

Merciful Wrath Jonah 3

Jonah, like many of us, is living a different kind of life than he expected. Happy in Israel, God called him to Nineveh. This made him very unhappy. The Assyrians invented siege warfare and impaling people. Jonah imagined that they would kill him just as they were intent on destroying Israel. He resisted God's call, only to be pursued by God who is intent on saving both Jonah (from himself) and Nineveh impending judgement.

After a long struggle and once in Nineveh, life for Jonah took another unexpected turn. Instead of killing him, Nineveh repented at his message of God's wrath.

First: A Glimpse at Jonah's Preaching. 4b

a) Jonah preached God's wrath

And he called out, "*Yet forty days, and Nineveh shall be overthrown!*"

He didn't say "might" be overthrown but "shall" be overthrown.

The heart of Jonah's preaching is God's wrath and Jonah must have enjoyed enthusiastically preaching it.

- He didn't want to go to Nineveh.
- He knew Nineveh was destined to destroy Israel.
- He disliked Ninevites.
- He was afraid God would show Nineveh mercy. 4:2

Jonah could not wait for day 40 to happen and to watch that "exceedingly great city, three days' journey in breadth" (v 3) fall down like Jericho or be burned up like Sodom.

b) Jonah preached for social change. 8b

Vs 6-9 - 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."

(The king said) *Let everyone turn from his evil way and from the violence that is in his hands.*

We are not told but Jonah must have told the Ninevites why God was going to judge them and the king encouraged the nation to forsake what God hated.

Second: A Glimpse at Repentance

a) Contrary to Jonah's expectations, Nineveh doesn't kill him but does repent and, they did so – v 5 – "*from the greatest of them to the least of them.*"

repent = snub to turn = 4 times in vs 8-10

Evidently, Nineveh did turn from “evil” and “violence”

By repenting, Nineveh ceased to be its former self.

Historians tell us that Nineveh experienced famines, plagues and eclipses just previous to Jonah’s mission. Perhaps God paved the way for Jonah’s success. Just as he prepared a fish, he prepared catastrophes for Nineveh.

b) Repentance is always a work of God –

2 Timothy 2:24-26 - And the Lord's servant must not be quarrelsome but kind to everyone, able to teach, patiently enduring evil, ²⁵ correcting his opponents with gentleness. God may perhaps grant them repentance leading to a knowledge of the truth, ²⁶ and they may come to their senses and escape from the snare of the devil, after being captured by him to do his will.

c) Nineveh’s social repentance

As we have questioned about the sailors and Jonah, we are left in limbo about the extent of Nineveh’s repentance.

1:14 - Therefore they called out to the LORD, “O LORD, [Jehovah] let us not perish for this man's life, and lay not on us innocent blood, for you, O LORD, have done as it pleased you.”

1:16 - Then the men feared the LORD [Jehovah] exceedingly, and they offered a sacrifice to the LORD and made vows.

The sailors did use the covenantal name of God. They did offer sacrifices to him and make vows to him.

3:5 - And the people of Nineveh believed “God” = Elohim, the generic term for God and not his covenantal name. Unlike the sailors, they did not –

Nineveh used the general name for God.

*3:3 - Now Nineveh was an exceedingly great city,
Hb = literally – “Now Nineveh was a large city to the gods...”*

It is called a large city four times (1:2; 3:2, 3 & 4:11) emphasizing its godlessness.

We often use Nineveh as an example of revival, but revival is for those who are ‘vived.’

We know from Scripture that social change and appropriate behavior is insufficient to save anyone.

We don’t need a makeover.
We need a resurrection.

ILL – What if you saw a house disintegrating from a fire but couldn’t see the flames. Only if you saw the fire could you understand why the building was falling.

Evil is inherently self-destructive. But unless the connection is made between the sin of a person/society and its disintegration will the breakdown be cured.

d) Jonah’s repentance

1:1 - *Now the word of the LORD came to Jonah*

3:1 – *Then the word of the LORD came to Jonah the second time*

1:2 - *Arise, go to Nineveh, that great city, and call out against it, for their evil^[a] has come up before me.*

3:2 – *Arise, go to Nineveh, that great city, and call out against it the message that I tell you.*

1:3 - *But Jonah rose to flee to Tarshish from the presence of the LORD.*

3:3 - *So Jonah arose and went to Nineveh, according to the word of the LORD.*

Third: A Glimpse at God's Merciful Wrath. 10

Psalm 119:67 - *Before I was afflicted I went astray, but now I keep your word.*

The work of God's grace had to plough very deeply into his soul.

Sinclair Ferguson

1:15 – *So they picked up Jonah and hurled him into the sea,*

2:3 - *For you cast me into the deep, into the heart of the seas,*

Jonah understands that “*from him and through him and to him are all things*”. (Ro 11:36).

When Jonah looks back on what has happened to him he understands...

Exodus 8:19 - *This is the finger of God.*

To see God in our joy and affliction is to have hope that there is a reason for what is happening and that there is hope it is accomplishing something for our good.

We don't want to see ourselves at the mercy of random happenstance, a cosmic accident or a world out-of-control. We want to see life as Jonah now sees life, in God's control.

The option is fortune cookies – “*You'll accomplish more if you stay focused.*”

“Your talents will be recognized and suitably rewarded.”

Jonah now knows that God may choose to use Nineveh to discipline Israel. But God has also disciplined Jonah. How has he disciplined him? Salvifically. God will use Nineveh the same way God used the fish; to conform Israel to himself.

Seeing God in our fish-stories preserves us from despair, helps us accept the situation and to begin to work with God in what he is doing as we live in hope.

Romans 5:3-5 - *...but we rejoice in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance,⁴ and endurance produces character, and character produces hope,⁵ and hope does not put us to shame, because God's love has been poured into our hearts*

Only when we recognize... that he works all the events of our lives together for his purpose, will we begin to rejoice in the good that is produced out of tribulation.

Sinclair Ferguson

God's glory is always our good.

God's glory is always in our best interests.

God is the greatest good.

“I really don't mind the inconvenience of being paralyzed... if my faithfulness to God while in this wheelchair will bring glory to him... When God brings suffering into your life as a Christian, be it mild or drastic, he is forcing you to decide on issues you have been avoiding. He is pressing

be a mind or a muscle, he is forcing you to decide on issues you have been avoiding. He is pressing you to ask yourself some questions: Am I going to continue trying to live in two worlds, obeying Christ and my own sinful desires? Or am I going to refuse to worry? Am I going to be grateful in trials? Am I going to abandon my sins? In short, am I going to be like Christ? He provides the suffering, but the choice is yours. Today as I look back, I am convinced that the whole ordeal of my paralysis was inspired by His love. I wasn't a rat in a maze. I wasn't the brunt of some cruel divine joke. God had reasons behind my suffering, and learning some of them has made all the difference in the world."

Joni Eareckson Tada

Conclusion:

1 – Is it true that Jonah's repentance is short-lived?

a) Yes. But this is why we live lives of repentance. We are daily making course corrections that make us live "according to the word of the Lord" (3:3).

b) **Picture** – Van Gogh painting – "At Eternity's Gate" is a self-portrait, painted at the same time as *Starry, Starry Night*, at the end of Van Gogh's life from an asylum at St. Rémy during the same year in which he also committed suicide at 37. (also the birthplace of Nostradamus). The painting captures profound sorrow and needs no explanation, but it does also depict Jonah at the end of his story.

c) Nonetheless, the book of Jonah, like the story of the Prodigal Son, ends, open-ended. Does or does Jonah not, repent again?

2 - What is God driving at in Jonah's fish story?

Job 42:5 - *I had heard of you by the hearing of the ear, but now my eye sees you;*

When we think of Jonah it is most often in connection with the fish and that picture steals the story. But God's deepest work did not occur in the belly of the fish but the heart of Jonah.

Psalm 119:75-76 - *I know, O LORD, that your rules are righteous, and that in faithfulness you have afflicted me. ⁷⁶Let your steadfast love comfort me according to your promise to your servant.*

Look at Jonah's 'gutsy guilt.' –

2:4 – *Then I said, 'I am driven away from your sight; yet I shall again look upon your holy temple.'*

This echoes a prophecy concerning Christ –

Psalm 16:9-10 - *...my heart is glad, and my whole being rejoices; my flesh also dwells secure. ¹⁰For you will not abandon my soul to Sheol, or let your holy one see corruption.*

This is what gave Jesus confidence to say on the cross,

Luke 23:46 - *"Father, into your hands I commit my spirit!" And having said this he breathed his last.*

*Because God is God, he can hear;
Because He is a loving God, he will hear.
Because He is our covenant God, he has bound himself to hear.*

- Charles Spurgeon

Community Groups:

- 1 - Compare 1:1-3 and 3:1-3. What does this tell us about God's work in Jonah's life?
- 2 - How does this same progression offer hope for God's work in Nineveh?
- 3 - How are our lives "living epistles" (2 Cor 3:2) of what God is doing and wants to do in the world?
- 4 - Why might Jonah have been happy to preach this 'doom and gloom' sermon to Nineveh?
- 5 - Using the names for God in 1:14, 16 & 3:5, how might we consider Nineveh's repentance to be social and not spiritual?
- 6 - What does 'repentance' mean?
- 7 - How is repentance a gift of/from God?
- 8 - Read 2 Corinthians 7:10. Is there false repentance?
- 9 - How can we determine false repentance?
- 10 - What does genuine repentance look like?
- 11 - How does 1:15 and 2:3 explain God's use of second causes to accomplish his will? Can you think of any other places in Scripture that demonstrate this same principle? Consider Acts 2:23.
- 12 - How was God's wrath merciful to Jonah?
- 13 - How is God's wrath merciful in Nineveh?
- 14 - How might we experience such wrathful mercy?
- 15 - Can you point to a time in your life when God wrathfully demonstrated mercy to you?
- 16 - What is God trying to do in Jonah's life?
- 17 - How is Jonah a living illustration of God's work in Israel?
- 18 - How is Jonah a living illustration of God's work in your life?

