“Throw Me Into the Sea” (Jonah 1:1–17) 14 June 2026 KRCN

1. When reading the book of Jonah, there is a name that often comes to mind: Shim Cheong, the heroine of the Korean literary classic *The Tale of Shim Cheong*. In order to restore the sight of her blind father, Shim Cheong sold herself. She was then thrown into the waters of Indangsu in exchange for three hundred sacks of rice offered to Buddha.

2. Koreans who grow up with this story learn from it about honoring one’s parents. They also see the outcome that follows such devotion. Of course, reality is different. Not every sacrifice ends like *The Tale of Shim Cheong*. Yet people at least expect such a happy ending. And before long, they become absorbed in the conviction that the world ought to work that way.

3. The same thing happens when we read Jonah. Seeing Jonah thrown into the sea, we naturally think that this is what must happen for the ship to be saved from the storm. We believe that everyone is rescued because of his sacrifice. We expect salvation for all through the sacrifice of one person. And eventually we arrive at the assumption that salvation must work in that way.

4. But if our thinking stops there, we still have a long way to go. Perhaps we still do not understand what the book of Jonah is, or even what the Bible is.

5. If we focus only on being thrown into the sea, Shim Cheong and Jonah experience the same event. Yet Scripture does not say that Jonah possessed the same filial devotion as Shim Cheong simply because the same thing happened to him. Nor does it reveal Jonah’s intentions. At the very least, Scripture does not portray Jonah as some great and noble servant.

6. The great city of Nineveh mentioned in the book of Jonah was the capital of the Assyrian Empire. It was Israel’s enemy. Later, of the two kingdoms, Judah and Israel, it was Assyria that first destroyed the northern kingdom of Israel. Even from the standpoint of world history, they were an exceedingly cruel empire.

7. Therefore, for the God of Israel to remain silent concerning such an enemy would itself have been highly inappropriate. Suppose the United States were at war with Iran, and the god worshiped by Iran remained silent toward America. People would say that such a god knew nothing of justice. The reverse would be true as well.

8. It is in that sense that God sent Jonah. *“Arise, go to Nineveh, that great city, and cry out against it, for their wickedness has come up before Me”* (Jonah 1:2). What was he to proclaim? Jonah 3:4 tells us: *“Forty more days and Nineveh shall be overthrown.”* In other words, destruction would come in forty days.

9. What would you do? Would the road to Nineveh be a joyful one? Or would it be a reluctant journey? Jonah went a step further in his struggle. Though he appears to be like a child running away from home in disobedience to his parents, in reality he was staging a coup against God.

10. In effect, he was saying, *"I do not like that kind of God."* What kind of God did he dislike? A God who would destroy His enemies after forty days? No. A God who would threaten them in order to bring them to repentance! A God who would save even those enemies by such means. Jonah was ashamed that such a God was his God.

11. Yet the reason Jonah appears to us like Shim Cheong is because of the storm he encounters while fleeing by ship to Tarshish. In truth, that is all we tend to see. We do not yet see the whole picture; we see only the reality immediately before our eyes. And so, when Jonah realizes that he is the cause of the storm and tells the sailors to throw him into the sea, he appears to us merely as a righteous man sacrificing himself.

12. Among the figures much discussed these days is Pastor Dietrich Bonhoeffer. He was a pastor of the Confessing Church (*Die Bekennende Kirche*) in Germany. He attempted to assassinate Hitler, failed, and was eventually executed in prison. He is also known as one of the key figures associated with the well-known Operation Valkyrie.

13. There is an illustration often associated with Bonhoeffer. Imagine a madman driving a bus full of passengers straight toward a cliff. In this illustration, the madman represents Hitler, who was leading Germany toward destruction. The problem is that those who witness this scene feel the burden of having to stop the madman.

14. The justification is that many lives must be saved. It is a situation in which one person must be sacrificed for the sake of many. The means is assassination. Faced with such an urgent situation, people become consumed by the question: *Can this killing be justified?* And before long, they arrive at an answer. What matters is that afterward, they no longer struggle with such attempts; they cease to wrestle with the question altogether.

15. In the face of such killing, people eventually became incapable of even the slightest hesitation. Going a step further, they began pointing fingers at those who opposed it, calling them cowards. In the end, everyone falls into the assumption that all must become like Shim Cheong. If someone cannot act as Bonhoeffer did, he is branded as one who does not truly love his country.

16. I mention this because I wish to expose the root of the problem, which lies within us as we read the book of Jonah. And what is that problem? It is that, while reading Jonah, we try to extract from it the things that we ourselves want to find. Human beings already possess their own standards regarding righteousness, fairness, and love.

17. And so we attempt to discover moral lessons or proper conduct in Scripture. The purpose of reading the Bible becomes study. We search through it looking for practical solutions or useful principles. In other words, we approach it with the intention of justifying our own righteousness.

18. When we approach Scripture in that way, the Word of God hides itself. We say that we are looking for noble examples or good morals within it, but in reality that may be little more than coincidence. Jesus spoke in parables so that, though seeing, people might not truly see. As long as we wear the spectacles of the self, the Word of God veils itself from us.

19. Consider this carefully. For whom was the book of Jonah written? To whom was this prophecy given to read? It was given to the people of Israel, those who were called the people of the kingdom of God. More specifically, it may have been intended for the rulers and people of the northern kingdom of Israel, who themselves would soon be destroyed by Assyria.

20. But as soon as the book opens, where is God's attention directed? Not toward Israel, but toward Israel's enemy—the Assyrian Empire. God's eyes are fixed upon the one hundred and twenty thousand people of Nineveh, whom Israel hated, feared, and despised, people who did not know their right hand from their left. His concern also extends to the animals.

21. So what is the storyline of this book after all? It is the story of God sending His own servant Jonah in order to save Gentiles. And to whom is this story given to read? To Israel, the people of the kingdom of God, who prayed that those Gentiles would simply be left under God's judgment and destroyed.

22. In other words, this Scripture was written for the people of God's kingdom. Yet it reveals that Israel, who claimed to be God's people, desired to use the great power of God to defeat their enemies, leave them to judgment, and ultimately see them perish. Jonah represents precisely that kind of Israel.

23. Does Jonah still look like Shim Cheong to you? Or like Pastor Bonhoeffer? If so, then Jonah's command to throw him into the sea is not a statement of noble self-sacrifice. Rather, it is a declaration that by casting him into the sea, not only he himself, but no one else either, should ever reach Nineveh.

24. It is an expression of his determination that no one should bring Nineveh to repentance, that no one should allow them to receive God's forgiveness and salvation. He is saying that he cannot bear to see his enemies prosper. Rather, he would prefer to drown in the sea if, by doing so, he could sabotage the work of salvation that God intends to accomplish.

25. Consider Jonah's actions later in the book. He goes out and stands far away under the blazing sun in order to watch Nineveh be destroyed. Even there, God places a vine over his head for shade. Yet

Jonah continues to rage because God does not destroy Nineveh. He is still protesting against God's mercy.

26. And do you know what is even more shocking? That Jonah is God's prophet, and that he belongs to Israel. This is the true condition of God's chosen people. It is the unmasked face of the Christian—the one who prides himself on having been called by the Almighty God and made into a holy saint.

27. Why, then, was this story written in Hebrew rather than in the language of Nineveh? Why is this story found in the Scriptures of Israel rather than those of Assyria? And why has this book been given to us Christians as the Word of God?

28. It is because, even after becoming Christians, we continue to live according to the habits of the old self. What habits? The habit of thinking that *my God should destroy my enemies* and *my God should protect me*. It is a way of thinking that has been preserved under the name of faith within the tradition of the Christian church.

29. The Apostle Paul says: *"Or is God the God of Jews only? Is He not the God of Gentiles also? Yes, of Gentiles also."* (Romans 3:29)