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# Begrudgingly Obeying God

Jonah 3:1-4:1a

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## Introduction

There is something about seeing the face of a happy human that calls to a deeper part of a person's heart. Something that reaches out to the spectator and pulls him/her into a moment of joy – a moment of wonder – there is something that strips away trivia and awakens desire stabbing the soul with great delight. This week the world witnessed a wonderful thing.

33 Chilean miners trapped in a mine since August 5 were magnificently rescued. One by one, the miners fixed for 69 days in a dungeon that could have been their tomb were taken into a rescue capsule and brought to safety. Watching as a rescuer entered the capsule and lowered over 2,000 feet into the belly of the earth to then come up and out of this tomb-like captivity with his prize – another human rescued!

For many of us, our joy gazed upon the faces of those jubilant over this astounding rescue. Truly a sight to behold! But this is not a sight we see in the book of Jonah.

In the 8<sup>th</sup> century BC the world witnessed a most amazing event. Through one lone prophet the LORD rescued the capital of the world empire from its evil and ensuing judgment. The LORD of heaven and earth gave Nineveh repentance leading them to matchless mercy. 120,000 people rescued from judgment by one who plunged into the belly of Sheol and was brought out alive to proclaim God's glorious truth. This is one of the most staggering episodes in the Old Testament. But here is the odd thing. Why wasn't Jonah happy? Why was he not overjoyed at this amazing display of God's glorious and gracious rescue? Why do we see him angry? (Answer: because he is "begrudgingly obeying God")

Open your Bibles to Jonah 3 as we continue our study of the book of Jonah.

We are in a month long series called *two hearts one story*. It takes but a short time to notice that the two hearts unfolding for the reader of Jonah are 1) Jonah's defecting heart (who represents the religious community of Israel who hardly wanted to be a blessing to the nations) 2) and the LORD's gracious heart (who brings back his covenant-breaking people in order to move forward his covenant-causing mission). What we are to see in this unusual book are these two hearts. We are to look at Jonah and see ourselves. We then are to look through Jonah and see the Christ. One the one hand Jonah functions as a mirror. We look at him and see ourselves. We notice sin. And on the other hand Jonah functions as a window. We look at him and look through him to see the Savior. We notice grace. As these two points of view work on our hearts we become recaptured by the gospel. We then are put back into the great work of the great commission. We began to function as we are called to function. We become a commissional church. And this is the aim of this series.

To be tracked down and recaptured by God first we need to notice a demonstration of a Jonah-like heart – a heart defecting from God.

First week we noticed it as – *Running from God – choosing a path that leads to death to escape the road to obedience.*

Last week we noticed it as – *Acting close to God – lips that honor the Lord but hearts that are far from the LORD.*(are nauseating to the LORD)

Today we notice a heart defect as – *Begrudgingly obeying God –*

<pray>

## Begrudgingly obeying God

To notice Jonah's heart listen as I read Jonah 3:1-4.

*Then the word of the LORD came to Jonah the second time, saying, "Arise, go to Nineveh, that great city, and call out against it the message that I tell you. So Jonah arose and went to Nineveh according to the word of the LORD. Now Nineveh was an exceedingly great city, three days journey in breadth. Jonah began to go into the city, going a day's journey. And he called out, "Yet forty days and Nineveh shall be overthrown!"*

To see what chapter 3 communicates requires following the arrangement of events in the story. As we do so we will notice a central conflict that needs to be resolved. Notice with me first the conflict introduced. This is seen in v1-4

### Conflict introduced

v1-4

In v1-4 we are introduced to the conflict of the story. It is as though chapters one and two were a detour. We are back to square one. Here we see the prophet back in action sent to the evil city to proclaim the message the Lord has given him. As I was working through this text I had the question, "Is the conflict in the story between evil Nineveh and holy and just God"? I believe the answer is *yes*. We do see the justice of God fast approaching the wickedness of Nineveh and how this impending danger is resolved. But is this the central conflict of the story? Are the verses we just read here in the story to communicate that Jonah repented and now obeys the commission set out in 1:1-2? And that the LORD now uses repentant preachers to carry out His mission? Or are we to see further how deplorable Jonah's heart was and how amazingly gracious and compassionate the LORD is? Two observations lead me to believe that Jonah is not to be viewed in these verses as honorable. First, a pattern break.

### Pattern breaks

v1-4a

We see a heart that is begrudgingly obeying God as we notice that the commission has three commands. 1) Arise 2) Go 3) Call out. In chapter one, we see these three commands. In chapter one we notice that Jonah carried out the first command. He arose. But then we do not see him going (command 2) nor do we see him calling out (command 3). Now in chapter three we see the parallel to chapter one and the three commands before Jonah. What does Jonah do this time? Arising and going he does. But what about the third aspect of the commission? Is Jonah faithful in the ministry of proclamation? Because he goes now to Nineveh are we to see conflict with the LORD resolved?

The writer of the story stops the action here. He breaks the pattern – Arise, go, and call out is followed by in v.3 arose, went and... The narrator begins to describe the city of Nineveh. He talks about the size of it as being a "three days' journey in breadth". Then in v.4 he talks about Jonah beginning to go on this journey and he only went a day's journey. Will Jonah carry out the commission? The writer through this pattern break and action freeze heightens suspense. You can almost hear readers of the story begging, "Tell us, tell us, did he carry out the commission"? The narrator wants us to be unsure about Jonah's heart. Will he or will he not preach the message in the manner in which the Lord has commanded him to preach it?

The second reason why I believe the central conflict in the story concerns Jonah is found in the latter part of v4. Here we notice how Jonah responds. His response is seen in a sermon dud and the use of a vague word.

### **Sermon dud**

**v4b**

In v.4b we come to the third aspect of the Lord's command – call out. Here we come to Jonah's sermon...if you can call it that. Conrad Hyers remarks on Jonah's sermon as "the world's shortest and poorest sermon becomes the world's most successful sermon". In Hebrew this sermon comprises of a mere 5 words (not much better in English = 8). Again as found everywhere in this story we see comical strangeness. When we look at our main character, we don't know whether to laugh or cry. Oddity and unusualness prevail throughout this little book.

### **Vague word**

And then notice the vague word he uses in his sermon. "Yet forty days and Nineveh shall be **overthrown**". Overthrown is the word in question. It can be translated as "overthrown" suggesting the idea of destroyed – ESV, NASB, KJV. Or it can be translated into English as "overturned" suggesting the idea of changed – NIV. What did the LORD mean by this word? How did Jonah want the Ninevites to understand the message? There seems to be ambiguity in the term that Jonah did not want to preserve. He wanted wicked Nineveh to hear only judgment. In his recorded message sounds of hope, mercy and potential rescue are muted.

Jonah's heart becomes more and more exposed. And what we see is not a pretty sight.

### **Conflict growing**

**v5-9**

As v.1-4 introduce the conflict of the story, notice in v5-9 and how the conflict grows. The writer builds suspense in two ways. Picking up the story in v5 listen as I read v5-9.

*And the people of Nineveh believed God. They called for a fast and put on sackcloth from the greatest to the least of them. The word reached the king of Nineveh and he arose from his throne, removed his robe, covered himself with sackcloth and sat in ashes. And he issued a proclamation and published through Nineveh, "By the decree of the king and his nobles: Let neither man nor beast, herd nor flock taste anything. Let them not feed or drink water, but 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.*

### **Redundant stretch**

**v5-8**

Our anticipation grows over what will happen. Suspense increases as we think about Jonah and his relationship with God and the mission of God. In v5 we witness how Nineveh takes to heart God's word. They believe God and demonstrate deep remorse for their evil.

But we do not see how the LORD responds quite yet. v.6-8 describe the King's response to God's word. He issues a command over his kingdom for the very thing his kingdom had already done. It appears that these verses function in the story as a way to heighten the reader's anticipation. The writer desires to stretch out suspense. What will happen? What will the Lord do? Where is Jonah and what is he doing? We feel conflict growing. We intuitively want it to be resolved.

### **Who knows**

**v9**

Verse nine arouses suspense even more. 1:6 and 3:9 mirror each other. The "maybe" and "who knows" lead us to the critical question, "can repentance alone suffice in reversing the consequences of their wickedness? Will God's hand of judgment turn away simply due to repentance and faith?"

### **Conflict peaking & resolving (?)**

**v10**

As the conflict climbs to its peak we hear v10.

*When God saw what they did, how they turned from their evil way, God relented of the disaster that he had said he would do to them and he did not do it.*

We finally ascend to the top of conflict and resolution is enjoyed in v.10. This is the most amazing scene in the story. Revival breaks out among some of the most ruthless and barbaric people known in Jonah's day. This chapter is to make clear something of the LORD. His passion to make His name known by reaching the world is clear. Ps.66:4 says, "All the earth shall worship you and shall sing unto you; they shall sing to your name" In Isaiah God's people coming back from exile were exhorted by these prophetic words: "I will send survivors to the nations...that have not heard my fame or seen my glory and they shall declare my glory among the nations" (cf. Isa.66:19).

The LORD's mission to make His name known to His adversaries (Isa.66:1-2) is victorious! Nothing can stop His Word (Isa.55:10f). He will reach the ends of the earth with His blessings in order that His glory will fill the whole earth (cf. Hab.2:14). Everyone is happy. Jubilation breaks out. Conflict is resolved...or is it?

Where's Jonah? I want to see his face radiating with joy as he gazes upon happy humans who just experienced the greatest rescue mission seen in the Old Testament. Where is Jonah? I want to rejoice with him with hugs and high 5s. Where, oh where, is Jonah?

There he is – one of the saddest pictures in the Old Testament – chapter 4:1

*But it displeased Jonah exceedingly and he was angry...*

The heart of the preacher comes out. We witness his begrudging obedience all along as we see his response to the rescue. Jonah was displeased with the LORD's compassion on wicked Nineveh. He was angry that the LORD did not "overthrow" them with his righteous anger. Rather he "overturned" them into repentant wonders of God's grace. Salvation comes from the LORD...and Jonah disapproves!

## Conclusion

Next week we will conclude the story by noticing specifically why Jonah was so displeased. We will also next week understand more precisely where we find ourselves as a church in this story. But for now...

### Δ Look at Jonah

- Recognize your sin
  - Δ Resenting God's ways in your life noticed in lack of joy over God's grace in other people's lives
    - Δ Baptisms & Testimonies run too long
    - Δ Missionary stories are out-of-date and irrelevant
    - Δ Hearing others share gospel consolations while thinking of selfish irritations
  - Δ Grinding out "obedience" while grinding in displeasure
    - Δ Attending church like punching in for work
    - Δ Tithing money like paying taxes
    - Δ Showing up for church activities like showing up for a company Christmas party

Δ **Look through Jonah**

- Recognize the gospel
  - Δ See Jonah hurled into the sea of wrath (in chapter one)
  - Δ Notice him plunging to the bottom of Sheol (in chapter two)
  - Δ Witness him coming out of this “death” rising to life (chapter two)
    - Δ Who does this remind you of?
    - Δ Matthew 12:40
  - Δ Notice how this “resurrection” comes before proclamation (chapter three)
  - Δ Of whom is Jonah a type? To whom does Jonah point? He is a sign of whom?
    - Δ Luke 11:30
- Repent of sin
  - Δ Begin to see the Lord Jesus and how much you miss him because of your sin
  - Δ Turn from the sin God has shown you today
- Rejoice in the Christ
  - Δ Thank him for substituting himself on the Cross for you
  - Δ Thank him for granting you his righteousness
  - Δ Thank him for the gift of life united to him by faith
  - Δ Joy in him for his glory and grace
  - Δ Joy in him for his splendor and sympathy
  - Δ Praise him for his name’s sake!
- Rejoice in the Christ with others
  - Δ Enjoy Flocks and fellowship
  - Δ Enjoy sharing gospel stories with each other
  - Δ Enjoy forgiving each other’s sin
  - Δ Enjoy boasting of the Christ to an unbeliever
  - Δ Enjoy celebrating the Christ with His people!

The grace of God found in Jesus Christ is always going somewhere. It is the inward movement of our hearts – seeing sin, experiencing sadness over sin, sensing hope in who Christ is and what he has done, repenting of sin, experiencing great joy in Jesus.

The grace of God found in Jesus Christ now moves outward. It sees opportunities to love and serve others, it causes a dying to self and a stepping out in faith, it rejoices in serving and seeing others served with grace.

This beloved is the power of the gospel. This beloved is the call on our lives. May God’s grace do this work in and through our lives today.