

PP Jonah: God's Relentless Grace-Part 9

Jonah 3:1-3a

12/5-6/2015

Not all God's servants have had exemplary, and faithful lives
 Cyprian was a wealthy, educated influential man who lived in Carthage during the 3rd century
 When he became a Christian he gave away a significant portion of his wealth to the poor and he
 was ordained to the clergy, and years later elected Bishop of Carthage
 But Roman persecution of Christians spread under Emperor Decius, heading toward Carthage
 due to its Christian influence in the world
 Christian clergy were being rounded up and compelled to give allegiance to the Emperor and
 made to sacrifice to the Roman gods and refusal brought public execution
 When the edict was pronounced in Carthage, however, Cyprian had fled in fear causing him to
 lose the influence that he had gained as he preached and guided the poor in that city
 He continued to function as the Bishop of Carthage but was dogged by accusations of weakness
 He eventually returned to the city of Carthage and it wasn't long before persecution arrived again
 in 256 AD, known as the Valerian Persecutions
 This time Cyprian stayed there, and he was soon summoned before the Roman Proconsul
 He boldly proclaimed his faith, and was exiled where he continued to preach and minister
 A year later, he went back to Carthage when a new edict required execution instead of exile
 He refused to deny the faith, and was sentenced to be decapitated by sword, and he responded
 with these words, *'Thanks be to God!'*
 They took him to an open place in the city, where he removed his own clothes, knelt down and
 prayed for Carthage, his persecutors and himself
 He blindfolded himself, bent his neck before the sword, a moment later opened his eyes in glory

We serve the God of second chances, and it is what we find our prophet Jonah about to receive
 He was ***'the prophet'*** of the Lord, a hero in Israel and that status can bring a person to the place
 where they believe they can choose what assignments they take from God
 Jonah refused to go to Nineveh and preach against them, handing in his resignation letter, and
 boards a ship to flee to Tarshish, 2500 miles away in the opposite direction
 But God pursues his rebellious prophet, sending him to the bottom of the sea into a fish's belly
 For three days and nights Jonah is in there, until he finally began to surrender to God, admitting
 in **2:9, *"Salvation belongs to the LORD."***
 Do you recall the reason why Jonah handed in his resignation letter?
 He didn't want God to forgive the Assyrian people, He wanted God to destroy Israel's enemies
 Yet, from the belly of that great fish, he comes to the place where he admits that God has the
 right to save whoever He wants, and only He can save anyone
 Upon this admission, God moves the fish to vomit him onto the ***'dry land'***
'Dry land', in the great flood, in the division of the Red Sea, both God's salvation and new
 beginnings
 For Jonah, it signals the end of his great trial and the beginning of a second chance

PP 1-God's Grace Extended

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

When is the last time you boasted about God's love and grace?

PP *"let him who boasts boast in this, that he understands and knows me, that I am the LORD who practices steadfast love, justice, and righteousness in the earth. For in these things I delight, declares the LORD."* **Jeremiah 9:24**

Boasting in the Lord means to brag on Him and what He has done for you
Christian, we ought to brag, boast, and be thankful that God is the God of second chances
Where would we be if God did not give us 2nd, 3rd, or 4th chances to obey?
He has demonstrated this to Israel all throughout her history and will in her future

PP One person wrote: *"The second chance is so uniform a feature of Israel's history that there can be no question of the propriety of calling Israel the people of the second chance"*

Thomas M. Seller

Abraham who twice gets in trouble because he fearfully lied that his wife was only his sister
Moses who in a fit of rage smashed the first stone tablets of the law
Israel on the edge of the Promised Land who rebelled in unbelief and didn't crossover into it
Israel who wanted to be like the other nations and chose a poor king to rule them
David who was given that kingdom but used his power for adultery and murder
Rahab the prostitute who was given a new life
Peter who lied and abandoned Christ in His hour of greatest need, given another chance to serve
The thief on the cross, the promiscuous woman of the city, and the examples go on and on
And we are no different than any of them, we have all received mercy after mercy from God

Have you ever been in need of a second chance?

Maybe once again, gambled yourself back into bondage, or your temper caused what seems an insurmountable strain on a relationship

Or been beaten by regret and guilt that you stumbled in that sin for the thousandth time?

Arrived at the marriage altar having given away your purity in a regretful moment of passion
We all find ourselves in need of second chances, and God freely offers them to His humble saints
He will not discard you, He will not throw you away, He hasn't lost His purpose for your life,
God does not give up on His children, and with Jonah He sent His Word to Him again: *"the word of the LORD came to Jonah the second time"*

There is a wonderful truth in this verse: The Word of the Lord *came to Jonah*

God didn't wait until Jonah came to Him, He went to Jonah

This is incredibly contrary to the ancient custom of a Master and his servant

The master never went to the servant, the servant had to go to the master

Yet, throughout the bible, and throughout history, God is the one Who goes

PP *"For God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through Him."* **John 3:17**

It is now, in this season when we celebrate the birth of Jesus Christ, that we think most vividly on this point of Christ coming to us

PP *"And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth."* **John 1:14**

The Word of the Lord came to Jonah, and the Word came to earth, wrapped in flesh in the person of Jesus Christ

The Word in Jonah's day, is the incarnated Word we celebrate on December 25th

And this is the great lesson we learn in this verse...God's Word is personal!

God comes to us and speaks to us...today as well as in Jonah's day

PP 2-God's Word Demonstrated

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

The most attacked elements of Christianity are Jesus the Son of God, and the Word of God
One of the many ways it is attacked is through the effort of reducing its exclusive authority
Head into Barnes and Noble, or the Moravian Bookstore, and you will see a vast variety of
books covering religion, spirituality, and philosophy which speak of God
Many people then conclude that since these writings reflect insights from different cultures, it
would be arrogant for anyone to claim that their religious views are correct and others'
are wrong

Religion, they claim, is a private matter and each of us has to find our own way
And the popular analogy used is three blind men who encounter an elephant for the first time
One at a time, they touch the elephant; one touched its leg, another its tail, the third its trunk
They each exclaimed '*Now I know, I've learned what an elephant is like*' and they sat down to
discuss what they now believed an elephant looked like

The one who touched its tail went first and said an elephant was like a straw fan swinging back
and forth to give a breeze, except it is wispy in the middle

The one who touched its leg said, '*No, an elephant is a strong, sturdy tree without branches*'
But the third, who touched its trunk said, '*You're both wrong, an elephant is like a snake, long,
strong and round*'

Back and forth they argued until the point of the story emerges: How can anyone really know
until he has learned all there is?

Or, from the critics of Christianity, *How can you talk of Christianity as the only way to heaven?*
*You're only seeing it from one vantage point...the same as a Muslim, or Hindu or
Mormon*

Therefore, all religions are equally valid, and no one of them has exclusive authority over others

But what if the elephant talked, and explained what He was like to the blind men?

What if it wasn't really about the blind men trying to figure out what an elephant was like, but
the elephant explaining to the blind men what he was like?

And this is precisely what the scriptures claim: God Himself has spoken and revealed Who He is
**PP "Long ago, at many times and in many ways, God spoke to our fathers by the prophets, but
in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed the heir of all things,
through whom also he created the world." Hebrews 1:1-2**

When you read the Scriptures, you are reading the Words of God

God's purpose in giving us the bible is not to list a thousand rules

It is to know Him, to reveal Who He is, and how we can have a relationship with Him

To read the bible, is to read God's message to you, and when you hear the bible spoken, it is to
hear the voice of God

When I read a book off the shelf of a bookstore, I retain the right to disagree with the author

But when I read the bible, to disagree with the scriptures is to disagree with God

I may not like all the bible says, or be comfortable with it, but He is God, I am not

I place myself under its authority

We don't critique the scriptures, we invite the scriptures to critique me

Yet Jonah, when the Word of came to him in chapter one, rejected it

The Word comes to him again her in chapter 3, and now we see a different response: ***"So Jonah arose and went to Nineveh, according to the word of the LORD."*** 3:3a

Do you see the purpose of the storm, and the great fish?

To bring Jonah to the place where he yielded his heart to God's Word, and obedience

Notice what God didn't tell Jonah in 3:2, ***"call out against it the message that I tell you."***

He didn't yet give Jonah the message that he was to preach

God has done this throughout history with His people

PP ***"Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen."***
Hebrews 11:1

PP ***"By faith Abraham obeyed when he was called to go out to a place that he was to receive as an inheritance. And he went out, not knowing where he was going."***

Hebrews 11:8

PP ***"Faith and obedience are bound up in the same bundle. He who obeys God, trusts God; and he who trusts God, obeys God."*** Charles Spurgeon

Kingdom work is done by faith

PP If you can do God's assignments in your own power then it wasn't from God

PP ***"Not by might, nor by power, but by my Spirit, says the LORD of hosts."*** Zechariah 4:6

PP ***"God's work done God's way will never lack God's supply"*** Hudson Taylor

PP 3-God's Servant Recommissioned

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

Jonah is back on mission

The storm, the distress inside the fish, they began a transformation in Jonah's heart

And this is where we return again to what we need to understand about the roots of sin

The worst part of sin is not doing what we shouldn't or not doing what we should

There is a deeper problem, and it resides in each and every person

There is a dissatisfaction with God that results in a rebellion to Him

PP All sin is a God-rebellion rooted in dissatisfaction that looks to satisfy with a god-substitute
The gospel aims its sights at the root of rebellion, and redeems us, rescues us by releasing us
from the slavery to sin and giving us life and freedom

This is what God is up to, this is rescue plan of redemption, and our mission is to share to
everyone around us that God can save them too

PP ***"Have I any pleasure in the death of the wicked, declares the Lord GOD, and not rather that he should turn from his way and live?"*** Ezekiel 18:23

PP (Chart from two weeks ago) Remember from two weeks ago: the story of the bible is seen in
4 parts: Creation...Fall...Redemption...Restoration

And the Christian life snaps into its clearest, most joyful purpose when we live on mission

The Word of God came to Jonah in chapter 1 telling him to go to Nineveh and he refused

The roots of rebellion, his dissatisfaction in the plan and mercy of God to the Assyrians, they had to be pulled out of him, and the trials and difficulty began to do just that
 And by the time Jonah landed on *'dry land'*, he was ready to go to Nineveh
 Jonah represents Israel, and wherever the Jewish people were, even in bondage, their mission remained the same

PP *"But seek the welfare of the city where I have sent you into exile, and pray to the LORD on its behalf, for in its welfare you will find your welfare."* **Jeremiah 29:7**

Christian, we have this same mission, and many of us are living out of obedience to it
 And I would invite you to honestly consider why that is so
 Here is my conclusion...and it is not the popularly given one of fear...it is apathy
 We don't care enough to tell people how to be saved from eternal destruction and given life
 It truly boils down to apathy for almost every Christian who is living off mission

Can you see that in your heart?

If so, feel the Holy Spirit convict you and confess this and repent and obey
 If that is you, remember that God is the God of second chances, the God of relentless grace
 And what He is about to do for the city of Nineveh is unlike any revival that has ever occurred

Amen

Pray