

MERCY TRIUMPHS OVER JUDGMENT -- COMMENTARY ON THE BOOK OF JONAH

by Paul G. Apple, September 2005

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THE SOVEREIGN DISPOSITION OF GOD’S MERCY AND GRACE EXPOSES THE PRIDE AND JEALOUSY OF JUDGMENTAL BELIEVERS

“I knew that Thou art a gracious and compassionate God, slow to anger and abundant in lovingkindness, and one who relents concerning calamity.”
(Jonah 4:2)

For each section in the Book of Jonah:

- Thesis statement ... to focus on the big idea
- Analytical outline ... to guide the understanding
- Devotional questions ... to encourage life application
- Representative quotations ... to stimulate deeper insight

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BACKGROUND OF JONAH

Malick:

Yahweh's merciful works of salvation are expressions of His good character towards all who repent of their rebellion against Him – whether Jew (Jonah) or Gentile (Sailors / Ninevites)

Bull:

- I. JONAH AND THE GREAT MISTAKE
- II. JONAH AND THE GREAT WIND
- III. JONAH AND THE GREAT FISH
- IV. JONAH AND THE GREAT CITY
- V. JONAH AND THE GREAT KINDNESS

Walton:

Israel and Judah were going to be warned of coming judgment. This was going to come in the form of prophetic pronouncement – usually deemed irrevocable. The Book of Jonah tells them that repentance was a proper and acceptable response, and could even turn back the pronouncement of the prophet (which, of course, was the pronouncement of the Lord). It had worked even for Nineveh, a naïve, wicked, pagan city (cf. Ezek. 18:21). When the warnings came to Israel (2 Kings 14:27 tells us they had not yet), here was the example. Even though doom had been pronounced, repentance could bring mercy. (Though arrived at independently, a similar understanding was expressed by R. E. Clements, “The Purpose of the Book of Jonah,” VT Supp. 28 (1974), pp. 16-28.)

Tatford:

The Divine purpose was always that Israel should be a witness to the nations and not merely the repository of Divine blessings for the nation's own satisfaction. In this purpose she completely failed and George Adam Smith (The Book of the Twelve Prophets, Vol. 2, p. 514) argues consequently that the purpose of this book “is to illustrate God's grace to the heathen in face of His people's refusal to fulfil their mission to them . . . It is the drama of Israel's career as the servant of God, in the most pathetic moments of that career . . . The cause of Israel's recusancy was not only wilfulness or cowardly sloth, but the honour of a whole world given over to idolatry, the paralysing sense of its irresistible force, of its cruel persecutions endured for centuries, and of the long famine of heaven's justice. These it was which had filled Israel's eyes too full of fever to see her duty.”

McGee:

There are six significant subjects which are suggested and developed in the book of Jonah which make it very relevant for us today:

- (1) This is the one book of the Old Testament which sets forth *the resurrection of Jesus Christ*. . .

(2) The book of Jonah teaches that *salvation is not by works*, but it is by faith which leads to repentance. . . The most significant statement in the book of Jonah is in the second chapter: “*Salvation is of the Lord*” (Jonah 2:9). He is the author of salvation; He erected the great building of our salvation; He is the architect.

(3) The third great purpose of this book is to show that *God’s purpose of grace cannot be frustrated*. Jonah refused to go to Nineveh, but God was still going to get the message to Nineveh. The interesting thing in this particular case is that Jonah was going to be the witness for God in Nineveh – he didn’t know he was going there, but he did.

(4) The fourth great truth in this book is that *God will not cast us aside for faithlessness*. He may not use you, but He will not cast you aside. There are a lot of football players sitting on the bench; in fact, more sit on the bench than play in the game. A player is called out to play only when it is believed that he can make a contribution to the game. If you and I are faithless, God may bench us; but we are still wearing our uniform, and He will not cast us aside. Anytime we want to get back in the game of life and do His will, He will permit us to do it.

(5) The fifth great truth is that God is good and gracious. Read Jonah 4:2 for the most penetrating picture of God in the entire Bible. It is wrong to say the Old Testament reveals a God of wrath and the New Testament reveals a God of love. He is no vengeful deity in the book of Jonah.

(6) The sixth and last great teaching is that *God is the God of the Gentiles*. When God chose Abraham, in effect He said to the Gentiles, “I’m going to have to leave you for awhile because of the sin that has come into the human family. I’m going to prepare salvation for you through a man and a nation, and I’ll bring the Redeemer, the Saviour into the world through them.” Now God has a salvation for all mankind. I have written Romans 3:29 over the book of Jonah in my Bible. Paul writes, “*Is he the God of the Jews only? Is he not also of the Gentiles? Yes, of the Gentiles also.*” The book of Jonah reveals that even in the Old Testament God did not forget the Gentiles. If He was willing to save a woman like Rahab the harlot, and a brutal, cruel nation like the Assyrians and the inhabitants of Nineveh, its capital, then I want to say to you that God is in the business of saving sinners.

Martin:

(Re the only recorded prophecy of Jonah in the OT = 2 Kings 14)

It thus appears that, while Israel were in a very wretched and oppressed condition, the Lord had employed His servant Jonah to predict an unmerited and most gracious interposition of His power on their behalf, to restore to them the territory of which their enemies had deprived them. It is very remarkable that living, as the prophet did, in a time of abounding provocations, when we might have expected his sole office in Israel would have been to denounce judgment on the apostate tribes and their ungodly rulers, the only one of his predictions on record is that of a most gracious and generous interposition on the part of Jehovah in defense of His afflicted people.

Martin:

It was partly, then, with the view of constructing, so to speak, a handle against His professed and peculiar people, and of “*provoking them to jealousy,*” that Jehovah, the God of Israel, the God of all the earth, planned and executed this memorable dispensation of His righteousness and forbearance towards Nineveh. . .

Thus, in general, the doctrine of free grace is frequently said to encourage men in sin; but we are not to modify the freeness of God’s offered mercy on pretence of taking care of the glory of God, and the maintenance of His law. This was substantially Jonah’s sin; -- the sin of pretending to be more careful of God’s glory, and more qualified to advance it, than God himself. It is a glorious fact that His thoughts are not as our thoughts; and we reduce them to a measure that would render them useless to ourselves, when we constrain them within the limits of our own judgment or capacity. God is able to vindicate His own procedure and all its principles; and He will do so without the aid of man’s wisdom.

Fairbairn:

Finally, we are taught here the salutary lesson, that whenever and wherever God is pleased to manifest of his grace and goodness, it is our part to acknowledge and rejoice in the manifestation. It may possibly be done through instruments that we should not have expected to be peculiarly honoured, or in regions which are in a manner cut off from our sympathies and regards. That such showers of blessing should descend there, while scarcely a drop falls where our desires and efforts are mainly engaged, may often appear strange, and may even be felt to be mortifying, as if what were given to the one were somehow withheld from the other. But this is to judge after the flesh. The Spirit of the Lord is not straitened, and what he bestows on one corner of the vineyard is not given at the expense of another – it is rather designed to awaken a desire and expectation for like gifts of grace, where they have not yet been received, and to give manifest proof to all of God’s infinite power and goodness. If his eye, therefore, should be good toward any, far be it from us to cherish an evil eye – let us rather view with thankfulness the benevolent working of his hand . . .

Ironside:

Unquestionably the great theme of this book is the divine sovereignty. The expressions “*The Lord prepared*” and “*God prepared,*” frequently repeated, would manifest this. Throughout, however man may plan, and whatever he may attempt, it is God who is over all, and working all things in such away as to bring glory to His own name. . .

For that it was pride and bigotry that was at the bottom of all his wilfulness and waywardness is clear enough. He knew that God was long-suffering, and that He delighted in mercy. He tells us that in the end. He therefore feared for his prophetic reputation; and his thoughts were so far from those of the Lord that he could not endure that grace should be shown to a Gentile power.

Hawkins:

I. THE STORY OF A MAN’S PILGRIMAGE

A. Rejection

Jonah went in the opposite direction, choosing to reject the will of God for his life.

B. Reflection

Often the adversities of life bring us to this moment of reflection.

C. Correction

Yes, God is the God of the second chance. Jonah corrected his ways.

D. Objection

II. THE STORY OF GOD'S PROVIDENCE

A. Election

God elects his own people, assigns their duties, appoints their places. He calls particular people to particular places for particular purposes.

B. Protection

Even in our rebellion He protects us until we come to ourselves.

C. Perfection

God is more interested in revival than we are.

D. Affection

God has compassion for sinners.

Feinberg:

Amazing as it strikes us each time we read it, the account states that Jonah was exceedingly displeased and very angry. Why was the chastened messenger of God angry? . . . Jonah begrudged the heathen Ninevites the abundant mercy of God.

What a contrast we have here between God's attitude toward Nineveh after its repentance and Jonah's attitude to the same city's repentance. He had received pardoning mercy from the Lord on his repentance but was not willing for Nineveh to have the same. We are reminded of the parable of our Lord in Matthew 18:23-35. The human heart is ever the same in all ages. (Cp. Jer 17:9.)

Jonah is like so many today: they feel they could govern God's world much better than He can. Think of it! The prophet of God angry beyond measure because of the pardoning grace of God. He was, like so many of us, more zealous about the judgment of Nineveh than the sparing of it. He assumed he knew better than God the proper course to be followed.

TEXT: Jonah 1:1-17

TITLE: JONAH'S FLIGHT -- RUNNING AWAY FROM GOD --
WHERE CAN I HIDE FROM HIS PRESENCE?

BIG IDEA:
RUNNING AWAY FROM GOD NEVER WORKS –
IT ONLY EXPOSES A HEART THAT IS OPPOSED TO GOD'S SOVEREIGN
AGENDA

INTRODUCTION:

People try to run away from God for a variety of reasons and in a variety of ways:

- 1) Run away from His Presence – Desire to Hide from God
 - 2) Run away from His Calling or His Mission – Desire to Do Your Own Thing
 - 3) Run away from His Accountability over you – Desire to Escape Judgment
- But there is no escaping God. That doesn't change the reality that in their desperation and panic, people's first impulse is to try to flee and escape.

I. (:1-3) A JUDGMENTAL SPIRIT AVOIDS MISSIONS OF COMPASSION AND MERCY

Why?

- thinking people don't deserve to be helped
- thinking it's not my job or responsibility to get involved

A. (:1-2) Jonah's Calling – The Compassion of God for a Lost World Cannot be Reconciled with a Judgmental Spirit

(4:1-3 provide the commentary here)

1. The Prophet of God Should Always Welcome the Word of God
"The word of the Lord came to Jonah the son of Amittai saying"

Should always be an exciting experience to receive new revelation from God.

2. Jonah's Commission Was Clear But Distasteful
"Arise, go to Nineveh the great city, and cry against it, for their wickedness has come up before Me."

- a. Apparently he had no problem traveling
quick to hop a boat headed the opposite direction
- b. Reputation of wicked Nineveh well-known
- c. Proclamation was one of Judgment
- d. But Heart of God is one of Compassion and Mercy

e. Heart of Jonah was one of Bitterness and Condemnation

B. (:3) Jonah's Rebellion – Substituting His Judgmental Agenda for the Lord's Mission of Mercy

“But Jonah rose up to flee to Tarshish from the presence of the Lord. So he went down to Joppa, found a ship which was going to Tarshish, paid the fare, and went down into it to go with them to Tarshish from the presence of the Lord.”

Called the reluctant prophet ... but we could use much stronger terminology ... direct rebellion here

II. (:4-9) OPEN REBELLION FLIES IN THE FACE OF OUR PROFESSED FEAR OF GOD

A. (:4) Terrifying Situation – The Perfect Storm

“And the Lord hurled a great wind on the sea and there was a great storm on the sea so that the ship was about to break up.”

B. (:5a) Appropriate Fear Motivates Pagans to Take Desperate Measures

1. Reality of Their Fear

“Then the sailors became afraid”

These were hard core sailors, in their element, but recognizing they were up against unusually powerful forces of nature

2. Renewal of Their Religious Commitments

“and every man cried to his god”

There are no atheists in the foxhole of battle

3. Resourcefulness of Their Desperate Tactics – did everything humanly possible

“and they threw the cargo which was in the ship into the sea to lighten it for them.”

C. (:5b-6) Denial of Rebellion Associated with Exhaustion and Prayerlessness

“But Jonah had gone below into the hold of the ship, lain down, and fallen sound asleep. So the captain approached him and said, ‘How is it that you are sleeping? Get up, call on your god. Perhaps your god will be concerned about us so that we will not perish.’”

Jonah recognized as a religious personage; if he didn't care about his own safety, at least he should be praying for the safety of the others

D. (:7-8) Exposure of Jonah as the Cause of the Calamity

1. (:7) The Inquiry – Who is to Blame?

“And each man said to his mate, ‘Come, let us cast lots so we may learn

on whose account this calamity has struck us.” So they cast lots and the lot fell on Jonah.”

2. (:8) The Inquisition – Who are You really and What did you do?

“Then they said to him, ‘Tell us now!

- On whose account has this calamity struck us?*
- What is your occupation?*
- And where do you come from?*
- What is your country?*
- From what people are you?”*

E. (:9) Empty Profession of Faith – not practicing the fear of the Lord

“And he said to them, ‘I am a Hebrew, and I fear the Lord God of heaven who made the sea and the dry land.”

III. (:10-16) PACIFYING THE LORD REQUIRES THE PAYING OF THE APPROPRIATE PRICE

In this instance, Jonah had to be tossed into the sea to quiet the storm

A. (:10-12) Figuring Out the Price that Needs to be Paid –
Only One Price Will Satisfy

1. (:10) Indignation at Jonah’s Foolishness to Put Them All in Jeopardy

“Then the men became extremely frightened and they said to him, ‘How could you do this?’ For the men knew that he was fleeing from the presence of the Lord, because he had told them.”

Even the pagans understood that you cannot flee from an all-present Sovereign

2. (:11) Pursuit of Justice

“So they said to him, ‘What should we do to you that the sea may become calm for us?’ – for the sea was becoming increasingly stormy.”

- How to punish the transgressor in appropriate fashion*
- How to spare the victims further damage*

3. (:12) Only One Solution

“And he said to them, ‘Pick me up and throw me into the sea. Then the sea will become calm for you, for I know that on account of me this great storm has come upon you.”

Cf. how salvation attacked as exclusivistic – there is only one price God will accept

B. (:13-14) Last Ditch Effort at Mercy

(Jonah unwilling for people of Nineveh to be shown mercy; but here the pagans are willing to extend mercy to Jonah if at all possible)

1. (:13) Self Effort can seem Magnanimous, but actually is Counter Productive
“However, the men rowed desperately to return to land but they could not, for the sea was becoming even stormier against them.”

2. (:14) Plea for Absolution/ Accepting the Inevitable
“then they called on the Lord and said, ‘We earnestly pray, O Lord, do not let us perish on account of this man’s life and do not put innocent blood on us; for Thou, O Lord, hast done as Thou hast pleased.’”

C. (:15) Paying the Price Demanded
“So they picked up Jonah, threw him into the sea, and the sea stopped its raging.”

D. (:16) Genuine Conversion Results in Genuine Fear of the Lord and Obedient Commitment
“Then the men feared the Lord greatly, and they offered a sacrifice to the Lord and made vows.”

(:17) CONCLUSION: SOLITARY CONFINEMENT FOR THE REBELLIOUS RUNAWAY

A. Divine Appointment
“And the Lord appointed a great fish to swallow Jonah”

B. Death and Resurrection Experience
“and Jonah was in the stomach of the fish three days and three nights.”

DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:

- 1) When have we tried to run away from the Lord? How has He brought us back to Himself?
- 2) When are we reluctant to carry out God’s agenda of mercy and compassion? What people or groups of people cause us to react with a judgmental spirit?
- 3) How are we evidencing a genuine fear of the Lord?
- 4) Where are we relying on self effort instead of submitting to God’s sovereign plan?

QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

Goins: But the question I want to confront you with this morning is, how do you respond when you're asked to be a minister of reconciliation and an ambassador for Christ to individuals or groups whom you fear or find difficult to love---those who don't have the innocence of children, or perhaps those with whom you have radical disagreement?

Think specifically of individuals, types of people, or groups of people of whom you're the most critical and judgmental. (They may very well deserve your judgment and evaluation.) Think about the people whom you tend to dismiss, those you hope to have very little contact with, and those for whom you want no responsibility. They may be as close as a spouse or a child who has deeply disappointed or hurt you. Or they may be as distant as the television image of a terrorist who massacres innocent victims.

These are people who have become our enemies because of what they believe, say, or do. If these individuals or groups have declared themselves to be God's enemies then we feel all the more justified in passing judgment on them, writing them off, and distancing ourselves from them. That is exactly what happened to the Old Testament prophet Jonah. . .

Jonah is introduced to us as a prophet of God who served the Lord faithfully during the reign of Jeroboam II in the middle of the eighth century BC. He ministered to Israel in the north in the time of the divided kingdoms, before any of the invasions and deportations that would affect both kingdoms. King Jeroboam was an idolatrous and immoral king who brought nothing but evil to the land. And yet God in mercy and grace had Jonah prophesy to the nation that the territorial boundaries were going to be expanded. God was going to give back to Israel territory that had been taken several generations earlier by the Syrians. God hoped that the nation would respond to his mercy in repentance. And Jonah's ministry was fulfilled; he preached expansion and it happened. He had great public success in the economic and military glory days of the northern kingdom.

Leake: The Reluctant Evangelist -- The Fleeing Prophet
Text highlights the grandeur of the mercy of the God of Israel.

Chaps. 1-2 – God's Mercy on Jonah
Chaps. 3-4 – God's Mercy on Nineveh

Introduction:

Favorite passage for the liberals to bash; they like to make fun of the story; but they come with presuppositions that there cannot be an omnipotent miracle-working God; Story is not about the fish (never called a whale in the account); greatest miracle in the book is **God's Sovereign Mercy** upon a rebellious, sinful people

The content focuses more on the messenger than on the message – different in that respect from the other minor prophets; a running narrative; didactic history; not a prophetic oracle; you read the story and learn the lesson; don't get bogged down in the details; from literary, artistic standpoint it is a masterpiece; a great read

Cf. some of the clever outlines of other commentators:

Chap. 1 – “I won’t go”

Chap. 2 – “OK, I’ll go”

Chap. 3 – “Here I am”

Chap. 4 – “I knew I shouldn’t have come”

I. (:1-3) The Opening

A. (:1) Who Was Jonah?

Name means “dove”; father’s name means “truthful, loyal”

Matt. 12:41 – Jonah was a real person preaching to real people; 2 Kings 14:25;

ministered during reign of Jeroboam II in N. Kingdom of Israel

B. (:2) What did God want Jonah to do?

What’s the big deal in being commissioned to preach judgment to Nineveh? We need to place ourselves in his shoes and try to understand how he felt. Would have been an astonishing command to any Jew. Nineveh was a very wicked city – among many wicked cities it is singled out – something very bad; similar to Sodom and Gomorrah; but no missionaries were ever sent to Sodom and Gomorrah; God did not have mercy on them; It was not normally God’s method in OT times to send out missionaries to Gentile nations; in fact Jonah is the only prophet to have received such a call; The world was to come to Israel to worship the true God; the Great Commission reversed all of this

C. (:3) Jonah’s Response = refusing God’s Commission

How could a little prophet like Jonah stand up against God? Everything in this book obeys God – the wind, the sea, the fish, the heathen sailors...

Did Jonah think he was going to be successful in fleeing God? He knew the doctrines of the character of God – His omnipresence, etc.; he wasn’t surprised when he got caught; He was attempting to flee from the special manifested presence of God in Jerusalem (same language used of Cain in Gen. 4:16)

Fleeing his calling; his service obligation; smooth sailing at first; no problems; looked like the coast is clear; maybe feeling relieved; God allows us our own plans; we might think that all will be well; but eventually judgment catches up to us; cf. Harvest Principle

II. (:4-16) The Storm

A. (:4-9) The Storm Hits

A great wind; we give names to storms today; delayed response by God; He did not send this storm immediately; Ps. 104

Whatever you call on in your moment of need is your god;

Sailors = Rope pullers; Phoenicians; large decked ship

They were desperate = willing to throw valuable cargo overboard;

Contrast: Christ sleeping peacefully in boat in the midst of a storm – He had every right to be at peace; Jonah’s was a false peace

Irony: you have a pagan captain instructing Jonah to call on his God; Unbelievers

involved in rebuking the prophet of God

“Arise” = same command word used by God in the original commission

“lots” were often viewed as valid in the Scriptures – Acts 1:26 – little stones from ankle bones; “You can roll the dice, but God determines the outcome”

The jig is up; identified himself as a “Hebrew

B. (:10-14) The Storm Worsens

These experienced sailors were terrified; could not be a worse scenario; If they kept Jonah in the boat they would perish; if they threw him overboard they would be guilty of the blood of an innocent man (not convicted of any crime);

How could you do this to us?

God had nothing against these sailors;

Jonah not suicidal but making a confession that he was worthy of death and of being sacrificed to save the others; these were noble sailors – still tried to row harder to reach land and save Jonah; but the storm kept worsening;

What God decrees always comes to pass; He is in control of all history

C. (:15-17) The Storm Ceases – storm = life-changing encounter

1) Spiritual pilgrimage of the sailors: began with self effort; turned to their gods; then turned to God of Israel = genuine conversion experience; convinced that Jonah had died; even if they had seen the big fish, they would not have interpreted that as God’s mercy or deliverance

Psalm 107:23ff; 76:11

the storm humbled these strong, self-sufficient men

You can tell their repentance and confession was genuine because it was followed by vows of obedience (not some phony foxhole conversion)

God was merciful in granting them repentance

2) Spiritual pilgrimage of Jonah – he had some time to think before the fish swallowed him; he was almost half-drowned by that time

This is example of didactic poetry – Hebrews loved poetry = it taught history; emphasis not on rhyming but on comparisons and contrasts; restatement, enhancement; increase in intensity, etc. – Transition to Chap. 2

Conclusion: Prov. 3:5-7

TEXT: Jonah 2:1-10

TITLE: JONAH'S FERVENCY -- CRYING OUT TO GOD IN DESPERATE PRAYER – CAN YOU HEAR ME NOW?

BIG IDEA:

**THE GOD OF THE SECOND CHANCE HEARS OUR DESPERATE CRIES
DESPITE THE DEPTHS OF OUR DISTRESS**

**(GOD'S DELIVERANCE IS NOT CONSTRAINED BY THE DEPTHS OF OUR
DISTRESS)**

INTRODUCTION:

Do you ever feel that your situation is so hopeless and entangled that God could never bail you out?

The belly of the fish is a lot safer place than the depths of the sea. God is moving Jonah through various stages on the way back to following Him.

As long as you can still pray there is still hope.

**I. (:1-2) ANSWERED PRAYER REACHES DOWN TO THE DEPTHS OF OUR
DISTRESS**

“Then Jonah prayed to the Lord his God from the stomach of the fish, and he said, ‘I called out of my distress to the Lord, And He answered me. I cried for help from the depth of Sheol; Thou didst hear my voice.’”

A. Prayer as the Lifeline Connection to our Personal God
“prayed to the Lord his God”

B. Prayer in the Nick of Time -- Even as the Last Resort
- Jonah prayed
- I called out to the Lord
- I cried for help

Context: running away from God; under God's hand of judgment – yet still able to pray to God for help.

In the belly of the fish for three days and three nights – did he start calling out to God right away . . . or did he sulk for some time?

C. Prayer from the Depths of Distress (Impossible Complications)
- from the stomach of the fish
- my distress
- from the depth of Sheol

D. Prayer that Receives Merciful Response – (The Mercy of Answered Prayer)

- *He answered me*
- *Thou didst hear my voice*

The Lord wants to train us to be merciful instead of judgmental and prideful.
He wants our heart of compassion to be wide like His.

Guzik: God can give us a total peace and assurance that our prayers have been answered, even before the actual answer comes

II. (:3-4) HOPE COMES FROM UNDERSTANDING THE HAND OF THE LORD IN ADMINISTERING DISCIPLINE

“For Thou hadst cast me into the deep, into the heart of the seas, and the current engulfed me. All Thy breakers and billows passed over me. So I said, ‘I have been expelled from Thy sight. Nevertheless I will look again toward Thy holy temple.’”

A. Sovereign Discipline – from the hand of the Lord

- “Thou hadst cast me”*
- “Thy breakers and billows”*

B. Severe Discipline

- “into the deep”*
- “into the heart of the seas”*

C. Surpassing Discipline – beyond measure – looks like I am permanently separated from God

- “engulfed me”*
- “passed over me”*
- “So I said, ‘I have been expelled from Thy sight.’”*

D. Sufficient Discipline – Accomplishes purpose of Restoration and Orientation towards Holiness, Worship and Service

- “Nevertheless I will look again toward Thy holy temple.”*

III. (:5-6) THE AWESOMENESS OF THE DELIVERANCE CORRESPONDS TO THE MESSINESS AND HOPELESSNESS OF THE PIT

A. The Messiness and Hopelessness of the Pit -- 5 Images

- “Water encompassed me to the point of death”*
- “The great deep engulfed me.”*
- “Weeds were wrapped around my head.”*
- “I descended to the roots of the mountains.”*
- “The earth with its bars was around me forever.”*

B. The Awesomeness of the Deliverance

“But Thou has brought up my life from the pit, O Lord my God.”

IV. (:7-9) REPENTANCE SPARKS RENEWED COMMITMENT AND THANKSGIVING

A. Turning Back to the Lord with his Last Gasp

“While I was fainting away, I remembered the Lord; and my prayer came to Thee, into Thy holy temple.”

B. Specific Repentance to Return to Faithfulness

“Those who regard vain idols forsake their faithfulness”

Ryrie: Jonah includes himself among those who forsake God’s faithfulness for lies.

C. Renewed Commitment

1. Worship from a Heart of Thanksgiving

“But I will sacrifice to Thee with the voice of thanksgiving.”

Copeland: It is interesting to note that his prayer is more of a THANKSGIVING, than a petition

2. Service in the context of Faithfulness

“That which I have vowed I will pay.”

3. Dependence Upon God’s Grace and Mercy

“Salvation is from the Lord.”

Note: But we can tell from the events of Chapter 4 and Jonah’s attitude there that he had not fully repented or grasped the lessons yet that the Lord had for him.

V. (:10) SOVEREIGN DELIVERANCE BRINGS US TO THE PLACE OF SAFETY AND RENEWED SERVICE

A. The Sovereign Lord Accomplishes His Purposes

“The Lord commanded the fish”

B. The Process of Restoration Can be Painful and Messy

“and it vomited Jonah up”

C. The Place of Safety Brings Opportunity for Renewed Service

“onto the dry land”

Now it is time to obediently answer the call of God and go minister to Nineveh.

DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:

- 1) When have we felt **disconnected** from God? How have we seen Him still respond to our prayers and pleas for help?
- 2) How have we learned to be **merciful** to others from God showing us mercy?
- 3) What **vain idols** have we had to turn away from in order to faithfully maintain our loyalty to our God?
- 4) How are we encouraged by resting in the sovereignty of God – “*Salvation is from the Lord*”?

* * * * *

QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

Piper: Before we look at this chapter let me mention briefly why I regard the book as historical rather than as a parable. Not only was Jonah a historical person, as we saw from 2 Kings 14:25, but also in the New Testament Jesus treats Jonah's story as historical. He says in Matthew 12:40, "Just as Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of the sea monster, so will the Son of man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth. The men of Nineveh will arise at the judgment with this generation and condemn it; for they repented at the preaching of Jonah; and behold, something greater than Jonah is here." Those of us who respect the wisdom of Jesus will be very slow to call his judgment into question. He thought the story was historical. We should, too. If you ask how a man can survive in the belly of a fish three days, the answer is, he probably can't—any more than a person can stay three days in the grave and live again. That's why Jesus called it a "sign." In Matthew 12:39 he says, "An evil and adulterous generation craves for a sign; and yet no sign shall be given to it but the *sign* of Jonah, the prophet." Jesus knew this was no ordinary event. It was a miraculous sign of God's gracious and powerful intervention. There is no point in trying to explain it scientifically any more than the miraculous signs of Jesus' ministry. Jonah cried for help and God saved him miraculously with a fish.

[Outline of message:]

First, God answers us in spite of our guilt.

Second, God answers us in spite of his judgment.

Third, God answers us and delivers us from impossible circumstances.

Fourth, God answers us in the nick of time.

Fifth, God answers us in stages, not all of which are comfortable.

Sixth, God answers us in order to win our undivided loyalty and thanks.

Finally, God answers us in our guilty distress to help us become merciful like he is.

Keathley: I think the life of every individual is also parallel to Jonah's experience. God calls us, but we rebel. We search for life in everything else but God until we come to a point in our life where we are so low that we finally recognize our inability and come to the conclusion that Salvation is from the Lord.

Calvin: But we must remember that his prayer was not composed in the words which are here related; but Jonah, while in the bowels of the fish, dwelt on these thoughts in his mind. Hence he relates in this song how he thought and felt; and we shall see that he was then in a state of distraction, as our minds must necessarily be tossed here and there by temptations. For the servants of God do not gain the victory without great struggle. We must fight, and indeed strenuously, that we may conquer. Jonah then in this song shows that he was agitated with great trouble and hard contests: yet this conviction was firmly fixed in his heart,— that God was to be sought, and would not be sought in vain, as he is ever ready to bring help to his people whenever they cry to him.

PRAYER

Grant, Almighty God, that as thou hast once given us such an evidence of thy infinite power in thy servant Jonah, whose mind, when he was almost sunk down into hell, thou hadst yet raised up to thyself, and hadst so supported with firm constancy, that he ceased not to pray and to call on thee,— O grant, that in the trials by which we must be daily exercised, we may raise upwards our minds to thee, and never cease to think that thou art near us; and that when the signs of thy wrath appear, and when our sins thrust themselves before our eyes, to drive us to despair, may we still constantly struggle, and never surrender the hope of thy mercy, until having finished all our contests, we may at length freely and fully give thanks to thee, and praise thy infinite goodness, such as we daily experience that being conducted through continual trials, we may at last come into that blessed rest which is laid up for us in heaven, through Christ one Lord. Amen.

Constable: The following prayer is mainly thanksgiving for deliverance from drowning. It is not thanksgiving for deliverance from the fish. Jonah prayed it while he was in the fish. Evidently he concluded after some time in the fish's stomach that he would not die from drowning. Drowning was a particularly distasteful form of death for an ancient Near Easterner such as Jonah who regarded the sea as a great enemy. Jonah's ability to thank God in the midst of his black torture chamber, which pitched him uncontrollably in every direction, shows that he had experienced a remarkable change in attitude (cf. 1:3, 12). . .

The testimony that salvation comes from Yahweh is the expression of Jonah's thanksgiving that he promised God. The last declaration in this psalm is one of the great summary statements about salvation in the Bible. Salvation, either physical or spiritual, ultimately comes from Yahweh and only from Him, not from idols or people including oneself (cf. Ps. 3:8; 37:39). It is in His power, and only He can give it. This statement also implies a recognition of the fact that God has the right to save whom He will.

Leake: Salvation is From the Lord

Description of Jonah's descent into the stormy waters

I. Jonah Descending (2:2-7)

God did it; Jonah was responsible for his sin and aware of what was happening; full and honest confession; the sea did not get calm for Jonah immediately; it was an overwhelming sea; understood that he was receiving a just penalty; descended way down to the depths; no hope of saving himself; no hope of deliverance from others; sinking into his own death chamber; finally in 2:7 there is a ray of hope; People must come to point of desperation before crying out to God for deliverance

II. Jonah Delivered (2:8-9;1:17-21)

How did God answer that cry for help? The ever present Judge became the ever present deliverer; Why did God send the fish? Why not just consign Jonah to a watery grave? The fish represents the mercy of God. Jonah was confident of his deliverance even while still in the fish; amazed at the mercy of God (Ps. 91:15; 30:3).

The best way to prepare for the moment of crisis is to know the Scripture.

A guilty person has no right to claim mercy, but must appeal to the compassion and pity of God.

Examples of Mercy (like thief on the cross)

Hymn: "There's a wideness in God's mercy like the wideness in God's sea. . ."

Eph 2:4-5 – God is rich in mercy

James 2:13 – mercy triumphs over judgment – but not at the expense of justice; mercy shown to us in Christ

Story is too familiar so we miss the impact of the amazing mercy and deliverance provided by God

The fish was appointed and commanded by God – Divine sovereignty in salvation; meticulous providence; swallowed in a single gulp to preserve Jonah; other details are not important (e.g. what type of fish; how Jonah got enough oxygen, etc.)

Salvation is from the Lord!

1. Salvation is not from any other source

Vain, empty, useless idols; you can't just be a sincere follower of another religion; you must respond to the covenant God of Israel; the God of Abraham – John 8:23-24

2. Salvation is a matter of God's pure mercy

Not based on human merit, religious works, participation in sacraments; Jonah did not aid in his salvation at all; it was all of God; Not "but you have to do ..."

3. God's sovereign choice ultimately determines who gets saved

God owed Jonah nothing; did not have to save Jonah; Rom. 9:15; if you get what you deserved, then that is fair; Way is narrow that leads to life; no Ought in mercy; but it leads to thanksgiving and praise and vows of obedience

Where did the fish spit up Jonah?? Maybe back at Joppa where he started out

TEXT: Jonah 3:1-10

TITLE: JONAH'S FAITHFULNESS -- PREACHING GOD'S PROPHETIC MESSAGE
– WILL YOU REPENT IN TIME?

BIG IDEA:

THE PREACHING OF GOD'S PROPHETIC MESSAGE OF IMMINENT JUDGMENT CAN CHANGE MEN'S HEARTS AND TURN AWAY THE IMPENDING WRATH OF GOD

INTRODUCTION:

Cf. a mulligan in golf; oppty to replay the shot

Jonah still doesn't have the right attitude and heart of compassion – we will see in chapter 4. He has heart of contempt and judgment – that is the main emphasis of the book – God wants to work on the heart of His people so that our heart towards the lost reflects His heart of compassion and mercy.

I. (:1-3) THE MESSENGER – CALLED TO DELIVER THE GOODS -- SAME CALLING . . . DIFFERENT RESPONSE

A. (:1) God Calls His Prophet a Second Time – Service is a Privilege

“Now the word of the Lord came to Jonah the second time, saying”

He is the God of the Second Chance; but don't presume upon His patience

Goins: Let me ask you: Has the discipline of God, the distress that God has brought into your life because of sin, made you more obedient or less obedient to him? In the long haul have you become more flexible or less flexible in responding to God's heart desires? Are you more submissive to his will or less submissive? Has the stress made you bitter toward God, or better in serving him and following him? Are you more consistent in running with him and agreeing with him?

B. (:2) God Commands Faithfulness in Proclaiming His Message

“Arise, go to Nineveh the great city and proclaim to it the proclamation which I am going to tell you.”

God doesn't always give us the entire picture up front.

C. (:3) God Casts a Big Vision of Great Challenge and Great Compassion

“So Jonah arose and went to Nineveh according to the word of the Lord. Now Nineveh was an exceedingly great city, a three days' walk.”

- a very significant city

- a very large city

II. (:4) THE MISSION -- PROCLAIMING MESSAGE OF IMPENDING

DESTRUCTION

- A. Tackling the Scope of the Mission – Hardest part is actually beginning
“Then Jonah began to go through the city one day’s walk”
- B. Conveying the Urgency of the Mission
“and he cried out and said”
- C. Proclaiming the Message of the Mission – Unpopular and Dangerous
“Yet forty days and Nineveh will be overthrown.”

Short sermons can be quite effective!

III. (:5-9) THE MOVEMENT – HUMBLING THEMSELVES AND PETITIONING GOD FOR HIS MERCY

Perhaps most impressive and astonishing people movement of all time – an entire city repenting and turning away from their wickedness and back to God

What inspired such a dramatic turnaround?

- God’s heart of love and compassion reaching out to them
- Circumstances of the unusual prophet

Ritchie: Well, the second thing that caused their repentance, I suggest, is that I think that Jonah looked strange. Let me explain. There is some evidence that in the late 1800’s a sailor fell overboard and was swallowed by a great fish of the shark family. Two days later the shark was caught in a net. He was brought on board, cut open, and the man was found alive. There was only one difference about him, and that was that somehow the fish’s digestive juices (which hadn’t got to him totally), had burned off his first layer of skin so that every feature of the man was white, and he stayed that way for the rest of his life.

- A. (:5) Response of the People
 - 1. Faith – The essential starting point
“Then the people of Nineveh believed in God”
Corporate movement towards repentance on the part of all the people
 - 2. Humbling themselves before God
“and they called a fast and put on sackcloth from the greatest to the least of them.”
Involves confession of sin and petitioning God for mercy
No caste system when it comes to our standing before God
- B. (:6-8) Response of the King
 - 1. (:6) Personal Response – Same as that of the people
“When the word reached the king of Nineveh, he arose from his throne, laid aside his robe from him, covered himself with sackcloth, and sat on the ashes.”

Effectiveness of Jonah's preaching – *the word reached the king*
King taking a leadership position
Recognizing the sovereignty of the King of the Universe
(how different from Nebuchadnezzar)

Goins: It is amazing that what the king is doing is following the lead of his people as he exchanges his own royal robes for sackcloth. To put on that scratchy burlap covering acknowledges that one deserves God's judgment and affliction. It symbolizes grieving over one's own sin. For the king to sit in ashes means he leaves his seat of authority and humiliates himself. He prostrates himself before God in repentance. These are powerful symbolic actions in leadership. When the king issues this royal decree, although it comes in response to the people's initiation of mourning and fasting, it does add official sanction and impetus to what is already going on.

2. (:7-8) Public Response – Issuing Mandate

a. Invoking his Authority

“And he issued a proclamation and it said, ‘In Nineveh by the decree of the king and his nobles:’”

Buy-in from his nobles

b. Instituting Extreme Corporate Fast – extending it to animals

“Do not let man, beast, herd, or flock taste a thing. Do not let them eat or drink water.”

c. Calling for Extreme Expression of Humility

“But both man and beast must be covered with sackcloth”

d. Commanding Repentance – Petitioning God for Mercy

“and let men call on God earnestly that each may turn from his wicked way and from the violence which is in his hands.”

Fervency entreated

Corporate concern, but personal responsibility

Calling for radical lifestyle transformation

No movement on God's part apart from movement on our part

We need God's working in our hearts to enable us to repent

C. (:9) Fear of God coupled with Hope in His Mercy

“Who knows, God may turn and relent, and withdraw His burning anger so that we shall not perish?”

III. (:10) THE MERCY – RESPONDING BY AVERTING EXECUTION OF WRATH

A. Awareness of Fruits of Repentance

“When God saw their deeds, that they turned from their wicked way”

B. Averting Execution of Wrath

“then God relented concerning the calamity which He had declared He would bring upon them. And He did not do it.”

* * * * *

DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:

- 1) When have we blown it but God has graciously given us another opportunity to serve Him? How have we responded?
- 2) Are we being faithful to proclaim the message that God has committed to us?
- 3) What is our expectation in terms of how people might respond to the message? Do we write off certain groups of society and look down on them with contempt?
- 4) What concrete steps do we take to humble ourselves before God and seek His mercy?

* * * * *

QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

Ritchie: In Genesis 10 we are told that Nimrod built the city of Nineveh and during all those years it had continued to grow bigger. (The city proper was something like San Francisco, with three smaller cities surrounding it, like Daly City, Pacifica and Millbrae.) In Jonah's time Nineveh was about to become the capital of the Assyrian Empire which, in 726 B.C., would take Israel into captivity and become the ruler of the world until Babylon became strong.

So Jonah comes to the city and finds over six hundred thousand people going about their business. He finds within the city all kinds of shrines and temples; he discovers that the Ninevites love astrology and they love the gods. He goes through the city, which is majestic in his eyes, for about a day and a half, after completing a 500-mile journey across high mountains and desert plains, and he proclaims a message to the people.

Now the people are the issue in this story. God loves these wicked Assyrians even though they are hung up on all kinds of astrology and pagan worship. They had water gods and land gods; they had sky gods and wind gods, but they were forever under fear, because the gods they created in their minds were like people--they were greedy and demanding; they loved sacrifice; they had husbands and wives and children. Their gods controlled their destiny, so the Ninevites were forever trying to appease them. So in a true sense they were religious people; they were very conscious of the other world; they were very aware of powers and beings and destiny; they were very aware of the stars

and how they moved in the heavens.

Goins: Jonah says two things in the condensed sermon. First, he says there are forty days before judgment will come. Throughout the ancient Near East that would have had religious significance. It always suggested a time of waiting for divine activity, or a period of divine activity. Think of some of the instances in the Old Testament: Forty years that Israel wanders in the wilderness, forty days of the flood. And in other ancient Near Eastern cultures it had similar religious significance. So when they hear that in forty days something bad is going to happen, it comes like a trumpet blast of warning: "There is danger coming and you had better pay attention!" And all ears would prick up.

The other thing Jonah says is that Nineveh is going to be destroyed or overthrown. This is an unambiguous announcement of judgment or divine wrath. Remember, in God's first call to Jonah in chapter 1 he said, "Cry against [this great city]; because their wickedness has come up before me." Nineveh is going to be destroyed as a consequence of its sinfulness. That is really the heart of the message. And sin is always going to be judged in the life of an individual, a community, or a nation; that message is very consistent in the Scriptures. . .

But what is even more awesome to me is that God is the one who instigates our ability to repent and turn back to him. His activity precedes as well as follows our repentance in a three-step process. In this account we see God first sovereignly choosing the city of Nineveh on which to focus his love; out of grace he elects these people to salvation. Second, the people respond to God's word through Jonah and repent of their sin. And then third, God seems to repent in granting forgiveness for sin and withholding judgment, but in fact that was his purpose all along. So in the story of the king and people of Nineveh, the full circle of repentance takes place, and Jonah is strategic in that process because of his obedience, ambivalent as it is, to God's will and God's message. There is an unparalleled outpouring of God's Spirit in Nineveh. A revival like this never happened even in Israel throughout biblical history.

Constable: The meaning of "a three days' walk" remains somewhat obscure. The Hebrew phrase is literally "a distance of three days," which does not solve the problem. It may mean that it took three days to walk through the city from one extremity to the opposite one. It may also mean that it took three days to walk around the circumference of the city, though this seems unlikely (cf. v. 4). Whether the size refers to the area enclosed by the major eight-mile wall, which seems improbable, or includes the outlying suburbs is also unclear.⁵⁴ Regardless, the description clearly points to Nineveh's geographical size as being large and requiring several days for Jonah's message to reach everyone (cf. 4:11).

Another explanation is that the literal meaning of the phrase, namely, "a visit of three days," describes the protocol involved in visiting an important city such as Nineveh. It was customary in the ancient Near East for an emissary from another city-state to take three days for an official visit. He would spend the first day meeting and

enjoying the hospitality of his host, the second day discussing the primary purpose of his visit, and the third saying his farewells.⁵⁵ If Jonah was such an emissary, he went as a divine representative to Nineveh's king and other government officials as well as to the people. This explanation suggests that Jonah's preaching may have started with the king and then proceeded to the people rather than the other way around. This view may account better for the king's repentance and his decree to all the people to repent (vv. 6-9) compared to the traditional view. . .

Notice that in this section of verses (vv. 5-10) the name "God" (Heb. Elohim, the strong one) appears exclusively. Earlier and later in the story the name "Lord" (Heb. Yahweh, the covenant keeping God) occurs frequently. Jonah did not present God, and the Ninevites did not fear God, as the covenant keeping God of Israel but as the universal supreme being. Likewise God did not deal with the Ninevites as He dealt with His covenant people Israel but as He deals with all people generally. His mercy was part of the "common grace" that He bestows on all people who do right rather than a manifestation of "special grace." Thus the story teaches that God will be merciful to anyone, His elect and His non-elect, who live submissively to natural divine law.

Matthew Henry: Here is a wonder of divine mercy in the sparing of these Ninevites upon their repentance (v. 10): God saw their works; he not only heard their good words, by which they professed repentance, but saw their good works, by which they brought forth fruits meet for repentance; he saw that they turned from their evil way, and that was the thing he looked for and required. If he had not seen that, their fasting and sackcloth would have been as nothing in his account. He saw there was among them a general conviction of their sins and a general resolution not to return to them, and that for some days they lived better, and there was a new face of things upon the city; and this he was well pleased with. Note, God takes notice of every instance of the reformation of sinners, even those instances that fall not under the cognizance and observation of the world. He sees who turn from their evil way and who do not, and meets those with favour that meet him in a sincere conversion. When they repent of the evil of sin committed by them he repents of the evil of judgment pronounced against them. Thus he spared Nineveh, and did not the evil which he said he would do against it. Here were no sacrifices offered to God, that we read of, to make atonement for sin, but the sacrifice of God is a broken spirit; a broken and contrite heart, such as the Ninevites now had, it what he will not despise; it is what he will give countenance to and put honour upon.

Guzik: (5-9) The response of the people: repentance

a. The word repentance isn't in this passage; but repentance isn't really a word, it is something you do - and these people were doing repentance

b. Repentance begins with believing God; as we believe Him and His word, we have the power to transform our lives as He wills - you can do all these other things of repentance, but if it doesn't begin with believing on and trusting God, it is all a useless work of the flesh

c. Repentance means doing something - the people of Nineveh fasted, mourned as if for the dead, and they did it from the highest to the lowest

- i. If repentance is anything, it is not business as usual; something has to change, something has to be different - in their case, they took off their normal clothes and put on sackcloth - made of a thick coarse cloth, normally made from goat's hair; to wear it symbolized the rejection of earthly comforts and pleasures
- ii. They even repented on behalf of their animals, dressing them as if they were mourning for the dead!

d. Repentance means cry[ing] mightily to God; it means coming to God with passion and seriousness about your sin and need for His mercy and forgiveness

- i. So much of modern "repentance," with its claim of excuses and reasons why we sinned, is really not repentance at all - it is an attempt to justify and excuse our sin - but either you have sinned or you haven't; if you have, there is no excuse, and if you haven't, there is no need to repent

e. Repentance means turn[ing] from his evil way and from the violence that is in his hands; it means to change your minds and turn from your previously sinful actions

- i. In the Christian life, repentance does not describe what you must do to turn to God; it describes the very process of turning to God, because when we truly turn to Him, we turn away from the things that displease Him

f. Repentance has hope in the mercy and love of God; it hopes that God will relent and that the repentant people will not perish.

Pastor Thomas Leake: Real Repentance and Revival – 4 Scenes Described

Big Idea: True Revival is always ignited by the preaching of God's Word which leads to genuine repentance which is evidenced by a humble turning from sinful acts and subsequent obedient acts

Introduction:

Recall the Revival under the preaching of George Whitfield in England and then in the colonies = the Great Awakening. It happened in an unlikely place; at an unlikely time; His message was simply to call men to repentance from sin and faith in Jesus Christ. As a Calvinist he clearly understood that "salvation is from God" (= the message from Jonah chapter 2). But his belief in sovereign election did not dull his zeal for evangelism; instead it gave him confidence in the efficacy of evangelism.

But as great as that revival was the 8th century B.C. revival in the wicked city of Nineveh surpasses it as a surprising and powerful work of God. Jonah 3 records the climax to the dramatic account of Jonah's life = stunning events. Many people lose sight of how astonishing this repentance was because they focus just on the story of Jonah and the fish. But this was an unprecedented work of God. It teaches us what true revival is all about – in contrast to the many counterfeit claims to revival we see today.

Cf. the need for revival today in America

I. (:1-2) Scene #1 – Recommissioning of Jonah

A. "*the second time*" – brings to mind all of the events of chapters 1-2. How long did it take for God to send this word to Jonah? Probably very soon after he got thrown up on

the beach of Joppa. Why delay any longer? There already had been some delay because of Jonah's disobedience.

B. The job of a prophet is not to be an innovator; just faithfully proclaim God's truth.

C. Amazing that God still was willing to use Jonah

He was a reluctant prophet at best. He had failed miserably. Yet in His mercy and grace God continued to use him. Cf. Eph. 2 – the riches of God's mercy and grace; definitions of mercy and grace; example of God using the Apostle Paul after he had persecuted the church (Eph. 3:8); but God also warned Jonah not to presume on His grace; many people today sound like grace can offer a free ride so we do not have to feel the obligations of obedient service; grace is never a license to live as we please; but grace strengthens us to obey fully the commands of God

D. Commissioned to cry out with a great voice a great message to a great city with great consequences; not allowed to offer some accommodating, entertaining message; had to cover 500 miles to reach Nineveh

II. (:3-4) Scene #2 -- Response of Jonah

A. Complete opposite response from 1:3

Jonah had to change the label on his suitcase from "Tarshish or Bust" to "Nineveh here I come"

B. What was Nineveh like? Founded by Nimrod; Nahum 3:1-4 – an account from 150 years after Jonah – but still gives us a good idea; violent group of people; about 120,000 people

C. "a three days walk" – 2 possibilities

- circumference walking distance

- time it would take to walk up and down the streets proclaiming the message

D. Manner of preaching: walking and preaching; Jonah wanted everyone to hear the message of judgment; repeated the same message over and over; not hard to understand; Jonah liked preaching this message of judgment; he was not rooting for their salvation; shows that God can use the preaching of the truth even when the motives of the preacher are not totally pure; the truth has power

E. 40 days – significance of this number 40 in Scriptures

Time of testing or divine judgment; a waiting period; God watching: would they repent? Would God still go ahead and punish them anyway?

F. Sometimes people like to argue that certain people groups don't get a fair shake in terms of exposure to the gospel message – you could argue that these Assyrians had not been so blessed; but God never excuses our ignorance of Him (cf. Romans 2); God did not owe the Ninevites a special divine message; they knew they were violating the standards of God and they didn't care; no fear of God

III. (:5-9) Scene #3 -- Repentance of Nineveh

A. Simplistic message

No frills; how could they have responded – laughed at him; called him Nuts; imprisoned him; etc.

B. Responded in genuine faith and repentance – believed in God; not in Jonah; the king knew the message was true; now we find him sitting on a new throne = throne of ashes

C. Felt so serious about this repentance that they included the animals – they were headed for destruction as well

D. Hope in the king's voice – Will God have mercy on such a wicked people as the Ninevites if they repent? – this is the subject of the entire book

God's mercy is their only hope; they have no other; not making excuses for their sin; all segments of society in the same boat

E. Message of Repentance cannot be changed or diluted

People may find it distasteful today; but it is the only message that is the power of God unto salvation; we need to keep speaking this message of divine judgment; Acts 17:30-31; often we think "that won't work" or we think we have a better idea how to attract the response of faith; cannot try to get a free ride by aligning with Christ as your Savior but not submitting to His Lordship; you must repent from sin and have following acts of obedience

F. Genuine Revival for this generation

Future generation slipped back into sin and was wiped out; there might have been a few tares amongst the wheat; but the city was characterized by genuine repentance; Not every generation repents – cf. generation of the day of Christ – a greater one than Jonah was present preaching the same message of repentance and divine judgment, but the people did not respond; they stubbornly remained in their sins; no godly conviction of sin

Day of the Lord is coming – count on it

IV. (:10) Scene #4 – Relenting of God's Wrath

(next week)

TEXT: Jonah 4:1-11

TITLE: JONAH'S FAILURE – BEGRUDGING GOD'S MERCY AND COMPASSION TOWARDS THE UNDESERVING – WHO ARE YOU TO COMPLAIN AGAINST GOD'S SOVEREIGN DISPOSITION OF MERCY AND GRACE?

BIG IDEA:

THOSE WHO BENEFIT FROM GOD'S COMPASSION HAVE NO RIGHT TO COMPLAIN AGAINST THE SOVEREIGN EXTENSION OF MERCY TO OTHERS (NO MATTER HOW UNDESERVING)

INTRODUCTION:

Jonah's ministry "success" was really "failure" when you examine his heart motivation. Here God takes the reluctant prophet to task and uses a simple object lesson to expose the difference between a heart of compassion and a heart of vengeance. Despite having just personally experienced the mercy of God in his own desperate situation, Jonah begrudges that same mercy to the city of Nineveh.

I. (:1-3) ANGER AGAINST GOD IS ESSENTIALLY COMPLAINING AGAINST SOME ASPECT OF GOD'S CHARACTER

A. (:1) Venting Displeasure -- Reformed Actions . . . But Same Judgmental Attitude
"But it greatly displeased Jonah, and he became angry."

Goins: Jonah's problem is that he wants to control God. And what do any of us do when we can't control circumstances and get our own way? We get angry. (We may express our anger in a lot of different ways---perhaps passively.)

B. (:2) Justifying Rebellion -- Preferring Personal Agenda
"And he prayed to the Lord and said, 'Please Lord, was not this what I said while I was still in my own country? Therefore, in order to forestall this I fled to Tarshish, for I knew that Thou art a gracious and compassionate God, slow to anger and abundant in lovingkindness, and one who relents concerning calamity.'"

C. (:3) Throwing in the Towel – Self Pity Party
"Therefore now, O Lord, please take my life from me, for death is better to me than life."

II. (:4-8) SHADE PLANT OBJECT LESSON DEMONSTRATED: DO YOU HAVE GOOD REASON TO BE ANGRY?

A. (:4) Fundamental Question
"Do you have good reason to be angry?"

B. (:5) Safe Vantage Place

“Then Jonah went out from the city and sat east of it. There he made a shelter for himself and sat under it in the shade until he could see what would happen in the city.”

C. (:6) Shade Plant Provided – Liking the Circumstances

“So the Lord God appointed a plant and it grew up over Jonah to be a shade over his head to deliver him from his discomfort. And Jonah was extremely happy about the plant.”

D. (:7-8) Shade Plant Removed – Hating the Circumstances

“But God appointed a worm when dawn came the next day, and it attacked the plant and it withered. And it came about when the sun came up that God appointed a scorching east wind, and the sun beat down on Jonah’s head so that he became faint and begged with all his soul to die, saying, ‘Death is better to me than life.’”

III. (:9-11) SHADE PLANT OBJECT LESSON EXPLAINED: DO YOU HAVE GOOD REASON TO BE ANGRY?

A. (:9) Fundamental Question / Defensive Answer

“Then God said to Jonah, ‘Do you have good reason to be angry about the plant?’ And he said, ‘I have good reason to be angry, even to death.’”

Ritchie: That's the way we react (at least I do) when God doesn't do it our way. This is called "biblical thumbsucking." "When God doesn't do it my way, I'd just as soon die. What is the use? I can't go on! This is not the way I planned it, and therefore, it is better to be home with the Lord. " (I suspect I am saying that for myself.) We all struggle with that, one way or another. Our children don't turn out exactly the way we want them; our marriages aren't exactly the way we want them; our jobs are not exactly what we prayed for, so we get angry with God and say we'd rather die. We'd rather give up, quit. What's the use?

B. (:10) Object Lesson of Shade Tree Reviewed

“Then the Lord said, ‘You had compassion on the plant for which you did not work, and which you did not cause to grow, which came up overnight and perished overnight.’”

C. (:11) Application to Lord’s Compassion on Nineveh

“And should I not have compassion on Nineveh, the great city in which there are more than 120,000 persons who do not know the difference between their right and left hand, as well as many animals?”

Goins: The expression refers to an inability to make moral judgments. That is how God views the wicked, evil, idolatrous citizenry of Nineveh. They are in the dark, blindly

flailing around. They can't tell their right hand from their left, good from bad, right from wrong. They are in bondage.

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DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:

- 1) Where do we try to control God and become angry when He refuses to conform to the image we have tried to create of Him? How does our anger manifest itself?
- 2) Why doesn't excellent theology regarding the character of God always translate into a heart that is consistent with God's heart?
- 3) List all of God's "appointment" (or sovereign acts) in chapter 4. What do we learn in this chapter regarding God's sovereignty and providence?
- 4) How do we attempt to hoard God's grace in a prideful or exclusivistic sense? Why do we harbor bitterness and vengeance towards certain individuals or groups and resent God's extension of mercy to them?

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QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

Goins: It can't be understated; these are the strongest possible words. What Jonah has suspected all along---the reason he disobeyed God's call to go to Nineveh in chapter 1--actually comes to pass. We saw Jonah run away from God at his first call, run back to God in prayer when he was sinking to his death in the depths of the ocean, and run with God in obedience proclaiming the message to Nineveh. Now in chapter 4 we will see him run way out ahead of God as he tries to usurp God's position of sovereign authority and questions God's mercy and forgiveness toward the Ninevites. You may wish that the story had ended with chapter 3, but chapter 4 continues to unfold God's tough love for Jonah. God continues to dialogue with Jonah and work on his behalf because he cares so much about him. God isn't satisfied with mere compliance, which is what he got from Jonah in chapter 3 when he preached judgment. What God wants is for Jonah to learn to value what God values. Jonah's heart has not changed since his original call in chapter 1. . .

He is calling this suicidal prophet to a self-examination of his willfulness. Think about it logically: If anybody has a right to be angry with the Ninevites, it is God; who hates sin, destructive evil, and violence. And yet he chose to offer them forgiveness. So implied in God's question is, who is Jonah to be angry when God chose not to destroy Nineveh? Remember, Jonah knows that it says in the Pentateuch, "Vengeance is mine, and recompense" (Deuteronomy 32:35). That is God's call, not Jonah's. We play God when we continue to be angry at individuals or groups of people whom God has forgiven, when we take their punishment into our own hands through a negative

attitude; vindictive words; or even hostile, destructive actions. We are running out ahead of God in meting out what we think justice demands. God asks us just as he asked Jonah, "Is that your right?" Divine logic drives us to only one answer: "No, Lord, it is your right, not mine. I don't do well to be angry." . . .

When Mike Johnson was a pastor here he had a book on Vatican art with a number of photos of Michelangelo's paintings. On one of the walls in the Sistine Chapel Michelangelo has a painting called The Prophets and Apostles. He has tried to capture the faces of all the Old Testament prophets and the New Testament apostles. The art critics said in the text of the book that out of all the faces Michelangelo painted, none had a more radiant countenance than Jonah. Michelangelo was convinced that Jonah did accept God's merciful pity. Jonah became a communicator of grace to his own nation through his book and probably through his preaching as a prophet of God. . .

This book forces us to see our own power struggles with God. What has God called us to do that puts us into a contest of wills with him? What challenges to obedience in our inner spiritual transformation have set us running away? Where are we right now---in a Tarshish of escape or in a Nineveh of obedience? And what about the hard inner core of ego that has never been given over to God's control? Was our conversion a radical transformation from self-centered willfulness, or was it an effort to recruit God to help us accomplish our goals? Have the painful and difficult experiences of life broken the inner shell of proud individualism, or are we essentially the same people we always were? After the crises are past, are we any more flexible or any more willing to discern and do God's will?

Are there people we resist loving and caring for because their values, beliefs, or lifestyle contradict ours? Who are our personal Ninevites, our enemies? Do they belong to religious cults? Are they secular humanists? Are they homosexuals? Are they people who stand for pro-choice and pro-abortion? Do they worship Mother Earth? Are they those who advocate a left-wing social agenda? Do they embrace New Age spirituality?

Piper: [God explains to Jonah His reasons for showing pity and mercy to Nineveh:]

1. And the Lord said, "You pity the plant." What did he mean by that? Verse 9 said he was angry about the plant. But why? Because this worm had attacked the plant and killed it. Do you see what God is doing? He is helping Jonah see where his pity for Nineveh comes from. He says, You pity the plant, should not I pity Nineveh. But a worm destroyed the plant! Yes, Jonah, and a worm has been at work to destroy Nineveh ever since I planted this city. Reckon with the worm-factor, Jonah--the Satan factor. The god of this world is blinding the eyes of people in every city. Pity comes from reckoning with a worm factor when somebody--or some city--lets you down and falls short of God's laws.

2. The second reason God feels pity for Nineveh in verse 10 is that he labored over Nineveh and made it grow. "You pity the plant, for which you did not labor nor make it grow." The point is the contrast: I did labor over Nineveh; it was I who made it grow.

Here we need to see that our strong belief in the providence and sovereignty of God should give us a glimpse of God's pity for cities. Cities are not autonomous. They do not grow without God. Even though the people in them may think that they are building a monument to human independence, they aren't. They depend on God at every minute and not a single building in this city was built without God's work. The waterworks, the sewer system, the electricity, the traffic plan, the government structure, the laws and ordinances, the educational and cultural and technical and entertainment institutions--they are all there because God's gifts and God's power and God's wisdom have been used. Minneapolis is God's city. He has labored over it and he has made it grow. Cities are not any more autonomous than people are. They live and move and have their being in God. And so God does not quickly or easily destroy the work of his hands.

3. The third reason God gives Jonah for his pity in verse 10 is that Nineveh is a very old city. Again the contrast with the plant is the point: "You pity the plant, for which you did not labor nor make it grow, which came into being in a night and perished in a night." In other words, its life was brief, unlike Nineveh.

Nineveh is referred to in Genesis 10. It is a very old city. God has been involved with Nineveh a long time. Its institutions and buildings and laws bear the marks--no matter how distorted by sin--of God's image. All these humans who for centuries have planned and organized and built have been people created in the image of God, and what they have made carries the imprint of that image. . .

4. The fourth reason God gives to Jonah for pitying Nineveh is weakness of moral confusion. Verse 11: "And should I not pity Nineveh that great city in which there are more than a hundred and twenty thousand persons who do not know their right hand from their left?" This might refer to little children who are old enough to know right and left. But there's no other place in the O.T. where children are described like this, and the generic word for human (adam) is used, not a word for child.

This is what Jesus meant when he prayed, "Father, forgive them, for they don't know what they do" (Luke 23:34). Yes, they were guilty. This ignorance does not make one innocent. It is owing to real corruption and sin. But there is also a weakness component. "He knows our frame," Psalm 103 says, "he remembers that we are dust."

Knowing the right hand from the left is basic to following the simplest instructions. "Go to 11th Avenue and turn left; then right on Franklin, and right again on Park and right again on Eighth Street." So what God means is that the people are so morally adrift that they can't even follow the most basic moral instructions: like thou shalt not kill. God looks at the moral confusion and pities the city. . .

5. Finally, God closes his reasoning on an utterly unexpected note: besides he says, "there are many cattle." Now don't get the idea that this is the basis of some sentimental vision of animal rights. God ordains that cattle be killed for sacrifices every day. He ordained them for meat according to Genesis 9:3.

Then what's the point. I think the point is: God made cattle and hundreds of other things to be useful to man. And the tragedy of judgment is made worse when things which are meant for good uses are simply swept away in judgment. When fire and brimstone fell on Sodom and Gomorrah everything was consumed.

Ritchie: In conclusion, I think there are three things to remember from this book. One, God desires for us to see the whole world as he sees it; to see that the people who don't know the difference between their right and left hand are the victims of the enemy, not the enemy. The second thing is that God's desire is for us to be available so he can express his compassion toward those people through us. And third, God desires for us to be a sign in our generation. We're to be men and women who have the resurrected Jesus Christ living within us, and the resurrected Jesus Christ is the One who brings life out of death, and he is willing to bring life out of death to everyone around you if you are available.

Paul Decker: (sermoncentral.com)

Be willing to act on God's passion...even if you find His calling difficult, perhaps even distasteful; realize that the people that you struggle over are no more and no less God's concern than you are.

Reflect God's passion...there are people lost all about us and their rejection of the Creator breaks His heart; it should break ours as well.

Share God's passion...let God move you toward the unbeliever, and as He does, tell the good news of God's passion for them.

Mark Beaird: (sermoncentral.com)

- I. HE WAS A MAN FILLED WITH HATE—PREACHING GOD'S LOVE.
- II. HE WAS A MAN SEEKING JUDGMENT—PREACHING GOD'S MERCY.
- III. HE WAS A FAILURE EVEN IN HIS SUCCESS.

Mark Leiter: (sermoncentral.com) – How God Corrects a Bad Attitude:

- I. He gives us challenging experiences. (v.1-3)
- II. He asks us challenging questions. (v.4)
- III. He teaches us challenging lessons. (v.9-11)

Donnie Martin: (sermoncentral.com) – When God's Doings Disappoint Us

I find that most of our disappointment in God stems from two basic things:

- (1) Impatience with God's timetable, and
- (2) Displeasure with God's system of justice. . .

JONAH'S NASTY DISPOSITION

- A. Jonah Was Displeased.
- B. Jonah Was Disappointed.
- C. Jonah Was Depressed.

JONAH'S NEEDED DISCIPLINE

- A. The Delight Of Jonah.
- B. The Discomfort Of Jonah.
- C. The Defiance of Jonah.
- D. The Discernment of Jehovah.

Pastor Leake: Coming to Grips with the Mercy of God

Introduction: Mary Magdalene – initially inhabited by 7 demons; delivered; had led a sinful life; experienced the mercy of God; ended up following Christ with great devotion; Have you tasted the mercy of God? The more sinful, the sweeter the taste of God's mercy; Why would anyone have trouble accepting God's extension of mercy to certain sinners?

3 Stages in Coming to Grips with the Mercy of God:

I. Stage #1 – God Demonstrated His Mercy (3:10)

God testifies that the repentance and faith was genuine; He retracted His own wrath; “*God relented*” = to regret doing something; Gen. 6:7 – to pull back from something; Job 42:6; Don't translate as “repent” when applied to God – because there is no connotation of turning from evil; God is not ashamed of His burning anger; Changed His mind about destroying the city of Nineveh

Presents 2 Difficulties:

1) God is described as responding to man rather than initiating salvation
But we know that God always initiates salvation; “*Salvation is from the Lord*” – Chap. 2:9; Eph 2; Rom. 9; Prov 16:4; Eph 1:4
But there are also many passages which portray God as granting help not at His initiative but in response to man – John 5:40
Answer: God's elective purposes work through man's will – not against or around his will; We did really choose Christ; We did really believe; God did not believe for us; Must maintain the balance which the Scriptures represent

2) How can God change His mind?

Some people explain it away as simply an anthropomorphism – but that only explains it in part; don't let your theology cause you to deny the text under consideration; danger of systematic theology; Num 23:9 – God doesn't repent; Mal 3:6 – I do not change; 1 Sam. 15:29; Ex 32:14

2 seemingly irreconcilable truths are taught in Scriptures

Jer 18:7-8; God's prophetic pronouncements of judgment against nations were never meant to be irreversible – dealing out consistent mercy to a changing mankind; Gives us Hope = when we change our hearts, God will change in how He deals with us – Nahum 3:15ff

II. Stage #2 – Jonah Despised God's Mercy (4:1-4)

Jonah was greatly angered that God would withhold His judgment – Ex. 34:6-7; Revengeful heart brought Jonah into Depression; we try to get God to do what we know

He should be doing and then God doesn't cooperate; we get depressed and angry = depression because we don't really love God's actual will for our life;

We criticize Jonah here – but we must understand his difficult mission – we most likely would have failed as well; Jonah figured that God needed to be straightened out; Assyria had a long history of shaming Israel; attacking her borders and subjugating them; Why should God have mercy on them?

Cf. older brother in the account of the Prodigal Son; cf. Hosea 9:3 – Jonah might have known of this prophecy = how God would use a pagan nation to discipline His own people; 722 B.C. was a major event = dragged into captivity to Assyria just 40-50 years after time of Jonah

We can understand Jonah's bad attitude; but never excuse it; it must be exposed

III. Stage #3 – God Defends His Mercy (4:5-11)

Jonah takes up his theater seat and watches the drama unfold; hoping still to see major fireworks; Jonah was extremely pleased with his comforts vs. the fate of these people; when his circumstances changed, he begged to die; He's had it; nothing to live for; but God wanted Jonah to learn the lesson; We always feel we are justified in our anger when we are angry; v.10-11 = the Lord brings the lesson home – a lack of joy in our hearts when God shows mercy to someone we have a problem with reveals a problem with our heart; we need to be loving and compassionate; Who is your enemy? Your boss at work?? Do you pray and love them? When they are bothering us and our peace is upset then we know what it is like to offer mercy to others; Have you been saved by the mercy of God? God wants to broaden our hearts; Is your heart cold or warm towards others?

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