

Jonah in Biblical Perspective  
A Preaching Prophet and a Pardoning God  
Jonah 3

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We have started this study on Jonah and I'll remind you that we have Jonah 3 tonight and Jonah 4 the next Lord's Day evening and after Labor Day we are going to do the book of Daniel on Sunday nights which I think is one of the keys to studying the book of Revelation. I love the book of Jonah for many reasons but here's one that we will uncover in this study. Tonight, we are going to come to what I call the high point in the book of Jonah. As far as I know the greatest awakening of a pagan, culture, city and nation is recorded in the text we are about to go over. So this has got to be a high point. This is an unbelievable high point in what God did in the city of Nineveh through Jonah, but as much as this awakening is the high point, it's not the point of the book of Jonah. As much as it is the high point that thrills our soul and gives us hope and encouragement and challenges and all of that, I don't think it's the point.

To kind of prepare us for the point I want to share a phrase with you and that is God's providence is extremely interesting, meaning the tapestry of God's providence. We're pretty single minded as individuals. We just kind of focus in on one issue and we stay with that issue but when you take an overview of Jonah 3 here's something that becomes abundantly clear. When God does something He's not just doing one thing, He's doing multiple things. When He's working in your life and my life, He's not simply just working in your life and my life. He's doing other things as well. This is the way I put it. God's purposes are not only sure and will be accomplished but they are seldom singular in nature because God has manifold designs in His providence. God will accomplish His purposes.

Do you remember our study on Jonah 1? God called Jonah to go to Nineveh. Jonah went geographically the exact opposite direction. He went to the outer coast of Europe and North Africa beyond Gibraltar, is where he was headed to a place called Tarshish. He was willing to pay the fare. He was even willing to be thrown overboard into the sea and die rather than do what God had called him to do. Did anybody notice that God said, "I guess I won't be able to reach Assyria because Jonah doesn't want to go"? Does it seem like God's purposes are not going to be accomplished? No. God's purposes are sure. When we give to Restoration Academy or missions or general giving or our response to the call of the Gospel that we be missionaries or evangelists in the lives of other people, you'll never hear me say to you, "If you don't do this then God's not going to get done what He wants to do." What will happen is that we will miss out on the opportunity to do what God is going to do.

God will save His people. There is no doubt about that. The question is simply, will we get in on it or not? Jesus is very clear. He says, "All that the Father gives Me, I lose not one but will raise them up on the last day." That is sure. God's sovereign, electing, providential, decreeing from all eternity will be accomplished but, also when God is doing something like reaching Nineveh, He's not just reaching Nineveh. It's not just for this moment either. What He is doing in Nineveh will have an impact literally hundreds of years later. What He is doing in Nineveh is actually having an impact in

Jonah. What He is doing through Nineveh through Jonah is making a statement to Israel directly. We could go on and on and see in this one act the amazing weaving of God's tapestry and things we will never know until we get to eternity that when God did something we saw what He did but we have no idea all the other things He did through it. Oh the glory and majesty of our God! His providence is inscrutable. It is beyond finding out but it is sure. It is dependable.

I would like to look at this text in Jonah 3. We have gone from Jonah 1 where he leaves and then God's sovereign hand finds him out. The finger of God brings him out of the bottom of the ship. The finger of God sends him over and this Jonah, who is all upset about some pagans in Nineveh getting converted and all the pagan sailors that get converted and start worshipping God because of that occasion, is thrown over and then he is in the belly of the great fish. That is not a punishment, it is a hand of discipline where God is teaching Jonah as well as giving us something of the historical work in Jonah's life that becomes a type of the historical work of what He does through Christ when He goes to the grave and is resurrected. The type of that is Jonah in the fish 3 days and 3 nights. Not only is this an instrument of discipline to develop Jonah out of God's love in handling him and working with him, but he is bringing Jonah to repentance and that repentance is given in a prayer in Jonah 2. Then the fish becomes God's wonderful conveyance to his call as he regurgitates him up on the land. He lands on the land in order to be about his ministry. So now that Jonah has been disciplined, he has repented, he has prayed and now he has been resurrected and brought forth upon the land we now pick up what God then does next.

I love the way this text starts off in Jonah 3. Jonah 3:1-5 says, **1** *Then the word of the LORD came to Jonah the second time, saying,* **2** *“Arise, go to Nineveh, that great city, and call out against it the message that I tell you.”* **3** *So Jonah arose and went to Nineveh, according to the word of the LORD. Now Nineveh was an exceedingly great city, three days' journey in breadth.* **4** *Jonah began to go into the city, going a day's journey. And he called out, “Yet forty days, and Nineveh shall be overthrown!”* **5** *And the people of Nineveh believed God. They called for a fast and put on sackcloth, from the greatest of them to the least of them.* So here is this permeating work of God's grace and mercy throughout the pagan population of Nineveh from the greatest, people in seats of power and possession, to the least of them. It pervades throughout through a sermon that Jonah preaches because Jonah obeys God's call a second time.

Of course none of us ever need God to repeat anything to us, do we? I mean when God calls us we just immediately obey don't we? None of us ever falter. I just love that phrase, *the word of the LORD came to Jonah the second time*, because it is so encouraging to me. By the way, when the word of the Lord comes a second time, while God patiently calls him and persevering works in his life and He calls a second time, Jonah didn't like the call the first time but notice while God is patient He didn't modify the call. All God did was sharpen the call. Notice again in Jonah 3:2, 3 where it says, **2** *“Arise, go to Nineveh, that great city, and call out against it the message that I tell you.”* **3** *So Jonah arose and went to Nineveh, according to the word of the LORD.* He goes and preaches to Nineveh. God called him to preach to Nineveh and when He did He told him to cry out against it. The Lord adds on the second time the words “against it.”

That's an element of preaching today that we don't do. We are so interested in people coming to Christ as Savior that many times we don't tell them why they need Him

as Savior. We'll say, "Come to Jesus and you'll feel better about yourself" but we don't identify the real need that we need Jesus which is because of our sin. We don't bring the Word of the Lord against what the Word of the Lord declares what He has done for us as meaning.

Recently I was asked to do a conference where they asked me if I would address the doctrine of hell. Obviously, I'm praying about it and thinking about it but it was interesting that the guy who asked me to do it said, "We are asking you to do this because one of the things we have noted is that nobody ever deals with hell. Most pulpits are silent about hell." Hell is what Jesus saves us from to bring us to Himself and I responded to this man saying, "I think at least one of the reasons we don't preach about hell is we don't preach about what hell is the monument to which is God's judgment against sin." Therefore we don't deal with that exposing of people to why they need a Savior. Nineveh would be able to come to the Lord for grace and mercy because they heard from someone the message and the indictment that was against them. Now who would liberate them from it?

We have taken the Gospel and made it mean just about anything and everything except the deliverance by God's grace from sin. That's what the Gospel does. It delivers us from sin and deposits us to a Savior. The Gospel is not something that is all about us. As one preacher said, "The Gospel is not so much that God is making so much about you but saving you so that you can make much about Him." So that you and I can make much about Him. So here is this call to Jonah to "go and cry against it." Jonah still has the same call but he has just been sharpened to cry out against it and he does.

Now you find Jonah's sermon. It's a rather short sermon as you can see. His sermon is found in Jonah 3:4 which is, "*Yet forty days, and Nineveh shall be overthrown!*" The tendency is to look at that and say, "Man, that's not a very big sermon." Now what I'm about to say is pure speculation on my part. I don't believe the book of Jonah is an attempt to give us the full manuscript of his sermon. I think he said more than this but I'm not sure he said much more than this. I think this is put there for two reasons. One is to let you know the burden of his preaching, the focus which in preaching homiletics we call it his purpose statement. This is what his sermon is communicating as a whole. "*Yet forty days, and Nineveh shall be overthrown!*" Your sin indicts you. God's judgment is sure. The only thing that will turn the judgment of God's hand against you is for you to hear God's hand of grace that is now calling you to repent. So I think that is the purpose of his sermon and not the full manuscript of his sermon.

But I also think (a second reason), it is pithy and short, while now Jonah the second time did not go in the opposite direction but went in the right direction, as we're going to find out in Jonah 4, I'm not sure his heart is yet completely in it. He is obeying but it is not with great concern and passion for the call or the people that he is called to preach to. He's accomplishing the call and he's declaring the message. It's a clear message that is succinctly stated for us but I am not sure and I think the clarity and brevity of this statement is telling us something that we're going to find out very clearly in the next study and that is his heart has no desire that they repent. On the contrary, Jonah would be very stingy with God's grace and Jonah would much prefer God's judgment upon the Ninevites, not His saving work.

Let's go further. So we find this marvelous, unbelievable statement that the people of Nineveh believed God, by faith they trusted in God. Then they did everything

that responds to the call of repentance. They called for a fast. They put on sackcloth and this was permeating throughout the population, including its suburbs and this was a city that was as big as a three days journey across. Then what happened?

Jonah 3:6-10 says, **6** *The word reached the king of Nineveh, and he arose from his throne, removed his robe, covered himself with sackcloth, and sat in ashes.* **7** *And he issued a proclamation and published through Nineveh, "By the decree of the king and his nobles: Let neither man nor beast, herd nor flock, taste anything. Let them not feed or drink water,* **8** *but let man and beast be covered with sackcloth, and let them call out mightily to God. Let everyone turn from his evil way and from the violence that is in his hands.* **9** *Who knows? God may turn and relent and turn from his fierce anger, so that we may not perish."* **10** *When God saw what they did, how they turned from their evil way, God relented of the disaster that he had said he would do to them, and he did not do it.*

Here we find this amazing fact that not only does the great awakening of this call to repentance and trusting in God's grace and mercy permeate and is responded to from the greatest to the least of them and deeds appropriate to repentance are being done, but even beyond this we see that the message gets all the way up to the palace, the king and his nobles, and the king responded by writing out a proclamation of humiliation and fasting. He is calling everyone to repentance with no presumption that God should be gracious to them but maybe God will be gracious to them. He wraps the whole thing of repentance up by not only calling for a fast but a hard fast where they have no food or water. He calls for sackcloth, repentance, humiliation and he calls for the people to call upon God for grace and mercy. Now, that decree comes out from the king and subscribed to by the nobles.

Now, I want to draw out for you and me some lessons that I think are very appropriate for us today from this. The first takeaway is that by God's grace and mercy we are being told that God delights and is determined to accomplish His purposes through His people. God can raise up worshippers from stones if He desires but God delights in working through His people. May I be a little bit provincial here? God particularly delights in working through those whom He has called as preachers like Jonah. It's not because God needs them. God can do what He desires to do but He delights to work through His people. So if Briarwood ever decides that they are not going to obey the Great Commission, we're not going to make disciples of all the nations, God will delight to work in His people. Then God will do one of two things to Briarwood. He will either discipline us that we reengage with Him or He'll write Ichabod (meaning the glory has departed) and go to someone else, but He will work through His people and He delights to work through His people.

Not only does God delight to work through His people, but the second thing I want you to see is this God who is determined to accomplish His work through people also delights to work *on* people. We are really going to see that in the next study. God is working on pagan sailors, pagan Ninevites and Jonah. God works on His called servants. God works on His people. God not only works to gather a people who are not a people, but God delights in working through people and when His people are not, dare I say, workable, then God delights on working on them.

I want to say something here extremely carefully but I want to make it as clear as I can. You'll hear this again I'm sure, because it has become somewhat of a burden. *There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. (Romans 8:1)*

If you are saved and you're a sinner God's work of grace has covered your sins, past, present and future. Right? Amen. God has been satisfied because the payment for our sins has been made through Jesus Christ but I keep hearing that translated in today's "grace" preaching that then says, "So not if but when you sin remember God is still pleased with you." That's wrong. Are you still forgiven when you and I falter? It's not if but when you and I falter. Yes we are forgiven. Is God satisfied because all of our sin payments have been made by Jesus Christ? Yes, but our Lord was not pleased and did not take pleasure in David in a relational way when he engaged in adultery with Bathsheba or when he conspired to murder Uriah. We have got to somehow understand that while God's anger is for a moment, it is real. God does not delight when we sin against Him. Is He patient with us? Yes. Has He provided atonement? Yes.

Somehow we have gotten from the legal understanding that God is satisfied and that there is no condemnation and we have translated that into a relationship with God in which God is never allowed to frown upon our disobedience but He does. He does frown upon our disobedience and God's anger with His people and God's discipline upon His people is not inconsistent with His love for His people. It is the evidence of His love for His people. My father was the same way and perhaps your father was the same way. He loved me enough to let me know I'm in the family but he also loved me enough to let me know that everything that I did, did not bring pleasure to the family and did not honor our family. So it is with Jonah. Has God by grace and mercy paid for the sins of Jonah, including his willful disobedience to his call? Absolutely. Has God taken pleasure with Jonah as he walks in disobedience? No, but God's displeasure is not a giving up on him but God's discipline upon him is in order to reclaim him. God goes to work on Jonah. Not only does God say, "Jonah not only am I going to work through you but I'm going to work on you. So that when I work through you, you are going to be worked on also. The high point here is that a whole city is awakened. The point is that God works on His people. He delights to use them and He delights to work on them.

The third takeaway is God, thankfully, manifests His patience with His people with second times. Don't you just love the passages of Scriptures that say, "And the Lord said...and then immediately they got up and went." Matthew immediately leaves the tax table to follow Jesus. He immediately obeys the Lord. They immediately left their nets to follow the Lord but there are a lot of times we don't do it immediately. There are a lot of times that we hesitate. Sometimes we actually go the opposite direction just like Jonah. Praise God for His persistence and His patience. Praise God for second times or I am absolutely sure I wouldn't have any ministry if God didn't have second times. The Word of the Lord came a second time.

I won't go beyond the text but my guess is He has come more than two times to us at times, hasn't He? Dare, we might be in the area of seventy times seven times of God's patience with us? Do you think David is glad for God's grace and second times? Do you think John Mark was grateful for a second time in missionary service and opportunity? Do you think second times perhaps have been all around God's people? Do you think Moses was grateful for second times? God told him to go talk to Pharaoh and he said, "Lord, I can't do that." God says, "Okay I'm going to put Aaron there" but who ended up speaking to Pharaoh? Moses did, where God gave him a second time, a second opportunity. So I am very grateful for God's patience and that God's patience in

accomplishing His purposes through us means that God very powerfully works in and through His people and He uses second times.

A fourth takeaway is while God is patient with us He does not diminish His call and His expectations to accommodate us. He doesn't say, "Sam is having a hard time being a faithful husband so I'll just dial back on what it means to be a faithful husband." No, God does not dial back the Gospel call and responsibilities. The Gospel grace of already purchased blessings that are in Christ for us does not make God dial back on His Gospel call to us. Ephesians 4:1 says, "*I therefore, a prisoner for the Lord, urge you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling to which you have been called.*" Put off the old man and put on the new man. No unwholesome word, only good for edification according to the need of the moment.

Will God patiently keep working through us? Yes, remember second times, third times and fourth times but God does not dial back from where He wants us to be. He not only has shrouded us and clothed us with the perfect righteousness of Christ, but He has called us. 1 Peter 1:16 says, *since it is written, "You shall be holy, for I am holy."* Be zealous for those good deeds that honor Me.

The fifth takeaway from the text is to never lose sight of what God can do with one man (like Jonah) or one woman. It is amazing what God can do through a man. It is amazing what God can do through a woman. In fact, it's amazing what God can do through a man or woman when their heart's not really in what their doing. Why? It is because the power is not in us. The power is in God who is in us. The power is in His Word. The power is in the Gospel. The power is in His Holy Spirit. God delights to use us but we don't bring power, we are brought by His power and therefore God delights in using one man, who doesn't have the greatest sermon in the world, without the greatest heart for the people he is preaching to but God delights to use him. God is working through him and on him. God is being patient with him. God is moving him and directing him and even though Jonah is not yet fully engaged God is not going to wait to unleash His power. The power goes right through Jonah.

I might have mentioned this illustration before but the greatest illustration of this in my life is in the midst of my teenage rebellion, against everything my dad and mom were telling me, but my dad and mom stayed the course and they didn't send me to church, they took me to church. When we went to church my dad and mom said, "You're going to the youth group" and I'll never forget one Spring the youth group has this retreat. My dad and mom said, "You're going to this retreat." I said, "I don't want to go to that. I want to go play some baseball." "You're going." That was it and I went. When I got there it wasn't a retreat, it was all day evangelistic training. They are teaching me how to share the Gospel and I don't even know Jesus yet. I had heard the Gospel and I knew about Him but I didn't know Him. I answer the questions and take the test and then I found out training wasn't just simply training but we were going to go door to door. I said, "We're going to do what?" "We're going to go door to door" and we went door to door.

We went door to door in three man teams. This Bible college student would take two teenagers out to teach them how to share the Gospel by doing cold turkey door to door just knocking on the door evangelism. I wasn't saved yet but I got a prayer life that day. When we got out of the car to go to that first house I'm praying, "Oh God please let there be nobody in this house. Please! If there is somebody here let them be deaf so they

can't hear us or strike them with deafness so they cannot hear us." Anyway you get the picture. When we got to the third house the college student turned to me and said, "Ike, you finish telling them what I said." I stumbled through it and my heart was obviously not in it. I was embarrassed and I didn't know what I was doing here. I was praying for a rapture even though I didn't know where I was going if it happened. Lo and behold when I got to the end the person said, "I'd like to be a Christian." That person became a Christian. They prayed right there to receive Christ as their Lord and Savior, hopefully from the heart. That day proved to me that it's not the instrument. It's the Lord. It's the power of His Word, the power of His Spirit and that God delights to use His people but He's not dependent upon us and we become His instruments but it is done by Him and through Him.

You might be thinking, "I'm just old Sam Smith" or "I'm just ole Betty Jones" and God might have you in that office to totally turn it around or in that neighborhood to totally impact it or that school or that team or that everything. One might say, "I'm the only Christian." How many friends did Jonah have here? God delights in accomplishing His purposes through His people and don't lose sight of what He can do with one man or one woman because it's amazing what He can do through one person.

The sixth takeaway is the power is not in the instrument but in the Lord through His Word. Put no confidence in the flesh, it the Gospel that is the power of God (Philippians 3:3). It is not by might, or by strength but it is by My Spirit says the Lord (Zechariah 4:6). You shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you (Acts 1:8). The power is from the Lord, by His Spirit and through His Word.

Finally, the seventh takeaway is great awakenings very seldom, in nations, cultures, cities, offices, schools, teams etc, come from the top down. They almost always come from the bottom up. It wasn't this king that wrote a decree and the whole place fell down in repentance. It was when he heard what was happening in the people then the king got on board. I'm hoping and praying his repentance was true and his statement of humiliation was from his heart but it doesn't amaze me that when a politician hears that everybody is on board somehow he finds a way to get on board. I want Godly leadership in my country, city, county and state but basically Godly leadership very seldom ignites great awakening. It restrains the death spiral of a culture and I thank God for that. It can open up some doors and I thank God for that too.

I will tell you what changes a place. When you take that Bridge to Life training and you start sharing Christ with people, God changes this person and that person and another family and that family and it begins to spread. As it spreads the message goes to the top and the people at the top begin to respond. It's from the bottom up. God loves to do extraordinary things through ordinary people in ordinary situations even with ordinary sermons and that's a pretty ordinary sermon. God delights in doing that.

A guy called me one time and said, "Harry, I want you to come over to Jackson, Mississippi and preach on revival." I said, "Archie I would rather just come listen to you preach on revival." He said, "Harry, did you know that when God does an awakening or a revival He uses ordinary people in ordinary places to do extraordinary things and Harry you're about the most ordinary person I've ever seen in my life so why don't you just come on and preach." I said, "If that's the case I think I'm qualified." God delights in using people like us. Lord, here we are, use us. Let's pray.

Prayer:

Father, thank You for the time we can spend in Your Word. Thank You for this marvelous passage of Scripture and what you had done in this city and how it was woven into so many directions, but Father as we learn more and more about how the power is in You, from You and through You and that You delight in working upon us and through us and while You're working through us You're still working upon us. Then Father we declare, You're the Potter and we're the clay, make us, mold us, use us and Father we'll give You the glory, in Jesus' Name, Amen.