

A SERMON FROM THE BOOK OF JONAH

The Tale of Two Prayers

Part I (Jonah 1–2) | Part II (Jonah 3–4)

The Split-Screen Movie

FIRST HALF

A character makes a series of choices.

SECOND HALF

The exact same scenarios return — to see if he has truly changed.

Two Perfectly Mirrored Parts

THE BEAT

PART I · CH 1–2

PART II · CH 3–4

A command

Go to Nineveh

The word comes a
second time

A pagan encounter

The ship's captain

The king of Nineveh

An unexpected revival

The sailors worship

The whole city repents

A prayer

Chapter 2 —
thanksgiving

Chapter 4 — resentment

INTRODUCTION · JONAH 1–4

THE BIG IDEA · JONAH 4:2

**External obedience is
meaningless if our hearts still
resent the reach of God's
grace.**

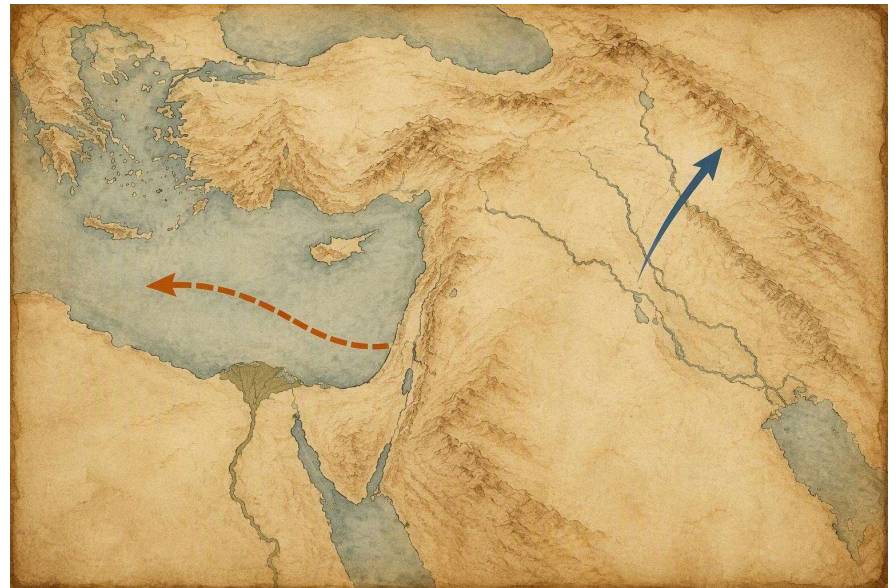
A dramatic, high-contrast image of a turbulent sea under a stormy sky. The water is dark and churning, with white foam from the waves catching the light. The sky is filled with heavy, dark clouds, with a bright, golden light source (likely the sun or moon) breaking through near the horizon, creating a strong backlighting effect on the clouds and the sea's surface.

PART I · JONAH 1–2

The Sea Voyage: Grace Received

The Command and the Flight

- God commissions Jonah to go to Nineveh.
- Jonah runs the opposite direction — to Tarshish.
- He wants nothing to do with God's mission.
- God sends a storm — and a pagan captain wakes the sleeping prophet to pray.



West to Tarshish. Nineveh lay northeast.

Glorification By the Outsiders

- Jonah tells them to throw him overboard.
- The sailors reluctantly do it — and the sea goes calm.
- The pagan sailors immediately sacrifice and make vows to the LORD.
- Glorification breaks out among the people Jonah never came to reach (1 Peter 2:11-12)

Illustration: The Emergency Room

“Salvation belongs to the Lord!”

Jonah 2:9

Jonah hits rock bottom at the bottom of the ocean. Swallowed by a fish, he prays a beautiful prayer of thanksgiving.

He is the man in the ER who promised God everything if he just survived the night. God hears him. The fish vomits him onto dry land. Part I ends with Jonah saved by scandalous grace.

PART I · ILLUSTRATION · JONAH 1:17–2:10



PART II · JONAH 3–4

The Nineveh Mission: Grace Resisted

The Rewind and the Re-Command

- Chapter 3 is a literal copy-paste of Chapter 1: "The word of the Lord came to Jonah a second time."
- This time Jonah goes — and delivers a pathetic, half-hearted, five-word sermon.
- Just like the ship's captain, the King of Nineveh steps up.
- He orders the entire city to fast, wear sackcloth, and pray to God.

Glorification Breaks Out — Again

- God sees the brutal Ninevites repent.
- He relents from destroying them.
- There is more glorification among the outsiders.
- The same beat as Part I — but this time Jonah's prayer will sound nothing like Chapter 2.

The Unmerciful Servant

*“I knew you were gracious and merciful...
that's why I ran!”*

Jonah 4:2 (paraphrase)

Jonah's second prayer mirrors his first — with a sickening twist. He is furious that God saved his enemies.

He is the Unmerciful Servant (Matthew 18): he took a multi-million dollar bailout of grace within the fish but then rages when God forgives his enemies' debt.

THE CORE TENSION · JONAH 4:1–4

**Jonah changed his location.
He never changed his heart.**

Walking in obedience — dripping with resentment.

The Danger of “Correct” Faith

- It is entirely possible to go to church, serve on a team, and say all the right Christian words.
- That is Part II Jonah: the location is right; the actions are right.
- And underneath — bitterness, prejudice, or a conditional view of who deserves God's love.
- Right behavior can be the best disguise a resentful heart ever wears.

APPLICATION 1 · JONAH 3:3–4

Our Modern “Ninevehs”

Who do we hope God judges instead of saves?

A political group?

**A cultural
movement?**

**A person who
deeply hurt us?**

When a Christian rejoices over his own blessings but resents the blessings of its cultural enemies, we are repeating Part II of Jonah (Matthew 5:43-45).

APPLICATION 2 · JONAH 4:2

The Story That Cuts to Black

PART I ENDS

A delivered prophet, praise-singing on dry land.

PART II ENDS

An angry prophet under a withered plant. God asks a final question about mercy — and the book stops.

CONCLUSION · JONAH 2:10 · 4:5–11

Jesus Resolves the Symmetry

Jonah went to a city he hated, hoping they would die.

Jesus came to a world that hated Him — and died so we *could live*. **Jonah weaponized God's mercy; Jesus embodied it: “Father, forgive them.”**

THE INVITATION • JONAH 4:11

Where do your actions and your heart disagree?

This week: pray a prayer of blessing for that one person you find it difficult to love.

A dark, moody background image of a horse standing in a field, with the text overlaid.

**Where do your actions and
your heart disagree?**

Take It Home: Six Questions

- Where in your life are you running to Tarshish?
- Where has grace reached you at rock bottom?
- Whose repentance would genuinely disappoint you?
- Where are your actions right but your heart resentful?
- Who is the “Nineveh” you'd rather God judged than saved?
- What would it cost to bless that person this week?

HANDOUT · GROUP OR PERSONAL STUDY

The Symmetry, Beat by Beat

THE BEAT	PART I · CH 1–2	PART II · CH 3–4
The call	“Arise, go to Nineveh” (1:2)	The same word again (3:2)
Jonah's response	He flees toward Tarshish	He goes — a five-word sermon
A pagan authority	The captain: “Call on your god”	The king: rises, sits in ashes
The outsiders turn	The sailors fear, sacrifice, vow	The city believes, fasts, repents
God relents	The sea grows calm	The judgment is withheld
Jonah prays	Ch. 2 — thanksgiving from the deep	Ch. 4 — resentment under the plant
The scene closes	Delivered onto dry land	Angry under a withered plant

HANDOUT · THE MIRRORED STRUCTURE