

“Personal Renewal and the God of Grace” - Jonah Part 8

Jonah 3:10 - 4:1-5

~ Delivered at Central Baptist Church on November 12, 2017 by Pastor Barton Priebe

INTRODUCTION

- **(SHOW SLIDE 1)** The Bible describes the message of Christianity as good news. The ancient word for “news” described what a herald did when he ran back to his city and shouted, ***“Our general has won the battle. Rejoice because you are free! Live out your lives in light of this freedom that has been won for you!”***
 - The message of Christianity is that through Jesus Christ, God has freed us from the power of sin, Satan, and death. But if we are free, why do we still sin? Why do we still struggle with fears, with relationships, with jealousy, with lust, or with pride?
- Think of it this way. Imagine a person who has been a slave all of his life in the Southern United States before the Civil War. His master is a cruel man and speaks harshly to him. But he must say, “Yes sir” and do what he says. If not, it is perfectly legal for his master to beat him.
 - But then good news goes out across the land. Abraham Lincoln has signed the Emancipation Proclamation. All slaves are free. All slaves are citizens. The man is free. But it is not easy to learn how to live as a free citizen when you have been a slave your whole life.
 - He has habits like lowering his eyes to white people and saying, “yes sir.” He may have a very low image of himself. To make it more difficult, people may continue to treat him like a slave even when he is free.
- Although he is free he must learn to apply his freedom to every area of his life: to his fears, his habits, his self-image, the way he talks, and the way he relates to others.
 - This will be a process for him but the key is to live out his life in light of this new identity.
- This is exactly how the New Testament describes the Christian life. The Christian has been set free and given all the rights and privileges of a citizen of heaven.
 - But the Christian must learn to apply the grace of God to every area of their life: to your fears, self-image, speech, and relationships.
- Here in Jonah 4 we have a wonderful case scenario of this. Like us, Jonah had experienced grace. Despite his rebellion, God rescued him from drowning by sending the great fish. Like us, Jonah praises God for His grace. In his prayer he exclaims, ***“Salvation comes from the Lord.”*** You would think that after such a profound experience Jonah would never have a problem again.
 - But like us, Jonah still has major areas of his life that have not yet been transformed by God’s grace. We know this because of the shocking twist at the beginning of chapter 4. After God’s astounding display of grace to the Ninevites you would think the story would finish with one more verse in chapter three that read, ***“And so Jonah, transformed forever by God’s grace, moved into the city of Nineveh and spent the remainder of his days teaching everyone about the grace of God.”***
 - Instead we read that Jonah was angry. In fact, he is suicidal. And it’s not that he doesn’t know of God’s grace. In verse 2 he says he knew God would forgive them if they repented. So why is he so angry? It is because, like us, Jonah knows about God’s grace in his head and even in his experience, but there are still many areas of his life that have not been transformed by grace.
- If Jonah 1 was God staging an intervention in Jonah’s life and chapter two was Jonah in rehab then chapter 4 is God’s personal counseling session with Jonah.
 - Today God is going to help Jonah, and help us to apply the good news of His grace in two major areas of our lives in order that we might walk in freedom, not in the old ways of slavery.

GOD'S GRACE FREES US FROM THE FALSE GODS

- **(SHOW SLIDE 2)** First, we must learn to apply God's grace in our lives because it frees us from the false gods that try to enslave us.
 - Let's look at Jonah's response to God's sparing of Nineveh. Look at verse 1. **READ 1** – *But it displeased Jonah exceedingly, and he was angry.* He is even more dramatic in verse 3. **READ 3** – *Therefore now, O LORD, please take my life from me, for it is better for me to die than to live*
 - What? As a prophet, Jonah has achieved everything a prophet could desire. Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, only dreamt about seeing a city listen to their message. Since when do people get suicidal when they have great career success? Why did Jonah get angry?
- Jonah tells us why in verse 2. **READ 2** – *And he prayed to the LORD and said, "O LORD, is not this what I said when I was yet in my country? That is why I made haste to flee to Tarshish; for I knew that you are a gracious God and merciful, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love, and relenting from disaster.*
 - Jonah is angry because he knew that if Nineveh repented God would forgive them. But why would that make him so angry?
 - It's because Nineveh was the great enemy of Israel. Nineveh was the capital city of Assyria, the world superpower of the day. But they were a ruthless, violent, and wicked people. They attacked Israel.
- So why is Jonah so angry? It has to do with his allegiance to his own people. Clearly Jonah loves his people. That is good. Jonah is patriotic. That is good.
 - But his patriotism has turned to bloodlust. God wants to give Nineveh one last chance to turn away from their wicked ways. But Jonah just wants God to nuke them.
 - Jonah's good love for his people and his nation has become the ultimate thing that he lives for. Deep down his true god is his ethnicity, his religion, and his nation. As long as God serves those interests, Jonah will obey and worship. But when God turns his grace toward Nineveh, Jonah turns away from God.
- Despite his profession of faith in God, Jonah's functional god is his nationalism. He is willing to watch a city burn rather than see them receive grace.
 - But God wants to liberate him from his racism, his nationalism, and his religious elitism. These are eating him up and God questions Jonah in chapter 4 to help him see this.
- So here is the question this passage asks of us today: who or what is your true God? I'm not asking you what you say with your lips. I want to know what your real religion is, what you really live for, who your true God is.
 - How can you know this? Jonah shows us two questions to ask of ourselves.

WHAT MAKES YOU ANGRY?

- First, ask yourself **(SHOW SLIDE 3)** what makes me really upset? Look at verse 4. **READ 4** – *And the LORD said, "Do you do well to be angry?"* God is saying, *"Jonah look at your anger. What is causing it? Examine yourself and you will find the root of your problem."*
 - Trace your anger back to its root and you may find a false god. It is not a false god if you lose something and you are sad. This is natural. It is most likely a false god if you are utterly devastated. The fact that you come undone and are angry shows you that you have elevated that thing above God.
 - So what makes you upset? What makes you come undone? What makes you turn away from God in anger?

WHAT WOULD MAKE ME LOSE ALL MEANING IN LIFE?

- Or secondly ask yourself, **(SHOW SLIDE 4)** what would make me lose all meaning in life if it was taken away from me?

- Jonah lived for his country. His nationalism was what got him out bed in the morning. And when God showed grace to Israel's enemy Jonah thought, ***“if God shows grace to our enemies then I have no reason to get out of bed.”***
 - Although he claimed to worship God, his true meaning in life came from his allegiance to his country. So what gets you out bed in the morning? Where do you find your ultimate significance?
- For many of us it is our role, which is usually our work. What if God took my voice away and I could not be a pastor or preacher again? No doubt it would be difficult. But would I lose my sense of meaning in life?
 - Or worse, if God in his unfathomable wisdom decided to take my family from me, would I lose all reason to live? No doubt I would be very sad. But if I live for my family then my true security and meaning is in them.
 - So what gives you meaning in life? That thing is likely a good thing but watch yourself lest you make it the ultimate thing you live for.
- Once, like Jonah, God reveals your false gods to you, the way to be free of them is to remember who you are. You are not a slave but a free citizen.
 - When you apply God's grace it crushes the false god of work. The false god of work says that you are only somebody if you perform and keep performing. That is slavery. But when you apply God's grace it crushes the false god of work and frees you.
 - Because of Jesus performed for me, I am already somebody in God's eyes. I am now free to work hard without my identity being chained to my performance.
 - When you apply God's grace it crushes the false god of family. The false god of family makes you live in continual anxiety and fear that you might lose your family, which then leads you to smother your children or let them go wild. That is slavery.
 - Since God has proved his absolute and eternal love for me in sending Jesus, I can trust him with the future of my family. I am now free to love my kids without smothering them and to train them without fear of them turning on me.
- Do you see it then? Like Jonah, we are all growing in grace. We all have areas where we need to apply God's grace.
 - Look into your life. Find those areas. Look at how they are the old ways of slavery and apply the good news to them.

GRACE LIBERATES US FROM RELATING TO GOD LIKE A SLAVE MASTER

- **(SHOW SLIDE 5)** Second, we must learn to apply God's grace in our lives because it frees us from relating to God like a slave master.
 - The New Testament does call us to relate to Jesus as our master but it uses it as an image of full allegiance to a gracious master. It is not speaking about earning his approval or as Jesus as a harsh slave master.
 - It is this latter sense that I am using here.
- So far we have seen that Jonah's anger comes from the fact that his heart is divided. He worships God but he also worships false gods.
 - Intermingled with this worship of false gods is a wrong of view of how he should relate to God. He is also angry because his heart keeps falling back into relating to God like He is a slave master.
 - In chapter 4 God is trying to get Jonah to relate to him properly.
- This is clear from verse 2. **READ 2** – ***And he prayed to the LORD and said, “O LORD, is not this what I said when I was yet in my country? That is why I made haste to flee to Tarshish; for I knew that you are a gracious God and merciful, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love, and relenting from disaster.***

- Follow me now. Like us, Jonah knows about God’s gracious character. He knows it in the history of Israel and in his own life. But like us, he is still learning how to relate to such a gracious God. We know he has problems with this because when it comes to the Ninevites, Jonah doesn’t want God to relate to them with grace.
 - He wants God to relate to them on the basis of strict justice. He is saying, **“God, relate to Nineveh based on their performance, not grace. Since they are so wicked you must destroy them.”**
- It is the difference between relating to God as a slave master and relating to him as a loving Father. It is our old captivity instincts that relate to God as a slave master. A master gives you list of things to do. If you do them well your master is pleased and likes you. But if you don’t perform your master will be displeased and will punish you.
 - Although we have learned of God’s gracious character to us in Jesus, we are always falling back into a performance-based relationship with God. Why do you so often gauge how much God loves you by how well you are doing at not sinning? Or how well you are doing in your devotional life? Good fathers are grieved by their children’s sins and are full of joy when they do well but they do not love them based on their performance.
 - Why, when life falls apart, do you find yourself moving away from God instead of toward him? Slaves don’t run to their masters when they are sad but when children are crying they run to their dads.
- One of the clearest proofs that you are falling back into relating to God as a slave master is how you relate to others. How you relate to others is a reflection of how you relate to God.
 - You know that the slave master mindset is still there when instead of showing grace you come down hard on the smallest faults, when you won’t overlook an offense, when you are jealous of how God blesses others and not you, when you hold bitterness close to your heart, when you look down others who just don’t get it, or when you refuse to forgive.
 - All of these are performance-based relationships. It is justice. And it shows you that, like Jonah, you have not yet fully understood the grace of God.
- To really understand this and experience lasting change in your life, spend time in Jesus’ parable that we call “the parable of the prodigal son.” This parable is really an exact parallel of the book of Jonah. You remember Jesus spoke of two sons. The younger son asked his dad for an early inheritance. He left his dad, went to the big city, and blew all his money in the clubs and bars. When his credit cards were all maxed out he stooped so low that he got a job feeding pigs, eating the food they leftover. When he came to his senses he decided to return to his father to beg for a job.
 - As he came over the hill to his home he saw his father running to him, something that Middle Eastern men never did. Racing to meet his son, the Father embraced him and kissed him. Before he could even utter his apology his father called the servants and saying, **“Quick! Bring the best robe and put it on him. Put a ring on his finger and sandals on his feet. Bring the fattened calf and kill it. Let’s have a feast and celebrate. For this son of mine was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found.”**
 - Nineveh is the younger son. Nineveh is filled with wickedness but turns to God and finds grace. Nineveh is a picture of how God wants to relate to all of us. The second you turn from your sin you will see the Father already running in full sprint toward you.
- But Jesus’ parable has two sons. There is also an elder brother who represents the Pharisees. The elder brother represents all religious people who lack grace toward others. Nineveh is the younger brother and Jonah is the elder brother.
 - In Jesus’ parable, the elder brother had never rejected his father. He had never run off and squandered the family money. He had kept the rules. And he is utterly disgusted with the grace his father shows to the younger brother. He refuses to go into the party. When the father comes out to speak with him he talks to his father as if he were his slave master. He speaks in performance based relationship terms.

