

Nineveh
Jonah 3

Luke 5:1-16

Luke 5:17-32

Psalm 147:1-9

This morning we are in chapter 3, Jonah has just spent 3 days and 3 nights in the belly of a great fish, believing himself dead, crying out to the Lord for deliverance. One would think that Jonah would have learned his lesson, trying to flee from the Lord, being thrown overboard the ship he had hired to take him to Tarshish, left to drown..but God sent a great fish to swallow him, to spare him but that alone would have been a dire situation inside the belly of a fish, covered in absolute darkness, surrounded by water, as he said in chapter 3, “weeds wrapped around my head.” God delivered Jonah, the great fish spat him back out on dry land, and Jonah’s response was obedience as we will see as we read chapter 3 this morning, so let us go ahead and read. (read chapter 3) God spoke once again to Jonah, telling him..go, to Nineveh.

God did not let Jonah off the hook, this was God’s purpose and plan, it was God’s desire that Jonah would be the messenger to Nineveh to repent, to turn from their evil ways and to follow him. This entire account shows us God’s mercy, and his grace toward mankind. He could have destroyed the ship, he could have let Jonah drown, he could have let Nineveh be destroyed, but in each step of the way he offered deliverance, and each step of the way when the power of God was revealed he brought about repentance. The sailors were quick to cry out to God when they saw his power, when they saw his judgment toward his prophet, and when they witnessed their own deliverance. They took vows, and made sacrifices to God. Jonah, in the belly of the fish cried out for deliverance, and God was merciful and provided, and Nineveh, when given the warning from God, repented and turned from her evil way, from the least of the them to the greatest. We see even the King repented.

God had done a might work through his reluctant prophet, and I see encouragement in this. For we to as followers of Christ are not always as we ought to be, yet God relents, and instead of offering punishment, shows mercy, he is quick to forgive, and the holy spirit which he has given us convicts us of our wrongs, and drives us to repent. Salvation is not a one time work of God, he doesn’t call us and then leave us to our own devices, no he continues to show us mercy, he continues to grant us his grace, as we struggle through this life. Any believer knows, and understands this, we experience God’s grace daily, we experience God’s provision for us daily, though we may not see it, though we may not attribute it to God at the time, it is he who allows our very breath, to go one continuing to live is a mercy, and like Jonah, he has not yet called us home for there is a purpose and a mission that he has yet for us. As Pastor Vic had always said, God does not call his people home until they have finished what God has set out for them.

We talked about this last week, the boldness that we as Christians should have in our own lives, in our own ministries because it is God who provides, and it is God who protects, and we are here to accomplish his purpose within our lives, and we will accomplish that purpose, and until that day we continue. So many people are looking to the rapture, are looking to God’s return, and each generation believes they are the generation, yet God relents, God waits, and more and more are added to the flock. Jesus said, in Matthew 24, “This gospel of the kingdom will be proclaimed throughout the whole world as a testimony to all nations, and then the end will come.” There will be an end, there will be a day when God no longer relents, a day when God judges the earth for her sinfulness. But each day that is delayed, is a day offered to allow repentance.

Nineveh was warned, you have 40 days to turn from your evil, to repent to God..and as we see in chapter 3 here, she did, a very large city, a city that took 3 days to walk across, inhabited by over 120,000 people. Each day that God waits to return, is a day that more and more come to believe, and he will not return until the last of his children are called. He said that he will not lose one of his sheep, and that he knew his people before the foundation of the world. He was the beginning, and he is the end, and we are in the middle awaiting that day of the Lord. Each day experiencing his blessings and his mercy as we are allowed to continue. So, I think that we as Christians should not be so over focused on those last days, but rather live within the days that God has given us to minister and to be witnesses of his great mercy and grace so that others may know him.

Jonah has been given a second chance, Essentially the story here restarts and God once again charges Jonah with the mission to go to Nineveh and tell the people of God's judgment toward them, so that they may turn and repent of their evil ways. We see in this account as well how God uses means to draw his people toward himself. Nineveh was on the path to destruction, being an evil pagan city but God brought in a prophet to warn them of his pending judgment. God used Jonah in the deliverance of his message, God uses his people in bringing the message of his redemption. God being God there are many different forms he could have used to reach the people of Nineveh, or the sailors, or Ruth, or any other examples we have of outsiders that God has brought into the fold...but he has chosen that by the words of his people, that others will come to know him.

And his messengers are not perfect, we are not perfect, we are flawed individuals with nothing of ourselves to add to what God has done, so the message is then that if God can save even us, he can save anyone. If God can use Jonah, a rebellious stubborn prophet who argues against, and becomes angry at God's mercy then he can use anyone to bring about his purpose. This should encourage us in the ministry, for the excuses that we are to shy, or we aren't confident enough, or we are not a good enough representative all doesn't matter, for it is God who gives the message, and it is God who has prepared the hearers to hear it, we are to merely share what we have been given. To share our own testimony, to live our own lives in the grace and mercy of God, striving to be worthy of this calling. Not being like Jonah, but these accounts exist to show us that God uses us, not because of ourselves...but despite ourselves. As we read through this account of Jonah, the thought probable arises..he is the worst prophet ever..he argues against God, he tries to flee, he is angry at their repentance, he doesn't want to see them forgiven, he wants to witness their destruction....yet he was to bring them a message of hope, a message of redemption

And even though we won't be getting into chapter 4 until next week...verse 1 shows us his response to Nineveh's repentance, "But it displeased Jonah exceedingly, and he became angry, so he prayed to the Lord and said, Lord, was not this what I had said when I was still in my own country? Therefore I fled previously to Tarshish for I know that you are a gracious and merciful God, slow to anger and abundant in loving kindness who relents from doing harm." Jonah himself being a recipient of God's mercy, being allowed to continue living despite his own sin and rebellion against God...and instead of rejoicing in the redemption of the Ninevites he becomes angry again at God and says, See I knew you were going to do this! Not a great prophet..hoping to see their destruction instead of their redemption. Think of the lesson that this should be to Israel...God's mercy being shown to this gentile city, the unfaithfulness of their own prophet, God's relenting in their destruction because of their repentance of sin. These are all lessons to be learned, that it would seem much of Israel did not heed, as we see their responses to Jesus' ministry is in the same line of thinking as Jonah toward Nineveh.

And they have completely lost the plot, that it is God who redeems, whom he wills, Israel was only called God's people, because God called them as such, Abraham was nothing special, until God spoke to him and chose him to be an instrument in his revelation of redemption. It is God who chose Jonah to be his messenger to Nineveh. With Israel there was an air about them, that being chosen as God's people made them a people just a bit better than the rest. We get a sense of this throughout the new testament in their treatment of gentiles, and anyone who is not a descendant of Abraham. Even those converts, gentiles who came to follow the Jewish ways, were never fully embraced, with the focus on lineage, and family lines tracing back to the patriarch there is always a sense of those who were once outside that have now come in are a bit less than those who were born inside.

Christians can act a bit like this as well, I have known a few in my life who act as if they are something just a bit better than everyone else, someone I once knew even made the statement, I thank God that he made me smart enough to believe. Implying that belief is predicated upon one's ability to comprehend, not on God, but on one's own ability. Israel was resting upon their lineage, upon their traditions and rituals, some today rest upon their own ability, their own will, yet in all things it is God, tradition, ritual, our own ability..none of that stands to right us from our sinful hearts, it is only God who can enact that change within us, it is only God who can open us up to seeing him, and hearing his word, and it is only God who works in the hearts and minds of his people to call them to repentance. And once we have been saved, once we have been grafted in, we are no longer strangers, and we are not less than, but we are fully, and wholly his. I think it was last week we read in Romans 11 about the branches being grafted into the tree, we are the wild branches grafted into Christ and we have become the natural members of him through faith.

Nineveh's repentance was not less than Israel's, just because the people are pagan gentiles does not make them any less God's if he has so chosen to graft them in, in fact Paul wrote, that branches are broken off so that we maybe grafted in, there is a judgment upon Israel for her unbelief, God has broken her off, and is grafting in the wild branches in her place, but that is not as if there is no hope for Israel, for if God can graft in the wild branch, he can graft in the natural branch which was once broken off. We have no grounds to be proud, we have no grounds to be haughty and arrogant, we have no grounds to consider ourselves better than, because we all are sinners, we all fall short of the glory of God, we all are undeserving of mercy, yet God, who is rich in mercy, by his grace as grafted us into the tree of life, that is Christ. But because of what we have done, or because of how smart we are, or because we just so happened to chose to, no it is because of God and God alone. A God who used a famine to call his servant Ruth from the pagan lands, a God who used his rebellious prophet to reach a small group of sailors, and likewise a large city.

God is so gracious, and merciful that he seeks the one. God is not worried about the efficiency, or the economy of actions, by that I mean he didn't just focus on Nineveh, an exceedingly large city, he also showed himself to that handful of sailors. He knew Jonah's rebellion, he knew that Jonah would attempt to flee from his calling, and he used that to show himself to these few men. This is a humbling reality of God's love and care for us, that he actively seeks us out, and there is nothing that separates us from him. The circumstances in our lives that result in our belief are the workings of God to prepare our hearts for him. Sometimes we have to be driven to hopelessness before we can see the light, Jonah had to be swallowed by a fish, the sailors had exhausted everything they knew to do and knew they

were destined for destruction, the city of Nineveh was undergoing a famine, what they believed was a time of judgment, so when Jonah cried out, repent of your evil ways or you shall be destroyed..was a message they already were prepared to hear.

Look at the response of the King of Nineveh, verse 9 “Who can tell if God will turn and relent, and turn away from his fierce anger, so that we may not perish.” He does not assume that his actions will be enough, he does not assume that forgiveness is owed them because of their repentance but he holds out hope that God might choose to be merciful. Where in comparison Israel assumes that her actions are enough, assumes that her sacrifices and traditions, and lineage makes God owe them their redemption. That is why the new testament message is faith alone, apart from the law. For it is given, not earned, it is a gift, not a reward. The faith of Nineveh, the faith of the king stands in stark contrast to Israel, stands as a condemnation to Israel to find a faith in the gentiles not found amongst themselves...a faith relying on God not ritual, a faith relying on God not lineage, a faith of a people knowing they deserve judgment, but hope for deliverance.

This is how God works, as we read this morning in Luke, Jesus said, “Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick. I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance.” In verse 10 here in Jonah, we see that God relented from his judgment, “Then God saw their works, that they turned away 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.” The Israelite reader would have likely seen a parallel here, for the phrase, relented of the disaster that he had said he would do to them” is the exact phrase found in the book of Exodus, chapter 32 in the response to the golden calf. God said he would destroy Israel for their idolatry, for creating a golden calf and worshiping it, yet Moses prayed on their behalf, and he relented of the disaster he said he would do to them. This parallel should humble the Israelite, they are being compared to the pagan gentiles and this is a reminder that they are no better than them, they to are in need of God’s merciful grace.

Jonah himself was also in that position, he himself receiving the mercy of God, and now witnessing again God’s mercy upon the people of Nineveh, this should instill in him, and in Israel a spirit of praise to God for again showing such grace and mercy. But as we know the story goes, that is not the case, as we will see in chapter 4 next week, just as we see in our reading in Luke this morning, the response isn’t worship, but it is questioning, it is disappointment, and accusation. The self righteous are so quick to judge, when they themselves are likewise in need of the same mercy. Yet, God works, and he calls his people not because of what they have done, but despite themselves. Jonah is a reflection of our own hard heartedness, God shows mercy, and Jonah complains. Where is justice, where is punishment, the people of Nineveh don’t deserve peace, they don’t deserve salvation. And that, is the entire point...no one deserves salvation, no one is righteous enough to earn it, we are all sinners who deserve judgment, but God who is rich in mercy has chosen to show us mercy.

So, just like the call for Nineveh to believe, to turn from her evil ways and seek after God, the call for us to believe goes out, to turn from our sins and follow God. Seek his mercy, seek his grace, be saved from the punishment of sin in the arms of a loving savior. Don’t be like Israel, don’t be like Jonah, be like Nineveh, be like the king of Nineveh, repent, and cry out to God that he may relent from the punishment of death, and instead grant life. It was not too late for Nineveh, it is not too late for you either, as the author of Hebrews wrote, Today if you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts. Repent,

believe, and follow him the Lord of mercy, the King of grace who will not let one of his people perish in their sins, who will cause famines and storms to bring salvation to his people.