

**Jonah 3: 1-10; “And God Saw their Works”, Sermon # 3 in a series –
“The Disobedient Prophet”, Delivered by Pastor Paul Rendall on September 20th,
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One of the great purposes which God has for Christians as they go about to live for Him and labor for Him, is that He has called you to go and make disciples of people around you. The command that we have received as Christ’s Church is to preach the gospel to every creature. The Great Commission says that we are to go, and as we are going, that is out to be Christ’s witnesses, we are to make disciples. God would have each of us who are Christians, to do His will in this regard, but perhaps you, like Jonah, may not have learned yet, how to do this out of love for fallen sinners. One of the great lessons that Jonah had to learn was how great God’s love was for those particular sinners in the city of Nineveh. We know from the New Testament Scriptures that God the Father has proved His love for sinners in His sending His Son so that sinners might be saved.

So, the question that I pose to you now is this: Are you willing to learn from God Himself how to love sinners around you? Because our God specializes in teaching us how to think rightly about sinful people around us. That is one of the great lessons of this book. The message that Jonah preach was a message threatening the judgment of God upon the city of Nineveh. Nevertheless, the message performed a work in those people who believed. And so I want to show you how this message preached by Jonah relates to us today in how we should preach and share the eternal gospel of Christ. I want to give you 4 observations on what true repentance is, and what we should expect to see, in ourselves or other people, so that we can discern whether it is true or not.

1st of all – We should see that a faithful preacher will preach repentance, having learned it himself. (verses 1 and 2)

We saw in chapter 2 how very merciful the Lord was to Jonah, His disobedient prophet. God preserved him by placing him in the belly of the great fish, and there He dealt with him in this very unusual way of placing him in a near death situation, so that Jonah would be led to pray to Him there in that dark and troubling place. Having heard Jonah’s prayer and his words of acknowledging his sin, God then released him from his watery grave. He spoke to the fish and He had him spit Jonah up on the dry ground. The reason that God worked in this extraordinary way was so that Jonah would come to understand that his disobedience to His commands was unacceptable to Him. But God always disciplines those whom he loves, so that they will learn to do His will most practically.

So God had mercy on Jonah. He preserved Jonah, He taught Jonah, and He raised him up, as it were, from what would have been, a most certain death, if he had not repented of his disobedience. We see here in verses 1 and 2 that God renewed his commission to His servant Jonah. The word of the Lord came to Jonah a second time, it says in verse 1. I hope that you can see that our God is a God who works very patiently with His people and teaches them to obey Him; especially those who He calls to preach and teach. You, as a Christian, will become more useful to God when you learn the lessons about yourself which God wants to teach you; lessons about yourself in relation to people around you. You may be very strong willed, you may be very strong-minded concerning your view of who is worthy to receive God’s mercy and who is not, but God would teach you to show mercy even to the unworthy.

Listen to Jude, verses 20-22 – “But you beloved, building yourselves up on your most holy faith, praying in the Holy Spirit, keep yourselves in the love of God, looking for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ unto eternal life.” “And on some have compassion, making a distinction; but others save with fear, pulling them out of the fire, hating even the garment defiled by the flesh.” How does God teach you to become a more compassionate person? He does so, often, by His showing you where you yourself have been disobedient in the past, and where you are disobedient even now, and then He personally leads you into situations during which He will make it plain to

you where the error in your thinking is. Blessed are the merciful for they shall obtain mercy. Sometimes, some Christians are like Jonah. They actually say to God, by their words and their deeds that they want to hold on to their own opinions of who is worthy and who is not worthy to be saved, or who should be shown mercy by God. If God sees this in you, then He will have to take steps to show you yourself more clearly; where the error in your thinking lies. He knows how to do this with each and every one of us. And He will bring it to your attention if you need to see it. How you will respond to what He shows you, will make it evident to Him how much exactly, He has yet to teach you.

By the way, when I say this, I want you to see that when he does have to correct you over your misconceptions, it means that He has good work for you to do for Him, if you will respond rightly. I want you to consider that the greatest revival in the history of the world thus far, in terms of people repenting of their sins and their coming to know God, began with this one man Jonah whom God taught this lesson to. What a stubborn man Jonah was in his own convictions, wanting God to judge the Ninevites instead of showing them mercy! How determined he was to prove his point to God; that these Ninevites were not worthy of being shown mercy! And yet this man would end up being the very instrument that God would use, to accomplish His purpose, and to see these astonishingly great results.

This ought to show us something about how God does his work. God does not always choose the person whom we would think would be the most qualified for His work of preaching or evangelism. He does not always choose the person who we would think might be likely to effect great results like this great revival which came to Nineveh. No, we need to see that the results are with God. God gives the increase. But God in this case chose a man who was the most unworthy himself, because he was the man who held feelings most strongly against the very people whom God was sending him to. Oh, how great were Jonah's objections! But God gets glory to Himself when He can accomplish His purpose through a man who will go and preach His message, even though he has issues with the people that God is sending him to.

This is one of the most important principles for every Christian to learn. The people you are sent to preach to, or to share the gospel with, have many sinful problems. You know in your heart and mind that they not worthy of receiving this good news. And so, perhaps you may even look down on them. You might even despise them in your heart. But you need to see how great God's love is for all sinners everywhere. God has good news for the vilest of sinners; sinners of every tribe, tongue, people, and language. This, Jonah was going to have to learn by hard experience. Would he really learn it? Well, we shall see.

2nd – I want you to see that repentance must be done in a timely fashion.

(verses 3 and 4)

You will notice that the message that God gave to Jonah, to speak to these Ninevites, was a simple message really. "Yet forty days, and Nineveh shall be overthrown!" Nineveh was an exceedingly great city, we are told in verse 3. It would take Jonah three days just to walk through it, preaching his message. There were one hundred and twenty thousand people living there. And we are told in in chapter 4, verse 11, that they did not know the difference between their right hand and their left in terms of their moral discernment. The only thing that Jonah was commissioned to preach was the message of future judgment. But in this case, God determined that it should be so. And so Jonah preached without adding anything to it, and without taking anything away from it. Now, even though this message of judgment applied only to their city state of Nineveh, it was a very awakening message to the people of Nineveh.

Why was this? It was because these people knew that Jonah was a prophet of Israel's God, and that Israel's God declared Himself to be the only true and living God. Jonah's message was accompanied by the Holy Spirit's powerful working and influences upon their minds and hearts. We know this must have been the case because this simple message of the coming judgment against their city convinced them immediately, that if they did not repent, they would be

overthrown. It is amazing that Jonah did not instruct them on what the judgment exactly would be, that would come to them in 40 days. He only told them that they would be overthrown by it. This judgment could be armies coming against them in war; it could be a pestilence sent to them by God that would wipe them out. It could be an earthquake or violent storms. It could be any of many terrible things that God could use to judge them with, but the outcome would all be the same; Nineveh would be overthrown. Sometimes it is what we do not know that is that makes such a statement so frightening.

We can be assured of this truth however, that God wanted to let them know and understand, that if they did not repent, they would lose their life as they knew it. And if they perished physically, the implication was they would also perish spiritually forever, not really knowing and acknowledging the true and living God, and obeying His word. In thinking of how we might share the truth of the gospel with people around us, and see them awakened to a sense of their sinfulness and the danger that they are in of perishing, and perishing eternally, we need to tell them that there is a Judgment day coming. Judgment days come upon cities, or states, or whole nations sometimes because they will not repent.

The judgment of political states always takes place only in this life; not the next. But we may reason with individual people from the lesser to the greater, because calamities in a city, a state, or a nation, all come from Almighty God, who sends these dark providences to awaken people to their danger; the real danger of their perishing forever in their sins. This has been God's design in His bringing the dark providences that we have seen in our nation and in our state and in this community here, with the Covid-19 disease, the riots, protests, and looting. And even here in this area, the recent great Derecho storm that we experienced. In ordaining these things, being perfectly righteous in His doing so, God is saying that we must wake up to the fact that He is the sovereign Judge of all mankind, and the ultimate Judgment Day will come someday.

I very much liked the approach of the Samaritans Purse worker Tony Williamson used recently in his witness to people who needed to hear the gospel and be saved. He came here not only to help out with the cleanup of the storm damage, but he came here to help spiritually. And how did he help spiritually? He helped by giving out the gospel. But when he spoke to people he would often begin with something like this: If you were to die tonight, would you be confident that you could face God's judging your life, looking at your life? For it is appointed unto men once for men to die, and then comes the judgment.

One lady that he spoke with said that she was not really sure that she could be confident, and so he was then able to preach the gospel to her, and tell her that it was not by her works that she could be saved, but only by faith in Christ. But since Christ bore her sins at the cross, if she believed in Him, she could be saved; delivered from the wrath to come. He told her that church-going and baptism and good works were not enough to save. But the conversation was often begun with the people that Tony talked to, and spiritual interaction that he had with them, was established by his introducing to them this truth, of the coming future judgment. You and I need to begin here at this same place, as well, in our conversations with people. Because the thought of having to face judgment, is for most people, a reason, they know, that they should think more deeply about whether they really know God, and whether they are going to heaven.

I want you to note, as well, that Jonah was told by God to preach about a specific period of time given for repentance; that was – Yet forty days, and Nineveh would be overthrown. We need to understand that God's evaluation of sinners is very specific in how long he will wait to bring judgment against them; either for a nation or for an individual. In this case, it was 40 days that this city was given, and if there was no repentance, their city would be overthrown. Now, in Jonah's doing this, in his proclaiming this to them, there is no indication from the text that he gave them any other message. I do not think that he exhibited any great emotion, or wept over the people. He did not harangue them over their many specific sins, either personal or national. He simply said that because they were sinners, and had not thus far repented. He told them that their

city would be overthrown if they stayed that course. This should show us that it is not always necessary, in order to see people saved, to put any great pressure on them. They simply need to be told in straightforward terms, that God is holy and He must punish sin. His will is that all men will repent and turn to Christ for salvation. This is God's will for all men everywhere. They must be exhorted to the duty of repenting now; to consciously make a clean break with their sins. They must not think that they can put it off to some time in the future when it might appear to be more convenient.

In thinking about this, I want you to see that the Lord Jesus talked to people about their need of repentance in just this same way. It says in Mark 1: 14 – “Now after John was put in prison, Jesus came to Galilee, preaching the gospel of the kingdom of God, and saying, the time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand.” “Repent and believe in the gospel.” It was a very simple gospel that He and His disciples preached. They were to tell people to see themselves as sinners, those who had broken God's holy law, and that they needed a righteousness better than their own. They needed Christ's righteousness, and they were going to need His dying for their sins. Sometimes people compare themselves with other people and they think other people are much worse sinners than they are, and therefore they conclude that they are somehow safe holding to their own righteousness as the basis for their salvation; that they really do not need to repent. God sees that they are a pretty good person.

But Turn with me over to Luke chapter 13, verses 1-9. “There were present at that season some who told Jesus about the Galileans whose blood Pilate had mingled with their sacrifices.” “And Jesus answered and said to them, ‘Do you suppose that these Galileans were worse sinners than all other Galileans, because they suffered such things?’ “I tell you, no; but unless you repent you will all likewise perish.” “Or those eighteen on whom the tower in Siloam fell and killed them, do you think that they were worse sinners than all other men who dwelt in Jerusalem?” “I tell you, no; but unless you repent you will all likewise perish.” “He also spoke this parable: ‘A certain man had a fig tree planted in his vineyard, and he came seeking fruit on it and found none.’ “Then he said to the keeper of his vineyard, ‘Look, for three years I have come seeking fruit on this fig tree and find none.’ “Cut it down; why does it use up the ground?’ “But he answered and said to him, ‘Sir, let it alone this year also, until I dig around it and fertilize it.’ “And if it bears fruit, well.” “But if not, after that you can cut it down.”

So, you can see that Jesus knew that some people think that if they see sinners die a cruel death, or a sudden death, that somehow they must be worse sinners than others because they suffered that kind of death. But he says, no, that is not the case; but that it shows forth the more important truth that we must always be ready for our death, and that the best way to prepare for our death is to repent. For that is what is truly essential, to prepare ourselves to meet God in a timely fashion. Repentance is that necessary preparative. The time is always now. Jesus says that the Father also has seasons when He comes looking for spiritual fruit in your life. If He does not find that fruit of the Spirit, if He does not find the fruit of righteousness and good works which are the evidences of doing His will from a straightforward and sincere heart, then he is willing to cut down the plant of that person's life.

Thanks be to God that the keeper of God's Vineyard is Jesus Christ our Lord, who through His Spirit's working strives with sinners to bring them to repentance. If they resist the Spirit, then they will eventually be cut down and perish in their sins. If they receive the cultivating work of the Spirit, and they repent and bring forth fruit worthy of repentance, then they prove that they are a true Christian. Repentance is essential to salvation even though it is not the basis for your salvation. The basis for your salvation is Christ's work of perfect righteousness and His sufferings as a substitute in your place at the cross. But repentance is the responsibility of every person in order to their coming to know God, and it is their responsibility after they come to know the Lord, when they see that they have sinned. You must deal with your sins by breaking off from them,

turning away from them, and turning to God and what He has provided for you through Christ. That is the gospel.

3rd – God always looks for works from those who repent.

Verses 5-9 say – “So the people of Nineveh believed God, proclaimed a fast, and put on sackcloth, from the greatest to the least of them.” “Then word came to the king of Nineveh; and he arose from his throne and laid aside his robe, covered himself with sackcloth and sat in ashes.” “And he caused it to be proclaimed and published throughout Nineveh by the decree of the king and his nobles, saying, ‘Let neither man nor beast, herd nor flock, taste anything; do not let them eat, or drink water.’ “But let man and beast be covered with sackcloth, and cry mightily to God; yes, let every one turn from his evil way and from the violence that is in his hands.” “Who can tell if God will turn and relent, and turn away from His fierce anger, so that we may not perish?” “Then God saw their works that turned from their evil way...”

We can begin by noticing that all of the works that were done by these Ninevites were done by faith. It says, “So the people of Nineveh believed God; that is God’s speaking to them through the preaching of Jonah. So works of repentance, to be acceptable to God, must be done by faith in Him. He who comes to God must believe that He is, and that He is a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him. (Hebrews 1: 6) These Ninevites show us how God can be sought for and found, in terms of the humble and sincere acts of contrition. What does acts of contrition mean? It means that that that person expresses their belief that they are guilty before God. They show it forth by the way that they speak and the way that they act in His sight, because it comes from their realizing that they have been sinful. That person really believes that they are guilty of their sins. And they show God that they realize that they have dishonored Him. They realize the implications of their guilt, personally, for themselves; that God will overthrow their life if they do not repent.

The people of Nineveh, here, first evidenced their faith by proclaiming a fast. True saving faith leads to works that show a contrite heart. They put on sackcloth, from the greatest of them to the least of them. Truly, when revival comes to a city or to a nation, conviction of sin comes to many. And they are willing to do something about it. These people were willing to participate in stated days of fasting. The initiative was taken by the people themselves. And then word came to the king, it says in verse 6, and he arose from his throne, he covered himself with sackcloth, and he sat in ashes. He laid aside his royal dignity to show forth his humility before God and men. He caused the publication of the edict to fast throughout Nineveh, that neither man nor beast, should taste anything of food. These were very radical and dramatic actions that they took, because they wanted to find God’s forgiveness and His favor. They all cried mightily to God. And the king preached repentance to all the people. He said – “Yes and let everyone turn from his evil way and the violence of his hands”.

So we can see from the words of the king in verse 9 that repentance is turning away from your sins and turning in faith to God. For these Ninevites it was more specifically turning away from their using violence and force to get what they wanted; that is, taking matters of justice into their own hands, and as a nation acting aggressively towards other nations. As we think of it in personal terms it is your being willing to thoughtfully and lovingly work through matters of disagreement with others. James chapter 4, verse 1 says – “Where do wars and fights come from among you?” “Do they not come from your desires for pleasure that war in your members?” “You lust and do not have.” “You murder and covet and cannot obtain.” “You fight and war.” “Yet you do not have because you do not ask.” “You ask and do not receive, because you ask amiss, that you may spend it on your pleasures.” It is this mentality that must be repented of.

But the king you will notice expressed real hope that God would forgive. For he said – Who can tell if God will turn and relent, and turn away from His fierce anger, so that we may not perish? This is how contrite sinners really should think and reason in relation to God. They have the great expectation that God is not only just, but that He is also merciful. Faith believes that God really will respond to your prayers when you cry mightily to God. God really will show you mercy if you

are contrite. Psalm 34: 18 – “The Lord is near to those who have a broken heart, and saves such as have a contrite spirit.” Psalm 51: 17 – “The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit, a broken and a contrite heart – These, O God, you will not despise.”

4th – By our truly Repenting, we will perceive that God’s Attitude towards us has really changed.

It says in verse 10 of our text – “Then God saw their works, that they turned from their evil way; and God relented from the disaster that He had said that He would bring upon them, and He did not do it.” So this is how God really responds when He sees you turn from your wicked ways and knows that your heart is contrite. He really does relent concerning the calamity that He was thinking of bringing to you. Yes, we must understand that in His great Being He is unchangeable, but we must also understand that in His actions that we perceive, He really does change His mind, as it is recorded here for our benefit. “Who can tell if God will turn and relent?” “Who can tell if He will turn away from his fierce anger so that we may not perish?” What good reasoning this was, on the king’s part. Sometimes, I believe, we let our logic take us to conclusions about God and the way that He is in His essential being, to a view of Him which is really not helpful to sinners trying to find His forgiveness and His favor.

In our weak and finite comprehension of things, we really must believe that God has fierce anger towards unrepentant sinners, even though He is without passions like a man. To be faithful to God in our understanding of Him, however, we must believe that God will relent when He sees our works. Let us let the Scriptures teach us how we should see God in action. Let us believe that God is unchangeable, that He is not a man who can lie, nor the Son of Man that He should repent or relent. But let us also hold fast the truth that will bring us as sinners real hope; that having repented that we will experience, according to His word, a real sense of His favor; that when we repent. We really do come to know that God’s attitude has changed towards us. Fierce anger is not the same as Love in God, as we behold Him. They are opposites to us.

We can, I know, with all fidelity to the Scriptures, say that God’s essence is the same as His attributes. But as finite beings, who are accountable to God, we must carefully and clearly distinguish between all of God’s attributes, and we must understand these truths according to how God Himself declares Himself to be, and to act, in His word. It is true that God never changes in His essence and Being. But He describes Himself in ways that we can understand. That is, if we will repent, then the expression of His attitude towards us does really change. He really does forgive us. He really does come into our heart and dwell there forever by His Holy Spirit who is given to us. Our hearts really weren’t opened to Him before, but now He sovereignly comes and convinces us of our sin and opens our heart to respond to the gospel. He really was once at enmity with us; hostile to us, but now, when we repent, He brings salvation. He reconciles us to Himself. He gives us His peace.

And so, I am saying, that as we really come to experience these blessings of salvation, we must distinguish them in their categories, such as justification and sanctification. We really must distinguish these great doctrines from each other so that sinners will understand when we preach the gospel to them. Salvation is not by our works but it is by His grace. But when God sees our works, He will turn and relent. I am saying, that if we do not plainly preach to sinners that God will change his mind concerning them, if they repent, they will not understand. Indeed, they may be in such confusion that it will lead them to despair instead of their believing what God has clearly said about Himself in His word. God is not like us in the limitations of our finite experience. But He says this to believers and unbelievers alike. “For thus says the High and Lofty One who inhabits eternity, whose name is Holy: I dwell in the high and holy place, with him who has a contrite and humble spirit, to revive the spirit of the humble, and to revive the heart of the contrite ones.” (Isaiah 57: 15) This is what God says to those who will order their conduct aright before Him. He will show them His great salvation.

