

Kome Ajise - Why Nineveh

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Our topic today is why Nineveh? And that would be something that you all are familiar with because it's from. It's Jonah. The only. The main.

The main discussion about the city of Nineveh, it's in Jonah. Our question is, why Nineveh? Why was Jonah sent to Nineveh? Why was Nineveh so special that Jonah had to be sent there? We chose the opening hymn to suggest the answer to that question.

It's because of God's grace. It's boundless grace. So I thought we'd just give the answer and then walk away and say, we're done.

My glasses. Yeah, I don't know. Oh, it's right here.

God's grace.

It would have been a long day.

Thank you. I love the hand signals.

Thank you so much. So this is really a refresher for us, and those in our class would know this because we began studying the minor prophets back in 2004, and we finally ended up at Malachi nine years later. So it was a very slow burn through the minor prophets and we cherished the diverse lessons that came from looking at those books, and Jonah was one of those.

And so that's where the question was sparked. Of all the 12 books of the minor prophets, Jonah is one that reads less like a prophecy or sermon. It was more like a confession, like he's telling on himself, which we found a little bit interesting and maybe even refreshing. Every other minor prophet was calling on the nation of Israel, whether it was Israel or Judah or the combined nation, to repent, and Jonah was, in his own story, was not doing that.

He was called to go talk to a whole different set of people that were not Israel, and that was also a uniqueness about Jonah. Jonah stands inside his own story and shows us without much flattery to himself, and exactly what he needed to repent of is what he was telling us. So this is worth keeping in mind as we go through this simple book, which most people know about this story whether they're Christian or not. They know about the story of the fish if just to ridicule it or just because it's so commonplace.

So it's a very interesting, well known story, but it has a lot of deep meanings to it. Working through those 12 books, one pattern kept showing up for us as we were looking through each minor prophet, and the pattern was book after book, God through his prophets would tell Israel or Judah or both plainly what they have done wrong, because they were always doing something wrong or what the king had done wrong, and sometimes the whole nation is indicted. Sometimes it's just the king, sometimes it's a priesthood alone, sometimes the people apart from the priests.

So there are several dimensions of it's all about what the nation had done wrong, away from the commands of God, and every single time, without fail, the prophet also reminds the nation of God's assured faithfulness to the promise made to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. Almost always the book concludes that God will save his people Israel, and that he will again be with his people. He Jehovah will be their God. This pattern is really nothing more than a reflection of God's own

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unchanging character.

And Malachi sort of tells us this in Malachi 6, excuse me, Malachi 3:6 and 7. Malachi 3:6,7 we read, for I, the Lord do not change. Therefore you, O sons of Jacob, are not consumed for the days of your fathers, from the days of your fathers you have turned aside from my statutes and have not kept them. Return to me and I will return to you. Says the Lord of hosts.

God will not change because he has bound his own glory and his own name to the blessing of this very stiff necked nation Israel. Otherwise by their own conduct they would have long ago been consumed. I think is what Malachi was sort of alluding to. But he does not change, therefore they are not consumed. Paul says the identical thing, same identical thing in Romans, in his own words, where he said the gifts and the calling of God are irrevocable.

In Romans 11:29 he does not take back what he has promised, and that promise to the fathers, to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, is all by his name. So he is firm on keeping that, and he was still going to be their God. So his grace continues to extend all through their misbehaviors and all through their falling away.

But while every minor prophet follows this pattern, Jonah is one exception. Jonah is not sent to Israel to tell him what they've done wrong, or to Judah for that matter. He lived in the early stages of both nations downward slide. I believe Jonah lived, and I know I have the number, the date here somewhere. He lived around about the same time as Jeroboam ii, the King of Israel.

And he would have preferred to preach to that nation and tell them to to change their ways. But he was not, he was not to do that. He was sent to preach, not to his own people, he was sent to a heathen nation, he was sent to Nineveh, and he does not quite like it, and he made that very clear. He does not quietly decline that he wasn't Going to go.

He was very overt about and very obvious about his dislike for this assignment that he got. He was told to go to Nineveh, but what did he do? He gets up and runs in the opposite direction. He runs in the opposite direction. So there could be no mistaking of how he felt about this assignment.

Jonah 1. Jonah, chapter 1, verses 1 through 3 reads. The word of the Lord came to Jonah, the son of Amittai, saying, arise, go to Nineveh, the great city, and cry against them, for their wickedness is come up before me. But Jonah rose up to flee unto Tarshish from the presence of the Lord and went down to Joppa. He went down to Joppa and found a ship going to Tarshish.

So he paid the fare thereof and went down into. It seems like he's just going down, right? Went down to Joppa, now down on the ship and to go with them into Tarshish from the presence of the Lord. Now you know this story. We're not going to rehash the story, but it's worth kind of thinking about what is happening here.

Jonah is a prophet of God and he is refusing direction from God. What we want to understand is why is the story, one that we are talking about today? Why is this story in the canon? Why is it in the book? Why is it in the Bible?

Why God chose to record it this way, and what is it about this story that makes it sit so prominently among the minor prophets? Well, three things make this book. There's always more than three things, but it's always interesting when you're speaking. You can only, you can only keep three things in your head. So you have three things.

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I'm sure you will find more, some other things, but three things make this book, at least for us at this point, unique or unusual before we even leave the first chapter. First, Jonah is the only prophet in the Old Testament sent specifically to preach to a Gentile nation rather than to Israel or Judah. We've established that. Second, this well regarded prophet of God, because we do have a record of him in Kings, where he was also referred to in the Book of Kings. So he's a well regarded prophet, but he refuses to follow God's command and has to be brought back to the assignment in the most dramatic way that one can imagine.

And, and the third thing is, and this is a little bit surprising, that even after he obeys and Nineveh repents beyond anything that any prophet has ever witnessed, how many prophets would have loved to have the same response to Their preaching to Israel during their time. Jonah gets a very remarkable response from Nineveh, but he's miserable. He hates it, and so that's a very. That's just in the first.

In the very first chapter of the book. Success does not fix what's wrong with Jonah. He complains to God about the outcome he himself just delivered without question. We know this book belongs in the Bible as an inspired scripture because our Lord picked on this book in Matthew 12 when he kind of tells the scribes and the Pharisees, you know, what they. What they.

What kind of nature of people they are, given that they were demanding a sign. In Matthew 12, we read. In verse 39, Matthew 12:39, we read, an evil and adulterous generation seeketh after a sign, and there shall no sign be given to it but the sign of the prophet Jonas. 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. The man of Nineveh shall rise in judgment with this generation and shall condemn it because they repented at the preaching of Jonah.

And behold, a greater than Jonah is here now because of this. It's often suggested that Jonah seems to be a type of our Lord. That comparison is difficult to sustain beyond the three days and the three nights, because we can't imagine our Lord running away from that assignment that he was given. We know he didn't. So it's a very interesting correlation here between the three days and three nights of Jonah and our Lord using that to compare and predict and prophesy his own death and ultimate resurrection.

Looking closer at both Matthew and Luke, because his account is Both in Matthew 12 and Luke 11. Looking closer at it, the real weight of our Lord's reference falls somewhere else. Not on Jonah's character, that's not what he was focusing on, but on the two audiences that were responding to what was preached and the same kind of preaching. The Gentile nation, the Gentile Nineveh, repented of the word that was brought to them by a very reluctant prophet who did not even want to be there. Yet Israel would not repent at the word brought by the one infinitely greater than Jonah.

That contrast between the two responses, not Jonah's personality, is really the sign that our Lord was holding up for the Pharisees. Deceit. Our Lord's reference to Jonah and Jonah's behavior and God's choice of an expression of mercy make Jonah the book of Jonah. Very compelling, very compelling study. So we Want to keep three questions in front of us as we go through this study.

What does Jonah represent?

Is it really Jesus or is there some different picture? Why did God choose Nineveh? Why? Why Nineveh when there are plenty of other ungodly populations the Heavenly Father could have picked from, or he could have picked from at any time the nation of Israel to be an example that he would

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have sent a prophet instead to Nineveh. We wonder why Nineveh?

And the third question, why did Jonah disobey God in the first place? Rather bizarre behavior for a man already trusted with a prophetic calling, a man called of God.

Before we chase down these questions, before we go through these questions, a word about Jonah himself. We were talking about the time that he lived. Jonah lived somewhere between 780 to 745 BC, and so this whole event happened some 2800, maybe almost 3000 years ago, during the reign of Jehoviah II in Israel. According to Second Kings, chapter 14, both that passage and the opening of the book of Jonah tell us that Jonah is the son of Amittai of Gath Hopher.

And again, this location is recorded for us in Joshua 19. So we know the geography of where Jonah was situated. I was just a few miles outside of Nazareth, mentioned, as we just mentioned in Joshua 19, as part of the tribe of Zebulun. We cannot make much of his background because there is not a whole lot. But we know where he grew up, we know who his father was, so we know that he grew up almost in the same neighborhood as our Lord was raised, not too far from Bethlehem.

An interesting detail alongside the three days and three nights, though perhaps no more than just interesting. What may matter more is that his father's name, Amittai, means truth. Means truth. So Jonah, the son of truth, or truth teller. Whatever else you might say about Jonah, the book bearing his name is remarkably unflattering.

He tells of him the way he was, such that I think it's he might even condition one to look at him and go, what's the matter with this man? What's wrong with you, Jonah? This is God that sent you. You could look down, but he told the story in a very honest way about the error of his ways, which would suggest that this man was raised right and he did write it and put his failures on the permanent record for us to learn from. Those are compelling elements of the book.

So why Nineveh? God's opening request to Jonah is simple. Arise, Go to Nineveh, that great city, and cry against it. For their right, for their wickedness has come up before me. Jonah again, we know, refused to go.

He walks away from God. Why God is concerned about Nineveh at all? I think it's a big question. Because as God is about to show, Nineveh was really no different than Jerusalem in some way. 2, 2 Scriptures refer to both of them in the same way.

In Nahum chapter 3, verse 1, we read of Nineveh where it says, woe to the bloody city. It is all full of lies and robbery. The prey departed, not the bloody city. Nineveh is referred to as well in Ezekiel 22. In Ezekiel 22:2, there's another bloody city mentioned, says, wilt thou judge the bloody city?

Yea, thou shalt shew all her abominations. That's Jerusalem. So both of these cities are referred to as bloody city. So why Nineveh? Well, Nineveh is no different than Jerusalem in terms of their infractions.

I think is one way to stop to start to think about this. God wants Jonah to go to Nineveh so that the mercy Jonah watches God extend to a gentile city becomes very lesson that helps Jonah understand the mercy that God intends in his own time for Jerusalem. That is one way to look at it. At least that's one way we've gotten comfortable with looking at this. That there is a lesson to be learned from God extending mercy to this heathen city for Jonah to be part of that, such that he can tell that story and understand that this is how God operates.

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And this same mercy can easily be extended to Jerusalem. Zechariah pictures this directly. The angel of the Lord. The angel of the Lord pleading, how long will thou not have mercy on Jerusalem? And the Lord answering in Zechariah 1:12,14 and 16 says, I am returned to Jerusalem with mercies.

My house shall be built in it. So we know that that mercy will not ultimately never come back to Jerusalem. Jesus reinforces the same connection in Luke 11:32. Luke 11:32, the men of Nineveh will stand up in judgment and condemn the generation that would not repent. Because Nineveh repented at the preaching of Jonah, while Israel did not repent at the preaching of one far greater.

So there is that connection between the two that our Lord makes. Nineveh heard the word of God and repented, proof of God's great mercy. The very lesson Jonah needed, that God may have mercy on whom he pleases. That's God's choice. Jonah already knew this about God.

He knew that God is Merciful. In fact, he complained about it.

That's Jonah. He's your Eeyore. He complains about everything in Jonah 4:2. Jonah 4:2. After this was all done, Nineveh was repented.

Jonah came back and says, I knew that thou art a gracious God and merciful and slow to anger and of great kindness and repentest thee of the evil. Jonah is not surprised at God's mercy. I think he was just resentful of where it was directed. Because this time it was to people. Jonah thought, and this is again our conjecture, that Jonah thought may not deserve this mercy.

He knew God was merciful towards Israel, no question. Mercy towards the heathen was another matter entirely. This was a very old prejudice and well documented one, because all through Jewish tradition they have been called a holy nation, a kingdom of priests. They learned to use the term, kind of a different term for people that were not Jews, because they were and they have been God's chosen, and it's documented and that's not changing.

So for Jonah, why would God then be so concerned when there was enough evil to deal with in Israel? Somewhere along the line, I think the nation forgot her actual mission. Israel was to be that blessed nation. Remember Zechariah? 10 men who grabbed the skirt of a Jew.

That's what God intends for Israel. But somewhere along the line, they lost that. Their role was to be there through whom God will bring blessings to the world. Israel had known all through their history about the promise to Abraham in Genesis 28, that in your seed all the families of the earth will be blessed. We know that has to do with the seed our Lord, and ultimately with the church.

But the work on the earth will also be including Israel, because the tabernacle of God will be down in Jerusalem. God alone would be the one to judge the outcome. Jonah's job was to carry the word to Nineveh, not to decide in advance whether Nineveh deserved to hear it. In that sense, he stands exactly where Abraham once stood, pleading for Sodom, able to intercede that it not be destroyed. He did not do that.

He didn't feel like they deserved to be to be interceded for. Abraham was never entitled to overrule God's judgment on the earth, and no one is. But Jonah felt like maybe this was a misdirected show of mercy. What is wonderful is that God does not give up on Jonah over this. When Jonah is spewed out of the fish, God simply.

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It's so interesting when you read the account, he's in the belly of the fish. He's come to terms with the fact that it's done wrong. He prays, is now really reformed. He got spit out onto land and there was no rebuke. God didn't say, you're so stupid.

Why did you do that? I mean, if you were you, what would you do? You give a command to a subordinate who didn't do it, and then they finally came back. Your reaction is going to be, what were you thinking? Right, none of that.

God just went straight to telling him to go do exactly what he had told him to do before. With Jonah finally underway, a second deeper reading of this book opens up to us. Jesus used Nineveh as a lesson to point at Israel in the same way. Jonah's own journey through this short book turns out to trace almost chapter by chapter, the larger journey. We think of the nation of Israel that belongs to, that he belongs to.

In chapter one, in the chapter of Disobedience, we notice that there was a. We notice how deliberately the text hammers down on this word down. We mentioned that earlier on that Jonah went down to Joppa and then went down into the ship and down into the sides to sleep while the storm raged above him. It is a steady. What seemed like.

Again, this is just. We're suggesting this as a picture that shows a downward descent in that disobedience that Jonah was showing, which is typical of what Israel was, what was going on with Israel, where they were sliding downwards in an era away from God. In the second chapter of Jonah, we see where Jonah, from the world's perspective, didn't exist anymore. Right? Jonah did not exist because he was in the belly of the fish.

He ceased to exist, simply dies in a way, struggling in the water he's pulled down. He says it that he was pulled down close to corruption before he was brought back. This also seems like a fitting picture of Israel, where from AD 70, Israel was out of existence, went out of existence and the nation was scattered into the nations, apparently.

And we know that this was indicative of part of their disobedience because Moses in Deuteronomy said, I will this Deuteronomy 32:26 says, I would scatter them into corners. I would make the remembrance of them to cease from among men. This was the same nature of what happened to Jonah. He just didn't exist for a little bit. The same way Israel did not exist for some time.

Israel is swallowed up, says Hosea among the Gentiles, as a vessel wherein is no pleasure. Hosea 8:8 Jeremiah pictures the same thing in his lament over the fallen city. The Lord hath swallowed up all the habitations of Jacob in Lamentations, chapter 2, verse 2. But swallowed up is not the same as destroyed. God still had specific work that he wanted Jonah to do.

So he was only swallowed up. It was to come back. No one else was going to do that work. He had to finish it. Hence there was no rebuke when he was spewed out.

He uses the great fish in a. Very uncomfortable as it was, I can't imagine how what he was doing in the fish and all that slime that might be in there, how he. Things go through your mind when you're thinking about these things. But I'm sure he learned a lot of lessons and he came to terms with his errors.

He was uncomfortable in the fish. But to save Jonah, rather than to let him drown, he had to be in the fish so that Jonah can still carry out God's message to Nineveh. The objective was not

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changing. The work that's assigned to him was not a mistake. God did not recant what he had told Jonah to do.

In the same way, the assignment to Israel is not changing and God is now recanting, even if they hadn't followed his ways. So in the same way as Jonah did not disappear, God did not let Israel die or disappear, I guess is what we're suggesting. He preserved her so that she could still carry out his message to the world. The great fish kept Jonah separate from everything else in the sea that would have otherwise destroyed him, and for 19 centuries of dispersion, we know that Israel was kept.

And it was the promises made to the fathers and the law given through Moses that kept Israel a distinct people. Never assimilated away, never forgotten, never scattered among. Even scattered among every nation under the earth, under the. Under the heavens, I should say. Every generation of every generation of Jew always said before next year in Jerusalem.

This was a living promise and a living assurance of what preservation seemed at the time. The law and the promises of God separated Israel from all the peoples in the earth, as First Kings 8:53 would suggest. Even better described. We see it in. We don't have time to read it.

In Nehemiah. Nehemiah, chapter 10, verse 28. In Jonah, chapter 2, verse 2, Jonah writes, I went down to the bottoms of the mountains. The earth with her bars was about me forever. Yet, yet has thou brought up my life from corruption.

O Lord, my God. Down becomes up. Jonah, who had gone down was now coming up. Jonah, for the first time in the book acknowledges that it is God who has saved him. Then he was spewed back onto land.

You know, this idea of him, him being spewed up, spewed back onto land, sort of reminds me of Brother Bob Wilson. Many of you might know, Brother Bob Wilson used to be one of our elders in Fresno. When I. When I studied in Fresno, and Bob used to connect this image of Jonah being spewing out with the refugee ships that carried Jews back to the land after the Second World War.

Decks were so crowded that people were falling off the sides. Some ships simply just beached themselves so people can get on the shore. That's the nature of how Jonah was spewed out. Seems like the same way we see the nation of Israel sort of coming back as it were, being spewed out onto the land. Whatever picture comes to your own minds, the pattern is the same.

It went down into the deep, but it was brought back alive. That same picture opens up in chapter three, when we get to the third chapter. Jonah is restored to dry land and given word for word. The very commission that he had refused to follow word for word. He's given that same direction by the Heavenly Father.

I notice there's something important about this manner of return. He comes back still upset. His character has not changed. He was brought back. Yes, he understood that God was dealing with him, but he was still Jonah.

Except now he's willing to do what he was sent to do, and I believe that is precisely where we find the nation of Israel today. They're restored to the land. They're being restored to the land and officially as a Nation, in 1948, they're present on the map of the world after about 19 centuries of being absent, and yet they're still not humbled and transformed the way the prophet promised

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would happen when the Lord, when God blesses them.

But that day will come. Whatever lessons remained for Jonah to learn. In chapter four, we believe there are similar lessons ahead of the nation as a whole. A process, a work in progress that the Heavenly Father is pursuing. Paul makes exactly this point in Romans.

In Romans, we're told that Israel, even restored, is not yet walking according to knowledge, still seeking to establish their own righteousness rather than submitting to God. That's from Romans 10:2,3. But you will, Paul says this elsewhere, be brought back under this discipline of the law, under the role of the schoolmaster, which lawyers are going to be brought back to Christ? We're told in Galatians 3, the very Christ, her own history had rejected. If we go back to the encounter between our Lord and the Pharisees, the three days and three nights in the belly of the fish are, you know, is one scripture that I think has always been fascinating.

It's used also in the book of Esther, where they fasted for three days and three nights. Turns out it's just part of three days and three nights. It's sort of an Hebrew idiom to be inclusive of all the days when you're literally, you know, really looking at 72 hours. Jesus applies this idiom to his own death and resurrection. In Matthew 12:40, Paul, describing Israel's own experience is almost in almost identical terms, calls her eventual national recovery nothing less than life from death from the dead.

Romans 11:15 raised, Ezekiel says, as dry bones given breath again. In Ezekiel 37:5, Jesus tells Israel her house is left desolate around AD 33. The temple falls and the city is destroyed in AD 70, and then the first organized return we know historically began in the 1800s, with the nation coming back in 1948. Chapter three continues to show us, shows us what obedience finally produces.

Jonah preaches, the whole city turns from the king down to the common man, and remarkably, even the cattle are covered with sackcloth. Included in the fast in Jonah 3, 7 and 8. Holding on to that detail about the cattle because it matters in the fourth chapter, the contrast our Lord draws from all of this could hardly be sharper. Nineveh repented at the preaching of a reluctant prophet, and Israel would not repent at one that's greater than Jonah.

The Gentile ear heard the word of God once from a stranger, but Israel did not. We see this same pattern repeating itself. We're going to cut to the chase here. So what does this mean for us? Paul writes to Timothy that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners of whom I am chief.

Paul writes that he obtained mercy precisely that his own life could stand as a pattern to them which hereafter believe in. First Timothy 1:15,16.

Jonah's failures are recorded in Scripture for exactly that same reason. Not so that we can shake our heads at a runaway prophet and wonder what's the matter with this man, but so that we can recognize ourselves in him.

Can we honestly say that they're not assignments that we run away from? Are there assignments that we run away from?

Well, I know there are assignments I've run away from. Do we rescind grace when it's stretched to someone else that we think is undeserving, like Jonah might have thought of Nineveh do we quietly assume that part of our job as Christians is just to decide who deserves the Lord's mercy, rather than leaving that judgment entirely to God? Do we take God's patience with us for granted the moment danger passes?

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Do we let anger over something small and personal, a bruised ego, a lost comfort, our own private gourd, blind us to something larger and urgent right in front of us?

Jonah assumed that because righteousness was imputed to the fathers and God had promised, that same righteousness simply belonged to their sons by inheritance. The very mistake Paul was telling us Israel was mistaken and the one that the church, no less than Israel, has to keep relearning. Our own history of privilege never entitles us to withhold or to judge the mercy God intends for someone else. Israel's calling from the very beginning was to bless, to be part of blessing the families of the earth, not to judge them. That calling was never revoked.

As Paul says in Romans 11, every ecclesia has his own version of Nineveh. People or families or backgrounds we quietly consider maybe less likely candidates for grace than others. These are things we have to come to terms with and face up to. Jonah would rather die than watch mercy go to the wrong place. God's question to him is still open.

Dost thou well be angry? Do you have any reason to be angry? Do you have any reason to be angry? It is worth each of us answering that honestly, alone and in our time. In closing, Jonah finally understood what all of this meant.

He did not bury the story to protect his own reputation. We could have just existed and never know about Jonah. But we do, and it does bring some really tremendous lessons. There are a lot of rich lessons in that book, but the one that struck me is this person who gave of himself so willingly to let us learn from who he was, who he didn't want to be.

And we think in the same way. The nation of Israel, as stiff necked as they are, will in time come to realize that God is the one who gives out grace and mercy to whom he pleases. The same God who patiently reasoned with a runaway prophet sitting angry under a withered vine, is still patiently, unhurriedly at work with every one of us. He finished the work with Jonah. He will finish his work with Israel.

Brethren, if we let him finish the work with us. Lord, add his blessings.