

Amazing Grace: No Shadow of Turning

Jonah 3 || Pastor Shawn Gendall || 5 September 2021

*To CARE for one another in truth and in love,
To GROW together as followers of Jesus,
To SERVE those God has placed in our path.
– CG Mission Statement*

Icebreaker: What's a perfect vacation for a long weekend like Labor Day?

Worship: [Psalm 2:10-12](#) (*Remain a few moments in worship with this passage. What is God's invitation?*)

Sermon Summary for [Jonah 3](#) (*Read the passage aloud before reading the sermon summary.*)

When we read a story like Jonah's, it's easy to fall into the trap of assuming we could have done better. That in a similar position, rather than run from God, we would have heeded His call; that we would gladly move toward our enemies with peace in one hand and God's good news in another. But those presumptions won't get us very far in God's Kingdom. Instead, we're called to humbly approach Jonah's story and imagine what it would have been like for us had we been there.

To this point, Jonah has proven fearful, stubborn and reluctant to God's call. For two good reasons: first, he had every reason to be fearful of the Ninevites. These were a brutal, cruel people. Second, Jonah felt a sense of loyalty to his own people; crossing over to extend God's grace to their enemies felt wrong. Nonetheless, after his encounter with God on the high seas, Jonah hears and obeys God's call.

Throughout this story, God is exceedingly patient, full of loving kindness, faithfulness, and ever-ready to extend His grace. God is also active, working in and through His creation – orchestrating a beautiful movement of His Spirit to bring forth repentance in Nineveh. And above all of these, we see His glorious grace revealed in this story as He offers Jonah another chance to heed His call. The same is true for the Ninevites: When God sees their repentance, He responds in compassion and grace. But that brings up a big question: Did God change His mind? (*Can He change His mind if He is everlasting and immutable?*)

It's true that everything comes from God. But God is also interactive and responsive – in a dynamic, relational way with His creation. Ultimately, He does not change His mind; and He never stops doing what He has set out to do. But God carries out His will through deep and meaningful interaction with us. He responds to our responses toward Him. God longs to show grace. One theologian put it succinctly:

“When the Ninevites repented, their standing towards God's righteousness was altered. So God's mode of dealing with them must alter accordingly. If God is not to be inconsistent with His own unchanging character, certainly He in His justice will take vengeance on the hardened impenitent but also delight to show mercy to the repentant.”

God is deeply aware of all that goes on in our world, in our lives, and in our hearts. And He is engaged in every facet of His creation as Shepherd, Father and King. The Ninevites offer us a beautiful picture of how we are to respond (v7-9) and repent. God's glory is most clearly revealed here in the hearts of the Ninevites – their responsiveness and their embrace of this new journey God has called them too. May this be true for us too – that God's glory would be revealed not only in our goodness (and how we express our love and obedience to Him), but also in our repentance when we fall.

So we must ask ourselves: *Will we trust God?* As disciples who want to follow His ways, we must truly learn to trust Him – that He engages in our lives, is attentive to our needs, and that His heart is focused on our repentance toward Him. All for our good. Ultimately, the question is whether our trust in Him will compel us to love. Do we

yearn and pray for the flourishing of all? The Ninevites are in no way safe to Jonah. And yet God calls him to go and proclaim God's mercy to them. To follow God to Nineveh is a true act of trust. This story calls us to ask these questions because Jesus takes the repentance we see in the Ninevites, and He lives it out for all of us. He becomes a prophet who speaks of the grace of God but also the living sacrifice who lives on our behalf and teaches us to do the same ([Joel 2:11-14](#)).

Discussion Questions (*You will not be able to discuss all the questions. Pick the ones you like. Some are personal perspective and application questions for life-transforming discussions.*)

Can God change his mind?

- Can you think of a recent example when you expressed an opinion and then later changed your mind?
 - Would you describe that “change of mind” as good, bad, something else?
 - How does our culture receive the “changing of mind”?
- When you think of God's character – in particular His goodness – what do you think of?
 - Shawn noted that “*God carries out His will through deep and meaningful interactions with us.*” If this is true: We, the work of God's Creation, play a role in the shaping of the world.
 - What is your reaction to that notion?
 - Do you believe this was true then and is still true today?

Will we trust him?

- In this story, what made it difficult for Jonah to trust the Lord and His call?
- What does it mean that *God's glory is revealed in our repentance*? How does this connect to trust?
 - In what areas of your life are you able to fully trust the Lord?
 - Has this been something you have had to work at and grown in, or something else?
 - In what ways do you find it difficult to trust the Lord? Why?

Will our trust in God compel us to love those we deem “unsafe”?

- In light of our current cultural moment, it's likely that those “enemies” (those God calls us to pray for, as with Jonah and the Ninevites) are those with differing beliefs or who are disagreeable to us.
 - Considering this, who are “unsafe” people for you? Are you praying for their flourishing? If not, could you honestly do that? Or are you praying simply that you would endure and tolerate them?

[Link to Weekly Prayer Guide](#)

Engage & Experience: Generous Service

“I was inspired watching our church mobilize around filling hygiene kits for The People Concern and Downtown Women's Center! Our focus, connectedness, and unity gave me nostalgia for the days before the pandemic when there weren't so many barriers to serve. If I'm honest, finding ways to involve families hasn't been easy. And to see kids involved, giving directions to their parents, “fill three kits, take one” felt like receiving a gift you didn't know you needed. I was reminded of the famous saying by Martin Luther King Jr., “Everybody can be great...because anybody can serve. You don't have to have a college degree to serve. You don't have to make your subject and verb agree to serve. You only need a heart full of grace. A soul generated by love.”

– **Michael Henderson, Director Hope for LA**

Labor day marks the end of unemployment benefits and the eviction moratorium in the U.S. People all across LA County will experience additional hardship as they try to find income, housing, and recoup lost rents.

- What spiritual practices can we use to keep our hearts full of grace and our souls generated by love during this turbulent time?
- How can we tangibly meet needs in our community?