

Jonah - Speaking of Grace

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 13 June 2010

Preacher: Jonny Grant

[0 : 00] Jonah chapter 3, page 928, as we follow in our studies there, so we can look that up.

So Jonah chapter 3, Jonah goes to Nineveh. Then the word of the Lord came to Jonah a second time. Go to the great city of Nineveh and proclaim to it the message I give you. Jonah obeyed the word of the Lord and went to Nineveh.

How Nineveh was a very important city. A visit required three days. On the first day, Jonah started into the city. He proclaimed, 40 more days and Nineveh will be overturned.

The Ninevites believed God. They declared a fast and all of them, from the greatest to the least, put on sackcloth. When the news reached the king of Nineveh, he rose from his throne, took off his royal rugs, covered himself with sackcloth and sat down in the dust.

Then he issued a proclamation in Nineveh. By the decree of the king and his nobles, do not let any man or beast, herd or flock, taste anything. Do not let them eat or drink.

[1 : 10] But let man and beast be covered with sackcloth. Let everyone call urgently on God. Let them give up their evil ways and their violence. Who knows? God may yet relent and with compassion turn from his fierce anger, so that we will not perish.

When God saw what they did and how they turned from their evil ways, he had compassion and did not bring upon them the destruction he had threatened. Thank you. Thank you. Second Peter, Chapter 3, Verses 3 to 10.

2 Peter 3, verses 3-10 First of all, you must understand that in the last days scoffers will come, scoffing and following their own evil desires.

They will say, where is this coming he promised? Ever since our fathers died, everything goes on as it has since the beginning of creation. But they deliberately forget that long ago, by God's word, the heavens existed and the earth was formed out of water and by water.

By these waters also, the world of that time was deluged and destroyed. By the same word, the present heavens and earth are reserved for fire, being kept for the day of judgment and destruction of ungodly men.

[2 : 50] But do not forget this one thing, dear friends. With the Lord a day is like a thousand years, and a thousand years are like a day. The Lord is not slow in keeping his promise, as some understand slowness.

He is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance. But the day of the Lord will come like a thief. The heavens will disappear with a roar.

The elements will be destroyed by fire. And the earth and everything in it will be laid bare. Thanks, Harry, and thanks, Graham.

Keep it open, please, a tune of three. That's the chapter we're going to be focusing on. We've been taking a chapter each Sunday.

The first one we were looking at was Jonah running from grace. Then the second one was about submitting to grace. And then today we look at speaking of God's grace.

[4 : 14] So let's just pray and we'll ask for his help as we look at this together. Father, we ask that you would be generous to us by giving to us your Holy Spirit.

that we may be generous. That we may understand the words that you have written and recorded for us. That we may be able to see how it applies to our lives.

We ask that you would open up our minds to understand. that it would be a word that changes us and transforms us, giving us a greater appreciation and understanding of your grace so that we may be able to speak your grace to those around us.

So please help us as we do this together. In Jesus' name, amen. Well, a very funny incident happened on BBC News 24 not too long ago.

A man by the name of Guy Goma arrived at the BBC offices to attend for an interview for a job. But present in the same building and unknown to him was another man with exactly the same name who was to be interviewed on BBC News about the computer company Apple.

[5 : 59] So the first Alan, who was there for the job interview, was left in this waiting area when the next thing he heard over the speaker system was his name being called.

Well, you can guess what happened. He ended up in the news studio where he was mic'd up and all his makeup put on and there he sat on live TV being asked his views about some internal debate with the Apple computers, of which he knew absolutely nothing about.

And the most amusing thing that happened was he actually tried to answer the questions when it was quite clear. He knew nothing about the subject. The point is, you've got to know your subject before you can speak about it.

There's no use in bluffing. Well, Jonah was a prophet called by God to speak on his behalf to the people of Nineveh. His subject, God's grace in judgment, of which it seems Jonah knows nothing about.

In chapter 1, verse 2, we're told that he was told to go and preach to Nineveh because of its wickedness. Verse 3, but Jonah ran away from the Lord.

[7 : 24] And we ask the question, well, why did Jonah run away? And the answer comes in chapter 4, verse 2, where he prays to the Lord, O Lord, is this not what I said when I was still at home?

That is why I was so quick to flee to Tarshish. I knew that you are a gracious and compassionate God, slow to anger, abounding in love.

I knew you are a God who relents from sending calamity. Jonah was quite happy to speak against the city. His problem was, he knew there was a good chance his God was going to forgive this city and not bring about his promised judgment.

It seems that Jonah can't handle this God of grace because he himself hasn't come to understand grace. Before Jonah can speak about grace, he's got to learn it for himself.

And that's what happened in chapter 2, where Jonah was swallowed up by the big fish. And inside the belly of the big fish, in the storm and all that happened, he learns and experiences God's intervening grace for himself.

[8 : 43] And in the midst of all of that darkness, he comes to grasp a little bit more. And in chapter 3, he continues to learn.

Because in chapter 3, God continues to speak his grace. He speaks his grace to Jonah. He speaks his grace to Nineveh. And then surprisingly, God even speaks his grace to himself.

So let's have a look at those in order. First, God speaks his grace to Jonah. Chapter 3, verse 1.

Then the word of the Lord came to Jonah a second time.

Go to that great city of Nineveh and proclaim to it the message I give you. Jonah obeyed the word of the Lord and went to Nineveh.

Now these first few verses are almost identical to the opening verses of chapter 1. Except for there's one difference. This time Jonah did not disobey.

[9 : 48] But he obeyed. Literally, in chapter 1, verse 3, it says, Jonah arose and fled. And in chapter 3, verse 3, it says, Jonah arose and went.

So what caused this change in Jonah's heart? Was he afraid that God was going to send another big fish? Maybe a flying fish this time and swallow him up?

Well, I'm quite sure he didn't want to go back inside the belly of the fish again. But I think his motivation to obey was because of God's grace in his life.

Look at verse 1 again of chapter 3. It says, The word of the Lord came to Jonah a second time. God is giving Jonah a fresh start and a new beginning.

God had every right to reject Jonah. But he doesn't give up on his people. He perseveres with us. He's patient and he's long-suffering.

[10 : 49] It would have been so easy to give up on Jonah and go off and try and get another prophet and say, Well, no, sorry Jonah. I've employed somebody else. If you can't be bothered with me, then I can't be bothered with you.

But we're introduced to a God who is a God of second chances. He perseveres. He doesn't give up. Now what's our experience or what's our response when we experience God's grace in our life?

Well, the response should be one of obedience, just like it was for Jonah. In fact, this is what God demands of us. He doesn't persevere with us so that we can go off and just disobey and live

however we want to.

No, God shows his grace in our lives so that we will obey him, so that we will follow him. I remember learning something of grace from my father.

In his kindness as a younger person, he allowed me to drive his car to go where I wanted to when he wasn't using it. Recklessly, however, I managed to crash his car.

[12:08] But rather than come and say to me, you're never going to drive this car again, which is what I deserve, he gave the car back to me and said, you can use it again.

He never said these words, but this act of grace demanded of me that I drive responsibly, not recklessly.

Although no words were said, my father's forgiveness demanded a certain kind of behaviour from me. Now Jonah wrote his life off.

But God showed forgiveness so that Jonah would go and obey and do what he called him to do. And this is the kind of God that we have.

This is the God who deals with us. He is persevering. He doesn't give up on us. He is the God of second chances. And if we stop and reflect, he is the God of third chances and fourth chances and however many more chances.

[13:16] He gives us a new beginning. He gives us a fresh start so that we will learn to obey him and do what he calls us to do.

So God speaks grace into Jonah's life. But he also speaks grace into Nineveh's life. The message that Jonah was to speak has not changed.

Verse 2, he says, go to that great city of Nineveh and proclaim the message I give you. Now that wasn't going to be easy for Jonah. Nineveh was one of the cities of the great Assyrian Empire. It was the superpower of the day. All the surrounding nations lived in fear of Assyria. They lived in fear of its king and they did whatever the king asked.

So to go and tell this city that God is going to judge you, well that is going to be hard. But yet Jonah, motivated by grace, goes and preaches.

[14:24] And this is what he says, verse 4. On the first day Jonah started into the city and he proclaimed, just simply summed up, 40 more days and Nineveh will be overturned.

Well you say, where is the grace in that? It sounds a bit severe. Well God didn't have to give any warning to Nineveh. Its wickedness was very evident to all.

But yet God in his grace says, 40 more days. It's as if God is saying to them, can't you see Nineveh? You deserve to be wiped out.

But I don't want to destroy you. I want to save you. I want to rescue from the judgment that you deserve. Rather than overturn you, I am persisting with you that you turn to me.

40 more days. And it had a profound impact upon the people because turning is exactly what happens.

[15:31] They repent, verse 5. The Ninevites believed God. They declared a fast and all of them from the greatest to the least put on sackcloth.

Now fasting and sackcloth, putting that on, was this outward expression, a very visible demonstration of an inward reality that they had repented and had turned to God.

In fact we're told their repentance was genuine. Look at verse 10. Because we're told there that when God saw what they did and how they had turned from their evil ways.

You see, a sign of repentance isn't just words. It's a change of action in our life. A completely 180 degree turn of doing opposite to what we were doing.

And repentance is what God demands of all people. Whatever nation we belong to and whatever social class we belong to. Verse 5, look at it again.

[16:39] It says, from the greatest to the least put on sackcloth. It even applies to the king. Verse 6, when news reached the king of Nineveh, he rose from his throne, took off his royal robes, covered himself with sackcloth and sat down in the dust.

You see, God in his persistence of showing grace to his people, he demands that people repent. And it's what he demands of each one of us and of our nation and whatever social class we come from.

Nobody is off limits. He calls everybody to repent, to put their life in order, to change things around and to turn back to God.

The story is told of a very patient king who was ruler of a very large city. And he was wondering where he could station his large army of troops.

And after much thought, he decided to locate them, not in the city, but a day's march from the city. So that on occasion of civil disobedience, it would take time for the troops to march in and restore order.

[18:00] In the interim, the rebels would have opportunity to come to their senses and back down. Nineveh, in God's grace, was given 40 days to change her way.

I wonder, how much more grace are we being shown today? Well, keep your finger in Jonah chapter 3 and flick over to Matthew's Gospel, chapter 12.

Because in Matthew 12, in verse 40, Jesus actually uses the story of Jonah. He uses the story of how the people of Nineveh repented to teach us something.

Matthew 12, verse 40, it says, For as Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of a huge fish, so the Son of Man, that's speaking of Jesus, will be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth.

Now in this verse, Jesus is referring to his resurrection, that he's going to die, that he's going to be buried for three days. He's going to rise again.

[19:35] And after his resurrection, is going to come the final judgment that will follow at the end of time. Whenever you see the phrase, Son of Man, it's always talking about the coming ruler.

So in verse 41, it says, At the judgment, the men of Nineveh will stand up at the judgment with this generation and condemn it.

For they repented at the preaching of Jonah. And now one greater than Jonah is here. It's as if Jesus is saying, look, if the people of Nineveh repented after hearing this little prophet Jonah preach, and they were given only 40 days to turn their lives around, but they did it within 40 days, and they did it through Jonah's preaching, how much more should we repent when we have one who is greater, the Lord Jesus?

God, who came as a man into the world, the one who died for us, and who is still, not just 40 days later, but 2,000 years later, is delaying his return, is delaying his judgment, so that we will turn to him.

Every day that passes by is another day of grace. Every day that Christ does not return is another opportunity for people to repent.

[21:08] If people could do it with Jonah after 40 days, how much more should we repent when we have Jesus, who has delayed it for 2,000 years? This is the kind of God that we have.

He is persisting. He's not wanting anyone to be overturned. He is the God who longs for people to turn back to him. He gives opportunity, delaying his judgment, so that people will repent, change their ways, and be able to live.

So God speaks grace to Jonah. He speaks grace to the city of Nineveh. And then surprisingly, and I, if you want to come back to me on this one, I hope I've got it right, that God even speaks grace to himself.

We should not underestimate what a wicked city Nineveh was. We're told that in chapter 1, verse 2. Its wickedness had come up before God. In fact, history records just how brutal an empire they were.

History tells us that when the Assyrian king captured another city, they would mutilate all the men. They would cut off their hands, they would cut out their tongues, and they would gouge out their eyes.

[22:43] And then they would be left in a great big pile to die a very slow, painful death in the sun. They were brutal. The women and children, well, they would be burned alive.

And anything of value would be taken. This is the kind of nation that they were. So when God threatens to overturn or destroy the city in four days, you would hardly say it's without reason, because they were a violent and evil race.

But here we're told the king takes Jonah's message seriously, verse 8. He gives this message to all the nation in verse 8. Let everyone call urgently on God.

Let them give up their evil ways and their violence. Who knows? God may yet relent and with compassion turn from his fierce anger so that we will not perish.

They deserve not even one day's grace, let alone 40 days' grace. In fact, they know they deserve to be wiped off the face of the earth.

[24 : 02] But knowing what they deserve, they repent and they throw themselves on God in the hope that God might not do what he said he would do.

Verse 9. Who knows? If we turn back to him, if we change our life around, who knows God? God might relent. He might have compassion so that we will not perish.

You see, God's justice demands that he deals with all wickedness. He can't pretend it's not there and look the other way. Sin must be dealt with.

It cannot be tolerated. But look at verse 10. When God saw what they did and how they turned from their evil ways, he had compassion and he did not bring upon them the destruction that he had threatened.

sins. It's quite an incredible verse. Literally, it's saying that God repented. Not that the threat of his judgment was wrong or that his response to their sin was over their top.

[25 : 19] No, it means that he turned back on his decision and instead of judgment, he had compassion. because when God sees people turn to him, his character demands that he has compassion.

It's as if God is having this sort of conversation with himself. On the one hand, he sees the wickedness and he says, it's got to be dealt with. But then, on the other hand, he's saying, but they've turned.

I've got to show compassion. And God speaks grace to himself to show that he's got to relent from sending the destruction that the people deserve.

Of course, we might not be as barbaric as the Ninevites. Now, we've become much more sophisticated and intellectual for that, but we are no less evil or wicked.

We might not mutilate people in war, but abortions are carried out at a rate of 180,000 a year in Britain, many of whom are travelling from Ireland.

[26 : 40] One doctor has even suggested that there should also be a choice to kill a disabled child after birth. And we are an increasingly violent nation.

Listen to your news, read the paper. Murders by drug gangs or an out-of-control husband or wife is a regular item on the news just as much as the sports results.

every day we hear of violent crime as yet another innocent victim is beaten up and jumped on until their head turns to pulp. And we mightn't burn our children and our women, but as the recent primetime investigate showed, in a period of 30 days, over 1,000 people in Ireland were downloading and sharing explicit and violent child porn.

And they are the ones that they can manage to track. In one day, last November, 368 women, 291 children, one day, receive children and women receive support because of domestic violence, many of whom are going to end up in long-term care.

And then there's our desire for the latest mobile and fashion accessories, which comes to us at affordable prices because children or women are stuck down mines, digging out coltons, while others are dying in the sweatshops of China.

[28 : 23] What does God see as he looks down on our so-called Christian nation? What does he see when he examines our own lives?

When he looks into the privacy of our own homes? What does he see? The truth is, we are no different.

The message that Jonah preached also applies to us. God's promised judgment is coming. God's God's just and fair response to the evil and the violence that he sees.

It's amazing that God has not yet returned and put an end to the suffering that goes on in our lives. What's our response?

God's love? Well, it should be no different to that of the king, verse 8. Let everyone call urgently on God. Let them give up their evil ways and their violence.

[29 : 34] Who knows? God may yet relent. God may be no different reality is, one day we will all have to deal with God.

The whole nation of Ireland is going to have to stand before God. What will that be like? Well, as we close, turn over to Revelation please, chapter 19.

Here we are given a picture. We are given a vision from the risen Lord Jesus through the words of John of what that day is going to be like.

Yes, there's lots of imagery here, but I think it presents a picture of just how serious Christ's coming will be.

Chapter 19 verse 11. I saw heaven standing open, and there before me was a white horse whose rider is called Faithful and True.

[30 : 52] With justice he judges and makes war. His eyes are like blazing fire, and on his head are many crowns, he has a name written on him that no one knows but he himself.

He is dressed in a robe dipped in blood, and his name is the word of God. The armies of heaven were following him, riding on white horses and dressed in fine linen, white and clean.

Out of his mouth comes a sharp sword with which to strike down the nation. king of kings. He will rule them with an iron scepter.

He treads the winepress of the fury of the wrath of God Almighty. name written, king of kings and lord of lords.

One day we will have to face him. One day the island of Ireland will face him, the people of King Thales will face him. But in his grace he is given warning of his coming judgment, life.

[32 : 06] That we should repent and if we do, who knows? God may yet relent. That he would have compassion, that he would bring forgiveness so that people would change their ways and live and know the joy of eternal life and the blessing of obeying and walking with God.

grace. Before we can speak of grace, we need to learn of God's grace and experience it deeply in our own lives.

Let's pray together. Amen. Father, sometimes we struggle with the fact that your words speak so much of a God who is one day going to come and judge.

We don't like to think of a God who will judge. But yet when we look at the state of our nation, when we see the suffering and pain in our world, when we examine our own lives, we are amazed that you have not yet come already.

Father, help us to take seriously your warning. Help us to take seriously your amazing grace, that you would give us chances, that you would give us opportunity.

[34 : 07] We pray that we would learn your grace more and more, speak your grace into our lives. If we come today and we're feeling we need that chance yet again, Lord, be gracious and give us that second chance.

Give us that chance to turn, to obey, to follow you, to live out your grace in our own lives, so that people will know you and follow you.

Please be at work by your Holy Spirit, we pray. In Jesus' name, Amen. We're going to take a spin together.

We're going to spin together. We're going to spin together.