

Jonah: Grace That Never Lets Go

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[0 : 00] We're going through a five-part series in the book of Jonah. Jonah is a book which is about God's love for a city.

A city which is a bit like Hong Kong, the city of Nineveh. It's a story about how God calls his people, his person, Jonah, to go to this city.

It's a story about how this person rebels against God. And yet, even in his rebellion, God is gracious to him.

Today, we have the privilege of seeing Alfie is going to speak to us. God has raised up a number of people who can bring God's word. And Alfie is someone who has been working tirelessly in the university ministry, along with Henrika, connecting with students and engaging them with God's heart and helping them to see the amazing God that we have.

So as Alfie comes to speak to us, let me just pray that God would really engage with our hearts. Because he doesn't just want to tell you some information this morning.

[1 : 19] God wants to speak to you, each person. So let me just pray, then Alfie will come and share God's word with us. Father, you're a God who loves this city of Hong Kong.

You're a God who loves each one of us. And I pray that this morning, as Alfie comes to speak, that we would hear you speaking to us. That we would not go away saying, that was a nice sermon. But we go away saying, God has spoken to me. And I need to change. I need to respond. I need to be different in the light of this. Open our eyes to see something more of you this morning.

Thank you that you're an amazing God who wants to speak to us. Amen. Good morning. That is the last time I let Chris introduce me.

Like I said, yes, I'm on staff at Watermark. I work with university students. And today we're continuing in Jonah. Graham, one of our elders, started this series last week. And he talked about four great things.

[2 : 27] But it's the two greater things that he talked about that are continuing on in this story. Those are a greater God and a greater grace. Graham talked about a God who reaches out to the Assyrians in Nineveh, the people who are probably furthest from his grace.

He reaches out to them and he sends Jonah and he gives him a chance at redemption, at restoration, a chance at repentance. But as we know, Jonah refused to go.

He went on a ship to Tarshish and ran away. Okay. But one of the things that Graham asked us last week, and it really, really stuck in my mind, was, where is our Nineveh?

Who is our Nineveh? Who are the people that God is sending us to that we're running away, that we're refusing to engage with the gospel? Today, I want to talk a bit more about grace.

We saw a bit of what it looked like for Nineveh last week. Today, I want to zoom in and really look at what it was like on the boat, what it looked like for the sailors, what it looked like for Jonah.

[3 : 37] As we know, there's a storm in this story, and in Hong Kong, we have our own storms. Monsoon season is coming, and we have typhoons that come and batter Hong Kong.

And as a child growing up, I had a love-hate relationship with typhoons. I would hate them because they would ruin my summer holidays.

I'd have to stay at home. I couldn't go outside. I couldn't play. But then, if typhoons came late enough, they'd cancel school. And I loved them because, man, I could stay home and watch TV all day. But sometimes, again, they came during the weekends or on public holidays and ruined those days for me again.

But growing up in Hong Kong, I never really appreciated what a storm was really like. We're very sheltered. We have good buildings. But in the Philippines, for example, last year, we saw Typhoon Yolanda come and tear up the country.

Storms are a big deal. They destroy lives. They're dangerous and disruptive. But very much like typhoons, we face storms in our own lives.

[4 : 44] Some are more literal than others. It could be something at home or at work, something with our families, something that comes or runs through our lives and leaves us helpless and wondering what just happened.

It could be a failing marriage, the loss of a scholarship, the death of a close friend, leaving Hong Kong.

Or you could be stuck outside in the middle of a black thunderstorm. We all face storms. And in them, we have this immense opportunity to see grace, to see God working in our lives.

We have an immense opportunity to turn to God and to respond to him. So today, we meet Jonah on a boat to Tarshish. In this little bit, we see that he's rejected God's heart to reach out to lost people.

And in his pride, he said that, I'm a prophet of God's chosen people, and the Ninevites are evil. They deserve to die. So I'm going to run away in this other direction.

[5 : 48] I'm going to go to Tarshish. Because, you know, God doesn't hang out in Tarshish. I'll get away from him. He gets in the boat, and God sends this storm that rocks the boat.

And the sailors are freaking out. They decide, this is not a normal storm. Something supernatural is going on here. Let's cast lots and see whose fault it is. It comes up with Jonah. And as we know, he ends up thrown overboard.

The storm stops. And the sailors worship God. It says they make vows and sacrifices. But this story is more than about Jonah.

It's more than about the sailors. And even later on, it's not really about Nineveh. This story is about what God is doing. This story is about God's grace.

It's about the grace that he's pouring out on those who are his people. It's about the grace he's showing to people who aren't his people. It's about grace that he's showing to you and that he's showing to me.

[6 : 43] God is gracious in many ways. And sometimes grace is easy to see. Other times it takes a little bit of digging. But as I've been preparing and looking at Jonah, I realized that I needed to be reminded of what grace was.

We talk about grace a lot. And sometimes we see, ah, okay, that is grace. We have this very good picture of what it is. And other times it kind of gets muddled up in the things that are going on in our life.

And we don't really see it. So I looked for a definition. And I came across with this. And I really like it. It says, Grace is undeserving love given lavishly by an unobligated giver.

Undeserving love given lavishly by an unobligated giver. Grace is God reaching out. It's him chasing us. It's him loving us. It's him refining us.

It's him turning us into his image. And not because we deserve it. But because he's God. Not because he owes it to us. But because he is God. So this morning I have a few things I want to show you.

[7 : 50] And talk about. The first is how God shows grace in this story. The second is how people respond to that grace. And the third is what that might look like in our lives.

Let's start with Jonah. Now if there's anyone in this story who knows about grace, it should be Jonah. He was a prophet. It was his job. Go to these people. Preach grace. Go to those people. Preach grace.

If someone knew about grace, it should have been Jonah. But in this story, he didn't. Something didn't connect between the work that he did and what God was trying to show him.

In this story, God is so gracious to Jonah. He's so loving. And I never really noticed it. And Jonah didn't either. I think until recently, when I looked at the story of Jonah, I was always looking at Jonah and what Jonah did.

Jonah on the boat. Jonah and Nineveh. Jonah and the fish. But this story is about God. This is about what God is doing. It's about all the seen and the unseen actions that God is doing through the story.

[8 : 57] God's grace isn't passive in the story of Jonah. It's very active. God is doing things. The story of Jonah could have ended in a million different places.

It could have ended a hundred different ways. And the existence of the story of Jonah in itself is grace. That's grace to us. And it's the first bit of grace for Jonah. I'm imagining a situation in which God goes and speaks to Jonah and says, go to the Ninevites.

And Jonah says, no, I'm just going to stay here. I'm going to go play on my Xbox. Or he could have run away and God could have let him run away. You know, he'd hear the story about, hey, remember Jonah?

He was a guy. He preached in Israel for a little bit. Oh, yeah. Now he lives in Tarshish. All right. It could have been that. Or it could have been something different. It could have been, ah, well, who is Jonah?

Jonah. I don't know a Jonah. No Jonah in the story. No Jonah heard of anywhere. But God wasn't happy with that. God wanted to see Nineveh being redeemed.

[10:01] God wanted Jonah to see Nineveh being redeemed. God wasn't letting go. The next bit of grace we see is a storm. Now, a storm isn't ideally what you'd think of when you think about grace.

But God needed to catch Jonah's attention. He needed something to show his grace that Jonah wouldn't miss. So he sends a storm. And, you know, it looks like a punishment sometimes.

I think that if I was God, that's what I would do. I tell someone to do something. They disobey.

Storm. Dead. All right. Now someone else come and do it. And it's probably a good thing that I'm not God. But the storm doesn't kill Jonah.

It wakes him up. And as the captain says to Jonah, wake up, wake up. And God is saying the same thing to Jonah. God is calling to Jonah and saying, Wake up. Next, God orchestrates this scenario in which the sailors are compelled to cast lots.

They cast lots. And now Jonah is stuck in a situation where the blame is on him. And he's called to account. He said, you know, what's the deal? What's going on? Who are you? Where are you from?

[11:07] And he says it in verse 9. But, and the sailors realize that they are in trouble. And they're terrified. And they ask what they must do to save him. Now I'm surprised they asked in the first place.

I imagine I'm a sailor. I'm on my boat. I'm going off on this journey. And this guy who's running away from God comes in my boat and tells me, ooh, actually, there's a God who's angry with me.

And so this storm that's about to destroy your boat is my fault. I'm surprised the sailors didn't just, you know, kill him on the spot. Get it done with. You know, get rid of the bad guy. But they didn't.

It seems that even these sailors care more about obedience to God than Jonah does. Now the result of this interchange is that Jonah's thrown overboard. And again, God would have been satisfied with that.

He could have been satisfied with a story which said that, well, God didn't kill the sailors, but he killed Jonah because Jonah sinned. But he doesn't.

[12:05] You know, later on we see that he sends a big fish. And I'm always thinking it could have been a shark. But God's story isn't about getting revenge on Jonah.

God's story is about grace for Jonah. It could have ended in Israel, in Tarshish. There could have been another prophet who had gone to Nineveh. It could have ended in the bottom of the ocean or in the belly of a shark.

But God isn't satisfied with that. He's always reaching out. He's always calling Jonah back to himself. He says, Jonah, I love you and I want you to see what I'm about to do for Nineveh.

I want you to come along with me and I'm not going to let you run away. Now, like the ship's captain waking Jonah, God says to him, wake up and see my grace.

See my grace that I have for you. See my grace in this storm. See my grace that is all around you. You know, in the story of Jonah, we continue to see time and time again God showing grace to Jonah.

[13:08] He sees it in the belly of the fish. We see it in Nineveh. We see it on the mountainside. God is always pouring out and showing Jonah how much he loves you. The sailors had a different story.

They were very different from Jonah. Jonah was a prophet. They were sailors. Jonah was a Hebrew. They were pagans. They probably worshipped a million different gods. And the sea being very unpredictable, they were probably very religious.

God still reaches out to them. And we see grace in three ways. I'll run through them real quick. The first is a storm. And God is catching their attention with that storm. Like waking up, but, you know,

they were not sleeping like Jonah.

I think it's safe to assume that the sailors were convinced this was a supernatural storm. You know, they tried to throw everything overboard. You know, the cargo that they were going to be paid for. They prayed to gods, and they prayed to any god that would listen. And they cast lots. And through the storm, we see that God is capturing their attention. And through the lots, we see them directing their attention.

[14:16] God says, sailors, listen to me. All right? Now go listen to Jonah. And Jonah says to them, we see it in verse 9. I am a Hebrew. I fear the Lord, the God of heaven, who made the sea and the dry land.

So here we have sailors on a boat, convinced of a supernatural storm. And now they have a reason for that storm. And God's grace continues as he confirms to the sailors that actually what Jonah was saying is true.

Because we know that as soon as they threw Jonah overboard, the sea stopped. The storm ended. And the sailors worshipped God.

Through all of this, God is bringing not just Jonah back to him, but he's bringing the sailors step by step closer to knowing him, to worshipping him. We have two very different displays of grace.

For the sailors, it's, wake up. Your gods can't help you. You're helpless. Come to me, and I will show you what salvation looks like. But to Jonah, he says, he's always realigning Jonah's story.

[15:21] Jonah tries to go one way, and God is realigning him and pointing him in another direction. Never letting go. Always reaching out. In this story, grace comes as a wake-up call.

Wake up, sailors. Come, be in a relationship with me, because your gods will leave you helpless. Jonah, I am serious about using you to reach new people.

Come with me. Come, take part in my mission to bless the world. The grace of God is that God is big enough to create a storm, but also gentle enough to show us grace through it.

There are two responses to God's grace in this story. We see rebellion on one hand and worship on the other.

But not quite how you expect. You'd think that because Jonah's a prophet, he would be the one worshipping God. But instead, he worships himself. He rebels.

[16:24] C.S. Lewis says that all human beings are worshippers. We all worship something or other. The difference between us would be what we're worshipping.

Someone who worships something that is not God rebels. And Jonah, it seems, was serving his own sense of righteousness. He worshipped his position as a prophet.

He worshipped his position as a Jewish person, part of God's chosen people, more than he worshipped the God who actually chose the people. And we see this in the way that he responds to God's grace.

We know he's running away. And he says in the beginning that, actually, I don't want to preach the gospel to Nineveh. Because I think that my sense of justice, of mercy, of righteousness is better than God's.

And it continues in the boat. Jonah says in verse 9, this is who God is. This is who I am as a Hebrew person. And it sounds almost like a creed. And when you say a creed, you're reminded of who you are and what you believe.

[17:30] And you'd think that this is the kind of thing that would cause Jonah to turn to repent. But he doesn't. I don't get it. It doesn't work for Jonah. He says, I'm a Hebrew and this is God.

And the sailors come to him with questions. And Jonah admits, the storm is my fault. And he's asked what they should do to make the sea quiet. What they must do to satisfy God.

Now, growing up in a Christian household, I was never really surprised by Jonah's response. Every time my mom told me the story of Jonah, it was the same. Jonah says, throw me in the water.

But why does Jonah give that answer? Now, I always thought that at that moment, we have Jonah who has seen God in the storm and realizes that, ooh, I've done a bad thing.

And now his heart is repentant. And he's going to say, I'm going to do the noble thing and sacrifice myself so that you guys can live. I always thought that Jonah was being noble in that moment, that he was reformed and that he was going back to God.

[18:35] Or maybe that Jonah had an inkling that God would send a fish to rescue him. But the Bible doesn't say anything about that. And a noble Jonah, that doesn't really fit in with his character.

I think that Jonah who was touched by grace may have said something like this. Well, God asked me to preach the gospel to Nineveh, so I'm going to preach it to you instead.

Repent and turn to God, and God will stop the storm. Or maybe he would have said, turn the ship around. Take me back to Nineveh. And then God will stop the storm. But Jonah's response is rebellion.

We see Jonah rebelling from God and running away. We'll see in the coming weeks, Jonah's heart rebelling as God saves the Ninevites. And when Jonah's telling the sailors to throw him overboard, I think he's thinking one of two things.

Either he's thinking, well, God has caught up with me, and he's right to punish me. But what I think he was actually thinking is something along these lines. I don't want to preach to the Ninevites.

[19 : 39] I don't want to preach the gospel to Ninevites so much that I would rather go into the ocean and die and drown in this stormy sea than do what God has called me to do.

And that's consistent with Jonah's character, I think. In chapter 4, we see Jonah saying, after God saves Nineveh, he says, I'm so angry I could die. That's the same Jonah in the boat.

The same Jonah that's running away is the same Jonah who's saying, I would rather die than do God's work. I refuse to bow down. I want to do things my way. So there's Jonah's rebellion, and there's this.

There is a bunch of sailors on a boat worshipping God. Now, the question I always ask is, how do we know that these sailors had truly turned to God?

It says that they made sacrifices, they made vows, but is that something that really changed their life? I don't know where they made these sacrifices, whether they made them on the boat or off the boat, but the time they made the sacrifice, I think, gives us a big clue.

[20 : 49] It says it was after the storm had calmed. And I think that after is very important. Before my mom had me and my siblings, she was a medical doctor.

And she used to tell us stories about different things that happened in the hospital. And her favorite story was about a man who came to the hospital with breathing difficulty. This guy came in, and he was making really short, shallow, painful breaths.

And he also had a cigarette dangling from his mouth. Now, you didn't have to be a doctor to know where his breathing problems came from. You don't have to be a genius to know why mom told us the story. She didn't want us smoking.

So this man comes in, and he's settled in, and the doctors come, and they do the tests. And later on, mom goes to speak to him and says, You have emphysema. Emphysema is this lung disease where the linings on the inside of your wall, they begin to shrivel, and the alveoli become small, and they're not really good at doing oxygen transfer.

And basically, the result of it is you feel like you're drowning, even though you're breathing pure air. But mom said to him, Actually, it's quite early on. We can do something about this.

[21 : 59] We can treat you. But the thing is, if you continue smoking, it's going to get worse. So this guy was so happy. He said, Doctor, I will do anything to get rid of this pain.

You know, treat me. And a couple of weeks later, he was on his way, having recovered. Now, a couple of months later, mom was doing a rouse and heard a familiar voice calling out to God, God, help me.

Doctor, save me. Yeah, he was begging to the doctors. And mom went and had a look, and it was the same man.

Now, obviously, he hadn't carried out on his promise. He'd kept smoking, and the emphysema was back. It was worse than ever. And a couple of days later, he passed away. I don't know about you, but in my experience, the more terrifying the situation, the more religious people become.

It doesn't matter whether they've been in church their whole lives or if they're an atheist. When people are terrified, they turn to God. You know, they'll do anything to make the pain go away.

[23 : 04] And I think you see this in the same time. We see this with the students. When exams are coming, all of a sudden, they turn up at church. And I love it. But, you know, they'll do anything to pass the exams.

Under pressure, we will do anything to make our pain go away. And the difference between the sailors in a boat and this patient with emphysema is that after the storm had calmed, the sailors were still worshipping.

Getting off the abyss at Ocean Park, the irreligious man forgets the promise he made to God never to go on this ride just 80 meters higher. And he runs and goes back to the line to get on the ride again.

The alcoholic forgets the vow he made while hungover that he would never touch another drink. And the patient left the hospital and forgot his suffering. The sailors' plea for salvation was a different kind of pleading.

They knew the seas. They knew that this wasn't a natural storm. So when they saw their salvation from God, they worshipped. They were shown, what we see later in chapter 2, that salvation belongs to the Lord.

[24 : 14] This was a transformation that continued after the storm. Their response wasn't to forget or to ignore God. Their response was to be changed. They became worshippers.

Jonah and the sailors and the Ninevites later on, they find themselves in this helpless situation. Something in which they could do nothing.

The sailors were changed by this. The Ninevites were changed by this. But not Jonah. He worships himself. He refuses to follow God.

A lot of the times in the storms that we face in our lives, whether it's something that's big and shattering like divorce, or whether it's something small like missing our bus. We lose sight of our helplessness.

And we try to figure out how to save ourselves. We get consumed in ourself, and we turn to our self-God to save us. There's that response.

[25 : 13] Or there's another response where we see our helplessness, and we realize there's nothing we can do, and we turn to despair. We become depressed and wallow in our own sadness. We're torn not just by the storm, but by the depression we fall into.

A typhoon season is coming. And Watermark, how are we responding? How are we responding to our storms? What do we do when our boss asks us to work all weekend?

Or when the cat needs surgery? Do we trust ourselves? Or when we get that letter from the bank asking for this and that charge? Or when your essay deadline is coming?

Are we despairing? Or what about that conversation that you're going to have with your child's teacher about his behavior? Or when you find yourselves wondering where next month's rent is going to come from?

Are we turning to ourselves? Or are we turning to God? Is our heart's response to trust God with our helpless state? Is Watermark a place where we worship God in our storms?

[26 : 28] Or do we worship ourselves? It's usually pretty easy for me to know if I'm in a storm. Because when something bad happens, it consumes my mind and my focus and all my attention.

I've been this way since I was a kid. As a child, and still now, I hated mosquitoes. And in the summer, I smelt like a chemical factory. Because I'd put everything on to make sure the mosquitoes wouldn't come within a mile of me.

But that was because if a mosquito bit me for the next three hours, there was nothing I was going to do except for look at my wound and tend to it and make sure that it gets better and that the itching stops.

When the storm of a mosquito bite hit my life, that was it. Nothing else was going to be done.

Nothing was going to be thought about. I'm not so bad anymore, I think. I still respond to storms in a similar way.

My response isn't usually despair. It's usually the thinking. Sometimes I think I'm a really intelligent guy. How long do you decide for yourselves? I turn to the idol of my own intellect, my own resourcefulness.

[27 : 35] Because I think that if I can figure it out, that everything will be okay. A couple of years ago when God was showing me that he wanted me to leave the church I was at and look for something else, another place to serve, I had a thousand reasons why my plan to stay was better.

It wasn't. Or when I used to work in labs and an experiment would go wrong. I would sit there and I would just be consumed by everything. Okay, what did I do wrong?

All right, did I put the PCR in long enough? Did I do this? Did I do that? And I would think and think and think and think until days had passed and I hadn't done anything but think about what I had done wrong.

Now, are these responses rebellion? I think so. I'm not despairing, but that doesn't make it okay. Because in each of those situations, I would say in my heart that my thoughts were greater than God's thoughts, that my will should be done.

The thing is, I never really thought I was turning away. I just kept doing what Alfie normally does. Alfie has a problem, he sits down, he thinks, he works it out. Let me tell you a story.

[28 : 48] Earlier this week, I went to a lawyer's office. I wasn't in trouble. But my parents are incredibly generous and they're helping me buy my first place.

In Hong Kong, that's a really big deal. And, you know, the thought of buying a place and getting on the property ladder has really consumed a lot of my mind, probably more than it should. I could probably have done with listening to this sermon a couple of times.

But I stepped in the lawyer's office and the lawyer was telling me that they had sent off a purchase agreement to the other guy's lawyer and he had sent it back with an amendment. I looked at it and I was like, okay, that looks good.

But I'm not a lawyer, so I didn't know that what actually had happened was this guy was trying to cover himself in case, you know, the tenant backed out or broke the tenancy agreement and would leave me in the cold with a house where I have to pay a mortgage on and no rental income.

So for the next hour and a half, I sat there with a lawyer discussing, debating, thinking, trying to figure out what could we do, how could we adjust this or change it so that they would accept it and so that I wouldn't be left out in the cold.

[29 : 56] Eventually, we came up with a solution. And so we drafted a little counterproposal and it was done. But in that moment, in that hour and a half, there was never a moment when I thought, hey, Alfie, you know that sermon you're preaching on Sunday?

You know, the one about trusting God in the storms? How about you trust him now? I didn't think that. I was thinking, if we sit down and we work this out, everything will be okay.

Now, I'm not saying that when someone is trying to take advantage of you that you should roll over and say, oh, well, I'm just trusting God. Yeah, I'm not being like Jonah. I'm trusting God and letting people take advantage of me.

And, you know, I know a lot of you in the business world, you're working with people who are out to get you. But my question is, what does it look like to trust God when you're making these decisions? It doesn't mean rolling over on the back, on your back, but I think maybe God has something to do in that.

God has something to say in that situation. In my story, God really showed me where my idols were. Because after we drafted that counterproposal, we called up the other lawyer to see if it was acceptable, and he found out that actually, the whole time, the lawyer had already retracted his amendment.

[31 : 13] For an hour and a half, I spent my life worrying about something that wasn't even an issue. And not one moment did I think, wow, there's a God of grace who's there.

I was so relieved. But in this experience, God is telling me that, Alfie, you're preaching about trusting a God of grace, but you don't even trust me yourself.

God is saying, I am great, and you don't have to be in control. He says, I'm good, and I'm gracious, and you don't have to prove yourself. God is saying that, I am God, and I love you, and I want to show you grace.

Turn to me and see my grace. God taught it to the sailors. He says, I'm a God of grace, and my weakest grace is stronger than you at your strongest.

God showed it to me, and he said that, Alfie, you're turning to yourself. It is idolatry, rather than turning to me. Another storm I was facing was this sermon.

[32 : 21] I don't know if you can tell, but I'm really nervous. On Friday, I sat with Chris, and we're talking about this sermon, and he pointed out to me that, you know, Alfie, this sermon is actually an opportunity for you to exercise what you're preaching.

And so, what would that look like? So, I made plans, and I decided that, I would make plans for all my Saturday afternoon, and all my Saturday evening, so that I wouldn't be spent sitting at my desk, pondering how to make the sermon perfect.

If that sentence is in the right order, or maybe I should change it. I did end up working mostly afternoon, but I didn't in the evening. But, trusting God for me meant, trusting God to speak his word, trusting God to change hearts, and me not trying to be you guys' savior.

I think we should remind each other, that the God of grace that we serve, is stronger than we are at our strongest. We should remind ourselves that, you know, when we're turning to God, it doesn't matter what the storm is, we're free to worship him.

We're free to love him, and rest in his grace. In storms, Alfie obsesses with the practical. I sit and brood, and I ponder, and I think, and then I get grumpy, and unsociable, and then people ask me how I'm doing, and I lie, and say that everything is fine.

[33 : 47] And then I think, and when I have a perfect plan, I carry it out. Because I think, in that moment, that I am God, and the plan that I have, will end the storm. I do this a lot.

I do this when, I'm overwhelmed with the student ministry. I do it when I'm worrying about a sermon. I do it when I'm thinking about, what being an adult, and having a mortgage is like. In my heart, in my storms, I separate, the practical, from the spiritual, as if they have no effect on each other.

And I'm pretty sure, I'm not the only one who does this. In my heart, I say that, the spiritual God, can't help me, with my practical issues. I did this in a lawyer's office.

I carried the storm by myself, because, I thought the Alfie God was strong, but, the Alfie God is weak. I didn't look out for, that God of grace, that powerful God.

You know, I say, I'll let God take care of the spiritual things in my life, my heart, my soul, my salvation, but I won't let him touch the actual, practical things. And Jonah did the same.

[34 : 53] He separated the practical evil from Nineveh, from the spiritual grace, that God was offering them. And he thought he could do it again. He said, I'll separate the practical and the physical Jonah, from the spiritual God, by running away.

God doesn't see that separation. The Bible says, and I believe that this is true, that the practical and the spiritual in our lives, are really intertwined. And God uses that.

God used a practical storm, to show Jonah his spiritual grace. He used a practical fish, to show Jonah his spiritual love.

We can respond like Jonah. We can reject God. Or we can despair. Or we can try to strain at the oars in our storms. Or we can respond with worship and changed hearts.

We can respond, recognizing our need for a strong God in our lives. Recognizing our helplessness and God's greatness.

[36 : 01] So what are we doing with the storms in our lives? Is God calling out to you in your storm? Are you seeing the grace that he has there for you? Where are you turning to?

Do you despair? Do you worship yourself? Or are you turning to God and worshiping him? If there's nothing else you remember this morning, whether you're like Jonah running away, or whether you're serving yourself, or whether you're despairing, I want you to remember this.

It seems to me that in the story of Jonah, that God isn't done. You know, I see it in my life. In my life, when, you know, throughout my university, I was trying very, very hard to run away from God.

But God wasn't done with me. God was bringing me here, to where I now serve university students. And it's not just in my life. I see it in the Bible. God wasn't done with Abraham when he lied about his wife.

He wasn't done with Jacob, who stole his brother's blessing. He wasn't done with Israel, who was faithless in the desert. He wasn't done with kings who wandered and served themselves. Jonah wasn't done with faithless disciples in a stormy lake.

[37 : 19] Jonah, Jonah, God, wasn't done with Peter, who betrayed Jesus. God wasn't done with me, and he isn't done with you. And the cross of Jesus shows us this, that God isn't done.

God keeps coming after us with grace. He'll follow us into a stormy sea. God's grace will follow us to his death on a cross. He'll follow us to that disagreement with your boss. God isn't done.

The sailors weren't beyond hope, and neither was Jonah. We see in verse 17, and God appointed a great fish to swallow up Jonah. As much as Jonah tried, his story wasn't over.

God's grace kept coming. God's grace kept chasing him. The thing about this God of grace is that his undeserving love is given freely, and it touches us, and it reaches out to us wherever we are.

Let's pray. Father God, I thank you. I thank you that you give us the story of Jonah, that we're able to see how you're reaching out and loving and changing people.

[38 : 37] Father, I pray for us. I pray for Watermark, that in the storms that we're going through, that we would remember to turn to you, a God of grace who is powerful and stronger than us at our weakest.

