



**SOMETHING'S
EATING AWAY AT
JONAH**

PART THREE

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Jonah 3:1-10, “Then the word of the Lord came to Jonah a second time: 2 “Go to the great city of Nineveh and proclaim to it the message I give you.” 3 Jonah obeyed the word of the Lord and went to Nineveh. Now Nineveh was a very large city; it took three days to go through it. 4 Jonah began by going a day’s journey into the city, proclaiming, “Forty more days and Nineveh will be overthrown.” 5 The Ninevites believed God. A fast was proclaimed, and all of them, from the greatest to the least, put on sackcloth.

6 When Jonah’s warning reached the king of Nineveh, he rose from his throne, took off his royal robes, covered himself with sackcloth and sat down in the dust. 7 This is the proclamation he issued in Nineveh:

“By the decree of the king and his nobles:

Do not let people or animals, herds or flocks, taste anything; do not let them eat or drink. 8 But let people and animals be covered with sackcloth. Let everyone call urgently on God. Let them give up their evil ways and their violence. 9 Who knows? God may yet relent and with compassion turn from his fierce anger so that we will not perish.” 10 When God saw what they did and how they turned from their evil ways, he relented and did not bring on them the destruction he had threatened.

Jonah has come a long way from chapter one hasn't he?

Let me refresh your memory.

When we first met him in the first verse of this story, God instructed him to, “Go to the great city of Nineveh and preach against it, because its wickedness has come up before me. But Jonah ran away from the Lord and headed for Tarshish.”

Unfortunately for Jonah, God already knew what he was up to and sent a great fish to bring him back. (It’s amazing what an extended layover in the smelly-belly of a giant fish will do for to spiritual maturity.)

In the last message, I made the case that the swallowing (Jonah 1:17) was an act of mercy by God, otherwise Jonah would have drowned had he been left engulfed in the waters with seaweed wrapped around his head (Jonah 2:5). Here’s another act of mercy from God; Jonah 2:10 “And the Lord commanded the fish, and it vomited Jonah onto dry land.”

That must have been a scene huh?

I’ve seen beached whales, but what in the world must it have looked like for this great fish to vomit a live human on shore? Come to think of it, the actions of the Ninevites in this chapter would make plenty of

sense if they had indeed witnessed this scene on the beach, right?

Let me put it in context for you. Imagine taking a family vacation at Point Pleasant beach at the Jersey Shore. Your kids or nephews are on the shore playing, you’re getting your tan on, and suddenly you hear loud screams. People are running out of the water pointing to something really large approaching the shore. You rush to grab your kids/nephews from the water and turn to see what everyone is pointing to. Lo and behold, the “something” is an enormous blue whale that looks like it’s about to be beached. As it approaches the shoreline, it opens its mouth and begins spewing out the nastiest, slimiest, odorous sea-junk you’ve ever seen. You’re just starting to cover your nose when you notice one particular large object in the puked-sea-junk moving around. In spite of the awful smell, you draw closer and the “large object” begins to stand up. “Holy cow! IT’S A MAN!” People start screaming and several turn to run away, others grab their smart phones and begin recording. You and a few others approach “fish-man” to try to help him. After assisting him in washing the “gunk” off his body, he opens his mouth to speak and these words come out, “The Lord God of heaven and earth has watched and observed how

sinful and rebellious Jersey residents are, and He is about to bring His judgment on you. Forty days from now, New Jersey will be destroyed!” Then he simply walks away to tell the next town the same message. In the background, you see the blue whale quietly slip back into the ocean as hundreds of beachgoers capture it all on their smart phones and tweet/post it all over the Internet.

Did that help put it in perspective a little?

Though an imaginary scenario, I can't imagine Jersey beachgoers suddenly dropping to their knees asking for God's forgiveness, or governor Chris Christie declaring a state of emergency and a statewide prayer and fast for repentance as a result of such an event. But that's a similar picture of what happened in Nineveh on that day. Jonah barely made his way through a third of the city (verse 3-4), when the Holy Spirit began to do a deep work of conviction in the hearts of all the residents of the city.

Great alarm has set in and Ninevite residents are panicked. Lest they turn from their evil ways, they might be on the verge of ending up like Sodom and Gomorrah.

Let me pause here for a moment and point out the fact that though

the Holy Spirit was turning around the hearts of the Ninevites, He was also busy at work on Jonah's heart.

Remember, Jonah does NOT want to be in Nineveh. He hates them because they are pagans, and because they have oppressed Israel at various times in the past. He'd prefer that God's actually judge them for their sin, which is why he fled the instructions in the first place.

I would like to think that when verse 1-3 of this chapter says “Then the word of the Lord came to Jonah a second time: “Go to the great city of Nineveh and proclaim to it the message I give you.” Jonah obeyed the word of the Lord and went to Nineveh”, it implies that Jonah had had a genuine change of heart.

Unfortunately, I'm wrong.

Later on in chapter 4:1-3, when God relents on His judgment and decides not to punish the Ninevites, here's how Jonah responds, “This change of plans greatly upset Jonah, and he became very angry. So he complained to the Lord about it: “Didn't I say before I left home that you would do this, Lord? That is why I ran away to Tarshish! I knew that you are a merciful and compassionate God, slow to get angry and filled with unfailing love. You are eager to turn back from

destroying people. Just kill me now, Lord! I'd rather be dead than alive if what I predicted will not happen.” (New Living Translation)

Yeah I know. Cringe worthy!

As much as we'd like to dwell on how awful a person Jonah must be, the truth is that we ourselves have people in our lives who've wounded us, and who we despise so much that we'd rather see them miserable than experience any positive transformation in their lives. So I'd take it easy on Jonah right about now.

That being said, we can surmise that though his outward behavior (Jonah 3:1-3) has radically changed from what it was in the beginning of the story (Jonah 1:1-3), nothing has changed internally. Jonah is a man convinced against his own stubborn will. As a matter of fact, by the time we get to the last verse of this book. Jonah is still unconvinced that the Ninevites deserve God's mercy. The book ends in the next chapter with Jonah sitting by a tree moping and whining about God's mercy for the Ninevites.

Now the Ninevites on the other hand, they are a great example of what it means to truly repent of sin.

First let's clarify what repentance looks is. Genuine repentance that honors God is not just an external action. It begins with the Spirit of God stirring in our hearts a deep dissatisfaction, or remorse over sin, which in turn leads us to take some very practical action steps towards repentance.

That's exactly what happened with the Ninevites. Jonah 3: 5 says that after Jonah's message, “The Ninevites believed God. A fast was proclaimed, and all of them, from the greatest to the least, put on sackcloth.” So think about this, God has cut through all their pagan beliefs and ceremonial rituals. He's gotten through to their hearts and exposed their inability to live up to their standards. Even more terrifying is the fact that they are on the precipice of facing the wrath of a holy God.

The good news is that what began as an internal sorrow over their sin quickly spills over into repentant action. In fact, when news reaches the king, he himself “got up off his throne, threw down his royal robes, dressed in burlap, and sat down in the dirt, (an indication that he was in mourning over something traumatic)” (Verse 6 – The MSG). But he doesn't stop there, he goes a step further and issues a “a public proclamation throughout Nineveh, authorized by him and his leaders:

“Not one drop of water, not one bite of food for man, woman, or animal, including your herds and flocks! Dress them all, both people and animals, in burlap, and send up a cry for help to God. Everyone must turn around, turn back from an evil life and the violent ways that stain their hands. Who knows? Maybe God will turn around and change his mind about us, quit being angry with us and let us live!” (Verse 6-9 | The MSG)

Think about how thorough these men and women were in their repentance. Not only does the king and his people fast and pray for forgiveness, but the animals were required to fast too, (just incase it was the pet goat’s fault that they got in this mess!)

This is what true repentance looks like. Even if you get the outward expression wrong, “...The LORD does not look at the things man looks at. Man looks at the outward appearance, but the LORD looks at the heart.”(1 Samuel 16:7). Sometimes it takes a while for our outward behavior to catch up with a transformative work God has already begun in our hearts.

Now here’s the best part of this story, verse 10, “When God saw what they did and how they turned from their evil ways, he relented

and did not bring on them the destruction he had threatened.”

Is that awesome or what! Judgment averted, thanks to the reluctant prophet!

Okay, here are two “take-homes” from this story?

ONE: LIVE A CONFESSIOANAL LIFESTYLE BEFORE GOD.

In other words, don’t let sin linger in your heart too long before confessing it to God. Here’s a secret, **GOD ALREADY KNOWS!** If you let unconfessed sin linger in your heart and in your life for too long, it will just eat away at you and keep you farther and farther away from God.

Keep your account current with God, not only are His mercies new each morning, (Lamentations 3:22-23) but 1 John 1:19 tells us that, “If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.”

TWO: CONFESS YOUR SIN TO A TRUSTED FRIEND AND SHARE HOW CHRIST HAS REDEEMED YOUR FAILURES.

James 5:16 says, “Therefore, confess your sins to one another and pray for one another, that you may be healed. The prayer of a righteous person has great power as it is working.”

There comes great healing and freedom when sin is exposed.

The world and Satan will lie to you and tell you that only shame and punishment awaits you if you open up your life. Yes, certainly, some form of repercussive punishment might follow in cases where a crime or a great offense was committed, but God wants you to live freely before Him. The fact of the matter is this - if man hates you, but God is pleased with the state of your heart, YOU HAVE WON!!! (Acts

4:19; Acts 5:29). Frankly, in the court of eternity, God’s view and judgment are all that matters and will ever matter.

So who have you sinned against? Make right what you have done wrong without making excuses.

Perhaps your sin is not against someone? Then find someone you love and respect, who also cares for you and has a vested interest in your spiritual development. Pour your heart out to them and ask them to pray for you.

Great freedom awaits you, just as it did for the Ninevites on that day.

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