

5. Interpretation – Chapter 3

July 19, 2018

In chapter 1, our renegade prophet Jonah ran away from the Lord to Tarshish in disobedience to what the Lord told him to do. But in chapter 2, after he was locked up in the great fish's pitch dark stomach for three days and three nights, he repented of his sin and ran to the Lord.

Now in chapter 3, we will see the man running with the Lord in his assignment.

A. THE MARVEL OF AN UNDESERVED COMMISSION

Jonah 3:1-4 Now the word of the Lord came to Jonah the second time, saying, 2 "Arise, go to Nineveh, that great city, and preach to 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, a three-day journey in extent. 4 And Jonah began to enter the city on the first day's walk. Then he cried out and said, "Yet forty days, and Nineveh shall be overthrown!"

Jonah made the first amphibious landing in humankind.

What do you see here in v1-4?

When He was called to go to Nineveh this time, I don't see an ounce of resistance in Jonah's part. He had learned a lesson not to fight with God.

Can you describe what the Lord is doing with Jonah and the people of Nineveh in one word?

Grace. This shows the amazing grace of God to His wayward people – believers and unbelievers alike. After Jonah did everything he could to resist the first call of God, once Jonah repented, God called him again – though God was under no obligation to do it. He did it out of mercy and grace. Jonah is being offered a new beginning.

God wants to use us – stumbling, falling and all – but He won't do so, if we refuse to get up.

The victorious Christian life is a series of new beginnings. When we fall, the enemy wants us to believe that our ministry is finished and there's no hope for recovery, but our God is the God of the second chance, amen?

Micah 7:8 Do not rejoice over me, my enemy; When I fall, I will arise; When I sit in darkness, The Lord will be a light to me.

Since the Lord showed us about His grace to His runaway prophet Jonah and the Ninevehites, we need to do some in-depth systematic theology study of "Grace" for a short time.

Here is my question: What is grace? We all know that grace is God choosing to bless us rather than punish us as our sin deserves. Before you come up with that pre-formatted answer that you knew or memorized, I want you to think about His grace through your own salvation. Let me ask you again: what is God's grace to you?

Another question: Why is it so important not just for salvation through God's grace in Christ Jesus, but for living life in victory through His grace?

2 Peter 3:18 but grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. To Him be the glory both now and forever. Amen.

The apostle Peter tells us that we must grow in the grace and the knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ continuously. We need grace and knowledge both.

Grace will keep us tolerant and loving, while knowledge will keep us strong; grace will make us compassionate, while knowledge will make us discerning; grace will help us smile, knowledge will help us think; grace will result in vulnerability, knowledge will result in stability.

But how easy it is to grow in knowledge but not in grace! All of us know far more of the Bible than we really live according to what we know. Knowledge without grace is a terrible weapon, and grace without knowledge can be very shallow. But when we combine grace and knowledge, we have a marvelous tool for building our lives and for building the church which is the body of Jesus Christ.

Christians must be on guard all the time, grow in the grace and the knowledge of Jesus through the Word of God. This requires diligence. It demands discipline and priorities. Oh, how we all need these desperately! Please remember this: nobody automatically drifts into spiritual growth and stability, but anybody can drift out of dedication and growth.

We don't have to read very far in our Bible to discover that God forgives His servants and restores them to ministry. Abraham fled to Egypt, where he lied about his wife, but God gave him another chance in Genesis 12 and 13. Jacob lied to his father, Isaac, but God restored him and used him to build the nation of Israel. Moses killed a man and fled from Egypt, but God called him to be the leader of His people. Peter denied the Lord 3 times, but Jesus forgave him and said, "Follow me" in John 21.

Does it mean that the more I sin, the more grace was dispensed from the Lord and He gets the glory?

No matter how encouraging these examples of restoration may be, we must never be used as excuses for sin. The apostle Paul was already anticipating people's pointless argument and prepared to answer:

Romans 6:1-2 What shall we say then? Shall we continue in sin that grace may abound? 2 Certainly not! How shall we who died to sin live any longer in it?

The justification we've learned is the one time act of God to declare a person who just became a born-again Christian holy and righteous and just as if he or she has never sinned. But sanctification is the on-going work of the Holy Spirit to keep us holy and righteous in the Father's sight since we are still living in our mortal sinful bodies.

In other words, the person who truly became a believer of Jesus Christ would not want to hurt the heart of God by committing sin willfully and continuously.

Would he have a struggle with sins? Absolutely.

Would he sin against God from time to time? Most likely.

Would God cleanse and forgive him again and again? Without a doubt.

What I am saying is that the true believer of Christ would not use grace as permission to sin freely, because he loves God.

4 times in this Book, Nineveh is called a "great city" and archeologists tell us that the description is well-deserved. Nineveh that was located in modern-day Mosul, Iraq, was one of the oldest and greatest cities in antiquity.

According to my research, the ancient Assyrian king Sennacherib built great walls around the city with fifteen gates, created public parks and gardens, aqueducts, irrigation ditches, canals, and greatly expanded upon and improved the structures of the city. His palace had 80 rooms and he proclaimed it "the palace without rival". The area of the city and its suburbs was 60 miles, and from what the Lord said in Jonah 4:11, we could guess that there were probably well over 500,000 people living in that area.

Don't you think that Jonah's preaching was rather short? "*Yet forty days, and Nineveh shall be overthrown!*" We don't know if there is more to Jonah's message for the people of Nineveh. I can assure you that Jonah was not doing this assignment with delight, rather because of obligation to God.

This brings up another question for you guys: Can we obey the Lord without our hearts are behind what we are supposed to? If we do that, we are just going through the motion. In other words, it is not true obedience.

Let's talk about disobedience briefly. Do you remember what prophet Samuel told king Saul about disobedience or rebellion?

1 Samuel 15:23 For rebellion is as the sin of witchcraft, And stubbornness is as iniquity and idolatry. Because you have rejected the word of the Lord, He also has rejected you from being king."

B. THE MARVEL OF AN UNPARALLELED AWAKENING

Jonah 3:5-10 So the people of Nineveh believed God, proclaimed a fast, and put on sackcloth, from the greatest to the least of them. 6 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. 7 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. 8 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. 9 Who can tell if God will turn and relent, and turn away from His fierce anger, so that we may not perish? 10 Then God saw their works, that they turned from their evil way; and God relented from the disaster that He had said He would bring upon them, and He did not do it.

What would you say about the reactions from the king and the people of Nineveh after they heard the preaching of Jonah?

When does godly repentance start?

It begins with believing God and what He says in the Bible. As we believe Him and His Word, we have the power to transform our lives as He wills. Repentance has hope in the mercy and love of God. It hopes that God will relent and that the repentant people will not perish.

Let me say it again. We can't believe God apart from the Word of God. Therefore, any real revival or repentance cannot begin without faithful preaching and faithful hearing of God's Word, just as it was in Nineveh.

It is not that difficult for us to imagine the reaction from the people of Nineveh when they saw Jonah and heard his message. His skin and all the hair would be bleached

and discolored by the gastric acid juice from the fish's belly. On top of it, He was yelling, "Repent, or you are going to be dead meat." I bet it was very convincing.

Like the sailors in the storm, the Ninevites didn't want to perish. Their fasting and praying and their humbling of themselves before God, sent a message to heaven, but the people of Nineveh had no assurance that they would be saved. They hoped that God's great compassion would move Him to change His plan and spare the city.

I believe that the repentance of the people of Nineveh was genuine. Charles H. Spurgeon, the prince of preachers from the Great Britain of yesteryear tells the story of a woman who came seeming to be in great sorrow, saying what a great sinner she was, but Spurgeon immediately suspected her repentance wasn't sincere. He said, "Well, if you are a great sinner, of course, you have broken God's laws. Let's read the Ten Commandments and see which ones you have broken."

They started at the first: "You shall have no other gods before Me," and Spurgeon asked her if she ever broke that commandment. "Oh no," she said, "not that I know of." "'You shall not make any graven image' – did you ever break that one?" "Never, sir," she answered. Spurgeon went through all Ten Commandments and she could not find a single one that she had broken, and what he suspected was true. She didn't really consider herself a sinner, and she was making a show of repentance because she thought it was expected of her.

How often do we say to the Lord, "Please forgive me for my sins," but in reality, we are not quite sure that if there is any sin we really need to be forgiven? Because we have a tendency to zoom up on the other people's sins, but when it comes to our own sins, we don't see the urgency, nor big issue.

There are many people who use KJV, RSV, and ASV and love them. They are great versions, but they are not perfect and inspired by the Holy Spirit. As I mentioned, only the original Hebrew and Greek manuscripts are inspired. Jonah 3:10 is a case in point.

Jonah 3:10 And God saw their works, that they turned from their evil way; and God repented of the evil, that he had said that he would do unto them; and he did it not. KJV

How can our perfect God who has never sinned repent? Repent of what? The phrase "God *repented*" might better be translated "God *relented*," that is, changed His plan. From the human point of view, it looked like repentance, but from the divine perspective, it was simply God's response to man's change of heart. Though God is utterly consistent with Himself, it only appears that He is changing His mind from our point of view.

One of the attributes of God is that He is immutable, which means that He never changes. There is no reason for God to change. He knows the end before the beginning. The Bible uses human analogies to reveal the divine character of God. That is what we call 'anthropomorphic' terms.

C. APPLICATIONS

1) God wants to use us – stumbling, falling and all – but He won't do so if we refuse to get up.

2) The victorious Christian life is a series of new beginnings. When we fall, the enemy wants us to believe that our ministry is finished and there's no hope for recovery, but our God is the God of the second chance.

3) Repentance begins with believing God and what He says in the Bible. As we believe Him and His Word, we have the power to transform our lives as He wills.