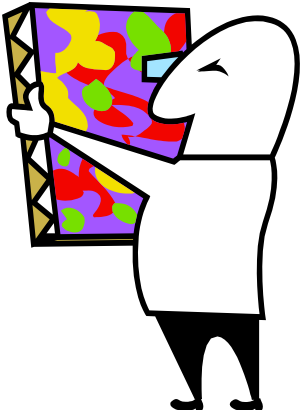


NORTH CHRISTIAN CHURCH PREP SCHOOL LESSON

Jonah Part 6

When we last left our friend Jonah, we had seen some of the “great moments” in his walk with God. We also had seen some of his “not-so-great moments”. Aren't you glad that YOUR life story isn't written in the pages of the Bible? Think about that one for a minute.

When I get to heaven, I want to thank people like Jonah for being a visual aid and showing me that God ALWAYS forgives and His plan NEVER changes! His plan stays the same, regardless of our successes and failures. He designed a beautiful piece of art, called “your life”, and He uses every breath that you breathe to create it and perfect it. Our part is making sure that we try to see the beauty of His plan at ALL times. When we have a spiritual “good moment”, we need to see it as Him working IN us. That equals GRACE. When we have a spiritual “not-so-good moment” we still need to see it as Him working IN us. Once again, that equals GRACE. There is no difference to God, so why do we see it differently? Well, it is because we are human.



While we are alive on this earth we are being “transformed” (changed) to be more like Him. We should see our life as one big, fun, adventure with many ups and downs. The world tries to turn our adventure into “pieces” of success and failures. We chop our lives into these chapters of “good” and “bad”. The good news is, as we have learned from Jonah, that it is NOT pieces and chapters. Our lives represent the different colors, shapes and sizes of God's grace. The end result is PERFECTION! A beautiful, PERFECT work of art! How? God is perfect, and His plan is perfect, and His plan WILL be completed! Please read that sentence one more time.

In chapter 3 of the book of Jonah, we read that Jonah finally obeyed God's instructions. He warned the people of Nineveh, they listened, and they repented of their “wicked ways”. They turned to God and were forgiven. Jonah was successful in his mission. This pleased him, right?

Jonah 4:1 *But, it greatly displeased Jonah and he became angry.*

Angry! What? Why is Jonah angry? Didn't God deliver the people of Nineveh? Didn't the Gospel get preached? Didn't thousands of people believe? Weren't these people now saved from an eternity without God? Isn't this amazing?

Jonah 4:2-5 *He prayed to the LORD and said, “Please LORD, was not this what I said while I was still in my own country? Therefore in order to forestall this I fled to Tarshish, for I knew that You are a gracious and compassionate God, slow to anger and*

abundant in lovingkindness, and one who relents concerning calamity. “Therefore now, O LORD, please take my life from me, for death is better to me than life.” The LORD said, “Do you have good reason to be angry?” Then Jonah went out from the city and sat east of it. There he made a shelter for himself and sat under it in the shade until he could see what would happen in the city.

I LOVE, LOVE, LOVE this chapter! Do you remember what we learned earlier in our lessons? The Word only focuses on our failures to show us how bad we are in our flesh and how much we need a Savior! We need a Redeemer! The Word of God shows us that deep down we are NOT good! We CHOOSE “bad” over “good” quite often, if it helps us in some way. We take God’s grace and mercy and we are selfish with it! Remember how much mercy God showed Jonah in our story? He accepted that mercy with open arms and couldn’t get enough of it when he realized how close to death he was in Chapter 2. Now, in Chapter 3, God is showing that same mercy to the Ninevites. When they heard the warning from Jonah, their attitude was...

Jonah 3:9 “Who knows, God may turn and relent and withdraw His burning anger so that we will not perish.”

The Ninevites understood that God might not destroy them if they listened to Jonah. They realized that God’s mercy could delay punishment or decide NOT to punish them at all. God can do this even when the punishment is totally deserved! That is God’s right as God! Jonah should have recognized this since he had just received this very same mercy. He deserved punishment for running in the OPPOSITE direction of God’s command. He even used the Bible Doctrine in his soul and prayed a Psalm of thanksgiving to thank God for this mercy. He was very aware of the mercy and grace that God gave him. Now Jonah is a witness to God giving the Ninevites the same mercy. Not only that, Jonah is the very person God used to show the Ninevites this mercy. They didn’t deserve it, but God was giving them one more chance! So, why is Jonah not excited for these people? Well, when push comes to shove, we WANT mercy but we don’t always want to GIVE it to those we don’t “like.”

Jonah 4:2 He prayed to the LORD and said, “Please LORD, was not this what I said [to myself] while I was still in my own country [Palestine]? Therefore in order to forestall this I fled to Tarshish, for I knew that You are a gracious and compassionate God, slow to anger and abundant in lovingkindness, and one who relents regarding calamity.

Jonah is completely honest with God and admits that the reason he broke his vow was because he just didn’t like the Ninevites! He didn’t want Nineveh to be saved! WOW! Are you that honest with God? Is there really a good reason NOT to be honest with God? The answer is no! He knows every thought you think before you even think it. God knows you are a sinner and He has forgiven every single sin. He knows every thought you have and every thought you will ever think. It is very humbling to know that THE perfect God sees every single bad thing about us and loves us just the same. Once we see ourselves like God sees us, we see that we don’t DESERVE His grace but we still RECEIVE His grace with open arms. He loves that! That is called “grace-

orientation". You think with grace towards yourself and, eventually, towards other people. That includes the people you DON'T like, too! Now, I said "eventually" because this does NOT happen over night! Jonah admits that he is not 'grace-oriented' towards the Ninevites. Why? Because he knows that God already knows it. God is not surprised when Jonah reacts the way he does. Maybe, just maybe, that's why the whole boat, big fish, disgusting belly experience happened in the first place. Hmmm...seems God is pretty smart after all!

When we come to grips with our failures and see them how God sees them, we are set free. You mean there is nothing I can do to make God stop loving me? You mean that God forgave ALL my sins? You mean Jesus paid for EVERY SINGLE sin, even the worst sins on this planet? You mean that even if I commit one of those "REALLY, REALLY, REALLY, BAD" sins, God's plan will still go on? YES! There is nothing but freedom when we see our life through the eyes of grace! Why do we have any expectations of ourselves when God only expects us to RECEIVE His grace? This is true your entire life. The truth is we are all sinners and we will continue to sin until the day that we die. In eternity past God looked down the corridors of time and saw ALL of your failures, before you even failed or succeeded, and designed a plan just for YOU!!! You just need to "see" His plan through all of the ups and downs of your life. Keep your eyes on His plan! Step out of this life and jump into Heaven. Pretend that you are watching a movie called "Your Life", written and directed by God. See yourself as if you are someone else watching you make these decisions. Watch yourself through God's eyes. What would you tell "you" to do if you were in Heaven helping God direct your movie? Now, you are not in the middle of the problem, you are in Heaven seeing your problem from God's eyes. It becomes much smaller, doesn't it? You can now see your troubles as adventures and opportunities to use the Word of God in your soul to bring God glory. You get to RECEIVE God's grace, just like He wanted you to do all along. Problems often come so that we may see our need for His grace in every single breath that we breathe! The entire adventure in Jonah's life was to reveal issues in Jonah's soul. Kids, we are not the smartest creatures. We do ONE good thing and we get puffed up and arrogant! We do one bad things and we hang our head in shame. God sometimes has to turn our world upside down to show us the big problems in our soul.

We now get to see how 'bad' Jonah really is. Again, thank God our lives are not written in the Bible, yes? Jonah is basically throwing a temper tantrum!

Jonah 4:3-5 "Therefore now, O LORD, please take my life from me, for death is better to me than life. The LORD said, "Do you have good reason to be angry?" Then Jonah went out from the city and sat east of it. There he made a shelter for himself and sat under it in the shade until he could see what would happen in the city.

Jonah is hoping that God will destroy Nineveh. The warning from God gave Nineveh 40 days to repent! So while Jonah is waiting, God takes this time to teach him a lesson. Why is Jonah so upset? As I mentioned earlier, Jonah had a history with Nineveh. Back in Jonah's day, Nineveh was one of the most powerful cities in the

Assyrian Empire. Assyria was unfriendly with Israel and was used by God to discipline Israel. As a matter of fact, the whole Northern Kingdom of Israel was captured by Assyria almost 100 years after Jonah wrote this book (671 B.C.). Ultimately, however, God punishes Assyria/Nineveh for its wicked ways. That is why God is sending Jonah to give them the warning. Now, with these details in mind, it is easy to understand why Jonah, being a prophet of Israel, would be ALL FOR God's wrath on these people and NOT His mercy. Jonah had an emotional problem with Nineveh. This emotion causes him to think not so clearly regarding God's mercy towards them. He doesn't like it one bit! Jonah has no desire to show mercy towards his enemy, which is why he broke his vow in the first place (**Jonah 4:2**). This is true of most human beings! The old nature resists showing God's mercy to His creatures. Our old nature is disgusting and despicable! Wouldn't you agree?!