

Jonah 3:1-10

As we approach the 3rd Ch of the book of Jonah we're at a point whereby Jonah has been learning some "deep" lessons in life. He's learning what it means to be called of God, that the gifts and callings of God are irrevocable, that if God isn't finished with you, you're not finished. That you can run but you can't hide from God and that no matter where you may be or how low you may've sunk you can always cry out to the Lord, and He will hear you and respond to you when you're repentant. He's learned that to pursue anything other than the Lord as a priority in life is to forsake your own mercy and that it's just not worth it to walk in disobedience regardless of what the other option may be. Jonah thought that *anything* would be better than going to Nineveh to preach to those people. It would've been like being a Jew at the climax of the Holocaust and receiving the word from God to go to Berlin and preach to Germany because He was about to judge them for what they'd been doing but He wanted to show them mercy and give them an opportunity to repent rather than be judged. "No way" was Jonah's response, "just go ahead and judge them and I'll take whatever lot falls my way. I'd rather endure anything and resign from office as opposed to going to Nineveh and preaching repentance to those people." However through a series of sovereignly designed circumstances Jonah has learned that it just doesn't pay to disobey the word of God.

To disobey God's word is to be brought low, you're no longer walking in the light but rather you're isolated in the darkness, things only go from bad to worse when you reject the word of God, there's never a better alternative. God's will for you (no matter how you may perceive it) is the best possible plan for you to embark upon; the only direction you can go apart from God's plan for you is down. Jonah went down, and he went down, and he went down until finally he bottomed out, and he cried out to the Lord. There in the stomach of the great fish he learned a lesson that would remain concretely resolved in him for the rest of his life, "Salvation is of the Lord." It's nothing I can work out for myself, it's nothing anyone can do for me, it's not found in the law or in a particular people or nation. God alone can save me and if He doesn't do the work it won't get done. Jonah resolved to walk in submission the will of God for his life, he was persuaded that God's plan was better than any other alternative route, and when he came to that place of repentance, the Lord brought him up from the deep.

He *raised him up* and in so doing Jonah becomes a picture for us of the death and resurrection of our Lord. As Jonah was 3 days and 3 nights in the belly of the great fish even so the Son of Man would be 3 days and 3 nights in the heart of the earth. But even as Jonah "resurfaced" Jesus would rise from the dead, death would "spew" Him forth unable to keep Him down and our hearts are overwhelmed with praise because His resurrection would make for our salvation; salvation is of the Lord.

Vs1-2

Interesting isn't it? After everything that Jonah has been through he's brought right back to where he started from. There are a # of things that we can glean even from these 1st couple of Vs.

I think that 1st of all we do well to draw attention to the overwhelming mercy and grace that's found in the God that we serve. "The word of the Lord came to Jonah the 2nd time..." Or another way to understand that, "God gave Jonah a 2nd chance."

We serve a God of 2nd chances, and 3rd chances, and 70x7 chances, a God who restores the repentant. Think about it, Jonah did everything he could to resist this particular call of God upon his life. He actually labored to go the exact opposite direction than the way that God had called him to go. But God in His mercy crafted for Jonah an environment that would be conducive to his repentance, then when Jonah repented He actually *restored* him to the ministry. God was under *no* obligation to do that; He could've told Jonah, "Look, in My mercy I'll spare your life. Even in that I'm being compassionate toward you, however as for the ministry you're through." God would've been *completely justified* in that course of action. But God didn't do that. He said, "Not only am I going to save your life, but I am going to restore you to the ministry and *use your life* to glorify My name once again."

It blows our minds yet God *delights* in mercy, in taking "washed up" broken down vessels and restoring them, gaining glory through them for His name's sake. And we thank God for it, how many of us would be in the ministry if it weren't for the fact that God will restore if we will repent? God could write each and every one of us off and justifiably so, yet He comes to us a "2nd" time doesn't He? If we will but turn our heart toward Him, He will invariably turn His heart toward us. Think of all the men that God has used in great ways, yet everyone of them had to receive of the manifold grace and mercy of God. Ab lied about his wife on 2 different occasions and God had to rebuke him for it. Jacob was a schemer, Moses murdered a man, David committed murder and adultery, Peter denied the Lord 3xs. Yet with each one of them God had called them, He pursued them and when they repented God restored. I'm quite certain we don't fully comprehend the grace that God extends to us in the precious privilege that it is to be used by Him to minister on behalf of Him and touch someone else's life. God gave him a 2nd chance. Aren't you glad, don't you praise the Lord that He delights in mercy?

God comes to His wayward children, those of us who've made a mess of things, we've fallen, we want to be made right but fear that we've sank to low; and He says, "Arise," you guys that's a word of restoration. You may *stumble* but God can cause you to *stand firm* for Him once again. What's the next word, "Go" that's a word of commission, not only will God restore you personally but He will use you again practically for His purposes. God is so much more gracious than man, we're seeing even in our country what happens to head executives who've made poor decisions for the company, have done lots of damage and stifled our economy.

They're getting the boot, they could pour themselves out, say they've made bad decisions and won't do it again. That would be fine and well however they'd still lose their job, they're done. Yet God, after all of our bad decisions, all the damage we've done, will not only forgive us, not only cause us to stand after we've stumbled, He commissions us to the work once again. Failure will not relieve us of the responsibility to serve the Lord, if anything it should serve to humble us that we might deal with others in a more compassionate frame of heart in the *name* of the Lord. He's shown mercy, now we're to be merciful.

However what do we note about Vs 2? It's essentially the same as the call, the commission that God gave to Jonah at the very beginning of the book isn't it? God will always bring us back to point "A" until we learn that lesson before we "graduate" to point "B". Now there are a couple of things we can glean from that isn't there? #1 How much better to simply obey God's word in the 1st place rather than need to be motivated through circumstance to come to a place of repentance, submission, and obedience. Jonah went through an awful lot, he was *brought down* in a way that none of us would ever want to experience only to be brought back up to the place he started from. All of the drama, all of the negative impact he had on people around him, all of his time spent "in the pit" could've simply been avoided through a yielded and willing spirit unto the Lord. He didn't *have* to go through all of that, he *chose* to go through all of that through his disobedience. How much grief we invite upon ourselves unnecessarily due to disobedience to the word of God...It doesn't have to be that way, we can choose to obey.

#2 We've already been speaking of but let me state it in another way. We serve a God of new beginnings, Who will allow us a "do over" He'll let us start all over. Perhaps we've made a mess of things, we don't deserve to be offered another chance, yet God gives us a fresh start, a new opportunity to start all over. He brought Jonah back and said in essence, "Hey, let's try this thing again." People might write you off; God responds to repentance. He responded to Jonah, He'll respond to Nineveh, and He'll respond to you and to me.

Couple more things then we'll pick up the pace. #1 We note a little insight into how God begins a work. As a general rule God will begin with one man, one individual. We read in Vs 1 that the word of the Lord came to *Jonah*. It didn't come to Jonah and 90-100 other people, think about it if your goal was to reach a city of ½ million people or more what would be your plan of attack? We think with a big work we need big #'s, a strategic ministry team, sharp thinkers, spiritually driven, business minded, we place together what we consider to be a spiritual dream team. God doesn't work that way, not generally. Most generally God will place the burden, give the vision, or impart instruction to one man, one individual and seed the work from there. God doesn't think like man thinks. **1 Sam 14:6, "...For nothing restrains the Lord from saving by many or by few."**

God doesn't need man, man needs God, so as with Gideon, or Jonathon and his armor bearer, God can do a great work with little to no resources humanly speaking, so He doesn't send out a huge strategic ministry team, just one reluctant (yet willing) prophet and He will do the rest. We do well not to limit God by our lack of resources.

#2 We want to draw attention to the message that Jonah was to bring to Nineveh. Notice Vs 2, "Preach to it (what) the message that I tell you." That is such a key for you and me, we're not to add to God's word, take away from it, seek to somehow hype it or whatever. We're simply to deliver God's word simply, it's the work of the Spirit to impact people's hearts. That's not my job, I'm to be faithful to deliver the word of God, nothing more, and nothing less.

Now we don't read where God told Jonah what that word would be at that time, he was simply to go. God doesn't always tell us the end from the beginning so that we can weigh out our options. He gave Jonah the word the 1st time and Jonah sought to opt out, this time He just tells him to go and share what He says to share. When we obey step #1, step #2 will be revealed.

However we do well to note that Jonah does show whole hearted submission here (though we'll see next time that his heart wasn't really in it he still submitted fully). He was at a place whereby it no longer mattered what the message was he would be faithful to deliver it. That's what God desires of us; that we will be faithful to handle His word regardless of what it is or what its impact may be. God told Ezekiel, "*You shall speak My words to them, whether they hear or whether they refuse,*" Ezek 2:7 The results of God's word is not up to us, it's between God and the hearer, it's our responsibility to deliver the word.

Vs3-4

Knowing the little bit we know of Jonah it's probable that though this wasn't the *whole* of his message it was undoubtedly the *heart* of his message. He may've expounded a bit more, but probably not much. He didn't really want to be there, it was a reluctant, disgruntled obedience at best, he didn't mingle words of mercy; just, "40 days and Nineveh will be overthrown." Translation, "Judgment is coming!"

But before we get too far into that we want to at least acknowledge the 1st sentence in Vs 3. "So Jonah arose and went to Nineveh according to the word of the Lord." His obedience may've been reluctant but at least he obeyed. He'd learned the lesson that disobedience is not only futile, it's counterproductive, so when God spoke to His heart, he obeyed. May the same be said of us, when God speaks we obey. We may not like it, it may call for a crucifying of the flesh, but we've learned enough to know that disobedience is both futile (often times painful) and counterproductive, therefore we obey.

40 days. Why 40 days? Because that's what God had said, other than that I have no idea, no doubt it was a period extended of grace, giving them opportunity to repent. We know that in the scriptures the # 40 is associated with testing and/or judgment. During the days of Noah it rained on the earth 40 days and nights. The 12 spies of Israel spied out the land of Canaan for 40 days, the nation of Israel wandered the wilderness 40 yrs, Goliath taunted the armies of Israel 40 days and of course Jesus fasted in the wilderness for 40 days. Here Jonah gives a 40 day declaration before judgment comes.

As we get to Vs 5 we realize that his words began to spread like wildfire, notice.
Vs5-9

I would venture to say that this is the single most large scale, radical repentance that's ever taken place throughout all of world history! And it's interesting because the word "repent" isn't even mentioned throughout the Ch yet the concept is on display in an undeniable way. Besides that we really don't *need* the word repent because repentance isn't something we *say* it's something we *do*, it's a verb, it's an action.

Let me underscore the fact that repentance is not a *feeling*, it's a *doing*. It's not something that we feel, it's not simply feeling sorry for your sin. Now I would never take away from someone feeling sorry from their sin, it's a good thing. But it's not an indication of repentance. Occasionally you'll be in a situation whereby someone is really spilling their guts and they're weeping and asking for forgiveness and often time's people think, "Man, that person is really repenting!"

Listen, I would never take away from someone's being overwhelmed by their sin, however weeping is not repenting, repenting is what takes place after they're through weeping, it's a turning away from sin. I repent when I turn my back on my sin and face forward toward God and the direction He wants me to go. You might understand it this way, God wants you to *face* Him, He doesn't want you to keep Him in your peripheral vision, He wants you facing Him head on.

Now, you can't face Him if you don't know where He is, you can't look the direction He sets you in if you don't know what that is. That's why the 1st key to repentance is what took place in Vs 4, the declaration of the *word of God*. Repentance is based #1 upon God's word, and #2 (see it in Vs 5) *Believing* God. God gives you His word, "Your direction is leading to destruction turn from it unto Me." You *believe God* based upon His word, and turn from your sin, that's repentance. Repentance isn't saying that you believe *in* God, lots of people believe *in* God and still lead sinful lives. They believe God exists, the question is whether or not you believe Him, do you believe His word or not? If you believe it you'll respond accordingly to it, if you don't you'll carry on about your life "business as usual."

The people of Nineveh believed God, and you can know that based upon the response that they had to the *word* of God. They humbled themselves, proclaimed a fast, and put on sackcloth. Now, don't misunderstand me, it's not the works themselves that imply repentance, you can do all sorts of things that are associated with repentance that don't equal repentance. For instance you can turn over a new leaf, stop leading a life that's reprobate, quit partying, start going to church, clean up your language, whatever... But if those things aren't based upon your *believing God* than they're just useless endeavors of the flesh. Remember repentance is predicated upon believing God. However if we *believe God* our lives will reflect that by our actions. James said it like this, **"For as the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without works is dead also."** James 2:26 Works are the spirit of faith; the evidence of the life of faith is found in the works faith produces in/through me.

For the Ninevites it was a fast, and a putting on of sackcloth, an afflicting of themselves outwardly in order to demonstrate their broken and contrite spirit inwardly. We read that *everyone* was impacted, from the common man to the king on the throne they all humbled themselves and cried out to God.

They didn't even let their dogs eat, you know your engaging in some radical repentance when you put sackcloth on your dog and your cows, and you don't let them eat or drink as long as you're not eating or drinking... and the king issued a decree that people forsake their evil ways, that they (notice Vs 8) *turn from* the violence that was in their hands and cry *mightily*, that is *earnestly, passionately* to God. The point being that we're to take sin seriously *before* God and cry out passionately *to* God for His mercy and forgiveness. So many today want to make excuses for their sin, "Well, I did it *but*..." when you or I begin to justify our course of action, there's no repentance there. There's justification; repentance will humbly cast itself upon God's mercy, repentance doesn't justify itself it appeals to God's mercy.

Now this is the incredible thing about this whole scene, it's found in Vs 9. "Who can tell if God will relent...so that we may not perish?" Wow, do you understand what's happening here? They are repenting on (as far as they're concerned) a "maybe." Jonah evidently didn't assure them of the mercy of God, they don't know if God *will* or God *won't* spare them... Yet they believed God responded to His word, made no excuses for their sin, turned from it and cried out to God's mercy. They humbled themselves radically upon the hopes of a "perhaps." It's no wonder that Jesus said, **"The men of Nineveh will rise up in the judgment with this generation and condemn it, because they repented at the preaching of Jonah; and indeed a greater than Jonah is here."** Matt 12:41 Jonah preached for 3 days, Jesus preached for 3 yrs, Jonah preached judgment, Jesus preached grace and truth, the men of Nineveh repented, the leaders of Israel rejected the Lord. But here's the deal, God delights in mercy, if we will *repent* then God will *relent*, notice.

Vs10

God responded to Jonah's repentance, He responded to Nineveh's and He responds to ours. Do any of the above merit His mercy? No, grace is never earned, repentance is never a work that deserves to be rewarded, however God does respond mercifully to repentance that takes place genuinely from the heart.

Now, before we wind down and wrap up we need to address something and that is this. Jonah said judgment was coming, judgment didn't come does that make him a false prophet? No, here's why. In nearly every declaration of judgment throughout the word of God there is an understanding inherent with in it that it's conditional based upon the person, place, or nation not responding in repentance. Why would you even call a people to repentance if judgment was coming regardless of what they did? 2^{ndly} God is acting in complete compliance with His word. We read in Jer 18:7-10 where God has said, *"The instant I speak concerning a nation and concerning a kingdom, to pluck up, to pull down, and to destroy it, if that nation against whom I have spoken turns from its evil, I will relent of the disaster that I thought to bring upon it. And the instant I speak concerning a nation and concerning a kingdom, to build and to plant it, if it does evil in My sight so that it does not obey My voice, then I will relent concerning the good with which I said I would benefit it."* The point being that God *wants* to show mercy, but if a people refuse to repent they put Him in a position whereby He has to respond through His justice. Finally, people kind of weird out about God changing when the bible says He never changes. That's because there are times we have to ascribe human traits to God because our finite understanding can't get a grip on the attributes of the infinite God. In reality it's not God who changes it's us. Did God change? No, the Ninevites did, God doesn't punish repentance, that's consistent with His character; He shows mercy. If we will repent, God will relent.

We serve a God of 2nd chances, of fresh starts and new beginnings, who pursues us and won't let failure alleviate our responsibility to serve Him. He takes us, picks us back up and sets us back on course making of us an even greater instrument of His grace, and His glory!

Prayer Points:

Father we're so thankful that you are slow to anger, and rich in mercy. We thank You that we can call upon You, cry out to You and You will hear us. May our lives reflect true repentance, a passion for You, a pursuit of holiness as unto You. We want to be fruitful for Your glory.