

## **Jonah: Chapter 3**

### **Summertime Monday Night Bible Study (RAW)**

#### **Introduction:**

Welcome back to our Monday Night Bible Study! Thank you for your amazing questions last week and by email this week. If you would like the notes and are not yet receiving them, please email me at [mark@rockymountchurch.com](mailto:mark@rockymountchurch.com) and I will be happy to add you to the email list. One of the questions I received by email last week will be answered during the teaching tonight, and I look forward to that part of our conversation!

Let's pray and dive right into God's Word!

#### **Jonah 3:1**

If there was a thought in Jonah's mind that the LORD's call or Word would change, wow, was he disappointed. God's plans are always sure, and His sovereignty is unyielding and unchanging.

- God's call may be found in numerous places in Scripture, to Abraham (Genesis 12:1-3), "The LORD said to Abram: 'Go from your land, your relatives, and your father's house to the land that I will show you. I will make you into a great nation, I will bless you, I will make your name great, and you will be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, I will curse anyone who treats you with contempt, and all the peoples on earth will be blessed through you;'" to Moses, (Exodus 3:10), "... 'therefore, go, I am sending you to Pharaoh so that you may lead my people, the Israelites, out of Egypt;'" to Gideon (Judges 6:14): The LORD turned to him and

said, ‘Go in the strength you have and deliver Israel from the grasp of Midian. I am sending you!’” to Elisha (1 Kings 19:19); to Isaiah (Isaiah 6:8); to Jeremiah (Jeremiah 1:4-5); to Ananias and to Saul/Paul (Acts 9:15-16); and to Peter (Acts 10:22-48), among *many* others in the Bible. When the LORD determines His name will be taught, it *will* be taught!

- All these people were obedient, even if some were originally reluctant. However, one who was *not* reluctant and who is one of my favorite examples of how we *should* respond to God is Philip (Acts 8:4-25), who obeyed God’s call and went to the Samaritans to preach. Philip led a fantastic revival in Samaria, so much so that Peter and John went to help after they heard of what God was doing there. And then *this* happened: “An angel of the Lord spoke to Philip, ‘Get up and go south to the road that that goes down from Jerusalem to Gaza.’ (This is the desert road).” So, Philip *immediately* got up and went – just as he was instructed. Did he go to preach another great revival? No, he went to a single man – the Ethiopian eunuch.
  - There are several central truths in this passage:
    - 1) God loves the many and He also loves the one.
    - 2) Faithfulness to God is always rewarded: many people believe this eunuch spread the Word in Ethiopia, but even if he didn’t, the Lord was determined to save *him*.
    - 3) This is a good example of why we are baptized – to show that we have repented of our sin, have accepted Jesus’s redeeming acts of crucifixion and resurrection, and are following in the same baptismal act of obedience as did our Savior.

4) Philip was caught away by the Lord to go to his next assignment after he taught the eunuch: only *God* truly knows how long He desires our ministry journeys to be.

- In our central passage tonight, God said the same message to Jonah that He had previously said: “Get up! Go to the great city of Ninevah and preach the message that I tell you.” Whether this “great city” was referencing its size or whether it was referencing the number of people God desired to save, or both, Jonah obviously needed three days to preach throughout the city... and His message was to be what *God* commanded.

### **Jonah 3:2**

Jonah was finally obedient, and he went to the Ninevites to preach *God's* message. How important this is! If I had to say one thing to my fellow pastors all over the world today, this would be it: preach *God's* message, *not* your own! There are far too many pastors in far too many churches who are more concerned about entertaining church *attenders* than they are about unapologetically preaching the Word of God to church members. This isn't as hard as we make it. We are to preach the “...good news of great joy that will be for all the people” (Luke 2:10b). Our *first* responsibility is always to preach *Jesus*.

- Peter and the Apostles understood this: “... We must obey God rather than people. The God of our ancestors raised up Jesus, whom you had murdered by hanging him on a tree. God exalted this man to his right hand as ruler and Savior to give repentance to Israel and forgiveness of sins. We are witnesses of these things, and so is the Holy Spirit whom God has given to those who obey him” (Acts 5:29-32).
- The Holy Spirit is the One responsible for giving Pastors the messages we preach. However, it is indeed difficult to preach what

we are not living; thus, the Pastor *must* be living a holy life *empowered* by the *Holy Spirit* to offer effective messages. John and Charles Wesley knew this as part of what they called the second work of grace – they were *holiness* pastors, as was Dwight L. Moody who also taught that the power for service, for preaching, was from and through the Spirit.

- Moody testified of this great move of the Spirit in his own life: “One day, in the city of New York – oh, what a day – I cannot describe it, I seldom refer to it; it is almost too sacred an experience to name...I can only say that God revealed Himself to me, and I had such an experience of His love that I had to ask Him to stay His hand. I went to preaching again. The sermons were not different. I did not present any new truths, and yet hundreds were converted. I would not now be placed back where I was before that blessed experience if you would give me all the world...”
- This overflowing baptism of the Spirit is available not only to the Pastor who preaches the Word, but *also* to the obedient Christian who hears and lives the Word. Notes Mark McLean, “The Holy Spirit can and will help every believer to properly interpret and understand the Word of God and His continuing work in this world...The Holy Spirit will lead us into all truth as we *carefully* read and study the Bible under His guidance.”
- We are to be sanctified by the Spirit; that is, set apart. We are forgiven at salvation, and then we are to be set apart from sin as we live in the sanctifying process of the Holy Spirit, and we are to look forward to the glorification from which our salvation is fully realized in Jesus Christ.

Fellow Pastors, if you don't know what to preach, preach Christ crucified, buried, and resurrected (see 1 Corinthians 1:20-25, 1:18; 1

Timothy 1:15; Romans 5:6; Luke 24:45, Ephesians 1:7-10), and faithfully preach the Word of God as the Holy Spirit guides you!

- Here in our account tonight, Jonah was likewise commanded to preach the Word of God: The LORD said, “Preach the message I tell you.”

### **Jonah 3:3**

We see here in Verse Three that Jonah finally chooses to follow the will of God to go to Ninevah.

Last week, I mentioned that although God allows humans the freedom to choose regarding whether to follow His will, He already knows what choices we will make. This is a biblical and theological understanding known as God’s “omniscience.” The prefix of “omniscience” is “omni” (*all*) and the suffix is “science” (Latin root: *knowledge*).

There are numerous verses which speak to God’s all-knowing nature:

- Joshua 22:22a says it plainly: “The Mighty One, God, The LORD! The Mighty One, God, The LORD! He knows and may Israel also know...”
- Job also has much to say about God’s omniscience:
  - 26:6 says, “Sheol is naked before God, and Abaddon has no covering,”
  - 28:23 reminds us too, “But God understands the way to wisdom, and he knows its location.”
  - 31:4 emphatically states: “Does he not see my ways and number all my steps?”
  - 34:21’s well-known words say, “For his eyes watch over a man’s ways, and he observes all his steps.
- The Psalmist, David, beautifully notes, “LORD, you have searched me and known me. You know when I sit down and when I stand

up; you understand my thoughts from far away. You observe my travels and my rest; you are aware of all my ways. Before a word is on my tongue, you know all about it, LORD” (Psalm 139:1-4).

- Similarly, many other verses, including Psalm 147:5, Proverbs 15:11, Isaiah 40:26, Ezekiel 37:3, Amos 4:14, 2 Corinthians 12:2, Hebrews 4:13, and 1 John 3:20 speak to God’s all-knowing mind.
- Likewise, God the Son was ascribed this understanding as we know from numerous New Testament verses (Matthew 12:25 and 22:18; Mark 2:8, 5:30, and 11:2; Luke 5:6, 8:46, 19:30, and 22:10; John 2:24, 6:6, 13:3, 16:30, 19:2 and 21:17; Acts 1:24; Revelation 3:1, 3:8, and 3:14). Notes John 2:24, “Jesus, however, would not entrust himself to them, since he knew them all.” Jesus knows us!
- Although there are some theologians known as “open theists” who believe God limits His all-knowing ability and therefore may not know what we will choose in the future, this thinking is *not* consistent with the overwhelming teachings of Scripture.

In addition to God’s omniscience, He is also omnipresent; that is, He is present everywhere: past, current, and future. He is outside of time because time cannot hold Him – He is eternal, has always been, and will always be (see Psalm 139:7-10; Genesis 16:13, among numerous other verses indicating the “everywhere presence” of God).

Finally, regarding the attributes of God found in Verse Three, we see that God is omnipotent as well; that is, God is all-powerful (Matthew 19:26). We see this in His Person, His Creation, His will, and in His love. Can God be limited? Well, only as He allows and as is His nature.

- For example, God does not force a person to become a Christian, but He pre-knows who will accept grace unto salvation.
- Additionally, regarding His nature, there are things that God cannot do: He cannot lie; He cannot sin; He cannot change His own nature; He cannot deal with anyone unjustly; and He cannot create laws outside of His own righteousness or holiness (Towns).

In Jonah's response in Verses One through Three, we see, then, that an all-knowing, all-powerful, everywhere-present, just God has determined that His message will be delivered to the Ninevites. Jonah had the choice to choose differently, but God knew the choice that Jonah would eventually make.

- If Jonah *had* chosen differently, could God have chosen someone else to go to the Ninevites? Yes, absolutely. Would God have been unjust if He had chosen not to send someone to the Ninevites? Absolutely not. God sent the prophet to the Ninevites out of His love for these abhorrent, bloody, idolatrous people. How great is His love! How great is His love for all of us!

### **Jonah 3:4**

We see here that Jonah's message was simple and direct: "In forty days Nineveh will be demolished!"

- Some scholars read into this that since the text says Jonah proclaimed this message "on the first day" of his three-day walk that he subsequently did not say anything on the second and third days. I am not sure I can get there in this thinking, but I can appreciate why scholars some note Jonah's half-heartedness and arrive at this conclusion.

- In any case, the message we know for sure was that the city was set to be destroyed by God in forty days.
  - We also know that the number “forty” often indicates a “period of testing or judgment” in Scripture, including Jesus’s forty days of being tested “by the devil” (Luke 4:2) and the testing of the Holy Spirit’s patience by the Israelites in the desert: ultimately only Joshua and Caleb saw the Promised Land because of their unbelief, complaints, fear, and on several occasions, idolatry (see also Psalm 95:7-11; Exodus 16:2-3, 17:7; 24:12-18, 32:1-14; Numbers 20:2-3 regarding testing or judgment in Scripture).
- Perhaps the most famous Old Testament Scripture regarding a forty-day period, however, is the account of the flood which ended all human life on Earth except for Noah and his family (Genesis 7:11-24). This horrific time ultimately ended with a covenant from God and the establishment of the rainbow of His eternal promise.

Here, in the Book of Jonah, we see again the LORD’s testing and judgment timeline: He would destroy this great city in forty days.

### **Jonah 3:5**

We see here the people’s response – they *believed* God.

- It is fascinating and overpowering to understand just how thoroughly the Ninevites responded to the call of God – the Word says that they repented from the least to the great. They did not wait for an edict from their earthly king: they responded to the voice, through Jonah, of the True King: God.
- The Ninevites did two things:

- 1) First, they fasted as a Nation (see also 1 Kings 21:9; 2 Chronicles 20:3; Ezra 8:21; Esther 4:16; Jeremiah 36:9; Joel 2:15). Their fasting, in this sense, was a fast of repentance – it was a response to the fury of a Holy God whom they had greatly offended with their horrible lifestyles and with their violent nature (Jonah 1:2). We know there are other reasons for fasting in addition to repentance including a consecration of oneself to Christ, to make important decisions, and to focus on God rather than the world (Acts 13:2, 14:23; Luke 2:37, 5:33), but in this case, the Ninevites were fasting in repentance (it is still quite appropriate to fast today!).
- 2) Second, the Ninevites covered themselves in sackcloth. Sackcloth was a rough, woolen garment generally worn while sitting on ashes, a custom of the time indicating repentance and/or mourning.
- There are many things we can learn from Verse Five, but I believe two are extraordinarily obvious:
  - 1) The Holy Spirit was obviously at work here. The Word of God is clear – we respond to God because the Holy Spirit draws us to Him. John 16:8 says, “When he comes, he will convict the world about sin, righteousness, and judgment.” We know that the Spirit is eternal – He is an equal Person in the Godhead – and that He has always been the Source of conviction (conviction: two Latin words meaning: *cause to see*). The Spirit helps us to see that we are in sin.
    - Christians, we are empowered to live holy, sanctified lives because The Spirit empowers us to do so!
    - In the Old Testament, the word for The Spirit (*ruah*) is quite similar to the word in the New Testament (*pneuma*): and associates the words “breath” and

“wind,” words describing this incredible expression of God’s hand, His Word, and His wisdom (Psalm 19:1, 102:25, 33:6, 147:15 & 18; Exodus 28:3; 1 Kings 3;28; Job 32:8). We also see that Jesus exemplifies the works of the Spirit (Isaiah 11:1-2; Revelation 1:4-5) and that we should as well (Galatians 22-23). As Richard Rolle said, “But even here and now, whenever the heart begins to burn with a desire for God, she is made able to receive the uncreated light and, inspired and fulfilled by the gifts of the Holy Ghost [the Holy Spirit], she tastes the joys of heaven. She transcends all visible things and is raised to the sweetness of eternal life.”

- Here in Jonah, the Ninevites – I am wholly convinced – felt the call of the Spirit when they heard the words of Jonah. It is *only* the Spirit who can call us.
- 2) The second thing we can learn from Verse Five is that the Word of God never goes out void. To hear the Word is to hear the Spirit. To obey the Word is to obey God. It *is* that simple.
  - When the people of Nineveh “believed God,” they believed His Word. The Word of God *always* convicts those who listen, because the Word of God carries the message of God to *all* those who *listen* (Revelation 2:7, 11,17, 29; 3:6, 13, 22; 22:7).
  - How about you, Church? When you read God’s Word, do you obey it? When you hear the Spirit and know His will, do you follow it? This was the choice the Ninevites faced, and we know from Jesus’s own words that the Ninevites were sincere: “The men of Nineveh will stand up at the judgment with this generation and condemn it, because they repented at Jonah’s preaching;

and look – something greater than Jonah is here”  
(Matthew 12:41: see also Luke 11:31).

### **Jonah 3:6-9**

We see here the most amazing and humble of responses: the Ninevite king shed his royal robe, which I believe was an incredible act of contrition – he rightly acknowledged God as the Greater King, and he humbled himself accordingly. Then he issued a command to his entire kingdom, who had notably already begun their own acts of repentance and contrition, and the people and the animals suffered under three days of “miserable bellowing” which reached the ears of God. Just as the people’s “evil [had] come up before [God] (Jonah 1:1), so too did their cries of repentance, their acts of repentance, and their very hearts.

- This is the Way for us too. We are to repent – to do a 180-degree turn in our walk, in our ways, in our thinking. Our outward walk should be an indicator of our inward change: people should be able to tell when we have become true disciples of Christ. As Dallas Willard once so ably said, “There is nothing wrong with the church that discipleship will not cure. Nothing. When you find problems in the church – and this is constantly discussed over and over in the best periodicals, secular and sacred – it is always a lack of discipleship that led to it.”
- The Ninevite people genuinely repented.
  - At least for a time, according to Jesus Himself, they were in right relationship with Him. Right relationship with God *always* leads to true discipleship.

### **Jonah 3:10**

Just *look* at God’s response! Hallelujah – God responds to repentance! We see throughout the Scriptures that God’s conditional responses to us

are often the result of our responses to Him: HE is – He *must* be – the standard by which we live (1 Kings 8:1-9; Jeremiah 18:8-10). We do not do this on our own – we do this in Christ. As the Great Awakening missionary Charles Finney said about his own conversion, “Just at this point the whole question of Gospel salvation opened to my mind in a manner most marvelous to me at the time. I think I then saw, as clearly as I ever have in my life, the reality and fullness of the atonement of Christ. I saw that his work was a finished work; and that instead of having, or need, any righteousness of my own to recommend me to God, I had to submit myself to the righteousness of God through Christ...Salvation, instead of being a thing to be wrought out, by my own works, was a thing to be found entirely in the Lord Jesus Christ, who presented himself before me as my God and my Savior.”

Just like Finney, we are to depend – totally – on Christ for our salvation, my friends. Then we are to respond by living this great life of holiness. Be holy as God is holy, we know the Word says.

### **Application**

Chapter Three of Jonah is such a fascinating chapter in God’s Word. We see the all-knowing attributes of a loving, holy, and just God; the merits of genuine repentance; and the kind response of the LORD. We see what it means to respond to the Spirit and to the Word. We see that genuine repentance leads to genuine discipleship. Are you following Him tonight, my friends.

Pray with me.

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