

Rev. Paul A. Hottinger

**Profound Fiction** Twenty-seventh Week in Ordinary Time Monday, October 5, 2015  
8:15 AM **Jon 1:1—2:1, 11; Lk 10:25-37** (Human beings no matter how bad they are can change, and the word of God itself has within it the power to change hearts.)

Today we are beginning the reading of the prophet Jonah. Now the Bible has many different kinds of literature within it, many different literary styles. We are familiar with narratives, stories about historic people like Abraham. Well **there are also stories that are fictional, although they all teach something profound.** We don't believe Adam and Eve are historic figures or Noah or Jonah, but **each of these stories says something very important about God and God's plans and God's dominion.**

We start off with the fact that God sends Jonah, a Hebrew, to Nineveh. Now Nineveh is not Israel. Why would God send a prophet to Nineveh? Well, because God has universal dominion and God's judgment applies to everyone. It is true the covenant was directed, at least at first, to one particular people, but that doesn't mean that the meaning of the divine law or God's wishes for universal prosperity and salvation applies only to one people. This is not true. It was a mistake people made; many people thought that. **The Book of Jonah is an effort to get people out of this narrow viewpoint that salvation is only for the Jews.**

**God sends Jonah to the Ninevites,** and Jonah says nothing doing, reflecting of course the prejudices of that time. Why should I go to Nineveh? Why should I care what happens to those people? But God is not a local deity. God is not tribal. So though Jonah tries to escape, there's nowhere to go. There is just nowhere to go from the God who made heaven and earth. So Jonah eventually relents and **he decides he can't get away from the universal God,** the God who made heaven and earth; **there is nowhere to go beyond heaven and earth. So he decides he will obey.**

So then he does go to Nineveh, and Nineveh is an enormous city. Mind you, it was noted for its cruelty and its violence. Its army was voracious. It chewed up everywhere it went, like locusts. So the picture of the quality of **Assyrian life from Jewish viewpoint is they are about the worst people around.** You can make your own comparisons today what people might think is the worst country around. **So Jonah goes, one man, with a message: God is displeased with you. God is going to destroy you.**

What happens in the story? Now this is where it becomes most implausible, but, nonetheless, what happens is the entire city, which is a nation state, repents. They change, even the rulers. **They hear the message of God; they respond to it.**

This has two points to it. First of all, that actually human beings, no matter how bad they are, can change—**human beings, no matter how bad they are, can change; and the word of God itself has within it the power to change hearts.** It's really there. And if people don't, that is their own strong, hardhearted will resisting the word of God because the word of God actually will change hearts.

And the second point is, that these violent, wicked, imperialistic, voracious people are actually **more willing to listen to God than God's own chosen ones.** That's what the author of this book was trying to tell the people of God. It is really a form of shaming, **shame on you, people of God:** you have had a whole series of prophets alerting you to God's true will, his desire to bless you and fill you with life, and you haven't listened. But look at this depraved culture of the Assyrians, they, they changed.

Now, again, the people who were listening to this in the first place knew it was a story. They knew it was fiction because they lived in that time, and Assyria never changed. But the point is from a standpoint of prophecy, **it is prophetically telling them something they needed to hear.** As Jesus might say, "For those who have ears, let them listen."