

God is Gracious

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Date: 27 October 2019

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[0 : 0 0] John 6, based on Matthew Yahweh. Please turn back with me your Bibles to Jonah chapter 3.

Jonah chapter 3. Our title today is God is gracious.

the story of Jonah is well known Jonah is an Israelite prophet who is commissioned by God to go to the Assyrian city of Nineveh and warn its inhabitants of imminent judgment but Jonah refuses the commission he disobeys God's call instead of setting out for Nineveh he goes down to the port city of Joppa where he finds a ship bound for Tarshish so Jonah pays his fare boards the ship and heads west instead of east because he is fleeing from the presence of the Lord but the ship runs into a dreadful storm and Jonah recognizes that this storm is divine retribution for his disobedience when he is challenged by the sailors he asks to be thrown overboard instead of drowning he is miraculously swallowed by a great fish and spends three uncomfortable days in its belly there he turns to God in grateful prayer before being vomited out onto dry land but the book of Jonah is more than just about Jonah it's also a book about God you see it's God who commissions Jonah to go to Nineveh it's God who brings about the storm it's God to whom the pagan sailors offer sacrifice and pray it's God who arranges for the great fish to swallow Jonah it's God to whom Jonah prays when he is in the belly of the fish and it's God who makes the fish deposit Jonah on dry land we see how God is sovereign he is in control of all that happens and he is gracious he graciously rescues Jonah from drowning he graciously brings the pagan sailors into relationship with himself here in chapter 3 the focus is very much on God we see his sovereignty and his grace demonstrated time and again he acts as he pleases and he shows mercy to the undeserving you could say that chapter 3 divides into four main movements first of all

God recommissions Jonah that's verses 1 and 2 secondly Jonah proclaims God's message of judgment verses 3 and 4 thirdly the Ninevites respond verses 5 to 9 and fourthly and finally God relents verse 10 first of all then God recommissions Jonah then the word of the Lord came to Jonah the second time we read saying arise go to Nineveh that great city and call out against it the message I tell you when God called on Jonah the first time he disobeyed he flouted God's call God was under no obligation to give Jonah a second chance he could have said to him you've had your chance you disobeyed me you refuse to do my will you have deprived yourself of the privilege of serving me in this important task

I can get others to do my bidding God could have sidelined Jonah but he didn't he gave him a second chance he recommissioned him and this time Jonah obeyed he'd learned the important lesson that he might try to wave his puny fist in the face of God but he couldn't ultimately frustrate God's will Jonah was a believer he was a follower of the living and true God that's what he told the pagan sailors in chapter 1 I am a Hebrew and I fear the Lord the God of heaven who made the sea and the dry land he feared God but he was running away from him he knew his God was God of heaven and creator of the universe but that hadn't stopped him flagrantly disobeying

[5 : 53] God's will the American D.L. Moody was a great Victorian evangelist on one occasion he was visiting Edinburgh and he was speaking to a large number of children gathered in a church for a children's meeting as Moody was speaking he asked the question what is sin?

it was a rhetorical question he didn't expect an answer but of course in those days most children knew the shorter catechism they knew that there was a question in the catechism what is sin?

and so with one voice and much to Moody's surprise the children all chanted sin is any want of conformity unto or transgression of the law of God sin is any want of conformity unto or transgression of the law of God that's a really good answer it reminds us that we sin when we don't do what God tells us to do as well as when we do what God tells us not to do Jonah sinned because he refused to do what God asked him to do but God gave him a second chance he was gracious to him he showed him compassion he didn't write him off instead he gave him a further opportunity to do what he should have done in the first place that's encouraging isn't it for all of us who call ourselves Christians for we remain sinners as long as we live we're all too conscious that so often we fail to go

God's way sometimes indeed like Jonah we can sin with what the Bible calls a high hand but God is gracious he doesn't deal with us as our sins deserve the blood of the Lord Jesus goes on cleansing from all sin when we come to the Lord in repentance we are assured of forgiveness he doesn't write us off even serious sin when it is confessed can be forgiven there's a way back to God from the dark paths of sin there's a door that is open and you may go in at Calvary's cross is where you begin when you come or come again as a sinner to Jesus our God can restore for the years which the locusts have eaten because he's the God of the second the third and the umpteenth chance two things are worth saying by way of qualification one is that God was particularly gracious to Jonah in giving him a fresh opportunity to be his messenger to the people of Nineveh in Jonah's case

God as it were restored factory settings he doesn't always do that if God asks us to do something and we don't do it that particular opportunity may not come our way again it doesn't mean that God won't use us in other ways in the future but it does mean that we miss out on that particular opportunity and we may have to live with any consequences of our sin the second thing that I'd like to say is this God is gracious but we must never presume on his grace we must never allow ourselves to think that sin doesn't really matter all sin is serious if we don't see sin as serious it has to be that we have an inadequate view of God he is holy sin is a contradiction of all that he is we mustn't take his willingness to forgive for granted on the other hand we shouldn't despair if we say we have no sin we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us but as the apostle John reminds us if we confess our sins he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness how good it is to know that if anyone sins we have an advocate with the father

[11 : 10] Jesus Christ the righteous one in his mercy and grace God recommissioned Jonah second in verses three and four we see how Jonah proclaims God's message of judgment to the Ninevites verse three gives the burden of Jonah's message yet forty days and Nineveh shall be overthrown no doubt Jonah had more to say than that he would have put God's judgment into context he would have explained why Nineveh was to be destroyed history tells us that the Ninevites were notorious for their ruthlessness and cruelty they didn't worship God and they didn't reflect his compassion Jonah's message was one of judgment it was in many ways an apparently negative message but it was also potentially at least a gracious message you see

God could have destroyed Nineveh on the spot he needn't have given the Ninevites any warning he needn't have given them notice of what he was about to do in effect he was giving them opportunity to repent of their sins and turn to him the king of Nineveh grasped this look at what he says in verses 8 and 9 let man and beast be covered with sackcloth and let them call out mightily to God let everyone turn from his evil way and from the violence that is in his hands who knows God may turn and relent and turn from his fierce anger so that we may not perish that's a perceptive comment from the king who knows God may turn and relent and turn from his fierce anger so that we may not perish the king and the noble saw there was at least a possibility that if they reacted appropriately to God's warning if they acknowledged their sin and pleaded for mercy judgment might just be averted it's interesting that what the king and the noble say in their decree mirrors what the ship's captain says in verse six of chapter one he wakens the sleeping

Jonah with the words arise arise call out to your God perhaps the God will give a thought to us that we may not perish at that point the ship's captain was a stranger to Jonah's God but he realized that in a dire situation there was nothing to be lost by pleading for divine mercy both the king and the ship's captain saw a glimmer of hope in the face of impending disaster Jonah's warning of imminent judgment for Nineveh sounded unconditional but the king was right to see that it held open the possibility that God might be merciful the Ninevites had 40 days in which to do business with God more than the king knew God's message through

Jonah was motivated by compassion there was good news wrapped up in the bad news that's worth thinking about for a moment for the Christian gospel is like that too that's what gospel means it means good news but it's good news in the context of bad news think of that well known verse in John 3 verse 16 God so loved the world that he gave his one and only son that whoever believes in him should not perish but should have eternal life God sent his son into the world and offers us eternal life in him that's good news of course it is but why did the father have to send his son why do we need eternal life why do we need to believe in Jesus because otherwise we would perish left to ourselves we would end up in hell cut off from God and from all that's good forever we have been created in the image of God to live to his glory in fellowship with him but we have rebelled against him and so have incurred his righteous judgment our sin is an affront to him it's the contradiction of all that he is and he must punish it he cannot simply sweep it under the carpet left to ourselves we are heading for inevitable and inescapable judgment we are destined for hell where

God's wrath is fully unleashed on impenitent sinners the Bible speaks of God as a consuming fire it says that it is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God that's bad news that's very bad news and we need to take it on board if we're to appreciate the point of the good news and there is good news in his love and mercy God has devised a way for the penalty due to us for our sin to be paid his son the Lord Jesus became a human being he entered our world as our representative and substitute he lived the life we should have lived and on the cross he died the death which we deserved he took upon himself

[17 : 55] God's wrath against sin he paid the price in full he defeated sin and death and the devil that's why he can offer forgiveness and eternal life to all who put their trust in him the hymn writer Horatius Bonner put it like this upon a life I did not live upon a death I did not die another's life another's death I stake my whole eternity it's the bad news that makes sense of the good it's the bad news that explains why the good news is such good news and it's the bad news that underscores the urgency of the gospel we need to flee from the wrath to come can I ask you this morning have you faced up to the bad news the Christian gospel is more than an ethical code it's a wake up call alerting us to coming judgment and the only way to escape it

Jesus wasn't simply a great example or a great teacher he was God in human form come on a rescue mission there is salvation in no one else for there is no other name under heaven given among men whereby we must be saved God and if you're a Christian does the gospel you share with others include the bad news as well as the good it's not easy to hold to a biblically balanced gospel these days our culture shies away from negative messages we're expected to be positive and upbeat even in our colleges and universities attempts are being made to create safe spaces where nothing is said which might cause folk alarm but is that really loving if people are in danger isn't it the loving thing to warn them the gospel we present must be balanced it must reflect the good news of course but it does so in the context of the bad news thirdly we see how the

Ninevites respond look with me please at verse five the people of Nineveh believed God they called for a fast and put on sackcloth from the greatest of them to the least of them these are interesting words the people of Nineveh believed God they hadn't heard of them before but they accepted that the message which Jonah brought came from the living and true God they were convicted by the message and they acted on it the whole community fasted and put on sackcloth showing they repented of the sins which merited God's judgment an edict was issued by the king and the nobles commanding the people to call out mightily to

God let everyone turn from his evil way and from the violence that is in his hands there was a city wide turning to God as Jonah proclaimed God's message God's word did God's work God's word accomplished God's purposes the power of God's word was demonstrated and down through history there have been instances of how God's word has affected whole communities think of the effect of Peter's sermon on the day of Pentecost when some 3,000 people were out as them and they would have to divulge the
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