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May memory verse Romans 6:8 (NKJV)

Now if we died with Christ, we believe that we shall also live with Him,

Commentary on Jonah Chapters 3&4 by Chuck Smith 5.1.24

Chapter 3

So the word of the LORD came unto Jonah the second time, saying, Arise, go to Nineveh, that great city, and preach unto it the preaching that I bid thee. So Jonah arose, and went unto Nineveh ([Jon 3:1-3](#)),

God brings us back so many times to the place of failure, and that is where we start again. I call it oftentimes back to zero. I wonder how many times God has brought me back to zero, back to that place of failure and then He says, "Okay." And there is where we start again. I can't really go on until I conquer in this area of my failure. I can't continue on in the progress of God in my life until God has worked out this particular area. And when He brings me back to it, then I'm facing the same issues again, but this time with obedience to the Lord and then I move on.

So Jonah arose, and went to Nineveh according to the word of the LORD. Now Nineveh was an exceeding great city of three days' journey ([Jon 3:3](#)).

That is, it would take you three days to walk from one end to the other.

And Jonah began to enter into the city a day's journey, and he cried, and said, Yet forty days, and Nineveh shall be overthrown. So the people of Nineveh believed God ([Jon 3:4-5](#)),

What a remarkable thing! Jonah, no doubt, in his heart was not happy with what he was doing. This is something that is revealed further on in the text. Jonah's anger at God for not destroying Nineveh. He still hated these people. He still didn't want God to work in their lives. He was only there because it was preferable to dissolving in the gastric juices of the whale. Notice there was no hope laid out in his message at all, no call to repentance, no loving exhortations, just a message of judgment. "Forty days, and Nineveh is going to be overthrown." But the people believed God much to Jonah's chagrin.

they proclaimed a fast, they put on sackcloth, from the greatest of them even to the least of them. For word had come to the king of Nineveh, and he arose from his throne, and he laid off his robe from him, and covered himself with sackcloth, and he sat in ashes. And he caused it to be proclaimed and published through Nineveh by the decree

of the king and his nobles, saying, Let neither man nor beast, herd nor flock, taste any thing: let them not feed, nor drink water: But let man and beast be covered with sackcloth, and cry mightily unto God: yea, let them turn every one from his evil way, and from the violence that is in their hands ([Jon 3:5-8](#)).

What a tremendous call to the people to repentance, even to the animals, "Don't feed them. And as the cattle are lowing for hunger, let it be as a cry unto God for mercy." So the cattle as they are getting hungry, you can hear them through the streets-mooo. Let that be a cry unto God for mercy. The general, total repentance of the people as they were there in sackcloth and crying out to God, repenting and crying out unto God for mercy.

Now the second reference that Jesus made to Nineveh was as He was talking to the scribes and the Pharisees and He said, "The men of Nineveh will rise in judgment with this generation and they will condemn it. For they repented at the preaching of Jonah and behold a greater than Jonah is here" ([Matthew 12:41](#)). The men of Nineveh repented at the preaching of this angry prophet who only preached the judgment of God. Here Jesus, the Son of God, had come declaring to the people the love of God, encouraging people to experience God's love and to come to God's love, but yet, they did not repent. So the men of Nineveh in the day of judgment will be standing, and they will be pointing a finger at this generation, those who have not repented, those who have not sought God, and they will be condemning this generation for they repented at the preaching of Jonah. Repent they did, complete sackcloth, even to the king laying aside his robes and putting on this itchy sackcloth, putting it over their animals, everybody joining in this citywide repentance.

On what basis did they repent? Jonah didn't say, "Repent or destruction comes." He didn't preach repentance at all. In fact, he didn't want them to repent. He became angry when they did repent. One of the only preachers in history who was hoping that he would not have a successful ministry. But they repented on the slim basis of,

Who can tell if God will turn and change, and turn away his fierce anger, that we perish not? ([Jon 3:9](#))

Who can tell? Maybe if we repent God will have mercy. We don't know. No promise of mercy. No promise of grace to these people, only a message of judgment, and yet, on just the slimmest of threads they were willing to hang their hope. Who can tell? Maybe. Hey, you don't have to hang your faith or your hope on that slim thread. I can tell you tonight that if you will repent God is gracious, God is merciful, God will forgive. You don't have to hang your hope on a maybe. I can assure you from the Word of God tonight that God will forgive if you will repent and turn from your wicked ways and turn from your sinful path. God will be gracious and merciful unto you and you will be washed and cleansed of your sin and be made a child of God. I declare that unto you on the basis of God's unchanging Word.

These people did not have that kind of a hope. They did not have that kind of a message. All they had was a maybe. Who knows? Maybe. And on that slimmest of threads they hung their hope as they turned and repented.

And God saw their works, that they turned from their evil way; and God repented of the evil ([Jon 3:10](#)),

Now, again, this is the problem we have of describing the action of God. All we have is human terms. God is the infinite eternal God, but we are the finite man. And as we talk to each other we have to use terms that are dealing in the finite realm of man because we don't have the infinite terms, and there are things of which we cannot even speak, because there are not words or languages that even relate to these things that we could understand.

Jesus was trying to speak to Nicodemus concerning spiritual things and He finally said, "Look, Nicodemus, you're a teacher of the Jews and all and if I speak to you of earthly things and you cannot understand them, how in the world can I ever speak to you of heavenly things?"

Paul the apostle after his trip to heaven when he came back he said, "Hey, whether in the body or out of the body, I don't know, but I know I was caught up to the third heaven and I heard things that are impossible to describe. In fact, it would be a crime if I tried to describe them. It would be an injustice, because there aren't any words that can describe the ecstasy, the things that I felt, the things that I heard, the things that were there. It's impossible. Words have not been created or formed."

So that we are limited in talking about God to the finite terminology of man, so that when judgment did not come, the promised judgment, we have to use terms that apply to man, but are not truly applicable to God, because God does not change. "Behold God is not a man that He should lie, nor the Son of man that He should repent: hath He not spoken and shall He not make it good?" ([Numbers 23:19](#)) "Behold I am the Lord God, I change not" ([Malachi 3:6](#)), He has declared.

So here was an obvious change. The prophet had said, "Forty days and then comes destruction." The people all repented. The destruction did not come. So we in using our finite terms to describe it say, "Well, it repented God," or, "God changed and He did not destroy them." No, God knew all the time that they were going to repent, that's why He sent Jonah to them. God knew all the time that the judgment would not come. But yet, had they not repented, the judgment would have come. But God knows the end from the beginning. And you say, "Oh, but I can't understand it." Of course you can't, because you have only finite, limited understanding and God is infinite. God says, "My ways are not your ways: My ways are beyond your finding out." And so it's only an exercise of frustration to try to understand the full aspects of the character and nature of God.

Chapter 4

But it displeased Jonah exceedingly, and he was very angry. And he prayed unto the LORD, and he said, I pray thee, O LORD, was not this what I said to you, when I was still in my own country? And this is why I fled to go to Tarshish: for I knew that thou art a gracious God, and merciful, and you're slow to anger, and of great kindness, and you do not want to bestow evil (Oba 4:1-2).

"God, I knew it. Oh, I'm so mad. Just what I was afraid was going to happen happened. Isn't this why I tried not to come here?" Oh, what a character this Jonah was. Angry at God because of the tremendous success of his revival meeting in Nineveh. "Okay, God, I've had it."

take my life from me (Jon 4:3);

I don't want to go on living.

for it is better for me to die than to live (Jon 4:3).

Boy, he was really angry. "All right, God, I've had it. I knew this might happen. It was what I was afraid of, Lord. It was what I told You about when I was in my own country. That's why I fled to go to Tarshish. I knew that You're so gracious, You're so merciful, You're so slow to anger, You're such a softy. I knew, God, that this might happen. Kill me, Lord, kill me. I don't want to live. Better for me to die than to live. Had it."

And the Lord dealing with this over-wrought prophet said,

[Jonah,] do you do well to be angry? So Jonah went out of the city, and he made a booth [little thatched lean to, shelter], and he sat under it in the shadow of it, till he might see what might become of the city (Jon 4:4-5).

Maybe God will wipe them out yet. I'll go out and just sit and wait and watch.

And the LORD God prepared a gourd, and he made it to come up over Jonah, that it might give shadow over his head, to deliver him from his grief. So Jonah was very thankful for the gourd [because he was able to have some shade from that burning sun]. But then the LORD prepared a worm (Jon 4:6-7)

Now the Lord prepared a great fish. He prepared a gourd. He prepared a worm, or appointed a gourd, appointed a worm.

and the next morning, the worm had eaten the gourd and it withered. And it came to pass, when the sun did arise, that God prepared a vehement east wind (Jon 4:7-8);

God prepared the storm. He has charge of the elements. I mean, God's in control of the whole scene.

and the sun beat on the head of Jonah, that he fainted, and wished to die, and said, I would be better off dead than alive. And God said to Jonah, Do you do well to be angry because of that gourd that was destroyed by that little worm? And he said, [You bet your life] I do well to be angry, even unto death. Then said the LORD, [Isn't that interesting, Jonah,] you have pity on that gourd, for the which you did not labor, you did not make it grow; it came up in a night, and perished in a night (Oba 4:8-10):

Something that was so short-lived; came up in a night, perished in a night. You didn't do anything to plant it. You didn't do anything to water it or to develop it. You had really nothing to do with it. It's just a gourd. It's just a vine, and yet, when it died because the worm ate it you felt sorry for the thing because the worm killed it. How strange, Job. For you see, I created the Ninevites. I had something to do with their existence. It isn't just an overnight process; there are eternal souls. It's not just a plant. They are people.

And shouldn't I not spare Nineveh, the great city (Jon 4:11),

And why is God sparing it? Because of his compassion upon the children,

in which there are sixty thousand little children not old enough to know their right hand from their left hand (Jon 4:11);

And interestingly enough, God also spared it because of the animals, because of the cattle.

So the book of Jonah ends with an insight into God who is gracious, who is merciful, who is slow to anger, who does not want to bring judgment upon evil people, who has great compassion and interest in children and in the animal kingdom that He has created. Fascinating story. So many lessons to be learned, the chief of them, "They that observe lying vanities forsake their own mercy."

Don't try to run from God. Don't try to hide from God. Surely God knows what is best for you. And for you to do anything other than what God wants you to do is only to create a misery and a hell for yourself. You are inviting and courting disaster. God knows what is best. Therefore, submit your ways unto the Lord and follow Him.

Father, we thank You for the book of Jonah and the lessons that it teaches us, lessons concerning Your nature. Lord, we're so thankful that You are a gracious, loving God; full of mercy, slow to anger. We thank You, Lord, for that grace that we have experienced through Jesus Christ, the mercy and the pardon and the cleansing of our sins, the escaping of the judgment, because Jesus bore that judgment for us. Oh God, how thankful we are that You have redeemed us and that You now claim us as Your children. Help us, Lord, that we might walk in obedience to Your will in all things. In Jesus' name. Amen.

May the Lord be with you, may the Lord bless you, may the Lord keep you through the power of His love through Jesus Christ. And may you this week be obedient unto the

voice of God as He calls to your heart for that work that He would have you to accomplish for His glory. In Jesus' name.