

Rejoicing in God's Mercy

Jonah 3:10-4:1-3

November 10, 2024

Greg L. Price

God's mercy to undeserving sinners like you and me is amazing and overwhelming. The Lord has delivered us once and for all from the guilt and condemnation of sin. We have been set free from the dominion and power of sin over us through our union with Jesus by faith in His death for us. **Biblical grace is God giving us** what we do not deserve (forgiveness, Christ's righteousness, and eternal life). Whereas **biblical mercy is God not giving us** what we deserve (His righteous judgment in hell). And yet having freely received such mercy from God in Jesus Christ, we can become so stingy in the mercy we show to one another.

James makes a most important point about mercy in James 2:13. James is not saying that there is not a time for God's righteous judgment, but what he is saying is that mercy shown to the weak, faltering, and repentant rejoices against the strict demands of justice which requires payment for almost every offense committed against us. God justice and God's mercy are not contradictory; rather God's mercy presupposes God's justice. God remains just though showing mercy (so can we).

When we have forgotten the mercy of the Lord to us, we will also forget to show His mercy to one another. When we are daily brought to tears over the mercy God has shown to us, we will look for every opportunity to show it to one another (in the family and church).

The Lord's prophet, Jonah, was patiently taught this very truth when God turned away His judgment from the city of Nineveh and showed His mercy. The main points are: (1) God's Mercy in Turning Away His Wrath from the Great City of Nineveh (Jonah 3:10); and (2) Jonah's Anger at God for Bestowing His Mercy upon the Great City of Nineveh (Jonah 4:1-3).

I. **God's Mercy in Turning Away His Wrath from the Great City of Nineveh (Jonah 3:10).**

A. Background.

1. Jonah had been commanded by the Lord to go to Nineveh, the capital city of Assyria, and declare God's judgment against its wickedness. Jonah sought to run away from God and from God's commission to him because Jonah knew that God is not only just but is also merciful to even the undeserving. Assyria had conquered the Northern Kingdom of Israel and had scattered the Jews throughout Assyria's vast empire and had brought in idolatrous people from other nations to intermarry with those who yet remained in Israel. But this was God's judgment upon Israel for having themselves rebelled against the Lord with all their idolatry. God brought an idolatrous nation, Assyria, to judge Israel who had turned from God to idolatry.

2. This cruel/wicked capital city of Assyria (Nineveh) was the last place on the face of the earth where Jonah wanted to preach God's Word. They did not deserve God's mercy. But you see, that is the very point of mercy—if it could be deserved, it would not be mercy.

3. When Jonah refused God's commission, he foolishly thought he could outrun God, but God brought a violent storm and a whale to swallow him to teach Jonah that he/we cannot run away from God. God's will is not necessarily easy or comfortable, but the consequences of stubborn disobedience to it will be worse.

B. Text

1. Jonah repented and God delivered him from the belly of the whale and when he went to Nineveh, he proclaimed the message of the Lord that we find in Jonah 3:4. But the most amazing thing happened: God granted Nineveh (even the king) a humble/contrite heart to repent of their sin (this is picture of the salvation God shall bring to the nations of the world through the gospel of Jesus Christ).

2. As a result of these acts of humiliation (at least outward if not inward brokenness before God), we read in Jonah 3:10 what our merciful God did. God did not destroy Nineveh because implicit in the

warning of judgment was God's mercy in calling them to turn unto Him. And when Nineveh humbly did so, the Lord stayed His righteous hand of judgment. God can have mercy on whom He will have mercy (Romans 9:18). That is His prerogative as our sovereign, holy Creator. Nineveh deserved God's judgment, but God chose to make Nineveh a trophy of His mercy as an encouragement to us all. That is a picture of the abundant mercy of our God toward us all in Christ.

3. Do you not see in God's repenting of judgment against Nineveh, His repenting of judgment against you, dear child of God? Oh, the glorious truth here that is revealed to us for our encouragement and comfort in the faith—God has repented of all judgment threatened upon you who receive and rest in Christ alone as your righteousness. Now, dear ones, no righteous judgment from God will ever befall you, whether in this life or in the life to come. Jesus removed it. All difficulties, sufferings, trials, and tribulations that befall you in this life are not God's curse but are for your good and for your growth in Christ. Rejoice and be glad, dear Christian, for God has repented of all His righteous judgment against you. He is a reconciled Father, and we are His beloved children.

II. Jonah's Anger at God for Bestowing His Mercy upon the Great City of Nineveh (Jonah 4:1-3).

A. What a notable transition we see as we pass from the glories of God's holy mercy in repenting of the judgment threatened against Nineveh (in Jonah 3:10) to the unholy anger of Jonah directed at the God who delights to show mercy to even the chief of sinners (Jonah 4:1). This is the sinful infirmity of one of the great prophets and types of Christ found in Scripture (Matthew 12:40). Let us briefly consider what brought Jonah to this point of anger and despising God's mercy (even preferring to die rather than to live).

1. Jonah had his own plan as to what Nineveh deserved—God's judgment. Israel was God's covenant people, not Nineveh. Israel had rebelled against the Lord, but what was important was Israel's salvation, not Nineveh's salvation. That is what Jonah seems to be saying in Jonah 4:2. Jonah had so closely tied the glory of God in his prophetic ministry to Israel, that he could only see Israel turning to the Lord if the Lord destroyed Nineveh, thus demonstrating to Israel that they alone were God's people.

2. Jonah knew the character of God, that He was gracious, merciful, slow to anger, of great kindness, and repented of threatened judgment where there was faith and repentance in a people. Jonah knew that if he went to preach to Nineveh that God might actually grant to the Ninevites faith in the Lord and repentance for their wickedness and then would deliver them from His judgment. Jonah's vision of God's salvation is limited to the Jews and does not include the cruel Assyrians (especially those who have conquered and treated Israel with such contempt).

3. It was with great difficulty that the apostles themselves preached the gospel to the Gentiles (Peter needed a vision from God to convince him to go to Cornelius in Acts 10), and that was even after Jesus had commanded them to go forth and disciple all nations (Matthew 28:18-20). The Apostle Paul made clear that God's plan was to bring salvation to the Gentiles in order to provoke the unbelieving and self-righteous Jews to jealousy (Romans 11:11). And God would then out of that jealousy bring all Israel to salvation (Romans 11:25-26).

4. Jonah wrongly conceived in his own mind that the salvation of cruel/wicked Nineveh would dim the glory of God's holiness. However, the holiness of God is not at tarnished by His mercy to Nineveh or to us. God's holiness and greatness is exalted. For God's mercy is only mercy because He is a holy God who deserves our perfect obedience. His mercy reveals that He does not save us because we deserve it, but because He is a gracious and merciful God to us in Jesus Christ.

5. Has our own pride and self-righteousness perverted our view of the grace and mercy of God that is in Christ Jesus? Have we looked at others or treated others as if they were undeserving of the kindness of God which we have received (though we are every bit as undeserving as the most heinous sinner on the face of the earth)?

6. Spiritual pride has no place in the lives of us who call ourselves Christians, who know

how foolish we are, how proud and conceited we are, and how given to follow the lusts of the flesh we are. Our pride is more grievous and detrimental than the heinous sins of others. If we truly understand our own sin, if we truly see how often we offend our holy God by our daily transgressions, then we of all people must be humbled before God that He would have mercy upon us. Let us boast not in our knowledge or purity, but in Christ and in His gospel that has mercifully saved us, even the chief of sinners.

B. When Jonah's plan to glorify God through the destruction of Nineveh did not work out (but God did the opposite in showing mercy to Nineveh), Jonah threw a pity party and claimed he did not want to live any longer (Jonah 4:3).

1. Jonah proudly conceived he had a better plan for Nineveh than did the all-wise, sovereign, merciful God. Because Jonah had placed his hope in his own plan (rather than trusting in God's most wise, holy, and sovereign plan), he became angry at God and even thought he would be better off dead than live with this disappointment.

2. Though we cannot approve of Jonah's behavior here, we cannot be too hard on him without being equally hard upon ourselves (for all the times we have done the same thing when our preconceived ideas, as to how God would be most glorified in various situations did not work out). How many times have we become angry and despaired of life because we thought God would be most glorified in saving that loved one right now, in restoring that backslidden brother/sister right now, in healing me immediately, in providing wisdom about an important decision now, in providing for my needs now? But how often does the Lord not choose to glorify Himself as we had conceived according to our timetable, and we become angry, frustrated, cast down (like Jonah)?

3. Pour out your heart to the Lord (not in anger, frustration, or despairing of life as did Jonah), but rather pour out your heart to the Lord recalling His mercy, His grace, His kindness, but also recalling His wisdom (which prevents Him from making a single mistake or error), His love (that has ordained this for your good rather than for your evil), and His sovereignty (wherein He has the right to choose that plan that glorifies Him the most—He is God and we are not).

C. Application

1. Dear ones, have we (like Jonah) tied the glory of God to His working by this one plan alone that we have conceived in our own mind? Have we put God into our own little box, and in effect, required that He work according to our plan? The sovereign Lord who is most wise will not be so confined by what we think would bring Him the most glory. So much of our own restlessness, anxiety, anger, and frustration is due to the fact that God has chosen to glorify Himself by a plan that we did not conceive and did not like. But that is His right. Jonah ran away from God, let us run to Him. In pouring out our hearts to the Lord, God help us to fall upon the mercy, the wisdom, and the love of our sovereign God who makes no mistakes and can do us (who are His beloved children by faith alone) no wrong.

2. Is God's rich mercy to us who are so undeserving confined and restrained by our judgmental, critical, unforgiving heart to those who are weak, faltering, and who have offended us. We should desire the repentance of those who have grievously offended us, but even in all of the steps we take to be reconciled, let us never ever forget mercy (God's mercy to us in the way we approach one another. "Blessed are the merciful: for they shall obtain mercy" (Matthew 5:7). When we are merciful with one another, Jesus says God's mercy abounds to us directly from Him and indirectly to us from others in our family and church.

Copyright 2024 Greg L. Price.