

God's Gracious Restoration

Jonah 3:1-3a

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Rev. Greg L. Price

In the previous sermon, we observed the prayer of Jonah, a repentant prophet, who prays from the belly of that great fish as he struggles with the sense of hopelessness that all is lost to him in the land of the living. His life in this world is held in the balance. But that sense of dark foreboding despair is chased away as Jonah in his prayer from the belly of the great fish (which is recorded for us in Jonah 2) turns his eye from his desperate circumstances to hope upon the mercy of God in Christ Jesus, that the God with whom nothing is impossible is a God of mercy and a God of promise to sinners, especially to His own adopted children, even when they (like the prodigal son) rebel against the revealed will of God and seek to flee from the presence of their most gracious Father. And thus, that deliverance which seemed hopelessly lost to the eye of mere human wisdom was a deliverance gloriously realized by the God who delights to show mercy to the undeserving, as Jonah was spewed forth by the whale upon dry land (Jonah 2:10).

But this miraculous deliverance was not the end of the story. God did not bring the hurricane-like storm or the great fish that swallowed Jonah only to deliver him from these seemingly impossible circumstances, though if God had chosen to end this biblical account there with Jonah having been given new life as it were when he was spewed forth on to dry land, God would have revealed Himself to be the gracious God of our salvation and would have given us more than ample reason to look to Him with a persevering hope that all is not lost, that God is teaching us concerning His revealed will, convicting us of our sin, and training us in holiness as His beloved children through every trial, affliction, and backsliding

through which we pass in this life. But the amazing love of a reconciled God is further demonstrated in restoring Jonah to that place of calling and ministry, as God's prophet, from which he had run in order to avoid going to Nineveh. God's undeserved condescension is manifested in Jonah's pardon and deliverance (to be sure), but does not Jonah's pardon and deliverance shine forth in even greater brilliance when the Lord re-commissions Jonah as His prophet? God caused the great fish to spew Jonah forth on to dry land not only to deliver him, but also to send him forth to serve Him in bearing witness to the glory, grace, and power of God. God was not finished with Jonah as he lay soaked there upon the dry land (no doubt exhausted from having spent three days in the belly of the great fish). God had a gracious plan to yet employ Jonah in serving Him as a trophy of God's grace for all to see (and especially for you to see for your encouragement).

Let us consider God's renewed commission to Jonah in the following main points from our text this Lord's Day: (1) God is not Finished with Jonah (Jonah 1:1-2); (2) Jonah Is Now Ready to do the Will of God (Jonah 3:3a).

I. God is Not Finished with Jonah (Jonah 1:1-2).

A. We begin today with Jonah on dry land having been delivered from death into life, from the grave of the fish's belly to dry land; for that is how Chapter 2 ended (Jonah 2:10). Now what? What is Jonah to do? Is he to spend the rest of his life in solitary confinement and obscurity somewhere, never to be heard of again? Jonah does not have to wonder ("Now what?") for very long. For the will of God is soon revealed to Jonah: "And the word of the LORD came unto Jonah the second time" (Jonah 3:1). "The word of the LORD came unto Jonah" the first time in Jonah 1:1-2. But Jonah rebelled against "the word of the Lord" and fled

from the presence of the Lord and from God's commission to him by sailing on a ship as quickly as he could, far away from either Israel or Nineveh. Now Jonah, the prodigal minister, has endured the backsliding of his sin and the loving (though severe) chastening hand of God even into the grave of the whale's belly for his rebellion, and has been miraculously preserved and delivered by God's almighty grace and power. "And the word of the LORD came unto Jonah the second time" (Jonah 3:1).

B. The phrase, "the word of the LORD", means the revelation of God's will. It is the opening up of God's mind to Jonah. I would submit to you that this phrase, "the word of the LORD", conveys more than simply the verbal transmission of God's revealed will (though it means that for sure).

1. But beyond a verbal conveyance of truth to Jonah, it also suggests the presence of Jesus Christ, who is the Word of God in His prophetic ministry to the Old Testament saints as well as the Word made flesh to New Testament saints (John 1:1,14). I would submit, dear ones, that here we see not only words of truth and revelation communicated to Jonah, but we also see the active, personal ministry of Jesus Christ, who is the Word and Revelation of God to man.

2. Jesus, our Prophet, Priest, and King, had as Jonah's Prophet first given him a word of judgment to preach to Nineveh. Jesus, as Jonah's King, pursued a rebellious Jonah with the hurricane-like storm and prepared a great fish to swallow Jonah. Jesus, as Jonah's Priest, had graciously pardoned and restored Jonah to Himself. And now, for a second time, Jesus as Jonah's Prophet, comes to Jonah as the Word to instruct him in the way in which he should go.

3. If Jesus, as Priest, is "the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world" (as taught in Revelation 13:8), then He is also our Prophet from the foundation of the world in revealing to us the will of God for our

salvation. So where you see in the Old Testament that phrase, “the word of the LORD came unto” this person or that person, remember that this is also an expression of Christ’s prophetic ministry to His people from the very time of Adam’s fall into sin (1 Peter 1:11).

C. Now it may seem very distant in time to speak of “the word of the LORD” coming to Jonah in that day and age of prophetic revelation, but dear ones, “the word of the LORD” comes to you, as you throughout the week read God’s word in your individual secret worship and in your family worship; but especially the “the word of the LORD” comes to you on the Lord’s Day in the preaching of God’s word by means of a faithful ministry. We can cast our minds back to those biblical times, and we can glory in how Jesus Christ revealed Himself to His prophets and His people in times past (as He did to Peter, James, and John on the Mount of Transfiguration where the body of the Lord shone in brilliant light, like unto the sun which shines in the sky and where the three apostles heard the very voice of God declare, “This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well-pleased; hear ye him”). And though that revelation of Christ was truly glorious to the three apostles, we have according to the apostle Peter “a more sure word of prophecy” in the Scripture than even the transfiguration of Christ and the words that came from God out of heaven (according to 2 Peter 1:19). How is Scripture “more sure” or more firm than the voice of God that came out of heaven? Certainly not in regard to Scripture being more truthful than the voice of God from heaven. But rather, it is “more sure” or more firm in that God has infallibly recorded His revelation in writing so that it might be passed on and preserved in all of its glory from one generation to another in the pages of Scripture. But dear ones, do you sit in awe and wonder that Jesus Christ comes as Prophet to speak unto you by His word in the preaching of the gospel? Are you disinterested, bored, easily distracted, and sleepy at hearing the voice of Jesus Christ as it is faithfully preached

by His minister? Do you simply consider faithful preaching to be the mere words of man, or do you rightly consider faithful preaching that expounds the word of God to be the Word of the LORD (Jesus Christ as Prophet) coming to you? Dear ones, do you carelessly come into God's presence on the Lord's Day with hardly a thought or preparation as to who will be speaking to you today? Not merely a man, for the faithful minister (like John the Baptist) is simply a voice. The faithful minister is the voice of Jesus Christ—the faithful minister is Christ's ambassador. Dear ones, rejoice and stand in awe and wonder this Lord's Day that to you comes "the word of the LORD", to you comes Jesus Christ as the great Prophet of His Church.

D. Now what did "the word of the LORD" (or Jesus Christ as Prophet) declare to Jonah: "Arise, go unto Nineveh, that great city, and preach unto it the preaching that I bid thee" (Jonah 3:2). There are three observations I would like to make about what "the word of the LORD" revealed to Jonah.

1. The first observation is this: Jonah has his commission renewed to him from the Lord. The Lord was certainly under no obligation to re-instate Jonah back into an active ministry, seeing Jonah had so flagrantly rebelled against the original commission to go to Nineveh. The Lord could have justly chosen to chasten Jonah by removing him from his office as a prophet or by sending him into some small, uninhabitable corner of the world where he would have had little to no contact with other human beings. If God had chosen to do so (after graciously granting him forgiveness, repentance, and deliverance from the belly of the whale), it would still have been more than Jonah ever deserved—it would have been most gracious of the Lord to do so. But the Lord desired to give us a beautiful glimpse of His unfathomable restoring love in the life of Jonah in order to lift our eye of hope toward another seemingly hopeless case (in the eyes of man) in which the Lord will re-

commission a prodigal nation to be His witness to the Gentile nations of the world. For just as Jonah, a covenanted prophet, was as good as dead in the belly of the great fish, was granted a kind of resurrection to life in being spewed forth on to dry land, and was graciously re-commissioned by the Lord to bear witness to Nineveh (that capital city of the greatest Gentile power on the earth at that time), so the covenanted nation of Israel is presently dead to Christ (her covenant-keeping God) and is like a valley of dry bones. But the Lord will yet in the future graciously grant to her a spiritual and national resurrection from the dead to own Christ as her Savior and to renew her covenant with Christ (and those dry bones that are scattered upon the ground will come together by God's almighty grace and power to form a restored covenanted and Christian nation). And then the Lord will re-commission Israel to be His witness to the nations of the world of the great wonders that the Lord has wrought on her behalf in delivering her from death (both spiritual and physical death) as we see in Romans 11 (especially verse 15: "For if the casting away of them [i.e. of national Israel—GLP] be the reconciling of the world [i.e. the message of reconciliation taken to the nations of the world—GLP], what shall the receiving of them be [i.e. the receiving of national Israel back into blessed communion with Christ—GLP], but life from the dead [i.e. life from the dead to national Israel and to the nations of the world—GLP]?" Thus, the gracious and free re-commission of Jonah was an encouragement in three ways.

a. First, it was an encouragement to Jonah himself that the Lord was not finished with him, that God yet had a plan to use Jonah (and his rebellion, his chastening, and his restoration) to bear testimony to the amazing and free grace of God. The Lord was making of Jonah a shining trophy of His grace.

b. Secondly, it was an encouragement to look in faith to the prophetic fulfillment of Israel's national restoration in covenant with Jesus Christ as a Christian nation to be used of the Lord to testify of God's

marvelous grace (not only to individuals, but even to all nations at the time of that future millennium when Christ will reign with great glory and power from heaven over all the nations of the world). The life of Jonah signifies and pictures the national life of Israel. In the life of Jonah we are taught to look in hope to the prophesied restoration of Israel as a Christian nation who shall be a light to all nations of the world. Though Israel is presently the enemy of God due to her hatred of Christ and the gospel (Romans 11:28), the God who cannot lie and the God with whom nothing is impossible shall bring national Israel from the dead unto life in Jesus Christ.

c. Thirdly, Jonah's merciful re-commission is an encouragement to the faith of all God's children who have backslidden into sin or error, that if God so lovingly (yet severely) chastened a prodigal Jonah, graciously forgave a repentant Jonah, and mercifully restored Jonah to a place of service in His kingdom, He will not leave you without a voice to bear witness to others of the mercy of God in delivering you out of all of your trials, afflictions, and backslidings. Whatever you have gone through or whatever you are going through, the Lord is not finished with you; you will not be silenced forever; He will give to you a voice to bear witness to His power, righteousness, love, and truth (if you are His child through faith alone in Jesus Christ as your only Redeemer and Mediator between God and man). God does not chasten us in order to silence us forever; He chastens us to use us all the more to bear testimony to His majesty, glory, and grace forever and ever. With David, we the children of God (through faith in Christ) who are severely chastened of the Lord shall say, "Before I was afflicted I went astray: but now have I kept thy word . . . It is good for me that I have been afflicted; that I might learn thy statutes . . . thou in faithfulness hast afflicted me" (Psalm 119:67,71,75). After David's sin with Bathsheba, his prayer for forgiveness is found in Psalm 51, and there we read, "Have mercy upon me, O God, according to thy loving-kindness: according unto the

multitude of thy tender mercies, blot out my transgressions” (Psalm 51:1). But God’s forgiveness of David’s sin does not leave David on the shelf to forever collect dust in silence and never to speak to others of the glory of God’s justice and the glory of God’s grace, but to the contrary we read in the same psalm, “Then will I teach transgressors thy ways; and sinners shall be converted unto thee” (Psalm 51:13). Dear ones, there may be very severe consequences to our sin as God chastens all those whom He loves; there may even be the removal of certain privileges and responsibilities we previously had due to our sin; but dear ones, though cries of sorrow may be ours under the loving yet severe hand of God, the shout of praise to God will indeed yet be on our tongues as we are restored to places of service (whatever service that may be) to teach others what the Lord has taught us (beginning with our own families).

2. The second observation is this: When the Lord restored Jonah to his public ministry, He did not give him an easier commission than was originally given, but rather gave him the same commission against which Jonah had previously rebelled—the Lord re-commissioned Jonah to go to Nineveh. If that was the part of God’s revealed will over which Jonah had stumbled and concerning which he had fled from the presence of God, then that was the very part of God’s revealed will with which the Lord would test Jonah a second time.

a. Dear ones, the Lord will indeed test you again as well at those very points where you have rebelled against His revealed will, and where you have run in the opposite direction, rather than receiving and submitting to God’s revealed will. The Lord tested Jonah again with the same truth of His revealed will (“Arise, go to Nineveh”), but as we shall see, he does not rebel or flee from the word of the LORD that comes to him this time, he rather embraces it and runs to do the will of the Lord. For the Lord had graciously worked within Jonah both to will and to do His good pleasure.

b. When Peter was restored to his ministry by the Lord Jesus after having denied the Lord three times, the Lord likewise tested Peter with the very sin of pride that had led to Peter's downfall and backsliding, for Peter had boasted that even if all the others denied Christ, he would certainly not do so (and Peter denied the Lord not once but three times). Thus, when the Lord Jesus restored Peter to his ministry, Christ tested Peter three times with these words (John 21:15), "Simon, son of Jonas, lovest thou me more than these?" In other words, "Peter, do you still proudly think that you love me more than all of the other apostles?" Peter had learned through the loving yet severe chastening of the Lord that all he could say was, "Thou knowest that I love thee" (John 21:15). He would no longer proudly proclaim his love for the Lord to be greater than that of the other apostles. Thus, dear ones, know that you will be tested in the very ways you have previously rebelled against the will of God. But know also that like Jonah and like Peter, your help and grace to stand is in the Lord (and not in your mere strength, determination, or resolution to stand).

3. The third observation is this: It is the great commission of the Lord to all His ministers, "and preach unto it [i.e. unto the great city of Nineveh—GLP] the preaching that I bid thee" (Jonah 3:2). Or as Jesus stated in the Great Commission to His ministers before He ascended into heaven: "Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you" (Matthew 20:20).

a. As was said earlier, a minister is the ambassador of Christ. A minister is not to add to what Christ has taught in His Word. A minister's faithfulness or unfaithfulness is determined by whether he is simply the voice of the Lord or whether he is the voice of man in spouting new doctrines, new practices in worship, and new forms of church government. The minister's faithfulness to Christ is judged ultimately not by the miraculous powers or great gifts of oratory he may possess, but by whether he preaches what the Lord commands in Scripture

(Deuteronomy 13:1-3). Imagination and creativity are to find no welcomed place in the doctrine or worship taught and practiced by the faithful minister of Jesus Christ. Ministers are not to be original thinkers—Jesus Christ is to be the only original thinker for faithful ministers and faithful believers.

b. But what is the duty of those who hear the preached word through the voice of a faithful minister of Jesus Christ? They are to joyfully and thankfully receive and rest upon the gospel that is offered to them in the preaching of a faithful minister. The preached gospel is like a feast that is offered to all those who hear it, and although that feast is sufficient to satisfy the hungering and thirsting of all to whom it is offered, you must come and take up the meat, the bread, and the water of life (who is Jesus Christ). You will live forever if you will eat of Christ and His offered salvation. However, you will perish forever in the torments of hell if you refuse to eat of Christ and His salvation by faith. It is the minister's duty to preach God's Word as Christ bids him to preach, but it your duty (which has eternal consequences) to receive the gospel of salvation as yours and to rest in Christ as your all-sufficient Savior. Dear Christian, if you are growing in your love and thankfulness for the ministry of God's word to you, then pray for it to continually prosper, and support it by your encouragement and offerings.

II. Jonah Is Now Ready To Do the Will of God (Jonah 3:3a).

A. We now come to that which indicates whether Jonah is truly evidencing the gracious work of God in His life: He seeks to do the revealed will of God. He not only knows and hears the revealed will of God to him. He not only could profess that to go to Nineveh to preach to the Ninevites was the revealed will of God. These are very good and necessary. But the evidence that points to a true change of heart in Jonah is not his willingness to talk about going to Nineveh, but in loving

obedience to God's merciful salvation in his life to do it—to actually go to Nineveh.

B. Dear ones, we can acquire great theological knowledge of doctrine, worship, church government, and church history, but unless there is evidenced in our lives a growing conformity to take up our cross and follow Christ from a heart of loving and thankful obedience for the undeserved and free salvation bestowed upon unworthy sinners like you and me, we will be making an outward profession of godliness, but denying the inward, transforming power thereof. What are we to do? We must fall upon the mercy of the Lord, looking to Christ in faith as He alone who can supply the grace in our lives to live a godly life, looking to Christ as He alone who is an all-sufficient Savior, Sanctifier, and Provider and offers to us His grace to live a life that pleases Him and brings glory to Him. Dear ones, He must work within you both to will and to do His good pleasure. Call now upon Him while He may be found.

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