

Repentant Jonah 3

Our God loves to give grace. It thrills Him to extend grace to those who turn to Him, even those who seem beyond hope of forgiveness. God's limitless grace gave a second chance to a prophet who had failed miserably and to a city whose evil rivaled the Nazis. God's grace knows no limit. Have you received it? Are you willing to share it with the Ninevites in your life?

Turn to Jonah 3

Amazing Grace: Do you know the story behind it?

- **Written 1779 by John Newton**
- As a young man, not the kind of guy you'd expect to write hymns!...
- Went to sea at age 11
- Developed reputation for insubordination & vulgarity
 - o one occasion - flogged for trying to desert his ship
 - o another - thrown in brig for writing obscene songs about his captain & teaching them to crew
 - o one of his captains called him, "one of the most profane men I ever met"
 - o later said of himself in those years, "I sinned with a high hand, and I made it my study to tempt and seduce others."
- But that's nothing compared to what he did during last 9 yrs at sea: slave trade
 - o became a captain - led 3 voyages taking slaves - chained to each other for 9 months from Africa to the sugar plantations
 - o witnessed, allowed, & profited from horrific evil
- John Newton was not a good man!
 - o if ever a man was beyond God's grace - it was Newton
 - o slave traders are up there with Nazis - worst of the worst!!
- And yet God's grace knows no limits!
 - o God brought a series of near-death experiences that led Newton to faith
 - o God began to transform Newton
 - began to read & study scripture
 - turned from sin; eventually left the slave trade
 - became a gifted pastor & hymn writer
 - dedicated his life to the abolition of slavery
 - o His life turned around literally 180 degrees! Complete transformation!
- As he said towards the end of his life, "I am not the man I ought to be, I am not the man I wish to be, and I am not the man I hope to be, but by the grace of God, I am not the man I used to be."

Listen to *Amazing Grace* & realize...

- **John's story is not about John at all - it's about God!**
- God is the hero of Newton's story because it's all about grace
- the limitless grace of God that can save & transform the worst of sinner

And that's exactly what the book of Jonah is about

- not primarily about Jonah or the Ninevites; it's about God
- it's a book written to reveal the gracious character of God
- this morning we'll see God's grace at work in ch 3 to both Jonah and Nineveh

The chapter begins with God giving grace to Jonah

- God gives grace to one of His own – a believer

God gives Jonah a second chance

- **READ vv1-2**
- **If you'll recall - exact same mission God gave him in ch1**
 - o 1:2 - "Go to Nineveh the great city and cry against it..."
- **How'd Jonah do with that mission? He failed!**
 - o And not by a little bit! Failed completely! Ran 180° the other direction!
 - o And not by accident, he failed on purpose!
 - o Only when life got really bad (drowning) did he finally repent
- **If I was in God's shoes...**
 - o I would have given Jonah early retirement!
 - "You're not cut out for this... go try farming or shepherding..."
 - o Or at a minimum - bump him down to the minor leagues
 - "You're clearly not ready for a Nineveh-kind of assignment..."
 - "Off varsity - let's see how you do in JV for a while..."
 - o **I certainly wouldn't give him another chance...**
- **But God does!**
 - o gives him a 2nd chance to accomplish this important mission
 - o doesn't bench Jonah; boot him to minor leagues; put him on probation
 - o puts him right back on the field - gives him the ball!
- **Why does God do that? Why not bench the guy?**
 - o Not because He owes it to Jonah... owes him nothing!
 - o Not because He needs Jonah... has Amos & Hosea - better prophets!
 - o **Why? Because that's grace - and God loves to give us grace.**
 - Isa 30:18
 - o **Grace means getting something good you don't deserve.**
 - Jonah didn't deserve a 2nd chance but God gave it anyways
 - When we've fallen in sin, God longs for us to repent so He can show us grace once again!
 - o He loves to extend us grace by giving us a 2nd chance!
- **That's what God does throughout scripture:**
 - o Not just Jonah who gets a 2nd chance - that's a **pattern** with God
 - o **He gives 2nd chances to believers who...**
 - **Commit apostasy - Peter:** publically denies Jesus 3 times
 - **Give into depression - Elijah:** runs to the desert and asks God to put him to death - the guy's suicidal!
 - **Sleep with prostitutes - Samson:** exchanges his supernatural strength for a night of passion - thrown in prison

- **Abandon their ministries - like Jonah - like Mark:** abandoned Paul and Barnabas on their 1st missionary journey
 - **In fact, He loves to give us 3rd, 4th, and 900th chances!**
 - **Abraham**
 - gave into fear and failed God 3 times - not small failures!
 - but God kept giving him more chances
 - grew him into one of the most radically faithful believers
 - **God loves to show the world the limitlessness of His grace by restoring us when we fall** - not once, not twice, but as often as it takes
- **What that means for all of us who are God's children...**
 - **If you are still breathing, then God still wants to use you!!**
 - Even if you've fallen deeply into sin - He still wants to restore, heal, & use you to do great things for His kingdom
 - **You have not fallen too far... if you will just return to Him**
 - May be particular leadership positions that are no longer available
 - but God wants to open new doors for you - new ways to serve Him
 - There is always a 2nd chance to serve God
 - **"But Blake, I've done some horrible stuff... ashamed... God could never use someone like me"**
 - Did you sleep with some guy's wife and then have him murdered?
 - That's what **David** did!
 - Yet when he confessed, God forgave & restored him as king!
 - Now there were painful consequences for David...
 - But God didn't give up on him
 - And He won't give up on you either!
 - **So if you fallen into a deep pit of sin, don't give up.**
 - Confess your sin to God and turn from it
 - that's what it means for a believer to repent
 - Get help
 - a friend to pray for you & hold you accountable
 - if addictive in nature: Celebrate Recovery - Tues pm @ SW
 - And know: as you turn, God will give you a 2nd, 3rd, 4th chance to serve Him & accomplish great things!
 - **He's not done with you yet!**

God' grace to us is limitless - always ready to give His people a 2nd chance

But God grace is not limited to His people - God gives grace to all people

- that's the point of the rest of ch3...

God gives grace to Nineveh

- **set the scene – read vv 3-4**
 - "great city" – lit: a "three-day-visit" city
 - so big it would take 3 full days of preaching to get the word out
 - Jonah gets just 1 day in & begins to proclaim this simple message of 8 words... and what happens?

- **Read vv5-9**
 - o **His mission is cut short because the Ninevites beat him to the punch!**
 - they didn't need 3 days! Prophecy lights a fire in Nineveh!
 - those 8 words start a city-wide mass revival!
 - o **It starts with the people...**
- **v5: they believed in God**
 - o Hebrew: not "YHWH" - the God of Israel.
"Elohim" – the generic word for a great god.
 - o They were pantheists - believed in many gods, that didn't change
 - o But at this moment: come to believe a great god is angry with them
 - o So "believe" in v5 is...
 - NOT about individuals trusting in YHWH getting saved
 - about the city as a whole believing Jonah's message
 - o Will we see some of these Ninevites in heaven?
 - maybe - if they learned more about God from Jonah
 - but we don't know because that's not what the book is about
- **The city as a whole believes... and that belief terrified them!**
 - o realized with horror that their wickedness offended a powerful god
- **So they do the only reasonable thing - they REPENT**
 - o **Define "REPENT"**
 - in Hebrew & Greek simply means "to turn around" - 180°
 - In the Bible, it takes on a spiritual dimension.
 - = to turn away from something bad to something good in order to escape God's punishment
 - o Who is repentance for? Varies
 - In some passages: believers; in others: unbelievers; in others: both
 - o What must you turn from? Varies, too!
 - It might be a particular sinful behavior - Athenians in Acts 17
 - Or it might be a sinful belief - Jews in Acts 2
 - In the Ninevites' case - violent & immoral behavior
 - o Notice, not just the people who repent, the king does as well
 - Surprising! Kings usually stood above fears of the common man
 - But not this king. Steps off the throne – joins in their repentance.
 - o **Their repentance includes three things:**
 - **1) Recognition of sin**
 - Interesting: Jonah didn't have to identify their sins!
 - o His prophecy doesn't say what they've done wrong...
 - o because they already know!
 - The king himself lists out their sins in v8:
 - o "his wicked way" = general immoral behavior
 - o "violence which is in his hands" = frequent violent behavior against other people
 - Repentance begins with taking responsibility for their sin

- **2) Sorrow for sin**
 - it's not enough to simply admit the fact of your sin.
 - Repentance requires sorrow as well
 - you must grieve; regret
 - must feel about your sin like God does - sorrowful
 - Their sorrow is demonstrated by:
 - **fasting** – common way of demonstrating extreme sorrow
 - **sackcloth** = the coarsest of cloth, often made of goat's hair, was the normal dress of the poor, prisoners, and slaves; it was worn by those who mourned..."
 - In our day and age...
 - fasting and sackcloth aren't required for repentance
 - but sorrow still is
- **3) Commitment to change behavior**
 - The king understands: "Let each man turn..." v8
 - To escape God's punishment, they had to commit to abandon their sinful behavior
- **Notice two more things about their repentance:**
 - **extended all the way to their animals**
 - when I've sinned – never occurred to me to go get our cat!
 - So why the animals? show's the extent of their repentance!
 - they're holding nothing back!
 - **motivated by HOPE**
 - v9 - held out hope god would relent...
- **Fortunately for the Ninevites, that's exactly what God does**
 - **READ v10**
- **When Nineveh repents, God shows them grace by sparing their city**
 - now again, this isn't about getting to heaven
 - it's about a city escaping the punishment it deserved because they repented
 - God sees their repentance and relents
- **Why does God relent? Why does He give them a 2nd chance?**
 - they still deserved judgment
 - repentance didn't remove their guilt for killing tens of thousands
 - **Why? Same reason He gave Jonah a 2nd chance**
 - **because He loves to give people grace!!**
 - God doesn't enjoy destroying wicked people.
 - We tend to enjoy that.
 - WWII movie - Nazis get killed - we rejoice!
 - Osama Ben Laden - parties in the streets
 - We love when bad guys get justice.
 - But God doesn't
 - God is a fan of justice
 - BUT, He would much prefer repentance & redemption!
 - **God's desire is not destruction, it is salvation!**

- Ezek 33:11
 - 2 Peter 3:9
 - God rejoiced to spare Nineveh!
 - They repent and He joyously relents - that's His preference always!
 - In grace, He spared a repentant Nineveh from judgment they deserved.
- **God spared them out of grace...**
 - **but that wasn't actually the first time God gave grace to Nineveh**
- **Even before they repented, God gave them grace by sending Jonah!**
 - Jonah's prophecy was, itself, a gift of grace!
 - When my children disobey...
 - sometimes, when I see them do wrong, I simply say "I will put you in time out."
 - What's the purpose behind that statement?
 - Simply declaring the future to them? No
 - It's a gracious warning!
 - It's my right to punish immediately
 - but in grace, I warn them & give them a chance
 - That's what God was doing when He chose to send Jonah.
 - You realize, if all God had wanted was Nineveh's destruction...
 - wouldn't have sent Jonah! would have just smited them!
 - Sending Jonah was not an act of judgment, it was an act of grace!
 - That's often how prophecy worked in the Old Testament
 - not simply a declaration of the future
 - a motivator - declares what He *would do if all remains unchanged*
 - When Nineveh repented and God changed His mind...
 - Jonah was not surprised (angry, but not surprised)
 - he knew the prophecy was a warning, not a declaration of the unchangeable future
- **Jonah's prophecy was not a lie, it was not a mistake, it was grace!**
 - God gave them 40 days to repent...
- Surprisingly, they didn't need even 1 day!
- **Tells us: God had been showering Nineveh with grace long before Jonah arrived.**
 - God's grace began years earlier as He prepared the city for repentance
 - That's the only way you can explain the unprecedented speed...
 - Here's what we know from Assyrian history:
 - Jonah preached ~ 759 BC - a particularly rough time for Assyria!
 - Had suffered multiple military defeats - not at all used to losing!
 - 2 plagues - one 6 yrs before Jonah; one right before he got there
 - A few yrs earlier - June 15, 763 BC - witnessed total eclipse of sun
 - very rare - an omen of impending doom to the Assyrians
 - By the time Jonah arrives - they're terrified!
 - looking for a reason for all this bad stuff
 - and Jonah gives it to them!!
 - History tells us God had been graciously working in Nineveh for years!
 - Plagues, defeat - doesn't sound like grace
 - But to a violent, prideful people - that is grace!!

- God brought just the right amount of pain at just the right time to make them ready to hear Jonah and believe!
- If you know someone who is intentionally rejecting God...
 - not a bad thing to pray for God to trip them up - break them, crush their pride, bring them to a moment of crisis...
 - because that's usually what's necessary for a rebel to turn to God!
 - Worst thing - rebellious person enjoying life!!
 - Won't turn to God till the party ends and the pain begins!
- God crushed Nineveh - and it was grace!
 - if Nineveh had been at the height of its power when Jonah arrived, they would have just killed the dude!
 - But in grace, God had prepared their hearts!

Jonah ch 3 - not about Jonah or Nineveh - it's about God

- His limitless grace to Jonah - gives him a 2nd chance
- His limitless grace to Jonah - they repent & He relents

As the men go back to prepare communion, let's draw out the lesson...

God gave us this chapter to prove that His grace knows no limits

No limit to the depth of His grace – can save the worst of sinners

No limit to the breadth of God's grace - it is extended to all of mankind

- wants to save all nations, peoples
- from all backgrounds, religions, sins, political persuasions!

That's the God of the book of Jonah – a God of limitless grace.

Which begs the question... Have you received His grace?

- "I'm beyond hope"
- Did you hunt down, imprison, and murder Christians... PAUL
- God loves you and wants to forgive you and give you eternal life.
- But He won't force it on you. You have to accept it.

And if you have received His grace...

Are you willing to share it with the Ninevites in your life?

- Nahum called Ninevah "the city of blood"
- As Brian shared a couple weeks ago, about 100 years before Jonah came, the king of the Ninevites Ashurnasirpal II boasted "I stormed the mountain peaks and took them. In the midst of the mighty mountain I slaughtered them; with their blood I dyed the mountain red like wool...the heads of their warriors I cut off, and I formed them into a pillar over against their city; their young men and their maidens I burned in the fire"
- His successor, Shalmaneser II similarly bragged, "A pyramid of heads I reared in front of his city. Their youths and their maidens I burnt up in the flames."
- The Ninevites did that kind of stuff the time. They killed, raped, pillaged... and then threw a party to celebrate. They rivaled the Nazis for pure evil.
- And yet that's who God wants to save! He didn't want their destruction, He wanted their redemption.

- Is that what you want for the Ninevites in your life?
 - Is that what you want for the relative who has hurt you badly;
 - the coworker who's living a flagrantly immoral life
 - the guy who drops F-bombs every other word.
- Are you willing to extend them grace? That's what God wants of us. He wants us to extend them His grace because He is a God of limitless grace.
- So will you be like God and extend grace to the Ninevites in your life?
 - Will you share the gospel in word and deed with those walking in sin?
 - Will you choose not to judge them, but to love them and bless them, like God does?

God's grace knows no limits. We're going to end by celebrating that fact with communion...