

Sovereign Grace in Nineveh (Part 1)

Jonah 3: 1-10

The harrowing ordeal for Jonah, being within the belly of the great fish for three days, had finally ended. He found himself alive and well, standing on dry ground. Following his miraculous deliverance, Jonah was again confronted by the Lord. He learned the hard way that it was impossible to escape the presence of God.

As we look at this third chapter of Jonah, we are again reminded of the central theme within the book – the absolute sovereignty of God, in particular, His sovereignty in dealing with humanity. God had a plan for Jonah that also involved His plans for Nineveh. Jonah had endured a horrific ordeal, but he had been unable to escape the call of God.

Our text today reveals the undeniable and incomprehensible mercy and grace of God toward those who were undeserving. Jonah had rebelled and deserved to face punishment for his rebellion. The Assyrians were barbaric idolaters, having no desire for the true, and living God. The Lord could have judged Jonah and Nineveh, and would have been just and right in His actions. Rather than dealing with them as they deserved, God chose to extend mercy and grace.

This Old Testament book ought to remind us of the mercy and grace of God for all humanity, in light of His absolute sovereignty. I am thankful the Lord had a plan to redeem mankind, and He was determined to see it through. For many God's sovereignty is difficult to embrace, but I rest in a sovereign Lord who stands in absolute control of my life and eternal existence!

As we begin to discuss chapter three of Jonah, I want to examine the [observations](#) revealed in the text as we consider: [Sovereign Grace in Nineveh](#).

I. A Conversation with God (1-2) – This chapter opens with a conversation between Jonah and the Lord. Through their conversation, we discover:

A. Grace was Extended (1) – [And the word of the LORD came unto Jonah the second time](#). Looking at this statement apart from its context would not be that significant. However, when it is considered in light of everything we've discussed thus far in Jonah, it is quite remarkable. God had spoken to Jonah previously, calling him to go to Nineveh and preach against their wickedness. Likely motivated by resentment and fear, Jonah chose to ignore the Lord's call, and flee unto Tarshish.

- Through God's patience, coming to Jonah a second time, we see His marvelous grace extended. God was in no way obligated to Jonah. He had already provided more than Jonah

deserved. God could have allowed him to perish in the sea, or abandoned him after delivering him from the belly of the whale. However, God continued to deal with Jonah in grace. He again came to Jonah, revealing His will for Nineveh and Jonah's involvement in His plan.

- Aren't you thankful that the Lord is not a "once and done" kind of God? How many times have we experienced similar grace? No doubt the Lord has spoken to us about His will, and like Jonah, we chose a different path. He would be just in allowing us to have our way, but He graciously comes again to us, revealing His plans for our lives. Such grace is revealed throughout Scripture, and God continues to patiently deal with us according to His sovereign plan.

B. Obedience was Expected (2) – [Arise, go unto Nineveh, that great city, and preach unto it the preaching that I bid thee](#). Surely Jonah was much more receptive to the voice of the Lord than he had been prior to his encounter in the sea. However, not unlike the first time Jonah was approached, God expected obedience. This was not a conversation to see how Jonah felt about the Lord's proposition. God had not spoken for mere consideration; He fully expected obedient compliance. God had determined to extend grace to Nineveh, calling them to repent of their sin, and Jonah was the man He had chosen to deliver the message. There were not several options for Jonah; he was expected to respond in obedience.

- Often those who do embrace God's sovereignty, do so selectively. They readily embrace sovereignty when it relates to blessing and provision; but when it deals with God giving specific instructions, many question whether they must comply. I am thankful for the Lord's provision and guidance in my life. I dread the thought of where my journey would have been had it not been for the Lord's sovereign direction. Like Jonah, sooner or later, we must come to the conclusion that God expects complete obedience. His Word and guidance for our lives are not mere suggestions – they are given with the expectation of obedience.

C. Competence was Provided (2) – [Arise, go unto Nineveh, that great city, and preach unto it the preaching that I bid thee](#). There is no doubt that Jonah cared little for Nineveh. In fact, he utterly despised them. God knew how Jonah felt about the Assyrians, and He did not expect Jonah to preach to them of his own accord. The Lord would provide everything Jonah needed, including the words he would proclaim within the city. God would sustain Jonah in this endeavor.

- Our human nature tends to focus more on the enormity or difficulty of the task, instead of relying upon the Lord. While He expects obedient submission to His will for our lives, He never expects us to embrace the task in our own ability. Where God leads, He provides. If He has spoken to you about His will for your life, you can rest knowing He will be there with you, each step of the way, faithfully equipping you for the task at hand.

II. The Commitment to God (3-4) – Here we discover Jonah’s decided commitment to the Lord’s desire for Nineveh, after hearing from the Lord the second time. Notice:

A. The Sincerity of Jonah (3a) – *So Jonah arose, and went unto Nineveh, according to the word of the LORD.* Following his miraculous delivery from the belly of the great fish, Jonah immediately arose and made his way to Nineveh. He would have traveled east for over 500 miles from the Mediterranean shore of Israel to Nineveh. If Jonah had learned nothing else, he had discovered that obedience to the Lord was always best. There is no argument or attempt to avoid his mission. Jonah went to Nineveh as the Lord had commanded.

- We would expect nothing less from Jonah at this point. He had escaped certain death, and he knew there was no further need to neglect the word of the Lord or attempt to avoid His call. Unfortunately, we tend to be rebellious and disobedient at times as well. I have never faced anything like Jonah, but there have been seasons in life where God used circumstances to get my attention. Following the particular ordeal, I was especially attentive to His will for my life, and more than ready to respond favorably to His desires. We need the commitment Jonah had at this moment in his life, ready and willing to do as the Lord has commands, regardless of what He has asked us to do or where the mission may lead.

B. The Enormity of the City (3b) – *Now Nineveh was an exceeding great city of three days' journey.* This statement affirms the enormous size of Nineveh, the Assyrian capital. This does not imply that it took Jonah three days to make the trip to Nineveh, but that it would have taken three days to journey around the perimeter of the city. Scholars contend the city would have been some sixty miles in circumference. The Lord declared there were over 120,000 who were unable to discern their right hand from their left, *Jonah 4:11*. However, many believe the total number of inhabitants could have been as high as 600,000 at this time. The city was on the east bank of the Tigris River, one of several cities founded by Nimrod. Warren Wiersbe states that one wall at Nineveh would have been eight miles in circumference, boasting 1,500 towers on that section of wall. Some estimate the towers were 200 feet high, with the walls being 100 feet in height, and three chariots wide. The palace and outer courts were estimated to have covered around 100 acres. This would have been a magnificent and intimidating site for the reluctant prophet. He was charged with preaching a message of repentance to the great city of Nineveh.

C. The Severity of the Message (4) – *And Jonah began to enter into the city a day's journey, and he cried, and said, Yet forty days, and Nineveh shall be overthrown.* It appears that Jonah did not immediately begin preaching upon reaching Nineveh. Apparently, he traveled a day’s journey

before he began to proclaim the warning of judgment. By this time, he likely would have reached the heart of the city and many would have heard his words.

- Jonah's message was very simple and matter of fact, but it was also quite alarming – In forty days, Nineveh will be overthrown. Can you imagine the anxiety Jonah might have felt as he walked through the heart of the great city, warning of impending judgment and doom? He had no way of knowing how they would respond to a Jewish foreigner, warning of death and destruction. These were ruthless, barbaric people, who feared no one. They had grown accustomed to victory in battle, and annihilation of their enemies. Regardless of their individual responses, Jonah heralded the message of impending judgment.
- It is interesting to note the time period given prior to judgment – forty days. The number forty is often associated with testing and judgment in Scripture. The rains descended for forty days during the flood. The spies spent forty days viewing the Promised Land. Israel wandered for forty years in the wilderness. Jesus was tempted for forty days of Satan. Judgment had been announced. God had graciously warned of impending doom. It was now up to the people of Nineveh to respond to the call for repentance.

Conclusion: We will continue with the unexpected response from Nineveh in our next study. God had not asked or expected Jonah to force Nineveh's submission; he had only been called to deliver the message. In His sovereignty, God chose to extend grace to the Assyrians.

God remains sovereign, and deals with those He chooses. We are not asked to force submission to the Gospel. We lack the ability to save anyone from their sin. We, like Jonah, are only asked to proclaim the Good News. God desires humanity to hear of His saving grace, and we have been entrusted with the responsibility to share the message. We have no way of knowing how they will respond, but we must be faithful to proclaim the Gospel.

Where do you stand with the Lord? Have you responded to His gracious offer of salvation? If so, are you living in submission to His will for your life? If there are needs, come to Him!