A Saving Word

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[0:00] Well, we've got two readings from the Bible this evening. As Willie said earlier on, we're going to be looking at the book of Jonah over these next few Sunday evenings. But our first reading this evening is not from the book of Jonah, but from 2 Kings chapter 14.

And I'd be very grateful if you turned to 2 Kings chapter 14. I think that you'll find that on page 321 in the Blue Bibles. It's an important little section because it sets some of the historical background for the book of Jonah.
2 Kings chapter 14. I'm going to start reading at verse 23. In the 15th year of Amaziah, the son of Joash, king of Judah, Jeroboam, the son of Joash, king of Israel, began to reign in Samaria.
And he reigned for 41 years. And he did what was evil in the sight of the Lord. He did not depart from all the sins of Jeroboam, the son of Nebat, which he made Israel to sin.
He restored the border of Israel from Leber Hamath, as far as the Sea of the Arabah, according to the word of the Lord, the God of Israel, which he spoke by his servant Jonah, the son of Amittai, the prophet, who was from Gath Hefer.
[1:23] For the Lord saw that the affliction of Israel was very bitter. For there was none left, bond or free, and there was none to help Israel. But the Lord had not said that he would blot out the name of Israel from under heaven.

So he saved them by the hand of Jeroboam, the son of Joash. Now the rest of the acts of Jeroboam and all that he did and his might, how he fought and how he rescued, restored Damascus and Hamath to Judah in Israel.
Are they not written in the book of the Chronicles of the kings of Israel? And Jeroboam slept with his fathers, the kings of Israel, and Zechariah, his son, reigned in his place.
Now turn over, please, to Jonah and chapter one. You'll find that on page 774. Amen. Remember where Jonah has been?
Back in Israel, in the northern kingdom, speaking the word of the Lord, involved in various positive things that are going on there. Jonah chapter one, verse one.
[2:39] Now the word of the Lord came to Jonah, the son of Amittai, saying, Arise, go to Nineveh, that great city, and call out against it, for their evil has come up before me.

But Jonah rose to flee to Tarshish from the presence of the Lord. He went down to Joppa and found a ship going to Tarshish. So he paid the fare and went on board to go with them to Tarshish, away from the presence of the Lord.
But the Lord hurled a great wind upon the sea. And there was a mighty tempest on the sea, so that the ship threatened to break up. Then the mariners were afraid, and each cried out to his God.
And they held the cargo that was in the ship into the sea to lighten it for them. But Jonah had gone down into the inner part of the ship and had lain down and was fast asleep. So the captain came and said to him, What do you mean, you sleeper?
Arise, call out to your God. Perhaps the God will give a thought to us that we may not perish. And they said to one another, Come, let us cast lots, that we may know on whose account this evil has come upon us.
[3:45] So they cast lots, and the lot fell on Jonah. Then they said to him, Tell us on whose account this evil has come upon us. What is your occupation, and where do you come from?

What is your country, and of what people are you? And he said to them, I am a Hebrew, and I fear the Lord, the God of heaven, who made the sea and the dry land.
Then the men were exceedingly afraid, and said to him, What is this that you have done? For the men knew that he was fleeing from the presence of the Lord, because he told them.

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Then they said to him, What shall we do to you, that the sea may quiet down for us? For the sea grew more and more tempestuous. He said to them, Pick me up and hurl me into the sea.
Then the sea will quiet down for you, for I know it is because of me that this great tempest has come upon you. Nevertheless, the men rode hard to get back to dry land, but they could not, for the sea grew more and more tempestuous against them.
[4:43] Therefore they called out to the Lord, O Lord, let us not perish for this man's life, and lay not on us innocent blood for you, O Lord, have done as it pleased you.

So they picked up Jonah and hurled him into the sea, and the sea ceased from its raging. Then the men feared the Lord exceedingly, and they offered a sacrifice to the Lord, and made vows.
And the Lord appointed a great fish to swallow up Jonah. And Jonah was in the belly of the fish, three days and three nights. Amen.
This is the word of the Lord. One of the big issues in the book of Jonah is the character of God. Is God a good God? Is he to be trusted? Is it? Is it? We're going to remind ourselves, as we come to this passage, of God's loving character.
The king of love, my shepherd is. A word of prayer. Heavenly Father, we pray that as we've already sung, you would indeed give to us true obedience, reverence, humility.
[5:58] Speak to us, and change us, we pray, in Jesus' name. Amen. Amen. Amen. For Sunday evenings, to look at this little book, the book of Jonah, I guess, well, who here, put your hand up, no, it's too embarrassing to do that.

I was going to say, put your hand up if you've never heard of this story, but that's much too embarrassing, because you'll be kind of on your own, because nearly everybody's heard of this story. Go out into the street outside, and ask people to complete this phrase, Jonah and the whale. Everybody knows that the name of Jonah is associated with a large marine creature, whatever quite description it is. It's a very well-known story, this story. For those of us who know a lot about the Bible, this story is probably even more familiar.
Grumpy prophet, doesn't like foreigners, told to go and preach to foreigners, won't go and preach to foreigners, goes to the sea instead. Storm, thrown into the sea, rescued by fish, vomited up by fish, told to go and preach to foreigners again, does it this time.
Preaches to foreigners, foreigners listen, prophet very, very unhappy. Take home message, bad man. Don't be like him.
[7:17] Simple story on the face of it, what is there to understand? Well, let me say that for me, this remains one of the more perplexing books of the Bible, and really quite difficult to understand, and well worth four Sunday evenings, even for those to whom this story is very familiar.

Let me point out how unusual this little book is. Three things to say. First, Jonah's words are very few in this book.
It's a prophetic book, but there are hardly any words of prophetic message in it. Flip over just a page to the book of Micah, the one that comes next.
Let's see how this one kicks off. The word of the Lord that came to Micah of Moresheth in the days of Jotham, Ahaz, and Hezekiah, kings of Judah, which he saw concerning Samaria and Jerusalem. Hear you peoples, all of you, pay attention, O earth, and all that is in it.
And every single word of the rest of the book is the prophet's message. The whole book is. Back to Jonah. What's Jonah's message?
[8:26] Well, Jonah's message, you have to look hard for it. Chapter 3, verse 4. Here it is. Yet 40 days, and Nineveh shall be overthrown.

That's Jonah's message. What kind of sermon is that? Put beside the rest of the minor prophets. Jonah's words are few for a prophetic book.
Second, Jonah's motives are very unclear. In some ways, this book is much more about the prophet himself than most of the other prophetic books.
The story revolves around him and his unwillingness to do what God tells him to do. However, in another way, Jonah as a personality is oddly out of focus in this book.
He gets plenty of space, but very little depth. Now, let me give you one example. Look at verses 2 and 3 of chapter 1. Arise, go to Nineveh, that great city, and call out against it, for their evil has come up before me.
[9:35] But Jonah rose to flee to Tarshish from the presence of the Lord. We are told what he does. He hears the word of God and runs away, but we're not told why.

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We're not told what he thought. We're not told what he felt. We have to wait until chapter 4 for any kind of explanation of what was going on in Jonah's head at that point.
Look at chapter 4, verse 3. Here we do begin to get an explanation. Sorry, 4, verse 2. Jonah prayed to the Lord and said, O Lord, is not this what I said when I was yet in my country?
That is why I made haste to flee to Tarshish. Here we begin to get an explanation. But nothing has been explained before this point of why Jonah heads in the other direction rather than doing what God told him.
Is that not strange? Given that the story seems to revolve around him. His motives are not nearly as clear as you might expect. What we do know about him at the end of the book is that he is immensely angry.
[10:44] Chapter 4, verse 1. This displeased Jonah exceedingly and he was angry. Can I say that being in a fuming rage about God is not characteristic of the prophets in the Bible.

Jonah is one of the angriest men in the Bible. I was fortunate enough to be brought up at the point when the Mr. Men books were coming out. You know, Mr. Tickle, Mr. Topsy-Turvy, Mr. Greedy, Mr. Messy, and all that lot.
And because of their greediness or messiness or whatever, various unfortunate things would happen to them from time to time. Well, Jonah is Mr. Angry. And it's tempting to read this book as a book of how God deals with angry people, angry men in particular.
And that would be some use. There are plenty of angry men in the world. You may be one. You may be married to one. But, when we get to chapter four, when Jonah's anger is to the fore, it is very difficult to pin down precisely why he is angry.
The passages don't say much about that. It's very hard to work out what's going on in his head at any point in this book. So there is more going on here than how God deals with his angry servant.
[12:05] With that in mind, let's just catch up with where this story sits in the Bible story because I think that's important. Turn back briefly, please, to 2 Kings 14.

The story so far. We are in the reign of Jeroboam II. Not probably a remarkable name in your mental landscape, but quite an important name in the story of the kings of Israel.
We are in the 8th century BC. The mid-700s. We are in a divided kingdom. The kingdom of Israel, once united under the rule of David some 250 years beforehand, is now divided.
The two parts, the north Israel and the south Judah, have been at war with one another and with surrounding nations. Israel, the northern and larger part, is ruled over by this king, Jeroboam II.
His capital city is Samaria. Let's focus in on the king for a moment. Jeroboam II is a successful but bad king. Successful politically and militarily.
[13:18] Look at verse 25. He gets back land that has been lost in battle. He's good at fighting. His reign is a time of relative calm and prosperity for his people.

This was, in some ways, a high point in the life of the northern kingdom. Assyria, a previously troublesome enemy, is languishing off in the east.
Things are not going well there. Nevertheless, verse 24, Jeroboam II is judged as evil in terms of his relation to God and his spiritual legacy.
This alerts us to the fact that things can look good and be dreadfully flawed underneath. In this setting, Jonah has been a significant player.
He has been the prophet of Israel's prosperity. We find him in verse 25. Jeroboam restored the border of Israel from Lebaham as far as the sea of the Arabah according to the word of the Lord, God is using him, which he spoke by his servant Jonah, the son of Amittai, the prophet.
[14:35] For the Lord saw that the affliction of Israel was very bitter. Jonah is a prophet at the court of King Jeroboam. He is the spiritual architect of the good things that have happened in Israel during Jeroboam's reign.

Unlike his contemporaries, Amos and Hosea, whose books we can also read in the Bible, Jonah is inside the institution, at least in some measure, helping to build the work of Jeroboam, helping to further it, and that is a God-given role.
He's not being disobedient in doing that. Now keep that in the back of your mind as we come to this book. He's come from at least relative success back home.
We're told nothing much about what his work involved, whether it was hard, how he did it, but we are told that he was used by God, and we're told that in some ways national life was going well, though notice verse 26, that underneath it all national life is not going well.

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The changes are superficial, the benefits are temporary. Now that backdrop is, I think, enormously important because it is from that situation that God says, Jonah chapter 1 verse 2, arise, go to Nineveh, that great city over there, and call out against it, for their evil has come up before me.
[16:13] For Jonah, this is an unbearable command. He simply cannot contemplate doing it. Why unbearable? Well, the reasons for why are not, as I said earlier, explored until we get to chapter 4.

So you're going to have to come back in four or five weeks' time to learn about that. For the moment, suffice to say that Jonah apparently would rather be dead than go to Nineveh.
It's that bad for him. Broadly speaking, I think there are three possible reasons why that might be. You might like to chew these over over the next few weeks. It might be because of what this command means for Assyria.
It might be that Jonah doesn't want the people of Nineveh to have the chance to avoid destruction. He hates them so much that he'd rather be dead than give them the opportunity. That's one possibility. It might be because of what it means for Israel.
Perhaps he sees this instruction to go and preach to those guys over there as signifying some sort of loss for the people over here.
[17:17] And he'd rather be dead than engage with that. Or perhaps it's because of what it means for him. Perhaps he sees this instruction as involving some sort of loss for himself.

One imagines it might be quite scary to go to Nineveh and call out against it for its evil is very great. Either way, he'd rather be dead than go.
And so he sets that on a trajectory towards oblivion and death. Jonah knows that God cannot be avoided, verse 9.
Who do you serve? I am a Hebrew. I fear the Lord, the God of heaven who made the sea and the dry land. Such a God cannot be avoided. He knows that. But what Jonah tries to do is to run away from his role in relation to God's word.
That little phrase is used several times that Jonah, we'll see it in verse 3, Jonah fled away from the presence of the Lord or away from before the Lord.
[18:25] And that little phrase before the Lord is not uncommonly applied to prophets prophets in the Bible. Elijah, for example, is described as one who stands before the God of Israel in his presence.

The prophet stands before the Lord and receives the word of the Lord and speaks the word of the Lord to other people. Jonah, I think, is having no more of that.
He wants no more of that kind of work and off he goes. For the rest of the chapter, Jonah is relatively unimportant.
The chapter involves around two main characters and both of these characters emphasize the fact that this book is not so much about Jonah as it is about God.
The two characters are the sailors and the sea. And we're going to talk about the second first. Now, let's consider what this passage tells us about the sea.
[19:30] You might not have considered the sea as being a character, but hold on there for a moment. You'll find the sea is a character in this book. The sea, the true God, is wonderfully powerful.

In the Bible, the sea and sometimes the sea containing a big monster swimming around within it is an image of anti-God chaos.
You'll find it everywhere in this chapter. Verse 4, the sea is mentioned twice. Verse 5, we're told about the sea. Verse 9, we're told that God made the land and the sea.
Verse 11, the sea. Verse 12, the sea times two. Verse 13, the sea grew more and more tempestuous. Verse 15, Jonah is thrown into the sea and it ceases from its raging. The sea is a major player in this drama.
It does things. Things happen to it. Now, this has little impact on 21st century Scottish people, let me say.
[20:30] The sea is the place we go to try and get a sunburn in the summertime. But in the Bible, the sea is an image loaded with negativity. Remember back in Genesis chapter 1, right at the beginning, what do we have?

Dark, undifferentiated, watery chaos. Into that chaos, God speaks a creative, life-giving word, let there be light, and God speaks repeatedly into this watery disorder and out of it emerges the order that we have in the world.

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And from that point on in the Bible, the sea, a good thing that God has made, is in some senses loaded with negative ideas.
Time and again, especially if you read the poetry of the Bible, the Psalms, or the book of Job, the sea, sometimes containing a great swimming monster, is an image of hostility towards God, an enemy of God and his people, symbols of chaos and death and evil.
And the true God is described in the Psalms as the one who shuts the sea behind the doors with a command, who calms its storms with a word, who slays its monster with his mighty power.
[21:52] He is able to control it, but it's a hostile image. Now let me say that images, either in the mind or visual ones, often become loaded with significance for human beings.

Many of you will have seen online the Arabic letter N in these last weeks, the first letter of the word Nazarene, painted on the doors of Christian homes in Iraq, with very negative results.
That image has become loaded with a whole bunch of ideas well beyond its value as a letter, as many Christians have been slaughtered having been labeled with it.
in the same way, the sea is a loaded image for a Hebrew audience. It signifies chaos, disorder, uncreation.
And Jonah the prophet, the speaker of God's powerful, life-giving words, heads for the sea rather than speaking that word.
[23:00] Now that is an action with attitude. It's there as early as verse three. Jonah rose to flee to Tarshish from the presence of the Lord.

Tarshish. Tarshish is probably not a name for a specific city like Glasgow or Edinburgh, Aberdeen or wherever. It's probably a more generic name.
That place a long way over there across the sea where the boats go. It's possibly used of a number of different seafaring places in the Bible. What they have in common is that they're seafaring places.
One modern translator translates verse three this way. Jonah set out to flee out to the sea away from Yahweh. Now there, as I said earlier, is a response loaded with attitude.
So great is as antipathy towards God's plan for him, that he sets out on a trajectory towards chaos, disorder, oblivion, and death instead of the life-giving ministry of the word of the Lord.
[24:09] That's what he chooses. And that is where he finds himself in verse 15, lost in the depths of the sea, quite unable to escape the end point of his choice.

And as chapter two makes clear, he is saved from the place of the dead. Jonah sets out for chaos and death rather than doing what God tells him to do.
But, in chapter one, though the sea is an anti-God image, God rules it. God rules the sea and the big fish, incidentally.
Everything that happens in this chapter suggests very strongly indeed that the sea is totally under the Lord's control. Verse four, he hurled a great wind upon it. Verse nine, I fear Yahweh the God of the heaven who made the sea and the dry land.
Verse 12, it's because of me that this great tempest has come upon you. Verse 15, they picked up Jonah and hurled them into the sea and the sea ceased from its raging. God is even in control of the big things that swim in the sea.
[25:15] It may be big, but it's not a mythical monster, it's just a fish. God is totally in control, even of those things in creation which are loaded with anti-God imagery.

Folks, I wonder if you believe that God is totally in control. It's not easy to believe sometimes. Sometimes the things that are contrary to God seem to be utterly in control in this world.
It doesn't matter where you look, natural disasters, human wickedness, the tyranny of human rule, sickness and death. none of those are positive things. Often they seem totally in control.
But the true God is wonderfully powerful. He rules over them all, even when they seem totally in control. If you feel overwhelmed by any of those things, do not despair.
The good God is absolutely in control of them. you do not see that yet from where you are standing. But he is.
[26:31] God is much, much, much, much bigger and greater and more merciful and more generous and kinder and more gracious than his people can possibly imagine.

sometimes the sharp end of that is that he does things and requires things that his people, small as we are and sinful as we are, sometimes he does things that seem utterly abhorrent to his people at the time.

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They will not seem so in the end, but they do seem so now. And if this book tells us anything, it tells us that this servant of the Lord is supremely angry at what God has done, so much so that he wants nothing more to do with what God is doing.
So much so that he'd rather turn his back on everything he's done so far and embrace the realm of chaos and disaster than continue within the realm of God's life-giving word.
Unless we face up to the fact that sometimes things happen that God allows that we absolutely hate, we will trivialize this book and trivialize the difficulties of life under God in this world.
[28:08] It is so easy, you see, to think of Jonah as Mr. Angry, that horrid man, the racist, the spiritual lightweight. It is very easy to look down on Jonah and describe him with words and slogans and think that we could never be angry at God like he is.

And it's very easy to think that nothing could ever happen to make real believers in a fuming rage with God. God. But to think that this is a world in which the good can always be perceived by God's people is to miss reality.
And just as Jonah is easy to look down on and despise, so we find it often all too easy to look down on and despise believers who are angry at God because of things that have happened.
Jonah is quite incapable of seeing that God is right to ask this action of him. Now I take it that this book is here because in the end Jonah was, at least in part, able to see the good.
I take it that this is a story told by Jonah himself. Why else would we have this in the Bible? Who else goes to Nineveh with Jonah? There's not a great team as far as we can see. I take it that this is a story originated from him and told against himself that he changes his mind at some point after all this, but he is a long, long, long way away from that in chapter one.
[29:51] However, in chapter one, we the readers are reminded that even though Jonah is in a fuming rage about what God is doing, God is wonderfully powerful over all the forces of chaos and evil.

And his control here is seen in the other great player in chapter one, which is the sailors. And we're going to spend the rest of our time on the sailors. The sailors, the true God, is wonderfully merciful.
The sailors are the main human characters in chapter one. As Jonah moves away out to sea, into the sea, towards death, the sailors come closer and closer and closer to life.
And the story is built around three episodes of fear on the part of the sailors. Three times we're told they're afraid. And each time, their fear is in response to something about the true God.
God. And each time, they make progress towards the true God. First thing the sailors fear, they fear the storm, verse five. The mariners were afraid.
[31:00] Each cried out to his God. They hurled the cargo that was in the ship into the sea to lighten it for them. God brings the tempest. The sailors are terrified. They do all the stuff that you'd normally do.

They pray, verse five. It's only our age that views prayer as an abnormal thing to do in difficulty.
They take action, verse five. They throw the cargo over the side. And Jonah's careless disengagement seems absolutely ridiculous to them.
Verse six. The captain came and said, what do you mean, you sleeper? Get up. Call to your God. Perhaps he'll do something. So great is the storm that they think something is going on, verse seven.
Let us cast lots that we may know why this has happened. It's obviously an unusual storm. And then we get to the second episode of fear.
And here, again, it's in response to something about God. The sailors fear Jonah's fear. Verse nine and ten.
[32:07] I'm a Hebrew. I fear the Lord, the God of heaven, who made the sea and the dry land. Then they were exceedingly afraid. They say to him, what kind of idiot are you to run away from the God who made the earth and the sea?

That's not a sensible thing to do. What are you doing? They know little about God, but they know that that's not a good idea. And interestingly, with the little they know about God, they're a great deal more compassionate than Jonah, the Lord's servant.
They want to protect the person who's brought this terrible calamity on them. Unlike Jonah, who sows no compassion at all for the city of Nineveh that he's been told to go and preach to. Notice what they do.

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Verse 14. They call out to the Lord. They try and get back to dry land. Verse 13. Then when they can't do that, they call out to the Lord. O Lord, let us not perish for this man's life and lay not on us innocent blood.
For you, O Lord, have done as it pleased you. Look at the name. They're no longer calling to their own God. They're calling to the Lord, Jonah's God. They're addressing him.
[33:17] They know that he has done this. They're calling him by name. And then there's the third bout of fear. When the storm stops, they picked up Jonah, verse 15, they hurled him into the sea and the sea ceased from its raging.

Then the men feared the Lord exceedingly. Do you see the pattern? Jonah knows about the Lord and runs from his word, a word that the Lord has spoken out of compassion, and Jonah knows that. But the word of the Lord cannot be escaped. And Jonah, the uncompassionate, unwilling, distant, disengaged, the careless, the sleeper, the speaker who does not want to speak, is used by God to speak to the sailors.
in such a way that they end up doing what he won't. He doesn't really fear God, but they do. He won't serve God, but by the end of the chapter they're making their vows to serve God.
This chapter is about the word of God and its relentless progress. God wants pagans to know him, and even a prophet bent on oblivion can't stop that.
[34:36] God. Now what do we make of a chapter like this? It's interesting certainly, it's dynamic, there's lots of things happening, but what on earth is this story doing in the Bible?

Well let me say two things by way of summary and closure. First, sometimes God's people hate what God is doing. God's people hate God's people hate God's people hate him extending his kindness to others, hate him making himself known, either the way he's doing it or the people to whom he's doing it.
That is not a good thing of course, but it is a reality. And before we think condemnatory thoughts about Jonah or others who find themselves angry with what God is doing, we will find by the end of the book how very patient God himself is with this fuming mad prophet who won't do what he says. God is very patient with Jonah. This is not a simple world in which God's good purposes are easy to discern or easy to like or easy to respond rightly to.
Here as so often, the Bible is wonderfully, wonderfully realistic about life's realities, what we're like, what God is like, how things are in this difficult world.
[36:21] If you are struggling with being angry about God at the moment for what God has done, how refreshing it is to know that this chapter, this book, is in the Bible.

Because the Bible acknowledges that kind of reality. Sometimes God's people hate what God is doing. God is remarkably patient with that in Jonah's case.
Second thing I want to say, the true God really is wonderfully powerful and wonderfully merciful. God's power and mercy are demonstrated abundantly on the smaller scale in this chapter.
And this brings us back to the big picture. This is not a timeless story. It's a story in a particular place at a particular time and written for a particular audience, for Israel, a people brought into existence to know God and to make God known in the world.
That's what they're there for. At this point in that nation's history, that task has come to a very low ebb. The nation Jonah has been working with has long ceased to know God.
[37:37] Israel, that most favored nation, has not been characterized by transparent obedience to God's commands and an obvious demonstration of God's loving character in her national life.

Israel has not known God or made him known. And Jonah, for all that he's been used by God back in Israel to do God's work, shares a number of his nation's characteristics.
Angry, self-absorbed, inward-looking, unwilling for the God who made the sea and the dry land to rule over his own creation as he chooses.
Just like Israel, Jonah is a creature. Unwilling at this point to be what his creator created him to be. What a relief it is to find that God is not thwarted by the disobedience of his people or of his prophets. God has much bigger concerns than just Jonah or just the people of Israel.
[38:49] He is the creator. The whole of the created order is his concern. And God has not abandoned his story to rescue the created order.

Indeed, as we know, looking back from where we are, he has sent from heaven a son, a willingly obedient one, an unreluctant messenger, one ready to do his father's will, prepared for hardship and conflict, prepared to suffer loss of face, loss of status, and dishonor for the sake of a hostile

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world.
The true God is wonderfully powerful and wonderfully merciful to his world. And that reality puts our own angers into proper perspective.
Let's pray together. together. So often the truth about God is known but difficult to embrace.
Here again Jonah's words. words, I am a Hebrew and I fear the Lord, the God of heaven, who made the sea and the dry land.
[40:24] Yet at the time of speaking, he is heading in the opposite direction from that God's purposes. Let's spend just a moment in the quiet responding to God's word ourselves and then I'll lead us ■■ him from this to the God of heaven.

Amen.amis buenos,eder. Jesus, our life is Al twent ■■ YMDAM. bottled illumined Him and our lives are in heaven. The Lord is a gracious God and merciful, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love and relenting from disaster.
We thank you, gracious God, for your loving kindness and your patience. We acknowledge that often in this difficult world in which we live, as finite creatures and sinful creatures, we cannot perceive what you are doing.
And we find ourselves from time to time perplexed and even angry. We thank you for the realism of this book. We thank you that you are not embarrassed that this is in the Bible.
We pray that you would help us over these next weeks to learn to trust your character, even when things are dark, to hang on to the truth about you, and to respond to you in the end with glad submission and obedience.
[42:27] Hear us, we pray, in Jesus' name. Amen.

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