalm 107:1-43*

Subject: *The Providence and Grace of God.*

Introduction:

The title of my message today is **THE HAND OF GOD IN THE LIFE OF JONAH**. The Book of Jonah, though it is found in the minor prophets, is not really a prophecy at all. It is an inspired autobiography. It is a book written by Jonah under the influence of God the Holy Spirit. **The purpose of the book is to show us the method of God's grace toward his servant Jonah**. This man, Jonah, was the insignificant son of an insignificant man in an insignificant place. He was the son of Amittai of Gath-hepher (2 Kings 14:25) in Galilee. Gath-hepher was a city that belonged to the tribe of Zebulun in a remote corner of Israel. But God had chosen Jonah as an object of his grace and ordained him to be a prophet in Israel of great usefulness.

Proposition: I am bringing this message to you because I want you to see that the life of Jonah, as it is recorded in this book, is a marvelous and instructive picture of God's providence and grace in the lives of his people.

As the Book of Jonah opens, Jonah is already a prophet of God, a man of faith, a servant of the Lord. But he had much to learn. **Look at verses 1 and 2.** — “*Now the word of the Lord came to Jonah the son of Amittai, saying, Arise, go to Nineveh, that great city, and cry against it; for their wickedness is come up before me.*” Why Jonah did not want to go to Nineveh, we are not specifically told, until we get to chapter 4. It appears that this man of God did not want to go to Nineveh because of his racial prejudice against the Assyrians who lived there! He did not want God to have mercy upon Nineveh (4:2).

(Jonah 4:2) “And he prayed unto the LORD, and said, I pray thee, O LORD, *was* not this my saying, when I was yet in my country? Therefore I fled before unto Tarshish: for I knew that thou *art* a gracious God, and merciful, slow to anger, and of great kindness, and repentest thee of the evil.”

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So, we read in verse 3, — “Jonah rose up to flee unto Tarshish from the presence of the Lord.” This is where Jonah’s troubles began. And this is where our story begins. When Jonah made up his mind to rebel against the revealed will of God, he went down to Joppa and very conveniently, (He probably convinced himself that it was an act of God’s providence to lead him in the path he had chosen!), “*He found a ship going to Tarshish.*” But read the next line. “**So he paid the fare thereof!**” If you choose the rebel’s path, be warned. When you get on that ship, like it or not, you have pay the fare thereof, and what a great price it is!

Some of you here are just like Jonah. God has spoken to you. He has revealed to you what you must do. Perhaps he has spoken to you by the gospel, calling you to follow Christ. Perhaps he has called you to a specific area of service in his kingdom. Perhaps he has called you to a specific task or responsibility for the glory of his name. But you have thus far refused to hear his voice. You are now fleeing from the Lord. And God may let you flee for awhile. But you will have to pay the fare thereof!

Divisions: I want you to keep your Bibles open on your laps; and I want you to follow me through the book of Jonah. If the Lord will graciously enable me to preach this message to your hearts, I want to show you **THE HAND OF GOD IN THE LIFE OF JONAH**. Here are five things which God prepared in his providence specifically for Jonah, the object of his mercy, love and grace.

1. “*The Lord sent out a great wind into the sea*” (1:4).
2. “*The Lord had prepared a great fish to swallow up Jonah*” (1:17).
3. “*The Lord God prepared a gourd*” (4:6).
4. “*God prepared a worm*” (4:7).
5. “*God prepared a vehement east wind*”
6. And all of this God did that he might prepare his servant, Jonah, to be an instrument of usefulness in his kingdom.

A GREAT WIND

First, we read in chapter 1 verse 4 that “**THE LORD SENT OUT A GREAT WIND INTO THE SEA.**” — No sooner had the ship set sail for Tarshish than a storm arose, nearly destroying the ship. Everyone was panic

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stricken. The captain and the sailors all got very religious in the face of death and began to call on their gods (v. 5).

(Jonah 1:5) “Then the mariners were afraid, and cried every man unto his god, and cast forth the wares that *were* in the ship into the sea, to lighten *it* of them. But Jonah was gone down into the sides of the ship; and he lay, and was fast asleep.”

But there was one man on the ship who knew what was happening. Jonah knew that this great storm had arisen for his sake (v. 12).

Jonah 1:12 “And he said unto them, Take me up, and cast me forth into the sea; so shall the sea be calm unto you: for I know that **FOR MY SAKE** this great tempest *is* upon you.”

Be sure you learn this lesson — **Everything that comes to pass in this world comes to pass by the hand of God, and comes to pass for the sake of God’s elect** (2 Cor. 4:15; 1 Cor. 3:21; 2 Cor. 5:18). — God “*performeth all things for me*” (Psa. 57:2).

1 Corinthians 3:21 “Therefore let no man glory in men. For all things are yours;”

2 Corinthians 4:15 “For all things *are* for your sakes, that the abundant grace might through the thanksgiving of many redound to the glory of God.”

2 Corinthians 5:18 “And all things *are* of God, who hath reconciled us to himself by Jesus Christ, and hath given to us the ministry of reconciliation;”

Though, Jonah was determined to forsake God, God determined that he would not allow him to forsake him! — “*The foundation of God standeth sure, having this seal, the Lord knoweth them that are his.*” And, though many times it is true of us as it was of Jonah, we turn from him in unbelief, yet, it is a faithful saying, “*If we believe not, he abideth faithful!*” (2 Tim. 2:19, 13).

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Though Jonah sought to flee from his responsibilities as a believer, the Lord graciously forced him to confess his faith before an unbelieving mob (vv. 8-12).

Jonah 1:8-12 “Then said they unto him, Tell us, we pray thee, for whose cause this evil *is* upon us; What *is* thine occupation? and whence comest thou? what *is* thy country? and of what people *art* thou? (9) And he said unto them, I *am* an Hebrew; and I fear the LORD, the God of heaven, which hath made the sea and the dry *land*. (10) Then were the men exceedingly afraid, and said unto him, Why hast thou done this? For the men knew that he fled from the presence of the LORD, because he had told them. (11) Then said they unto him, What shall we do unto thee, that the sea may be calm unto us? for the sea wrought, and was tempestuous. (12) And he said unto them, Take me up, and cast me forth into the sea; so shall the sea be calm unto you: for I know that for my sake this great tempest *is* upon you.”

- “*I am an Hebrew,*” a child of God’s election.
- “*I fear God,*” the one true and living God.
- “*I have rebelled against my Lord.*”
- Obviously, he also told them something about the mission of mercy the Lord had sent him upon, his absolute sovereignty, and his justice.

In verse ten we are told that Jonah told them what he had done. And in verse fourteen we see that they knew something about who God is!

Jonah 1:14 “Wherefore they cried unto the LORD, and said, We beseech thee, O LORD, we beseech thee, let us not perish for this man’s life, and lay not upon us innocent blood: for thou, O LORD, hast done as it pleased thee.”

Before the day was over, God was glorified before all who were in the ship (vv. 13-16).

Jonah 1:13-16 “Nevertheless the men rowed hard to bring *it* to the land; but they could not: for the sea wrought, and was tempestuous against them. (14) Wherefore they cried unto the LORD, and said,

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We beseech thee, O LORD, we beseech thee, let us not perish for this man's life, and lay not upon us innocent blood: for thou, O LORD, hast done as it pleased thee. (15) So they took up Jonah, and cast him forth into the sea: and the sea ceased from her raging. **(ONE FOR MANY — SUBSTITUTION)** (16) **Then the men feared the LORD exceedingly, and offered a sacrifice unto the LORD, and made vows.**"

So great is our God that even the wrath of man praises him. He so sovereignly rules all things that even the shameful deeds of his disobedient children shall ultimately cause men to praise his holy name, both for his faithfulness and for his sovereignty.

A GREAT FISH

Secondly, we read in chapter 1 verse 17 that **“THE LORD HAD PREPARED A GREAT FISH TO SWALLOW UP JONAH.”**

Jonah 1:17 “Now the LORD had prepared a great fish to swallow up Jonah. And Jonah was in the belly of the fish three days and three nights.”

God first prepared a storm. Then he prepared a fish. We do not know what kind of fish it was. Our Lord Jesus tells us that it was a whale; but it was no ordinary whale. This was a great fish that God made on purpose to swallow Jonah whole without killing him, a fish in which Jonah could live for three days and three nights, and a fish that would spit him out at the appointed time.

Jonah's experience in this passage is a typical representation of the accomplishment of our redemption by Christ (Matt. 12:40).

Matthew 12:40 “For as Jonas was three days and three nights in the whale's belly; so shall the Son of man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth.”

Our Lord Jesus, when he was made to be sin for us, was swallowed up in the sea of God's wrath and slain as our Substitute. As a dead man, his body was cast into the heart of the earth, the tomb of death. But three days later,

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the Son of God, our Redeemer, arose from the tomb victorious over death, hell, and the grave. His resurrection is the proof that he has, by the sacrifice of himself as our Substitute, put away all the sins of his people, which were imputed to him.

Jonah’s deliverance from the belly of this great fish is a picture of every believer’s experience of grace (2:1-10).

Jonah 2 “**THEN Jonah prayed unto the LORD his God out of the fish’s belly,** (2) And said, I cried by reason of mine affliction unto the LORD, and he heard me; out of the belly of hell cried I, *and* thou heardest my voice. (3) For thou hadst cast me into the deep, in the midst of the seas; and the floods compassed me about: all thy billows and thy waves passed over me. (4) Then I said, I am cast out of thy sight; yet I will look again toward thy holy temple. (5) The waters compassed me about, *even* to the soul: the depth closed me round about, the weeds were wrapped about my head. (6) I went down to the bottoms of the mountains; the earth with her bars *was* about me for ever: yet hast thou brought up my life from corruption, O LORD my God. (7) When my soul fainted within me I remembered the LORD: and my prayer came in unto thee, into thine holy temple. (8) They that observe lying vanities forsake their own mercy. (9) But I will sacrifice unto thee with the voice of thanksgiving; I will pay *that* that I have vowed. Salvation *is* of the LORD. (10) And the LORD spake unto the fish, and it vomited out Jonah upon the dry *land*.”

There is a lot of debate these days about when a person is saved. In my opinion the debate is nothing but useless strife. The question, “When were you saved?”, was never raised by any apostle of Christ and never addressed to any of his saints. But this much I know, whenever a sinner is saved by the grace of God, he is taught of God. And when a man is taught of God there are some things he experiences. **A person is saved when...**

1. With the awareness of God’s just wrath upon him he calls upon God for mercy (The Publican) (See Psalm 107.) (v. 2).

Jonah 2:1-2 “**THEN Jonah prayed unto the LORD his God out of the fish’s belly,** And said, I cried by reason of mine affliction

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unto the LORD, and he heard me; out of the belly of hell cried I, *and* thou heardest my voice.”

2. From the depths of his corruption he looks to Christ in faith (vv. 3-7).

Jonah 2:3-7 “For thou hadst cast me into the deep, in the midst of the seas; and the floods compassed me about: all thy billows and thy waves passed over me. (4) Then I said, I am cast out of thy sight; yet I will look again toward thy holy temple. (5) The waters compassed me about, *even* to the soul: the depth closed me round about, the weeds were wrapped about my head. (6) I went down to the bottoms of the mountains; the earth with her bars *was* about me for ever: yet hast thou brought up my life from corruption, O LORD my God. (7) When my soul fainted within me I remembered the LORD: and my prayer came in unto thee, into thine holy temple.”

3. He comes to know the One true and living God (v. 8; John 17:3).

Jonah 2:8 “They that observe lying vanities forsake their own mercy.”

John 17:3 “And this is life eternal, that they might know thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom thou hast sent.”

4. God lifts him up from the miry pit of corruption by his almighty grace (v. 6).

Jonah 2:6 “I went down to the bottoms of the mountains; the earth with her bars *was* about me for ever: yet hast thou brought up my life from corruption, O LORD my God.”

Jonah was still in hell; but he spoke as one already delivered from hell (Rom. 8:29-30).

5. From the depths of his inmost soul he acknowledges and confesses that “*Salvation is of the Lord!*” (v. 9).
 - Salvation is of the Lord’s purpose.
 - Salvation is of the Lord’s purchase.
 - Salvation is of the Lord’s power.

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Once the Lord caused the great fish to spit Jonah out, the word of the Lord came to him the second time. And Jonah hit the ground running to go to Nineveh and preach the preaching that God told him to preach (2:10 — 3:10). It is written, “*Thy people shall be willing in the day of thy power*” (Ps. 110:3).

(Jonah 2:10) “And the LORD spake unto the fish, and it vomited out Jonah upon the dry *land*.”

(Jonah 3) “And the word of the LORD came unto Jonah the second time, saying, (2) Arise, go unto Nineveh, that great city, and preach unto it the preaching that I bid thee. (3) So Jonah arose, and went unto Nineveh, according to the word of the LORD. Now Nineveh was an exceeding great city of three days’ journey. (4) And Jonah began to enter into the city a day’s journey, and he cried, and said, Yet forty days, and Nineveh shall be overthrown. (5) So the people of Nineveh believed God, and proclaimed a fast, and put on sackcloth, from the greatest of them even to the least of them. (6) For word came unto the king of Nineveh, and he arose from his throne, and he laid his robe from him, and covered *him* with sackcloth, and sat in ashes. (7) And he caused *it* to be proclaimed and published through Nineveh by the decree of the king and his nobles, saying, Let neither man nor beast, herd nor flock, taste any thing: let them not feed, nor drink water: (8) But let man and beast be covered with sackcloth, and cry mightily unto God: yea, let them turn every one from his evil way, and from the violence that *is* in their hands. (9) Who can tell *if* God will turn and repent, and turn away from his fierce anger, that we perish not? (10) And God saw their works, that they turned from their evil way; and God repented of the evil, that he had said that he would do unto them; and he did *it* not.”

- Jonah proclaimed God’s message. **When God intends to be gracious to sinners he sends his Word to heal them!**
- The whole city of Nineveh repented (120,000 infants!).
- The Ninevites reasoned like any condemned sinners should (3:9).

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Jonah 3:9 “Who can tell *if* God will turn and repent, and turn away from his fierce anger, that we perish not?”

- When sinners hear God’s Word and turn to him in repentance, they obtain mercy (3:10).

Jonah 3:10 “And God saw their works, that they turned from their evil way; and God repented of the evil, that he had said that he would do unto them; and he did *it* not.”

It was not that God saw their outward works of putting on sackcloth and ashes and fasting; but their inward works, their faith in him, and repentance towards him. These inward works of repentance and faith are the fruit of his grace. They were wrought in them by God and were attended with fruits and works meet for repentance, in that they forsook their former course of life and refrained from it. The repentance of these men is spoken of with commendation by Christ, and as what would rise up in judgment, and condemn the men of his own earthly generation (Matt. 12:41).

- Then, in chapter four we read that Jonah got mad at God for his mercy upon Nineveh and went out to pout (4:1-5).

Jonah 4:1-5 “But it displeased Jonah exceedingly, and he was very angry. (2) And he prayed unto the LORD, and said, I pray thee, O LORD, *was* not this my saying, when I was yet in my country? Therefore I fled before unto Tarshish: for I knew that thou *art* a gracious God, and merciful, slow to anger, and of great kindness, and repentest thee of the evil. (3) Therefore now, O LORD, take, I beseech thee, my life from me; for *it is* better for me to die than to live. (4) Then said the LORD, Doest thou well to be angry? (5) So Jonah went out of the city, and sat on the east side of the city, and there made him a booth, and sat under it in the shadow, till he might see what would become of the city.”

A GREAT GOURD

Now look at chapter 4 verse 6. Here is the third thing God did for Jonah — **“THE LORD GOD PREPARED A GOURD AND MADE IT TO COME UP OVER JONAH, THAT IT MIGHT BE A SHADOW OVER HIS**

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HEAD, TO DELIVER HIM FROM HIS GRIEF.’ — Here is a pouting, peevish prophet. But he is the servant of a merciful and gracious God. This gourd (palmcrist) was prepared by God for the comfort of his servant, Jonah. **As we see the hand of God in grace, I want us to see the hand of God in all the daily comforts of life.** Every good thing which we enjoy in this world, no matter how great or small it may be, comes from the hand of our God.

“‘Tis God that lifts our comforts high,
Or sinks them to the grave;
He gives, and blessed be His name!
He takes but what He gave.”

Let me show you a few things about this comfort, this gourd, that God prepared for Jonah.

- **God sent this comfort** to his servant when he was totally undeserving of comfort.
- The comfort God gave, though it was only a gourd, was **exactly what his child needed.**
- The Lord sent the gourd to Jonah **at the right time.**
- God’s purpose in sending the gourd was **to comfort and protect his beloved servant.**
- And God’s purpose was **perfectly fulfilled.** -- “*Jonah was exceeding glad of the gourd.*”

But all earthly comforts are only temporary. We must not get too attached to them! Read verse 7!

A LITTLE WORM

Here is the fourth thing God did for Jonah — “**GOD PREPARED A WORM, AND IT SMOTE THE GOURD THAT IT WITHERED**” (4:7). — As we see the hand of God in our comforts, let us also see the hand of God in our sorrows, bereavements, and losses.

- Eli — “*It is the Lord.*”
- Aaron held his peace.
- Job worshipped.

Illustration: The business man whose two sons died.

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SCORCHING HEAT

Now read verse 8. Here is the fifth thing — “***IT CAME TO PASS, WHEN THE SUN DID ARISE, THAT GOD PREPARED A VEHEMENT EAST WIND: AND THE SUN BEAT UPON THE HEAD OF JONAH.***” — If we are wise, we will see the hand of God in our heaviest trials.

- Our greatest trials sometimes come in connection with the most insignificant things — A gourd! A worm!
- Trials often come one on the heels of another.
- Our troubles sometimes appear to be downright brutal.
- The trials which are hardest to bear are those in which there appears to be no benefit.
- Our heaviest trials usually come when we think we are most secure.
- Our trials reveal what is in us. — Jonah’s trial revealed his anger against God (v. 9).

A USEFUL INSTRUMENT

Let me show you one more thing. Turn to 2 Kings 14:23-27. **GOD DID ALL OF THESE THINGS FOR HIS SERVANT JONAH, SO THAT HE MIGHT PREPARE JONAH TO BE AN INSTRUMENT OF UNSEFULNESS IN HIS KINGDOM.** (Read Jonah 4:10-11).

Jonah 4:10-11 “Then said the LORD, Thou hast had pity on the gourd, for the which thou hast not laboured, neither madest it grow; which came up in a night, and perished in a night: (11) And should not I spare Nineveh, that great city, wherein are more than sixscore thousand persons that cannot discern between their right hand and their left hand; and *also* much cattle?”

What God did for Nineveh he was also to do for Israel, an even more undeserving people. And the prophet who would carry the message was Jonah!

2 Kings 14:23-27 “In the fifteenth year of Amaziah the son of Joash king of Judah Jeroboam the son of Joash king of Israel began to reign in Samaria, *and reigned* forty and one years. (24) And he did *that which* was evil in the sight of the LORD: he departed not

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from all the sins of Jeroboam the son of Nebat, who made Israel to sin. (25) He restored the coast of Israel from the entering of Hamath unto the sea of the plain, **ACCORDING TO THE WORD OF THE LORD GOD OF ISRAEL, WHICH HE SPAKE BY THE HAND OF HIS SERVANT JONAH**, the son of Amittai, the prophet, which *was* of Gathhepher. (26) For the LORD saw the affliction of Israel, *that it was* very bitter: for *there was* not any shut up, nor any left, nor any helper for Israel. (27) And the LORD said not 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.”

- God taught Jonah his mercy.
- God taught Jonah to be merciful.
- And this man, knowing God’s mercy and being merciful, was used of God as an instrument of mercy for the deliverance of many.
- If ever we learn to be merciful, maybe God will use us!

Application: If you choose to run from God, you are running a race you cannot win.

- His grace is irresistible.
- His will is irresistible.
- His teaching is irresistible.

Amen.

¹ See Sermon #911 (Tape #U-21) preached at Danville (4\24\90, 11/09/97-AM), Fairmont, WV 4\28\90, Lexington, KY 5\23\90. — This message: Madisonville, KY (10/04/01) — Sylacauga, AL (02/14/09)