

V. *Jonah's Obedience*

31-Dec-06 Jonah 3:1-10

Theme: When sinners repent, God relents from punishing them; instead, Jesus Christ takes the punishment in the place of sinners.

Key Verses: Jonah 3:9-10 ⁹“Who can tell if God will turn and relent, and turn away from His fierce anger, so that we may not perish?” ¹⁰Then 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.

Review

Last week we considered the prayer of Jonah inside the belly of the great fish. God had sent the great fish as a miraculous intervention in the life of the prophet, to deliver him from death and to discipline him for disobedience.

Jonah apparently understood God's message, because his prayer or psalm of thanksgiving demonstrates his change in heart. His prayer is divided into three stanzas, describing his situation: 1) going down; 2) bottomed out; and 3) coming up. Jonah demonstrates confidence that God will hear and answer his prayer. He recognizes that God is sovereign and that there is nowhere he can go where God cannot find him, not even in the belly of a fish at the bottom of the sea. Rather than running from the presence of the LORD, Jonah now desires to serve God and worship Him. Jonah has undergone a tremendous “attitude adjustment.” Although his sojourn inside the belly of the great fish was not a pleasant physical experience, it was nonetheless a profitable spiritual experience.

Jesus uses the “sign of Jonah” in the belly of the fish to describe His own resurrection from the grave. Just as Jonah returned from the “belly of Sheol” after three days, so would the Son of Man rise again on the third day from the dead. This imperfect type points to the greater Jonah, the Lord Jesus Christ. The sign of Jonah is a sign of life to those who believe in the resurrection of Jesus; but it is a sign of condemnation to those who fail to trust in Christ. In his prayer, Jonah declares that “salvation is of the LORD.” Jesus, whose very name means “the LORD saves,” is that salvation. Let us rejoice in our Savior!

Introduction

We are going to transition into the second half of Jonah. Chapter 1 described the consequences of Jonah's disobedience. Here in chapter 3, we will see the consequences of Jonah's obedience. The chapter describes for us the steps of repentance and gives us a deeper understanding of our great God.

Exposition

A. Jonah's Re-Commission (3:1-3)

1. Second Chance (3:1)

¹Now the word of the LORD came to Jonah the second time, saying ... (Jonah 3:1).

Jonah 3:1-3 is the fourth section of Jonah and is a direct parallel to the first section. In Jonah 1:1-3 we have the commission of Jonah; here we have the re-commission. The first verse of each chapter is identical except for one substitution: instead of the “son of Amittai,” we have the

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“second time.” The first section was the call of Jonah; this is the “re-call.” Jonah has been recalled; he’s been given a second chance.

Jonah is not the only one who balked at God’s commandment to him. For example, Moses (Ex. 3:10-4:17), Elijah (1 Ki. 19:1-18), and Jeremiah (Jer. 1:6) experienced doubt and hesitation over their commissions, but Jonah is the only one who actually ran in the opposite direction rather than obey. In this sense, the “re-call” of Jonah is unique among Old Testament prophets.

Although Jonah is unique, he is also entirely typical. Like Peter who received a second chance after he denied Christ three times, the re-commissioning of Jonah demonstrates that God forgives sinners. Praise God that He gave Jonah a second chance. Praise God that He gives *us* second chances! Boice puts it this way:

Does God always do that? Does God stoop to use those who have rejected His calling, turned a deaf ear to His word, and pursued a course of determined disobedience? Yes, He is like that. Yes, He does use such messengers. If He did not, none of us could serve Him.

2. *Preach the Message (3:2-3a)*

²“Arise, go to Nineveh, that great city, and preach to it the message that I tell you.” ³So Jonah arose and went to Nineveh, according to the word of the LORD (Jonah 3:2-3a).

In God’s original commission, Jonah was called to “arise, go ... and cry out” (1:2). In the re-commission, the first half of the command is identical. His destination has not changed; he still must arise and go to the great city of Nineveh. However, the second half of the re-commission has subtly changed. Jonah was originally called to “cry out against” the wickedness of Nineveh; now, Jonah is to “preach to” the city. This change in language is preparing us for the response of the Ninevites in the next section of the chapter. Just as Jonah experienced the mercy of God in the face of his rebellion, the citizens of Nineveh are also about to experience the same grace.

Notice how Jonah responds to the re-call. We no longer read, “But Jonah arose to flee to Tarshish” (1:3). Instead, Jonah obeys: “So Jonah arose and went to Nineveh, according to the word of the LORD” (3:3a). This is the sentence we expected in chapter 1. It’s taken a long time to reach this point, and Jonah has traveled a very difficult road to get here. But it is due to the grace of God. “God brought Jonah back to reconciled fellowship with Himself” (Keddie). And in response to that sovereign mercy of God, Jonah responds appropriately – in obedience. Would it have been better for Jonah had he obeyed the first time, immediately? Of course. But the good news of the gospel is that God forgives sinners and reconciles them to Himself. Over and over and over again. As many times as we sin, that is how many times God forgives us. The apostle John writes of this forgiveness for believers in his first epistle:

⁹If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness (1 John 1:9).

3. *Nineveh (3:2a, 3bc)*

²“Arise, go to Nineveh, that great city... ³Now Nineveh was an exceedingly great city, a three-day journey in extent (Jonah 3:2a, 3bc).

The designation of Nineveh as a “great city” in 3:2 is a repetition of that same description in 1:2. Additional emphasis on the nature of Nineveh is given in 3:3b where Nineveh is described as “an exceedingly great city.” This Hebrew phrase literally means that Nineveh was a “great city to

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God.” Rather than describing its size, the text here is emphasizing the status or importance of Nineveh. Nineveh was a great city because it was important to God.

But why would a wicked, violent, pagan city be important to God? The answer is because God is going to do a great work of grace there. There is a tremendous lesson for the Israelites of Jonah’s day in this description of Nineveh. The residents of Jerusalem had better be paying attention; their city was not the only great city in the world. “The fact that God, the God of Israel, owns foreign cities and nations as well as Israel is a lesson that needs repeating” (Estelle). God is no respecter of persons. If pagan Gentiles repent, confess, and believe, God will save them. If covenant Israel repeatedly disobeys the LORD and ignores their covenant blessings, God will destroy them.

There is one more description of Nineveh in the end of verse 3 that is difficult to understand: Nineveh was “a three-day journey in extent.” This phrase has been interpreted in various ways.

1) Some have speculated that it may refer to the physical size of the city. Since a day’s journey by foot was approximately 20 miles, this would mean Nineveh would have to have a circumference of 60 miles. No city in the ancient world was that large. Alexander cites a secular document that describes Sennacherib (705-681 BC) enlarging the circumference of Nineveh from about 3 miles to 7 miles. So it seems unlikely that the phrase “three-day journey” refers merely to the physical size of the city.

2) This phrase may describe an administrative region centered on Nineveh but including other nearby cities such as Rehoboth, Ir, Calah, and Resen (*cp.* Gen. 10:11-12). That is, Jonah is talking about Nineveh in the way we might talk about the greater Houston metropolitan area. If this is the meaning, then Greater Nineveh could indeed be sixty miles across.

3) Rather than referring to distance, the phrase “three-day journey” could refer to the time it took Jonah to travel through Nineveh preaching his message. Winding through the city streets, preaching on every street corner, traversing the city from one end to the other could have taken three days. Thus, the meaning could relate to the thoroughness with which Jonah visited the city and delivered his message.

4) Another suggestion is related to royal protocol for important visitors. An official delegation could not be hurried, and it would take three days to properly receive foreign guests, entertain them, and send them on their way with the appropriate ceremonies. Thus, the phrase “three-day journey” could mean Nineveh was an important city in which royal protocol was followed.

5) Others suggest that it is a symbolic reference to size or distance, without specific meaning. For example, Estelle proposes that the month-long, 600-mile journey that Jonah had to undertake to travel from Israel to Nineveh could be described as a “three-day journey.” A one-day journey would be a short trip, but a three-day journey is a long trip of indefinite distance.

Any one of these may be more or less what is intended by the phrase “three-day journey.” However, I would like to point out the connection between this “three-day journey” and the “three days and three nights” that Jonah spent in the belly of the great fish. I believe that there is a spiritual significance to this phrase. The city of Nineveh was under a death sentence from God because of their wickedness. But just as Jonah experienced a journey from death to life in the belly of the fish, Nineveh is about to undergo a spiritual transformation of their own. Under the death sentence of God, the people of Nineveh are going to repent and believe on God. And God will see their repentance, have compassion on them, and spare them. He is going to give them

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life instead of the death they deserve! So we have two examples of three-day journeys in this short little book of Jonah, and in both cases we see a transformation from death to life.

B. Jonah's Mission (3:4-10)

Jonah 3:4-10 is the fifth section in the book, and is the parallel section to 1:4-16. In chapter 1, Jonah interacts with the pagan sailors who experience the mercy and grace of God; in chapter 3, Jonah interacts with the pagan Ninevites who also experience the mercy and grace of God.

Dorsey points out that this passage has a chiasmic structure that places the repentance of the king of Nineveh at the center, thus highlighting the need for spiritual leadership (which was absent in Israel):

- a **Yahweh's judgment announced** (3:3b-4)
- b **People repent** with fasting and wearing sackcloth (3:5)
- c **Word reaches the king** (3:6a)
 - d **CENTER: king repents** (3:6b)
- c' **Word goes out from the king** to people (3:7a)
- b' **People commanded to repent** with fasting and wearing sackcloth (3:7b-9)
- a' **Yahweh's judgment canceled**; He relents and spares the city (3:10)

1. Jonah Preaches (3:4)

⁴And 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 3:4).

If a "three-day journey" means a long journey of indefinite distance, than the "first day's walk" could mean a short distance. Alternatively, it could simply mean that Jonah started to carry out his mission as soon as he arrived in Nineveh. In either case, the meaning of this phrase seems to emphasize that Jonah did not wait around to begin preaching. After a month or more of weary travel along the caravan route from Israel to Nineveh, Jonah immediately got to work. As soon as he arrived in the city, he began to deliver the message that God had given to him. How refreshing it is to see our prophet obeying his commission!

The substance of Jonah's message is short and sweet. The message is eight words in English; only five words in Hebrew. Yet we need to take a few minutes to understand what God told Jonah to tell the Ninevites. First, we need to realize that the message recorded here is likely a summary of what Jonah preached. The essence or theme of Jonah's evangelistic mission to Nineveh was contained in these words: "yet forty days, and Nineveh shall be overthrown." No doubt, Jonah amplified this message of judgment with a description of who God was and the wonders He performs. Perhaps Jonah even described his own miraculous salvation from the belly of the great fish as a sign to the Ninevites of the power and the grace of God.

Secondly, the word "overthrown" is a slightly ambiguous term in Hebrew. The primary meaning is "overturned" as in destroyed. This is clearly the meaning of the word as it is used to describe the overthrow of Sodom and Gomorrah (Gen. 19:25; Dt. 29:23; Is. 13:19; Jer. 49:18; Lam. 4:6; Amos 4:11). Nineveh was under a death sentence just like Sodom and Gomorrah. No doubt, the prophet Jonah was primarily thinking in terms of judgment when he talked about Nineveh being overthrown.

However, the word can also mean "turned over" (2 Ki. 21:13) or "turned around" (1 Ki. 22:34), meaning transformed. Although an Ethiopian can not change the color of his skin, nor a leopard change his spots (*cp.* Jer. 13:23), nonetheless the power of God is sufficient to turn around or

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transform a sinful, violent, and pagan city like Nineveh. As Alexander points out, “although Nineveh was not overturned, it did experience a turnaround.”

Finally, notice the length of the probationary period. Nineveh is given forty days in which to repent, otherwise they will be overthrown. This period of “forty days” is not an arbitrary length of time; rather it has a special significance in Scripture. There are many 40-day or 40-year periods in the Bible (*e.g.*, Gen. 7:1-8:6; Ex. 24:12-18; Num. 13:1-14:35; 1 Sam. 17:1-51; 1 Kings 19:1-18). This period of 40 days and nights symbolizes a period of testing, temptation, or trial, leading either to salvation or judgment. At the conclusion of the 40-day period, there is either redemption, sanctification, and life; or there is judgment, condemnation, and death.

There are two recurring motifs in these 40-day periods: wilderness and fasting. Whether it is the watery “wilderness” of a flooded world or the wilderness wandering of the Israelites, the idea of wilderness is prevalent in periods of 40-day testing. The wilderness is the place of testing. God takes you out of your comfort zone in order to test your faith. Associated with the wilderness is the concept of fasting. For example, Moses does not eat on Mt. Sinai for forty days and nights; neither does Elijah. When the period of testing comes, there is deprivation in the “wilderness.”

These elements can be seen in the story of Jonah. Jonah has already been through his own personal “wilderness” – the belly of the great fish. Now, Nineveh is entering a period of wilderness testing. The question is, how will they respond? Will they rebel like the Israelites in the wilderness and be condemned, or will they repent and submit to God? As we will see, the Ninevites repent, complete with fasting, an entirely appropriate response when in the wilderness of God’s testing!

Of course all of the examples of forty days and nights of testing in the Old Testament are fulfilled in the temptation of Jesus Christ in the wilderness (Mt. 4:1-11). Jesus goes into the wilderness of temptation and deprivation, and He conquers the tempter. Because Jesus has defeated the tempter, He is able to help His believers also overcome temptation:

¹³No temptation has overtaken you except such as is common to man; but God is faithful, who will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able, but with the temptation will also make the way of escape, that you may be able to bear it (1 Corinthians 10:13).

2. Ninevites Repent (3:5-6)

⁵So the people of Nineveh believed God, proclaimed a fast, and put on sackcloth, from the greatest to the least of them (Jonah 3:5).

The response to Jonah’s preaching was immediate, and it was miraculous. The repentance of Nineveh is no less a miracle than the great fish, because both come through the power of Almighty God.

This repentance of Nineveh serves as a rebuke to faithless Israel. Israel had much more knowledge and many more privileges than did pagan Nineveh. And yet, the Ninevites of Jonah’s day repented, while his own countrymen did not. In a twist of divine irony, God will use these same Assyrians from Nineveh to effect the destruction and deportation of the northern kingdom of Israel within 1-2 generations. Keddie points out that the belief of these Ninevites was also “a rebuke to the Jews of Jesus’ day. Their faith rebukes Jewish unbelief and, by implication, unbelief in every generation. Nineveh points all men everywhere to the necessity of coming to the Lord in repentance and faith.”

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We can notice five steps in the repentance of Nineveh. The first step is *preaching*. Jonah faithfully (after his initial reluctance!) preached the word of the LORD. This step is absolutely vital if true repentance and conversion is to occur: “faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God (Rom. 10:17).

Second comes *belief*. Notice who the Ninevites believed: God. Jonah was the messenger, but the word came from God. It is possible that God had already been preparing the Ninevites to receive favorably the message that Jonah delivered. Assyria was in a period of political decline in this stage of history. Alexander describes two events that occurred in this time period would have been viewed as particularly ominous by the Assyrians. The first was a famine, which began in 765 BC and either recurred in 759 BC or lasted the entire seven-year period. The second omen was a total solar eclipse, which occurred on June 15, 763 BC. If Jonah had arrived in Nineveh shortly after this eclipse, the Ninevites may have been pre-conditioned by God to receive the prophet’s message of impending doom.

Belief, however, is of no avail if there is no change of course. “Even the demons believe—and tremble!” (James 2:19). The third step in the repentance of Nineveh is *sorrow for sin*. They demonstrated their belief by doing something about their sinful situation. They voluntarily deprived themselves of food and comfort. Fasting, sackcloth, and ashes were symbols of mourning (1 Ki. 21:27; Neh. 9:1-2; Is. 15:3; Dan. 9:3-4; Joel 1:13-14). The Ninevites were declaring by their actions that they knew they were sinners and that God was right to judge them.

This was not a localized ritual of mourning. Notice that all of Nineveh, from the least to the greatest, and everyone in-between participated. This is particularly emphasized in verse 6, where the actions of the king serve as the pivot point of the chiasmic structure for this section:

- ⁶Then word came to the king of Nineveh:
a and he arose from his throne
b and laid aside his robe,
b’ covered himself with sackcloth
a and sat in ashes (Jonah 3:6).

3. *The King Proclaims (3:7-9)*

The king did more than just wear sackcloth and sit in the ashes. In a joint decree with his nobles, he made the following statement:

- ⁷Let neither man nor beast, herd nor flock, taste anything; do not let them eat, or drink water. ⁸But 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. ⁹Who can tell if God will turn and relent, and turn away from His fierce anger, so that we may not perish? (Jonah 3:7b-9).

The proclamation of the king officially endorses (or initiates) the actions of mourning already described in the summary of verse 5. Notice the universality of the decree – even the animals of the flock are to fast and wear sackcloth! This foreign king recognizes that the entire creation is damaged by sin.

The fourth step in the repentance of Nineveh is *changed behavior*: the Ninevites turned away from a specific sin. The Assyrians were well known to be a wicked and violent people. Thus, the proclamation of the king implores the citizens of Nineveh to repent of their evil ways and in particular abandon the violence which characterized their city and their nation. The king’s

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proclamation underscores that it is not enough to be sorry for your sin. Repentance is not true if there is no putting aside of sin.

The final step in the repentance of Nineveh is *living hope*. Although the Ninevites have heard the preached word, believed in God, demonstrated sorrow for sin, and have turned away from violence, there is no guarantee that God will accept them. Alexander writes, “They realize only too well that pious actions and prayers can never merit or guarantee divine forgiveness (*cp.* Joel 2:13-14); God is under no obligation to pardon. There remains, however, the hope that He may look upon them with mercy and turn away His fierce anger.”

“Who can tell if God will turn and relent, and turn away from His fierce anger, so that we may not perish?” (3:9). Like the sea-captain in 1:6 or the sailors in 1:14, the proclamation of the king of Nineveh recognizes the absolute sovereignty of God to do as He pleases. Here is orthodoxy! “The repentant recognize that they have no case to argue for acceptance. Their future well-being is dependant solely on divine grace” (Mackay). Our good works cannot save us; all we can do is throw ourselves upon the mercy of God.

And that is what the Ninevites do. They throw themselves upon the mercy of God, having a living hope in His sovereign grace. What reason did they have to hope that God would reverse the death sentence He had proclaimed? Keddie points out two reasons. First, the time limit of forty days implies that destruction will occur if there is no change, but opens up the possibility for reconsideration if repentance occurs. The very fact that God went to so much trouble to bring this message of judgment to Nineveh demonstrates His care and concern for the Ninevites. If there was no chance of reversing the judgment, why bother to send Jonah in the first place? Secondly, the example of Jonah was a wonderful testimony of God’s grace and mercy. If God would restore the wayward prophet, would He not also have mercy upon repentant sinners?

⁹The Lord is not slack concerning His promise, as some count slackness, but is longsuffering toward us, not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance (1 Peter 3:9).

God is patient and longsuffering with us. He gives everyone many, many, many opportunities to repent and trust in Jesus Christ. But His patience is not unlimited. There will come a day when no more chances to repent will be offered. If you are not a Christian, follow the example of the Ninevites and repent as soon as you can. You never know if you will have another chance.

4. God Relents (3:10)

¹⁰Then 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 (Jonah 3:10).

The living hope of the Ninevites was founded in the character of God. They knew from Jonah’s mission and from Jonah’s experience that the LORD was a God of mercy and grace. Verse 10 demonstrates the hope of the Ninevites was well placed, for God did spare them.

Of course, verse 10 brings up all sorts of questions. What does it mean when it says God “relents,” (or “repents” in some translations)? Did God change His mind? We usually use this type of language to imply a change of heart caused by error, sin, or circumstances outside our knowledge or control. However, none of these scenarios can apply to the perfect, holy, omniscient, omnipotent God. As Estelle puts it, verse 10 raises questions about “God’s immutability and ultimately, His sovereignty.”

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Because we are Bible-believing and God-fearing Christians, we must absolutely affirm the immutability of God – that is, His unchanging character (*cp.* Ps. 102:27; James 1:17).

⁶For I am the LORD, I do not change; therefore you are not consumed, O sons of Jacob (Malachi 3:6).

God is not fickle or capricious. His character does not change and His mind does not change. If He continually changed His mind, He would cease to be God. If He were indecisive or even had the possibility of making a wrong decision, He would not be God. And yet the Scripture occasionally describes God as regretting a decision or relenting from a decision. How can we reconcile these two seeming contradictory truths? Mackay puts it this way:

The Old Testament does not hesitate to affirm both that God is unchanging, and that He can and does alter His attitude towards people and His way of dealing with them. It is interesting to find both these truths stated in one chapter of Scripture (1 Sam. 15:11, 29). There is no ultimate inconsistency between the two modes of expression.

Our understanding of God and His actions are somewhat limited here by human vocabulary and means of expression. The Bible often uses *anthropomorphic* language to describe God's actions using human forms. For example: God brought Israel out of Egypt “with a strong *hand*, and with an outstretched *arm*” (Ps. 136:12; Jer. 32:21); in the Aaronic blessing, we ask that “the LORD make His *face* shine upon you” (Num. 6:25); God protects His people like “the apple of His *eye*” (Dt. 32:10; Zech. 2:8); and we live by “every word that proceeds from the *mouth* of the LORD” (Dt. 8:3). Now, we know that God is a Spirit and does not have a body as we do, and yet we still talk about God as if He had hands, arms, a face, a mouth, eyes, and so on. Because our ability to describe the LORD is limited by our human existence and vocabulary, we use these human forms to describe who our God is and what He does.

When Jonah 3:10 describes God “relenting” or “repenting,” in a similar fashion we are using *anthropopathic* language – we are ascribing human emotions or passions to God. We must be careful not to limit God to how humans behave when we relent or repent, because our course change is often due to human limitations – we didn't know all the facts, we couldn't control all the variables, or we made wrong decisions that had unforeseen consequences. None of these options apply to God. The Hebrew word used here does not imply that the alternate course of action was superior to the original plan. Both outcomes – destroying Nineveh in their sin and sparing Nineveh in God's mercy – are entirely consistent with God's character. Again, Mackay explains:

When God is said to change His mind, matters are viewed from our human perspective. It appears to us that there has been a change in God, but what has in fact changed is our human conduct. God is consistently against sin. There is no variation in His loathing of it, or in His determination to punish it. That is a constant feature of God's character.

Thus, it is best for us to understand that Jonah's preaching of judgment in Nineveh was conditional in character. If Nineveh were to continue in its sin, God would bring disaster upon them in forty days. However, if Nineveh were to repent of their sin and turn from it, God would spare them. This principle of conditional judgment is thoroughly described by Jeremiah:

⁷The instant I speak concerning a nation and concerning a kingdom, to pluck up, to pull down, and to destroy it, ⁸if that nation against whom I have spoken turns from its evil, I will relent of the disaster that I thought to bring upon it. ⁹And the instant I speak

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concerning a nation and concerning a kingdom, to build and to plant it, ¹⁰if it does evil in My sight so that it does not obey My voice, then I will relent concerning the good with which I said I would benefit it (Jeremiah 18:7-10).

Conclusion

What an amazing God we have! Truly He keeps “mercy for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin” (Ex. 34:7a). Jonah experienced the forgiveness of God, and so did the Ninevites of Jonah’s generation. The sailors in chapter 1 were spared from the wrath of God’s storm, and the city of Nineveh was spared from the wrath of God’s judgment.

However wonderful the transformation of Nineveh was, it was unfortunately short-lived. Just like the Israelites who constantly disobeyed God’s law and were disciplined and judged for their sin, the Biblical record indicates that the repentance of Nineveh did not bear lasting fruit beyond Jonah’s generation. If the theme of Jonah can be summarized as “Repent, Nineveh, Repent!,” then the theme of Nahum, written approximately 100 years later, is simply “Die, Nineveh, Die!” The sin of cruelty and violence was not stamped out of the Assyrian nation, and as a result, God ultimately judged and condemned them. Nineveh was destroyed by the Babylonian army in 612 BC and was wiped off the face of the earth. God by no means cleared the guilty (Ex. 34:7b).

The fate of Nineveh is thus a reminder to us to continue steadfastly in our faith. Paul exhorts us to “work out your own salvation with fear and trembling” (Phil. 2:13). Paul does not mean that we can earn our salvation by our own works, but rather that we should demonstrate the truth of our salvation by living consistently with God’s revealed word. A vine is known by its fruit; what kind of vine are you? Do you bear the fruit of the Spirit, or are you continuing to walk in the works of the old man?

The fate of Nineveh also reminds us that salvation is not a trait that we can pass on to our children by natural generation. Although we do pass on our sin nature to our offspring, salvation comes only from God. Therefore, we should earnestly pray for our children, that the grace and mercy God extended to Jonah, to the sailors, and to Nineveh would also be granted to them. We need to remain faithful to pray for our children, to teach them the Scriptures, to model Christian behavior in front of them, and to encourage them in spiritual truth. If we fail to apply these means of grace to our children, how will they learn to do so with their children? As the story of Nineveh indicates, it only takes a generation or two to go from widespread conversion to rampant apostasy.

We must be clear in our own minds and also teach our children the reason that God can accept our repentance in the first place. Our repentance has been made possible because God Himself bore the punishment for our sins. Jesus took the consequences of our sins upon Himself when He died on the cross. The reason that Nineveh was not destroyed in forty days was because Jesus bore that wrath Himself. The reason Jonah got a second chance was because Jesus accepted the consequences of the prophet’s sin. The reason that we can come to God in faith and be declared “not guilty” is because Jesus took the guilt on Himself. Not only did Jesus take our punishment, but He also applies His righteousness to us. That is why God can accept our repentance. Because of Jesus. It is all because of Jesus. Amen.

Next week: Lesson 6 – Jonah’s Complaint – Jonah 4:1-11

Close in Prayer.