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**RESISTING GRACE**

*The tragic story of Jonah!*

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A Commentary by Zach Adams

This commentary is the byproduct of a sermon series Zach Adams taught at Calvary316. For the complete audio and video of each study, visit [Calvary316.tv/ResistingGrace](http://Calvary316.tv/ResistingGrace).

**Resisting Grace** | Commentary on the Book of Jonah  
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# *Jonah* 1:1-2

In way of introduction, the Book of Jonah falls into a category of Old Testament scriptures known as the Minor Prophets. Note: These books are not to be considered minor in any other sense than their length. It's been said, "They're minor prophets with a major message."

Yet, of all of the prophets — Major and Minor alike, specifically, the Book of Jonah is completely and totally unique. First, unlike all of the other prophetic writings, the Northern Kingdom of Israel nor the Southern Kingdom of Judah are ever mentioned by name.

Secondly, the Book of Jonah is unique because it doesn't present a series of prophetic messages typically found in the prophets, but instead a three-act drama: Jonah on a boat, Jonah under the sea, and Jonah in Nineveh. In a sense, the Book of Jonah reads more like the script of a play than a prophetic monologue.

What's interesting is that the Book of Jonah only contains one, eight word prophecy recorded in chapter 3 verse 4. Jonah declares upon his arrival to Nineveh, "Yet forty days and Nineveh shall be overthrown!" With these things in mind, the importance of the Book of Jonah is not found in its prophetic overtones, but rather in its particular narrative.

And it's to this point you need to know, contrary to popular opinion and what you probably learned in Sunday school, the story of Jonah is not about a magical whale! Yes, it's true and fair to admit that this tale garners a lot of attention, for it presents a scene whereby Jonah is swallowed by a "great fish" only to, after three days and three nights, find himself being vomited alive back onto dry land; and yet, there is much more to this story. Consider that while the "great fish" is mentioned 4 times in 4 chapters, and the city of Nineveh is mentioned 9 times, Jonah is mentioned 18 times, with God being referenced 38 times!

As we work our way through this book, keep in mind the story is really not about a fish nor is it really about Nineveh. Instead, by the pure emphasis of the participating characters, this book presents a story about a gracious God and the way He handles Jonah.

One more thought before we dive into the text. Though there have been some who have tried to soften the supernatural elements of this story by claiming the Book of Jonah should be viewed as either mythological or allegorical, the truth is it can only be read as literal.

Now I understand a historical presentation of this story becomes complicated by Jonah and the great fish, but a departure from a literal reading of the Book of Jonah creates larger problems than you might have at first realized.

Aside from the fact the structure of the book provides no evidence of anything other than a literal reading — specifically referencing known places and peoples in history, to this point look no further than what Jesus said in Matthew 12:38-41. We read, “Then some of the scribes and Pharisees answered, saying, ‘Teacher, we want to see a sign from You.’ But Jesus answered and said to them, ‘An evil and adulterous generation seeks after a sign, and no sign will be given to it except the sign of the prophet Jonah. For as Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of the great fish, so will the Son of Man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth. The men of Nineveh will rise up in the judgment with this generation and condemn it, because they repented at the preaching of Jonah; and indeed a greater than Jonah is here.’”

Not only does Jesus’ statement to the Scribes and Pharisees affirm a literal and historical reading of the story of Jonah and what results in Nineveh (even confirming this great fish), but Jesus also does something else of particular interest. The final reason the Book of Jonah is unique is because the story illustrates the mission of Jesus. This idea of Jesus being “greater than Jonah” is something we’ll be addressing throughout our study! Let’s begin by reading the first two verses.

**Jonah 1:1-2, "Now the word of the Lord came to Jonah the son of Amittai, saying, 'Arise, go to Nineveh, that great city, and cry out against it; for their wickedness has come up before Me.'"**

In order to understand this incredible story it's important we take a few minutes to set the scene by examining the times as well as establishing a profile for Jonah. For starters, you should know this is not the first mention of "Jonah the son of Amittai" in Scripture.

In 2 Kings 14:23-27 we read, "In the fifteenth year of Amaziah the son of Joash, king of Judah, Jeroboam the son of Joash, king of Israel, became king in Samaria, and reigned forty-one years (a divided kingdom). And Jeroboam did evil in the sight of the LORD; he did not depart from all the sins of Jeroboam the son of Nebat, who made Israel sin.

He restored the territory of Israel from the entrance of Hamath to the Sea of the Arabah, according to the word of the LORD God of Israel, which He had spoken through His servant Jonah the son of Amittai, the prophet who was from Gath Hopher. For the LORD saw that the affliction of Israel was very bitter; and whether bond or free, there was no helper for Israel. And the LORD did not say that He would blot out the name of Israel from under heaven; but He saved them by the hand of Jeroboam the son of Joash."

During the early half of the 8th century BC, Jeroboam II came to power in the Northern Kingdom of Israel. What is noteworthy about his 41 year reign is that while Israel enjoyed political stability, economic growth, material prosperity, and territorial expansion these things did not occur because of the people's goodness or merit.

Not only did the high places remain and idolatry continue, but Jeroboam himself "did evil in the sight of the Lord." Ironically, while "the LORD saw that the affliction of Israel was very bitter" but "there was no helper for Israel" He chose to use wicked Jeroboam anyway!

You see, Israel experienced the blessings of God not because they'd earned or deserved His blessing (as a matter of fact it was only God's mercy that was withholding a certain judgment). Instead, Israel was being blessed for one reason — God's grace!

During these years there was an active presence of God in the Northern Kingdom... His grace was seeking to draw a wayward people back to Himself, while His prophets, men like Hosea and Amos, were actively warning of the consequences if the nation continued in their sin and rebellion. Because of the influence of Elisha, the word of God was being proclaimed.

Most interesting, it was during this same time-period that the prophet Jonah was ministering in Israel. As we read in 2 Kings 14:25 Jonah had predicted victory for the Israel when King Jeroboam attacked a group of Gentiles nations reconquering lands that rightfully belonged to the Jews. In contrast to the dire warnings of his contemporaries, Jonah's prophetic ministry was not one of doom, but certain glory. As such, it's likely Jonah was extremely popular with the people as well as with King Jeroboam.

Aside from all of this, Jewish tradition presents Jonah as possessing quite a profound spiritual heritage. In 1 Kings 17 we are told of an interesting season of Elijah's ministry which during a three year famine in Israel, God instructs Elijah to go just over the border of Galilee into a Phoenician outpost called Zarephath where a widow would provide for his needs.

Well, upon his arrival, Elijah finds this widow only to discover her situation was bleak. Because she was low on provisions (food specifically), Elijah preforms a miracle whereby her flour bin and her jar of oil never ran out. Not only would these provisions be enough so that she and her son could survive the famine, but there would be enough food for Elijah as well.

Sadly though, in the process of time, this widow's young son grew ill and ends up dying. In one of the most amazing miracles in all of the Old Testament, we're told Elijah came, stretched himself out on the child three times, and cried out to God. Then most incredibly "the LORD heard the voice of Elijah; and the soul of the child came back!"

I bring this story up because according to Jewish tradition, this resurrected boy was none other than Jonah! Legend states that, once the famine was over, this woman and her son moved to the town of “Gath Hopher” where Jonah was dedicated to serve the God of Israel and would later receive his prophetic appointment from none other than Elisha himself.

If this is true, that Jonah was the resurrected boy of this widow living in Zarephath, the implications are radical. First, this means Jonah was acquainted with resurrection. He knew first hand that the God of Israel had the power to raise even the dead to life. This idea will become more important as we look at the events of the next chapter.

Secondly, it would also mean Jonah knew what it was like to experience the grace of God. As a boy he watched as the famine depleted their resources. He saw the desperation in his mom’s face as she used up the last of the flour and oil to make bread.

But Jonah had also witnessed a miracle. He witnessed that, in the moment of their greatest need, God provided for them by sending the prophet of Israel, Elijah to his home! He watched as the flour and the oil miraculously failed to run out. God’s grace had saved them and in the process afforded them life when their outlook had been certain death.

While each of these points add a certain depth to our story, there is one more implication to Jonah being this widow’s son that literally changes the entire way you read the story.

Consider that in Luke 4, in response to His rejection by His hometown of Nazareth, Jesus specifically heralds this widow along with Naaman the Syrian as being examples of Gentiles who had come to faith in the God of Israel. David Guzik writes, “Jesus’ audience wanted special favors because He was in His hometown. Jesus pointed out that this doesn’t matter to God, using God’s work among the Gentiles in the days of Elijah and Elisha as examples.”

Let that settle for a moment. Could it be that Jonah was not Jewish by birth, but was a Gentile boy who’d been grafted into the family of God by grace through faith?



Even Jewish tradition confirms this identity of Jonah. According to the Jewish Encyclopedia entry for Jonah, “According to one authority his mother was the woman of Zarephath that entertained Elijah. As this prophet, who was also of priestly descent, would have profaned himself if he had touched the corpse of a Jew, it was concluded that this woman, whose son, Jonah, he “took to his bosom” and revived, was a non-Jew.” This entire perspective is also reiterated in the 4th volume of Louis Ginzberg’s famous book “The Legends of the Jews.”

Not to descend to far down the rabbit hole, but Jonah being a Gentile makes sense as it pertains to the overarching idea of God sending someone to Nineveh. According to Deuteronomy 4, the purpose for Israel was to be an example unto the world. Never once had God commissioned missionary activity whereby He sent Jews out into foreign countries.

As one author put it, “Israel’s proselytism was to be non-verbal. Israel was not so much to preach as it was to obey and to teach.” This is what made the Great Commission of Jesus so radical. Instead of the nations coming to Jerusalem to encounter God at the Temple, God’s Spirit indwelled people, Living Temples, who were then being sent out into the nations.

If Jonah was ethnically Jewish, sending him to Nineveh would have completely deviated from God’s core purpose for Israel. However, if he was a Gentile convert then Jonah becomes uniquely qualified to be God’s messenger for such an occasion, and in actuality becomes a foreshadowing of the church receiving the Great Commission. With this in mind, I don’t think it’s an accident the name “Jonah” means “dove” — which is a picture of the Holy Spirit.

“But wait a second Pastor Zach, if you look down at verse 9 Jonah says, ‘I am a Hebrew!’ Aside from this the first verse even opens with the mention of a Jewish father ‘Amittai’. Doesn’t it seem Jonah was Jewish and therefore not the son of this widow?” — Maybe.

As it pertains to Jonah’s statement in verse 9, I don’t believe it’s definitive either way. From Jonah’s perspective, he was a Hebrew — by choice, not by birth. He’d moved from Phoenicia to

the land of Israel at a young age, was circumcised according to Jewish law, and even became a prophet. Additionally, it's not impossible that "Amittai" was his adoptive father.

To this point, in the Law, God even created a pathway for citizenship. In Exodus 12:48, "When a stranger dwells with you and wants to keep the Passover, let all his males be circumcised, and then let him come near and keep it; and he shall be as a native of the land."

Why is Jonah being a Gentile significant? Though both his identity as either a Jew or Gentile convert would both equally contribute to his sense of moral superiority over the pagan Ninevites, if Jonah had been a Gentile recipient of the grace of God his resistance to that grace now being demonstrated to other Gentiles becomes all the more astounding.

Because it would be bad hermeneutics and poor exegesis to base the entire story of Jonah on an unsubstantiated Jewish tradition as opposed to solid Biblical fact, instead of being dogmatic (which you can't) I plan to unpack the story of Jonah with both considerations in mind. The application of his story from the Jewish context as well as the Gentile.

Notice how the book begins, "Now the word of the Lord came to Jonah." Here we find a faithful prophet, actively ministering in Israel, who's presently experiencing success steaming from his first prophetic word that came true. Jonah's life was in a fantastic place. Ministry was yielding incredible fruit — when out of the blue another "word of the Lord came to him."

Though we have no idea how this "word came" to Jonah (whether it be a vision, spoken word, or dream), we do know the "word" itself proved to be unsettling. Because the "wickedness" of the Assyrian people dwelling in "Nineveh had come up before" the Lord, God wanted Jonah to "arise, go" there, "and cry out against" the people. Specifically, God wanted Jonah to tell the Assyrians judgment would come in 40 days unless they repented.

Historically, we know that, at the time Jonah received this word, Nineveh, the capital of the ever expanding Assyrian Empire, was indeed a "great city." With a population of roughly a

million people, it's likely Nineveh was the largest city in the known world. Nineveh was a metropolitan center — the seat of power which boasted of affluence and prestige.

Archeologists have discovered that the city of Nineveh, located under present day Mosul, Iraq, was approximately 60 miles in circumference and completely surrounded by 100 foot walls — so three wide chariots linked together could drive around it at once. Aside from this there were some 1,200 200-foot-high watchtowers making the city largely impregnable.

Scholar J. Allen Blair writes of Nineveh, "In its splendor it was probably more magnificent than Babylon, but in its sinfulness it was possibly even more wicked than Sodom." We're told, in the intro to this story, that God was sending Jonah to Nineveh "for their wickedness had come up before Him" — literally their "wickedness had reached it's highest pitch." Historically, the Assyrian people were known for vice and brutality. Once again writing to this point Blair says, "The name Nineveh stood for every possible kind of cold-blooded barbarity."

As it pertained to the barbaric and brutal nature of the Assyrians let me read you what one author wrote, "After conquering a village they'd hold a man down on the ground — reach into his mouth — and rip his tongue out by its roots. The Assyrians were known to cut lips or ears off a man's face. They would set fire to his wife and children before his very eyes.

Another Assyrian trademark was to set a pile of skulls outside the city gate to remind those who were left what would happen if they rebelled against Assyria. They'd secure a prisoner of war so he couldn't move, make an incision at his fingertips, and start peeling back his skin slowly and methodically. The torturers would literally flay their victim alive — then let him bake in the sun until he was dead. They would cover the walls of the city with human skins."

As far as Nineveh and her wickedness was concerned, from God's perspective, the situation had reach such a tipping point that only two options remained: Immediate National Repentance or Impending Divine Judgment! Such was the purpose in sending Jonah.

Aside from the pure wickedness of this Assyrian capital, there is another element to the context behind our story we'd be remiss not to mention. Since the early formations of the Northern Kingdom, the principle threat to Israel had always been Syria to the north. Yet, by the time of Jonah, the Assyrian Empire had completely decimated the Syrians.

Though this development had enabled Israel to experience prosperity under Jeroboam's reign, sadly several northern cities in the Kingdom end up experiencing the brutality of Assyrian incursions. Once again 2 Kings 14:25 informs us that Jonah grew up in a town known as "Gath Hopher" — which was a Galilean village about 5 miles north of Nazareth.

What makes this significant is that during the reigns of Jeroboam's predecessors (King Omri, Ahab, and Jehu), when Jonah was still a young boy, Scripture tells us the areas of Sidon and Galilee were the site of some of this Assyrian aggression. It is highly probable that as a young man, Jonah had witnessed the brutality of the Assyrian people up close and personal.

Imagine then you're Jonah and the word of the Lord comes to you with such an instruction as to arise leaving everything you know behind (including a successful ministry), go to Nineveh, and cry out against it! In the Hebrew these words "go" and "cry out" are presented in the imperative. This means God wasn't making a suggestion to Jonah. He was issuing a direct command. As His servant Jonah was being given new matching orders.

From Jonah's perspective, there is no doubt he was keenly aware this new mission could really only yield one of two results: The Ninevites would either reject his message and kill him or they receive his message, repent of their wickedness, and be spared of God's judgment! Neither of these two options sounded good to the prophet Jonah!

Though I'm sure Jonah possessed a natural fear over the prospects of entering the lion's den — especially with a personal knowledge as to how sadistic the Assyrians could be, the truth is that this natural fear was superseded by a much larger and deeper concern.

Chapter 4:2 records that, in response to the Assyrians repentance and the demonstration of God's grace, Jonah erupts with a complaint revealing his original fear of traveling to Nineveh with such a message... "LORD, was not this what I said when I was still in my country? Therefore I fled previously to Tarshish; for I know that You are a gracious and merciful God, slow to anger and abundant in lovingkindness, One who relents from doing harm."

As Jonah mulls over this command his chief concern becomes mission success, not failure! Jonah knew God! He had a relationship with the Lord. Jonah knew the inexhaustible nature of God's love in the presence of a repentant man. Jonah knew that if the Ninevites repented God was going to save them from judgment and forgive them of their wickedness.

What's interesting about the story of Jonah is that it emphasizes an aspect to God's plan that is often difficult to fully understand. It's a mystery, but God has determined to use people to reach people. If God had a word of warning for the citizens of Nineveh, why couldn't He have appeared to them or better yet sent an angel to testify. Why call and send Jonah? Once again we return to what this story is all about: God chooses Jonah because He was seeking to accomplish something in Jonah! The whole story is about God and Jonah.

You see, whether Jonah was a Jew presently experiencing the blessing of God because of grace or if he were a Gentile grafted into God's family through grace, it's my belief the purpose behind the command to take this word to Nineveh was that God desired to deepen Jonah's understanding of the power of grace.

Soon enough we're going to look at Jonah's response, but in closing I want to explain how this reality that God wanted to demonstrate grace towards the Ninevites proved to challenge Jonah — even before he made a decision to accept or reject his mission.

It's important to note — The very fact God was willing to demonstrate grace to Nineveh challenged both Jonah's moral framework as well as his hatred of the Assyrians. If we operate under the premise that Jonah was Jewish, we understand then that the entire basis for his

relationship with God was based on two religious foundations: His obedience to the Law and His ethnicity. And it was directly on account of these two religious beliefs that Jonah proved to be two things: A racial and spiritual bigot.

The truth is that this belief that being a Hebrew automatically made him a member of God's people fostered a sense of ethnic superiority. Sadly, the Jews had mistaken their unique privilege as being the evidence of a heightened standing. You see, the command for Jonah to go to Nineveh was designed to challenge his racial prejudice. Demonstrating grace to the Assyrians was God's way of making it clear to Jonah that He loved all people equally.

But Jonah was also a spiritual bigot. Jonah had come to view his obedience to the law as being the mechanism for his right-standing before God. And it was such a view that created a moral structure whereby he viewed himself as being morally superior to the Ninevites.

Once again Jonah's understanding that God was likely to save the city of Nineveh was designed to challenge his religious prejudice. Demonstrating grace to the Assyrians was God's way of making it clear to Jonah that since His grace was the only way any man could be saved, Jonah had no right to see himself as being any better than the Ninevites.

I pray you know that all racism is an affront to God's grace and has zero place in the body of Christ. No man has a right to claim he's superior to another either on the basis of ethnicity or religious moralism. And note: I'm not saying this because it's socially relevant or because the mainstream media is mandating what pastors should be saying from the pulpit. That's not their job and frankly current events don't dictate what we teach on Sundays!

I'm speaking to this issue for one simple reason: In the providence of God, He has led us to a text whereby He's wanting to communicate His truth. How interesting that months in advance God determined we'd be studying Jonah for such a time as this.

Friend, Jonah missed what so many do, if all mankind, including every tribe and tongue, has been created by God specifically in “His image and likeness” then no one ethnic group had any authority or right to stand superior to another — including the white supremacist.

Racism is a cancer the Bible diametrically opposes and is a concept that has no place in the church where all differences are dwarfed by the one strand that binds us all together — The fact we’ve all been saved by Jesus and the grace He demonstrated independent of us!

The very command God gave for Jonah to go to Nineveh left this man with a choice... He could accept the reality that favor with God was not determined by ethnicity or his obedience but through repentance leading to grace, and therefore repent of his racial and religious prejudice... Or he could resist God’s grace and seek to run from the presence of the Lord.

And yet, if Jonah was a Gentile the very prospect of God demonstrating grace to Nineveh served to challenge something else entirely... Once again, in his own words, Jonah says he didn’t want to go to Nineveh because he “knew the Lord was a gracious and merciful God, slow to anger and abundant in lovingkindness, One who relents from doing harm.”

Consider how did Jonah know it was in line with God’s character to save these wicked, Gentile Assyrians instead of judging them? Answer: Because Jonah knew first hand what it was like to be a wicked Gentile saved by the Grace of God. Jonah knew from personal experience how incredibly gracious and loving the God of Israel really was!

Though Jonah had done nothing to earn it, through Elijah, God’s grace had changed the trajectory of his life. Sadly, this presents Jonah as an example of a man who while a recipient of God’s grace was unwilling to see that same grace extended to others.

God’s grace was directly challenging Jonah’s hatred of the Ninevites. Sure Jonah loved God, but he hated the Assyrians. Because of their brutality and likely his own exposure to these things Jonah didn’t want to see these people experience salvation. Because of hurt Jonah craved wrath, judgment, destruction — not deliverance.

And the truth is that Jonah's hatred was in many ways justifiable. The Assyrians were a deplorable people. They were wicked. They were some of the worst scum to have ever walked this planet. What is truly shocking about God's command for Jonah to go to Nineveh is that in light of this reality, God still loved them and preferred salvation over judgment.

God wanted the Ninevites to repent so that they could be saved. So He called Jonah to lay aside his hurt and hatred in order to be the conduit of His love and grace.

Let me apply this idea in the most extreme way I can: What is the appropriate Christian response to the white supremacist? Sure, we should call it what it is — sin; and yet, does Jesus want us to angrily shout them down, protest their existence, or throw urine-filled balloons at them? Is the appropriate response to condemn them from the church marquee?

No! That shouldn't be our response to the white supremacist any more than it should be the Christian response to abortion clinics or gay pride parades. Here's a provocative thought: Jesus died on the cross for the sin of white supremacy. You see God loves even the most deplorable sinner and wants to free them from their sin. And to do this He sends people to people to demonstrate His love and grace knowing it's the only way repentance manifests.

In Romans 2:4 we're told that it is "the goodness of God that leads a man to repentance!" MLK, who brought about change, understood what our society has completely forgotten. The worst and least effective response to hate is more hate, because all it does is inflame passions. Christian, you should hate white supremacy, but you should remember the only power to transform the white supremacist is God's grace being demonstrated through you!

You see the remedy to racism isn't war — we tried that once and we're still dealing with the problem — the remedy is revival — when people filled with the Holy Spirit, respond to God's call to go out even to the deplorable, to be a conduit of God's love and grace.



It's a fact the one force more powerful than human hate is God's love! This is why Jesus commanded us in Matthew 5:44 to "love our enemies, bless those who curse us, do good to those who hate us, and pray for those who spitefully use and persecute us."

Yes, it's extreme, but the Book of Jonah illustrates the fact that God's grace is extreme! Grace challenges not only racism, but how we approach the racist. In the context of his hate and hurt the very command for Jonah to go to Nineveh left him with a choice: He could experience freedom from these things by demonstrating to others the very grace he'd once received, or he could resist God's grace and seek to run from the presence of the Lord.

It's important we end this message without immediately looking at Jonah's reaction, because he had a choice. There was a moment in time where Jonah had a decision to make. Understand, like Jonah, all humanity has but one of two responses to God's grace: We can open our hand to receive His amazing grace and then be a conduit by which that grace can be demonstrated to others or we can close our fist in defiance. Friend, as we will consistently see throughout the story of Jonah, "Resisting Grace" will not only yield tragic results in your life, but will ultimately reveal you're resisting God.

# *Jonah* 1:3

As we discussed, the story of Jonah illustrates a foundational principle you'll constantly find surfacing throughout the New Testament and one you'll never find in the Old. Under the Old Covenant it was evident that God intended for the Nation of Israel to be set apart from the world in order to remain an example unto the world.

Under this dynamic God never commissioned missionary activity whereby He specifically sent Jewish representatives out into foreign lands for the specific purposes of proselytizing. Instead, the people of Israel were to exist as a shining light that would draw the nations to Jerusalem so that they could encounter the True and Living God at the Temple.

It's within this context that God's instruction for Jonah to leave Israel and go to Nineveh broke with all Old Covenant norms — on a side note is one of the many reasons I believe Jonah wasn't ethnically Jewish, but a Gentile who converted at a young age. From the macro-perspective of Scripture Jonah's unique calling presents him as a foreshowing of Christians receiving the Great Commission to go into the world with the Gospel.

You see, in contrast to the Old Testament, the New Covenant of Grace presents the opposite dynamic for the followers of Christ. Instead of seeking to draw the nations to the Temple, a geographical location to encounter God, Christians are filled with the Holy Spirit and then sent out into the nations. It's a complete and total reversal.

As opposed to one ethnic group being a beacon unto the world as we see with the Hebrews, the book of Acts describes individuals from all the nations being filled with the Light only to then be sent out by Jesus into the world for the purposes of shining in the darkness.

It's really is amazing to consider, but the story of Jonah illustrates the missional nature of the New Covenant some 750 years before Christ's birth! You need to know it's not enough that we are the recipients of God's love and His grace. Christians have been called and commissioned by Jesus to "arise" and "go" out into the world in order to be a conduit of His love and grace. Believers are not called to be static, but rather we're called to be active.

In Matthew 28:18-20 we have recorded the Great Commission, "And Jesus came and spoke to His disciples, saying, 'All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age.' Amen."

With all of this in mind let's look again at Jonah's calling: **Jonah 1:1-2, "Now the word of the Lord came to Jonah the son of Amittai, saying, 'Arise, go to Nineveh, that great city, and cry out against it; for their wickedness has come up before Me.'"**

As we noted before, the Book of Jonah opens with the prophet facing a serious decision. Because the "wickedness" of the Assyrians had reached a point whereby it could no longer be allowed to continue unabated, "the word of the Lord came to Jonah" with a very specific set of matching orders. In actuality, God commands Jonah to do three things:

First, Jonah was to "arise." Then he was to "go to Nineveh." And then finally, upon his arrival, he was to "cry out against" their wickedness. In Jonah 3:4 the prophet will later deliver a very simple message to the Assyrians, "Yet forty days and Nineveh shall be overthrown!"

From the context we're given, it appears the situation in the Assyrian capital of Nineveh had reach such a tipping point that God wanted Jonah to go and issue to these wicked people an ultimatum: Either they repent of their sin or face a certain judgment! It's interesting that in light of their brutality God still desired forgiveness over wrath. What grace!

Which explains why Jonah was commanded to “arise, go, and cry out!” In the original language this directive to “arise” was so strong it was hostile. In today’s vernacular you’d translate this as “rise up!” The command itself intended to stir Jonah from a point of apathy to action.

Keep in mind, before this “word came to Jonah,” the prophet found himself in a great place. The Northern Kingdom of Israel was being blessed. God’s Word was active. Jonah was right in the middle of the action. He’d prophesied of Israel’s victory and his words had come true. As a result, Jonah was a rock star. He was loved and appreciated. The people respected him and he had the ear of the king. Ministry was good.

The last thing Jonah wanted to do was leave Israel — especially for Nineveh! He was comfortable. Things were easy. Life was on cruise control. Yet, what God was commanding him to do threw everything into chaos. It placed his future into uncertainty. You see, ultimately, God’s command challenged the Lordship of Jonah’s life. Was Jonah’s service to God absolute or was his service contingent upon how it would benefit himself?

As we’ve already noted, God knew what He was asking of Jonah would be met with an understandable measure of resistance — which was the fundamental purpose behind the command itself. The story, in its essence, is a tale about God and his dealings with Jonah.

Aside from the fact Jonah would possess a natural fear in proclaiming such a radical word to such a brutal group of people, God knew even the possibility of mission success which would be the Ninevites repenting and being saved, would challenge Jonah to his core.

The very idea that God would even consider demonstrating grace to the wicked Ninevites challenged the prophet on several levels. Beyond the spiritual prejudice driven by his religious moralism, the extreme nature of God’s grace would challenge Jonah’s racial bigotry as well as the justifiable animus and hatred he held towards the Ninevites.

Yet, you should also keep in mind, such a command was designed to challenge the very essence of Jonah's relationship with God. J. Allen Blair rightly observed that "every believer is plagued constantly by the enemy of self" and Jonah was no exception.

The decision to obey this command would require absolute surrender on the part of Jonah. He would have to submit his will and future to the sovereign purposes of God. Heading to Nineveh would require a measure of faith and trust Jonah hadn't experienced.

God's command left Jonah with a choice: He could lay aside his religious pride, repent of his racism, let go of his hurt, and die to himself in order to become the conduit of God's love and grace to the Ninevites or he could reject this mission and remain his own god.

Once again, before we look at Jonah's decision and in light of the fact his story illustrates the missional aspects of the New Covenant, it's important we first apply this to our own lives... Understand, there is a reason we refer to a Great Commission and not a Great Suggestion. Christians have not been saved by Jesus and liberated from sin to remain idle, but to be mobile. We're saved to be called, not kept comfortable. As Christians our purpose isn't to congregate, but to go out into this world on a particular mission.

Before I continue it's important we take a few minutes to address a misguided idea that has not only come to dominate our modern, Westernized, church culture, but has ended up distorting the missional purpose the New Covenant establishes for the individual believer.

Tragically, many Christians have come to falsely see their mission in this world as being "Church-centric" as opposed to "Believer-driven". What I mean by this is that many have come to see the corporate church in place of the individual believer as being the vehicle by which we reach the lost and fulfill the Great Commission of Jesus.

Instead of the Sunday church service being geared for the development of healthy believers, the purpose of the church-gathering has become largely seen as being similar to God's purpose for Israel... To provide a physical location whereby the lost come to encounter God.

Since the goal of the church-gathering is then to get unbelievers in the door, every part of the Sunday service is crafted for this intention. Instead of teaching God's Word out of fear that such concepts like sin and judgment maybe a turn-off for the unbeliever, the focus aims on fostering an inviting, fun environment the unbelieving world will find attractive.

For examples of this look no further than what we refer to as the "Seeker-friendly Church" — which honestly is unfair branding because if you don't adhere to the model it implies you aren't interested in being friendly to the seeker. The truth is that it should be called the "Seeker-focused Church" — In actuality such models even boast on being "church for the unchurched."

And while I'm not advocating the church-gathering can't be evangelistic or the kind of place that shouldn't be welcoming to the "weary and brokenhearted"; sadly, what we find is nothing more than an Old Covenant mentality which fosters to two unintended consequences:

First, such a notion that it is the purpose of the church to evangelize, naturally downplays the responsibility of the individual Christian from going out into their world on mission. Instead of the church-gathering crafted with the goal of equipping believers to go out and reach the lost world around them, the Christian mission tragically morphs into supporting the church-gathering to be better equipped and effective at reaching the lost.

We've seen this model dominate the church. The focus becomes building an attractive establishment for unbelievers to come to as opposed to being an effective place believers are equipped and sent from! And the ultimate irony is that such a strategy, while well intentioned, is simply inconsistent with the New Covenant model founded by Jesus.

Secondly, such a perspective that it is the purpose of the church to evangelize is dangerous because it misconstrues the actual purpose of the church-gathering. I imagine some of you are thinking, "Well, Pastor Zach what about the Great Commission you read earlier? Isn't the church called to reach the lost?" The answer is, "No! It isn't."

This is what so many miss! The Great Commission was not given to the institutional church, but to individual Christians! Seriously, Jesus issued the Great Commission to 120 of His followers from the Mount of Olives ten days before the church was even born!

Beyond this, if you examine the history and early formation of the church as recorded in the book of Acts, it will become evident that the church-gathering existed, not as a mechanism to shine a Light onto the world, but rather to be a time that focused on equipped and encouraged believers to take that Light into the darkness by teaching the Word of God.

Also note: Not only will you never find an example of an “altar call” occurring during the church-gathering or for that matter the emphasis of the institutional church being outreach to the unbelieving community, but every example of evangelism in Acts centers upon an equipped Christian, going out into the world, to tell people about Jesus. Individual mission!

Once again it really is the difference between the New Covenant and Old Testament models. Jesus formed His church for the purpose of equipping and sending out Christians to reach the lost, not to be an attractive place the lost gathers to encounter God.

If you believe your job is to support the evangelistic efforts of the church-gathering you sorely have it backwards. Instead, you support the facilitating of the church-gathering because it exists to effectively equip and encourage you to fulfill the evangelistic mission Jesus has called you to be engaged in! It’s why we call the gathering of the church on Sunday a “church service” — what happens intends to be a service to the church, not an outreach to the lost!

If we’re honest, people like the Old Testament model because it’s easier! If you see the church you support having massive altar calls, it tends to make you feel better about not evangelizing yourself. I don’t want to sugar coat it or look beyond the obvious, it’s true: going out into the world to share the Gospel with the lost is challenging. Stepping out in such a way can be uncertain — even scary. And since we love our comfort, it requires sacrifice.

Honestly, this is one of the reasons “Seeker-focused” churches are so vibrant and flush with cash. The truth is that people prefer to support someone else doing the job Jesus has called them to do, because it’s easier and doesn’t require they step outside their comfort zone.

Sadly, church leaders even prefer the seeker-focused dynamic because it’s easier to grow numerically. As opposed to relying on believers in the church to evangelize the lost, they just encourage their members to bring their unsaved friends to church to hear the Gospel.

And I’m not advocating that it is wrong to bring a seeker to church, here’s the problem with the “You bring ‘em and I’ll get ‘em saved” mentality... Aside from the fact believers end up being challenged to get saved every single week as opposed to growing through the teaching of God’s Word, it enables a Christian to do the very minimum and still feel like they’ve done their part! Sure, the results are better because more people are getting saved, but since it’s happening the wrong way it creates a culture of apathetic Christians.

It’s like a parent who does their kids homework for them — yes, the child is making better grades than they would have making the results great, but the kid is a moron! Doing the job for the child — no matter how hard, robs the kid of the opportunity to learn, grow, and mature.

The truth is that inviting the lost to church is not fulfilling the Great Commission! Bringing a friend to church should come after you’ve shared with them the Gospel: how the amazing grace of Jesus has transformed your life and can change theirs as well!

I was asked recently why we never give an altar call at Calvary316. My answer was simple: That’s not my purpose as your pastor and it isn’t the purpose of our church service. Though I have a deep passion to reach the lost world around me with the Gospel, that’s my individual mission as a believer — not the mission of the church. The church-gathering should be believer-focused for no other reason than that. It is what Jesus had in mind for His church.

“Well how do you expect the church to grow?” Our model is based on a simple principle that has proven effective for 2,000 years — Healthy sheep reproduce! Not only does this mean



we need you to make more babies, but our focus centers upon seeing you grow to the point where you'll answer the call, embrace your mission, and go into your world with the Gospel.

I don't mean to put a guilt trip on anyone, but I want you to be honest with yourself. When was the last time you told someone about Jesus or at a minimum told someone what Jesus has done in your life — your story? When was the last time you led someone in a prayer to receive Christ? Have you ever? You see, it's not my job to be a Light in your world. It's your job and I don't want to give you an easy out by doing it for you!

Christian, Jesus comes to you and I with the same command He gave to Jonah, being "Arise" and "Go!" Ironically, this very commission challenges us in the same way it did the prophet. As we turn our attention to Jonah's response, I want you to personalize this story. Since you've been saved to be sent on a mission, what is your Nineveh? To whom is God sending you or have you fallen into the trap of seeing ministry as the thing your pastor does? Take a minute and be honest. Who is God sending you to reach?

Is your mission a work-place, a specific co-worker, even a boss? Is your Nineveh a neighbor or entire neighborhood? Is it a family member, book-club, team, school, PTA, gym, or for that matter another country like New York or California? What Nineveh has God called and sent you to bring His message to? And if you don't know, pray that God would make that clear!

And keep in mind, like we see with Jonah, the purpose of the mission is much greater than simply reaching the intended target. God calls people to reach people because He's wanting to challenge us in profound ways. Is God calling you to show grace to someone who's hurt you so that you'll experience the depths of His love in a more radical way?

Is He calling you to lay aside a moral prejudice by befriending the gay couple in your neighborhood, the single lady who's had an abortion, or the co-worker going through a divorce, all so you'll come to understand that apart from His grace you're no better off?

Is Jesus calling you to serve the homeless or work in the projects because He's wanting to work out of your heart some type of racial bias? Never forget this truth, receiving God's love and grace, though incredibly powerful in its own right, is not nearly as transformative as demonstrating His love and grace to those you don't believe deserve it.

Consider — "The word of the Lord" has come to you for the same reason it came to Jonah. God is calling you to "arise" and "go" to a specific place and a particular people to preach the Good News. The message you've been given for your world is the same Jonah was given for Nineveh. While sin will result in a certain judgment, repentance will yield His salvation.

**Jonah 1:3, "But Jonah arose to flee to Tarshish from the presence of the Lord. He went down to Joppa, and found a ship going to Tarshish; so he paid the fare, and went down into it, to go with them to Tarshish from the presence of the Lord."**

While most stories build to a tragedy, the tale of Jonah wastes no time! Jonah had a decision to make, and sadly he chose poorly. Sure, though it's obvious why Jonah decides not to make the 500 mile trek north to Nineveh, the compulsion to then head 2,000 miles west is bizarre. The very fact Jonah decides to "flee to Tarshish" is quite a strange twist.

What demanded Jonah to go anywhere? Couldn't he have simply remained in Israel? Why does Jonah now feel the inescapable need to move when he didn't have to? I think there are two reasons Jonah decides to flee for Tarshish:

First, Jonah's compulsion to flee manifested as a natural reaction to "the word of the Lord." In Isaiah 55 God makes it clear that His Word never returns void. This means that the power contained in the Word of God will always spawn an action of some kind.

It's interesting that God's Word always yields what it intends in the amoral natural world. In Genesis 1 God said, "Let there be light and there was light." He commanded the waters to

divide and they divided accordingly. We even see that creation submits to the words of Jesus. He verbally rebuked the storm on the Sea of Galilee and it immediately obeyed.

But man is different because, unlike the rest of creation, God has given us a free will to make our own decisions. Now understand, this doesn't mean our free will provides an immunity to the power of God's word — quite the contrary. You see, the only difference between moral man and amoral creation is that, while all of nature automatically submits to the intentions of God's Word, we can largely dictate the reaction through our free-willed decisions.

To this point J. Allen Blair observed concerning Jonah's reaction to God's Word, "Whenever the word of God comes to a soul, it disturbs that soul until there is a response. No man is ever the same after the Word of the Lord comes upon him. Either we respond to the voice of God, to do His blessed and holy will, or we turn from Him to go in the way of the flesh."

"The word of the Lord came to Jonah" and command he "arise and go to Nineveh"; and yet, because he wasn't willing to go to Nineveh, God's Word wouldn't allow him to idly remain in Israel. He had to go somewhere, so he arose and went the opposition direction to Tarshish.

Greg Laurie said, "There are only two roads in life. One road leads to Nineveh. The other road leads to Tarshish. One road is the will of God. The other is disobedience to His will." Because Jonah chose not to go to Nineveh, the only other path took him to Tarshish.

Friend, this is the danger in attending a church that faithfully teaches God's Word. Because it will not return void, it will yield a response in your life. If you accept His Word and submit to it, God will work in awesome ways. If you reject His Word, it will eventually drive you from His presence. This is one of the reasons we tend to be very patient when it's brought to our attention someone is living immorally. God's Word will change them or they'll simply leave.

The second reason Jonah fled to Tarshish is pretty evident from our text. "But Jonah arose to flee from the presence of the Lord." To his credit Jonah at least understood his refusal to submit

to the will of God and answer the call would carry with it profound effects on his relationship with “the Lord.” His status quo would completely change.

Jonah rightly knew his rebellion and rejection of God’s command to go to Nineveh would yield serious consequences in his own life. Jonah knew there was no way he could have it both ways: Refuse God’s command and remain in fellowship with the Lord.

Keep in mind, the idea behind Jonah “fleeing from the presence of the Lord” doesn’t mean he honestly believed he could escape God’s presence. As a prophet, there is no doubt Jonah knew God was omnipresent, meaning he was everywhere at once. Instead, the idea behind this phrase is that Jonah was making a willful decision to break fellowship with the Lord. To this point the word we find in the Hebrew for “presence” can be translated into English as “face”.

This is rather radical, but what this means is that Jonah found the very notion that God would forgive the Ninevites if they repented so appalling that he was no longer willing to be associated with God. It’s interesting, but Jonah doesn’t argue with the Lord. He doesn’t lobby God to reconsider. He mounts no defense. The way the scene is set is that Jonah has now learned something about God he can no longer tolerate.

Jonah heads to Tarshish because he doesn’t want to be in Israel. Leaving for the other side of the world was Jonah’s way of breaking ties. Jonah was renouncing his religion, rejecting his God, departing from his people, and resigning from the position of prophet.

The extreme nature of God’s grace was simply more than Jonah could handle. What the command said of God was so disturbing that Jonah wants nothing to do with the Lord anymore. Jonah is choosing to hate God if his only other option included loving the Assyrians. It’s provocative, but Jonah is willing to be damned if it meant Nineveh was destroyed.

I know in light of the harshness of this idea what I’m about to say might be a weird way of looking at Jonah, but there is an aspect to his actions I can at least respect. Jonah knew he had to

be consistent. As it pertains to God he knew it was “either/or” — never “both/and”. Jonah knew he was either all in or he was all the way out. There was no grey area.

It’s sad that Jonah refused to submit to God’s will. It’s tragic he resisted God’s call. It’s even offensive that his hatred for the Ninevites ran so deep he’d rather reject the very grace he’d be given if it meant he’d have to demonstrate that grace to these people. And yet, of all the things you could say about Jonah, “hypocrite” is not one of them.

Personally, I’m convinced the worst thing Jonah could have done after rejecting the call of God was remain a prophet in Israel. In such a scenario Jonah would have been a complete hypocrite. You see, remaining in Israel wouldn’t have changed the reality, Jonah’s heart was still very far away from the presence of God.

Please understand, there is only one person God can’t reach, and it’s the hypocrite. If you aren’t willing to be honest, how can the truth ever set you free? I believe the reason God pursues Jonah boiled down to the fact he was willing to be completely honest and even accept the consequences of his actions. What was good for Jonah was the fact his feet took him where his heart wanted to go, but God was still fast on his tail.

In closing there is one more point I want to make and it relates to how “Jesus is a greater Jonah.” I’ve mentioned this before, but Jonah’s hatred for the Assyrians was in some ways justified. They were deplorable, wicked and vial. It’s likely their barbarity had even hurt Jonah personally. As a kid living in an area subject to random attacks, he’d seen first-hand the savage nature of these people. Men flayed alive and decapitated. Women raped and mutilated.

Jonah refused to go to Nineveh because he wanted these people to be judged — to get what they deserved. Jonah craved justice. He longed for vengeance. This is why the very possibility God would instead grant mercy and demonstrate grace was more than he could stomach. Ultimately, Jonah rejected God because he believed grace wasn’t fair or just.

And if we're honest, though we can sympathize with Jonah and his perspective, the reality is that Jesus can as well. Consider that God's commission of Jesus as well as the essence of His message was almost identical to Jonah. Jesus was sent to earth with a message of repentance in place of judgment just as Jonah had been called to go to Nineveh.

Furthermore, if you think about it Jesus could have used all the same justifications Jonah had for refusing His mission to earth. Humanity is deplorable. We are wicked and vial — capable of all kinds of wickedness. Jesus would have been justified if He'd desired judgment, vengeance, and justice. Honestly, it is what fallen, sinful man deserves.

And yet, "Jesus is a greater Jonah" because while Jonah rejected his calling, Jesus willingly accepted His! Unlike the attitude we see in Jonah, Jesus has a deeper longing to see men saved than judged. Jesus preferred the demonstration of God's grace in place of His wrath.

Like Jonah, Jesus had a decision to make. Jesus could have allowed hurt, like Jonah, to taint His perspective, but He didn't. God said to Jesus as He commanded Jonah, "Arise" and "Go!" And what makes "Jesus greater than Jonah" is that He accepted the call and came.

While Jonah refused to lay aside his wicked prejudices, Jesus willingly laid aside His heavenly glory to come to us. While Jonah was consumed with his hurt and hate, Jesus was more interested in demonstrating God's love and forgiveness.

While Jonah ran from the will of God, Jesus willingly submitted Himself to the will of His Father — even to the point of death. While Jonah was unwilling to let go of his moral pride, Jesus humbly endured the humiliation of a Roman cross. While Jonah wanted to see the Ninevites judged by God, Jesus desired that all sinful men might be saved.

Jonah refused his calling. Jesus accepted His. Jonah ran to Joppa. Jesus hurried to Jerusalem. Jonah boarded a boat. Jesus was nailed to a cross. Jonah rejected his purpose. Jesus died to fulfill His! Jonah resisted grace and it would take him down a difficult path. Jesus desired to demonstrate grace and He changed the world forever.

Christian, if you need a motivation to embrace your mission, look beyond Jonah and see Jesus. There is a lost world all around you in desperate need of the grace that you've experienced. The world doesn't need more Jonah's who run from their heavenly calling. The world needs Christians willing to go out and be the conduit of God's grace and love.

Always remember... While the person closing their fist to God's grace will find it impossible to share anything but hate to those they encounter, it is the open hand to God's grace that will be more than willing to share that grace with others!

# Jonah 1:4-17

Jonah 1:1-3, “Now the word of the Lord came to Jonah the son of Amittai, saying, ‘Arise, go to Nineveh, that great city, and cry out against it; for their wickedness has come up before Me.’ But Jonah arose to flee to Tarshish from the presence of the Lord. He went down to Joppa, and found a ship going to Tarshish; so he paid the fare, and went down into it, to go with them to Tarshish from the presence of the Lord.”

One of the most striking things about the story of the Prophet Jonah is how the entire trajectory of his life was derailed by one stupid decision. Keep in mind, up until verse 3, Jonah has been a Godly man in every sense of the word. As a Gentile he hadn’t been born into faith. Instead, he made a decision to reject the world and become part of God’s people.

As we noted before, Jonah had come to saving-faith in the God of Israel at an early age through the ministry of the Prophet Elijah. Then, after moving into Northern Israel, Jonah was mentored by none other than the Prophet Elisha. In his own right, Jonah was a great spiritual leader. Beloved by the people, he’d become a counselor to kings. In spite of all of these things, his disobedience to this one command changed everything.

Please understand, faithfulness is only meaningful as it relates to the present. It’s simply a reality an entire life of faithfulness can be derailed by one foolish action today. This isn’t rocket-science. If you cheated on your wife tonight, do you think years of marital faithfulness would lessen the offense or for that matter the consequences?

It should be a warning to all of us that even a sterling reputation can be completely tarnished by one poor decision! This is why the Apostle Paul wrote in Philippians 3:13-14,



“Brethren, I do not count myself to have apprehended; but one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind and reaching forward to those things which are ahead, I press toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.”

Paul realized the only thing that really mattered was what he did in the present. As such he “forgot” what was behind and “reached forward” to what was ahead by “pressing towards the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus!” Not only did such an outlook liberate him from the sins of his past, but it served as a constant reminder that he couldn’t live on the victories of yesterday when facing a fresh new set of battles today.

It’s sad, but Jonah the Prophet forfeited a lifetime of faithful service the very moment he refused to obey God’s command. Frankly, there should be no surprise this decision initiated immediate ramifications! Did you notice the one word that dominates verse 3?

We read that “Jonah went down to Joppa” and “went down into” the ship. Later on he’ll continue “down” into the hull and ultimately “down” into the sea and “down” into the belly of the great fish. There is no mistaking the reality this one decision to refuse God’s marching orders took Jonah the Prophet down! One author correctly observed that “every step away from God is a step down. That is the life running from God.”

Friend, of the many lessons you can take away from the story of Jonah don’t miss the most obvious. Rebelling against God by seeking to create a life apart from Him will never yield a better life, but instead a worse one! Jonah rejected God’s word and then set to “flee from the presence of the Lord” — what resulted was nothing but pain and suffering. J. Allen Blair wrote, “This is the price of disobedience. No one ever goes up while disobeying God. He always goes down... Disobedience is never without misery.”

Previously we saw that Jonah was a man on a mission. Tragically, it just so happened to be a mission of the wrong variety! Though God had called him to go to Nineveh and preach the

Gospel, for all kinds of reasons we've already discussed, Jonah wants no part of this plan. Not only does he reject "the word of the Lord", but Jonah renounces his faith.

Refusing to travel the 500 miles Northeast to Nineveh was one thing, but this act of then boarding a ship to sail 2,000 miles the opposite direction reveals a lot about Jonah's heart. As we've mentioned, Jonah's desire to "flee from the presence of the Lord" can literally be translated as "fleeing from the face of the Lord." It's not that the Prophet believed he could escape the long arm of God. The phrase instead indicates Jonah was throwing in the towel concerning his relationship with the Lord. He was resigning his position as Prophet, leaving the Promised Land, abandoning God's people. In fact Jonah was quitting.

We're told in his rebellion, Jonah decides to go "down to Joppa", which was a port city in the Southern Kingdom of Judah, where he immediately "finds a ship going to Tarshish." The exact location of Tarshish remains a mystery. Many archeologists believe it was likely an outpost on the Atlantic coast of Spain. Some even believe it may have been a settlement in what is today known as Great Britain. Regardless, Jonah wanted to go as far as possible.

Before we continue, there is one more observation worthy of our consideration. Not only does God allow Jonah the freedom to exercise his free-will by running (Note: the Lord puts up no fight nor does He resist Jonah's wishes), but the enemy had a vessel ready to facilitate his escape. To this point, Pastor Jon Courson writes, "Whenever you're running from the call of the Lord, you can be sure Satan will have a ship all ready for you to set sail."

Friend, the enemy will always make sure rebelling against God is as easy as possible. It's why anytime you decide to run from God there will always be a ship ready to take you away. God will not resist you and the enemy will be more than willing to aid you.

Contrary to popular opinion, the truth is that adultery doesn't begin when a man sleeps with another woman. Instead, adultery really occurred the very moment that man decided to leave his wife — when his heart left the marriage. You see the mistress really was nothing more

than the vessel the enemy prepared to facilitate his journey, and the action itself nothing more than a manifestation of what was already percolating in his heart.

Brothers and sisters there is a warning in this for all of us. Anytime your desires begin to wander, it won't be long before the enemy provides a perfect mechanism for you to act upon those desires. Out of the blue you just so happen to bump into an old running buddy you used to party with. One seemingly random day you get a notification on your phone that a former fling has friend-requested you on Facebook. How about you're given a juicy bit of gossip that pertains to an enemy or rival at school you can use to take down.

Or how about your boss surprises you with an important business trip to Vegas where you have to entertain an important client. I even have a dear friend who was struggling with pornography when out of nowhere he stumbled upon a brand new Playboy magazine on the side of the road as he was mowing the lawn at the church no less! (True story!)

And are any of these things accidental? Though on the surface they might seem to be, if you're being honest what's actually happening is that the enemy is seeking to facilitate a decision that will ultimately take you down. It wasn't coincidental that Jonah refused to go to Nineveh and just so happened to find a boat ready to take him to Tarshish.

**Jonah 1:4-5, "But the Lord sent out a great wind on the sea, and there was a mighty tempest on the sea, so that the ship was about to be broken up. Then the mariners were afraid; and every man cried out to his god, and threw the cargo that was in the ship into the sea, to lighten the load. But Jonah had gone down into the lowest parts of the ship, had lain down, and was fast asleep."**

Verse 3 left us with Jonah boarding a boat in Joppa that was headed "to Tarshish." What's interesting is that verse 4 fast-forwards the scene with this boat now caught in a "mighty tempest" somewhere on the Mediterranean Sea and likely off the northern coast of Africa, no

one dared sail in the open ocean. With this in mind, we have no idea how long they've been at sea, nor are we given any indication how far along the journey Jonah happens to be.

As I play the movie out in my head, I imagine this ship left this port in Joppa under ideal conditions. It was the right time of year to travel by sea. The weather was pristine. The sea calm. The winds favorable. From Jonah's estimation his plan was unfolding better than he'd imagined. Nineveh was officially in his rearview mirror.

With each passing day Jonah felt at ease knowing he was getting further and further away from that wicked place. No doubt he was eager to hear the imminent news that Nineveh had been destroyed. I'm sure Jonah spent his time daydreaming about his next steps in Tarshish.

"But the Lord..." Though God allowed Jonah to run, hadn't resisted his rebellious intentions, had even afforded him ample time to reconsider his decisions, the Lord loved Jonah enough to pursue him — even after Jonah had rejected Him! Never forget, at some point in your rebellion, there will come a moment God will no longer sit idly by.

The very fact we have "but the Lord" as it pertains to Jonah's story is really astounding. Nothing about Jonah demanded God's involvement. He'd made his decision. God could have sent another prophet to Nineveh. The amazing thing about this tale is that while Jonah was through with God — "the Lord" was not through with Jonah. What grace that even when he didn't want God's intervention, the Lord loved him enough to intervene anyway!

Yes, Jonah was absolutely free to run from "the presence of the Lord", but that didn't mean the Lord wasn't equally free to follow after! As a matter of fact, the remainder of this chapter describes several ways the Lord seeks to get Jonah's attention. Ways God attempts to get Jonah to stop destroying his life. Ways He pursues a man on the run!

Notice "the Lord sent out a great wind on the sea" that stirred up such "a mighty tempest that the ship was about to be broken up." What's being described here was without a doubt a

supernatural occurrence. This clearly wasn't a natural storm. As we'll come to see, even the pagan crew on board this ship sensed a divine element at work.

Beyond this, the tempest was so sudden that it caught even the most seasoned seamen off guard. They didn't see it coming. In a matter of only a few moments the sky darkened, the wind began to howl, and what had been a calm and favorable sea quickly grew into "a mighty tempest." This storm hit so fast it afforded the crew little to no time to prepare. The waves of this storm became so severe "the ship was about to be broken up."

Not only are we told the boat itself was in peril, but "throwing over the cargo" in an attempt "to lighten the load" failed to provide relief. Things quickly grew so unfavorable even these hardened "mariners" were so afraid "every man" began "crying out to their gods." It's been said there are no Atheists in foxholes. In a single moment upon that boat this storm turned even the crassest and most apathetic of sailors immediately into religious men of prayer.

In the Bible you'll find God allowing two types of storms: First, there are Storms of Obedience like the disciples encountered in Mark 4. In this story, Jesus commanded the disciples to enter a boat and sail to the other side of the Sea of Galilee. They obeyed the Lord's instructions only to find themselves later that night in middle of an incredible tempest.

You see, Storms of Obedience are not of your own making. Like with the disciples they are situations God allows with the express purpose of perfection. These storms do not originate as a consequence or a byproduct of anything you've done or haven't done. They are completely out of your control and often arise suddenly and without warning.

Storms like these occur naturally — sometimes being nothing more than a result of living in a fallen world. As our church family knows all too well these storms can arise from a cancer diagnosis or nagging illness, the declining health of loved ones, wayward children, the struggle to find solid employment, the disappointment of a breakup, etc.

More often than not the Bible refers to these Storms of Obedience as “trials.” In James 1:2-4 we’re provided the daunting exhortation, “My brethren, count it all joy when you fall into various trials, knowing that the testing of your faith produces patience. But let patience have its perfect work, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking nothing.”

There are also Storms of Disobedience. These are storms of your own making — situations God allows into your life with the express purpose of correction. These storms are self-made — caused by a person’s sin, rebellion, or poor choices. Since these storms arise as the natural manifestation of our wretched decisions, they are avoidable!

Keep in mind, verse 4 is clear this “mighty tempest” Jonah and these “mariners” were presently facing was initiated by God. The storm wasn’t a natural occurrence. As it pertained to Jonah this was a Storm of Disobedience allowed by God for a specific reason.

I don’t find it to be an accident “the ship was about to be broken up.” You see this storm that arose because of Jonah’s disobedience was used by God to target the very vessel facilitating his rebellion. Don’t miss this, the very thing the enemy used to aid in Jonah’s disobedience became the very instrument of his misery. It’s been said, “God will use the mechanism facilitating your rebellion to afflict you.” Such was the case with Jonah.

Please note the purpose of this “mighty tempest” was not to destroy Jonah. Rather, the storm was designed to awaken him to a much larger reality. Consider the identity of these seamen. These men weren’t Hebrews (the Jewish people weren’t nautical). In all likelihood these “mariners” were instead Gentiles like Jonah — specifically Phoenicians.

You see God wanted to save the Ninevites — which is why He commissioned Jonah to go there. And yet, Jonah was on this boat heading the opposite direction because he preferred they perished. Now, because of his actions, we find another group of Gentiles about to die. It’s as though God is trying to get Jonah to personalize the results of his rebellion.

As he looked around at these frantic men convinced they were about to meet a certain death, Jonah's heart should have been stirred. God loved these Gentile mariners as much as He loved the Ninevites. In a very practical way God is wanting Jonah to be moved to compassion in the presence of lost men facing the prospects of death and judgment.

And don't forget what's happening on deck. These men are so desperate they're crying out to their false gods, praying they would save them! Oh the irony that as a prophet Jonah personally knew the true and living God who actually had the power to save!

As Jonah stands there surveying the situation, I believe in this moment Jonah knew he was being given a second chance to make the right decision. He could repent, call on the salvation of God, seen the wind and waves cease, and lead these men to the Lord.

How sad that upon seeing the tempest, the practical needs of the fearful men around him, their spiritual desperation, and the fact they were all likely to drown in the sea — instead of repentance we read: "But Jonah had gone down into the lowest parts of the ship, had lain down, and was fast asleep." How calloused! Jonah knew why the tempest had arisen. He knew the crew was likely to be innocent bystanders. But he doesn't care.

In the Hebrew this words translated "fast asleep" means Jonah was in a deep sleep. There are some commentators who point to verse 5 as evidence Jonah was simply oblivious to the needs of those around him. That he's missing the chance to be a witness out of ignorance.

I disagree! Instead, I believe Jonah's actions are much more sinister than ignorance. What Jonah did was completely intentional! This man had rejected the grace God who wanted to demonstrate through him to the Ninevites. Now he doesn't care these "mariners" are about to perish on his account. Jonah's disregard for some had morphed into a disregard for all.

Friend, you need to know this is what resisting grace does in the heart of man. The person who closes their fist to God's grace will find it impossible to share anything but hate to those they encounter. And while you can understand Jonah's resistance to sharing grace to the wicked

Assyrians who deserved judgment, the truth is that he has no excuse for failing to demonstrate kindness to a group of men who've done absolutely nothing wrong.

Though this tempest was designed by God to awake Jonah to this reality — to stir his heart to demonstrate compassion for the lost, because he's unwilling to relent the storm only served to hardened him in his resistance. Once again, while no one would have blamed God for throwing up His hands in disgust and ending His pursuit of this man on the run, not so with the Lord. If the storm failed to get through to Jonah, maybe something else will.

**Jonah 1:6-11, "So the captain came to him, and said, 'What do you mean, sleeper? Arise, call on your God; perhaps your God will consider us, so that we may not perish.' And they said to one another, 'Come, let us cast lots, that we may know for whose cause this trouble has come upon us.' So they cast lots, and the lot fell on Jonah. Then they said to him, 'Please tell us! For whose cause is this trouble upon us? What is your occupation? And where do you come from? What is your country?**

**And of what people are you?' So Jonah said to them, 'I am a Hebrew; and I fear the Lord, the God of heaven, who made the sea and the dry land.' Then the men were exceedingly afraid, and said to him, 'Why have you done this?' For the men knew that he fled from the presence of the Lord, because he had told them. Then they said to him, 'What shall we do to you that the sea may be calm for us?' - for the sea was growing more tempestuous."**

As the tempest continued to worsen and the situation became all the more serious, one thing on this boat seemed odd to the captain. While all the men were fearful, desperate, and crying out to their gods to be saved, Jonah was fast asleep in the hull of the ship. He wasn't afraid. Showed no signs of desperation. And in fact seemed absolutely indifferent to their fate.

At some point we're told "the captain came to Jonah", presumably wakes him from his slumber, challenges his apparent apathy, and commands him to get up and start calling on his



God thinking perhaps Jonah's God would consider them and save them from the storm. You know you are in rebellion when unbelievers start challenging you to pray!

Once again we have no idea how long this scene plays out; and yet, two things are certain: (1) Jonah likely refused the captain's orders and remained totally disengaged, and (2) The desperation of these crewmen intensified. Convinced this "mighty tempest" was of a divine nature we read that they end up "casting lots" in order to identify the man who'd caused this trouble to come upon them. Imagine the moment the lot fell on Jonah.

Jonah has been discovered. He can no longer hide! The crew, knowing something is awry, begin to interrogate Jonah. They demand answers immediately: "Who are you? Where are you from? What is your occupation? What have you done?" Not only does Jonah explain who he is, but we're told he's actually honest about why he was on the boat in the first place. He tells the men that he was "fleeing from the presence of the Lord."

Once again Jonah has been provided another opportunity. Here's a group of Gentile pagans convinced their gods were fake and powerless, and that Jonah's God was real and powerful. It's why they ask him, "What shall we do to you that the sea may be calm for us?" In a twist these men are now looking to Jonah for guidance, wisdom, but mainly deliverance.

Jonah has been given another incredible chance to repent of his rebellion. In this moment he could have made the right decision. The storm would have ceased. And they could have taken him back to Joppa. And yet, Jonah is still resisting grace. Look at what he says.

**Jonah 1:12, "And Jonah said to them, 'Pick me up and throw me into the sea; then the sea will become calm for you. For I know that this great tempest is because of me.'"**

Of all the things you can say of Jonah, he wasn't a hypocrite and he doesn't seem to be a coward. Realizing God was not going to allow him to go to Tarshish, Jonah would rather die

than go to Nineveh! This man is so stubborn he tells these sailors only half the truth. Yes, if they threw him overboard the sea would calm and they'd be saved. And yet, what Jonah fails to mention is that his repentance would have also yielded the same result.

It's incredible that the "mighty tempest" was not enough to deter Jonah in his rebellion. Beyond that, witnessing the desperation of these Gentile sailors also failed to influence his perspective. And yet, there was one final way God would seek to get through to Jonah.

**Jonah 1:13, "Nevertheless the men rowed hard to return to land, but they could not, for the sea continued to grow more tempestuous against them."**

Think about the progress of these events. "The word of the Lord" comes to Jonah. He rejects the word and goes south to Joppa instead of north to Nineveh. From there he boards a boat to Tarshish and he and the crew set sail under ideal conditions.

Then without warning a "mighty tempest" strikes placing the ship and lives of all those on board in serious jeopardy. Recognizing the divine element behind this storm, the crew starts crying out to their false gods for deliverance. Even knowing the storm was on account of his rebellion, tragically Jonah chooses to do nothing until he's ultimately called on the carpet.

Now to his credit Jonah is honest with the crew, but instead of repenting he requests they throw him overboard! For just a minute I want you to think about that. If you were one of these "mariners" and this had been the chain of events, what would you have done? For me it's easy: I would have immediately thrown Jonah overboard just as he requested!

I'm serious! All things considered this would have been easy! Though I've done nothing wrong, I'm suffering because of this man's rebellion! Because of his sin, I've had to toss all of my cargo overboard at great personal expense — I'm not getting compensated for that! More pressingly, I now know without any doubts that his actions have placed my very life in peril.

And to make matters worse he doesn't even seem to care! As I see it the very instance Jonah suggests the storm would cease the moment he hit the water, he's going overboard!

This is what I find fascinating, while Jonah deserved to go swimming and these men would have been justified in such an action, "nevertheless the men rowed harder to return to land." Did you catch that? These Gentile, pagan "mariners" chose to demonstrate grace to a man who deserved judgment! What a contrast to Jonah who'd been willing to allow judgment to befall innocent men simply on account that he refused to show grace!

Understand, Jonah is running, but the Lord is in hot pursuit. Sure, God allows Jonah to board a boat and set his own course. But that didn't mean God was done seeking to reach Jonah. First, there was the Storm of Disobedience, Jonah experiencing the consequences of his own choices. Then when that failed to change his course God allowed him to see how his rebellion was effecting others. Finally, when none of this gets through to Jonah, God allowed a man refusing to demonstrate grace to be the recipient of grace.

There is something we can draw from the example of these men applicable to how we handle those running from God in our midst. The truth is that it would be so much easier to throw them overboard. So much easier to cut ties and go our separate ways — especially if we're suffering in the storm they created! And yet, the more divine calling is to show grace. Now that's not to say a time may come when the man resisting God should go overboard, but this should only occur after we've carried grace as far as humanly possible!

Sadly, in spite of the attempts of these men to get to shore, we're told the "the sea continued to grow more tempestuous against them." God was pursuing a man on the run and would not let Jonah off the hook. What should have happened as Jonah encounters a kindness he in no way deserved? He should have humbled himself and repented. Sadly, he doesn't!

**Jonah 1:14-17, “Therefore they cried out to the LORD and said, ‘We pray, O Lord, please do not let us perish for this man’s life, and do not charge us with innocent blood; for You, O Lord, have done as it pleased You.’ So they picked up Jonah and threw him into the sea, and the sea ceased from its raging. Then the men feared the Lord exceedingly, and offered a sacrifice to the Lord and took vows. Now the Lord had prepared a great fish to swallow Jonah. And Jonah was in the belly of the fish three days and three nights.”**

You know it’s not an accident God still used His prophet to reveal Himself to these pagan sailors in spite of Jonah and not because of him. Honestly, some of the greatest lessons I’ve learned in my spiritual life have come by witnessing a friend go down, down, down because he refused the appeals of a God in hot pursuit!

And yet, if you’re refusing God’s commands, resisting His word, and presently seeking to run from His presence there is a lesson you’d be wise to see. Not only is there a real enemy more than willing to help you run, “but there is a Lord” who will come after you!

Yes, as with Jonah, you’re completely free to flee as long as you understand Jesus is equally free to pursue! Though you don’t deserve it and likely don’t even want it, Jesus loves you enough not to sit idly by. As long as He can, Jesus will always pursue.

If this is you, I want you to be honest with yourself. Since you made the decision to resist His word, run from His will, and resist His grace, has your life gotten better or worse? You see, even if you’re presently experiencing clear skies, a “mighty tempest” is on the horizon and it will likely strike unannounced and when you least expect it.

Friend, in His love, God will not allow you to continue this journey away from Him undeterred. In actuality, whatever it is that has facilitated your rebellion will end up being the very thing that will ultimately take you down. And please know, the storm is not God’s way to pay you back, but instead exists to bring you back. God seeks restoration, not retribution!

If experiencing the consequences of your sin isn't enough to open your eyes and foster a repentant heart, look around and see the lives that are being unfairly devastated by your decisions. These people have done nothing wrong. The only reason they even find themselves in a storm is because of their proximity to you! So often we forget that rebelling against God negatively affects everyone around us!

I have to take a second and say it, but men — and this principle applies in so many varying ways — If you love your family, the best thing you can do for them is to follow Jesus! Honestly, following Jesus enables you to sacrificially love your wife and fosters an environment your kids will thrive in. Sadly, I have seen so many selfish and shortsighted men create a storm that devastated not only their life, but the lives of their wife and children.

And finally, if all of this fails to reach the man on the run and drive him to his knees, there is one reality that still can — it's the fact that even knowing the brutal reality of the situation, knowing your life is a mess of your own making — a mess hurting innocent bystanders, Jesus is still willing to demonstrate His grace! In spite of your rebellion... In spite of your resistance... In spite of the fact you've rejected Him, Jesus' grace remains. "For it is the grace of God that leads a man to repentance!"

# *Jonah* 1:17-2:10

If we take a step back from this epic tale and simply look at Jonah from a macro perspective, an interesting irony emerges. Jonah was a deeply religious man living in outright rebellion against God. Remember, Jonah was theologically sound. As a good Hebrew, Jonah knew the Scriptures and had committed the entirety of the Torah to memory.

Beyond this, Jonah was devoted. As a young Gentile who'd encountered the living God through the ministry of Elijah, Jonah made a decision to move to Israel, be circumcised, and dedicate himself to the service of the Lord. Jonah had given all to be a prophet. He'd made sacrifices, we have no mention of a wife, children, or larger family. Jonah was dedicated.

But he was also devout. Jonah was diligent when it came to obeying the Law of God. He was serious about observing the feasts and always respecting the Sabbath. I'm sure he even made the pilgrimage to the Temple frequently to offer the necessary sacrifices for sin.

If Jonah was around today, you would see him as being quintessentially the perfect Christian. Jonah loved to study the Bible. Memorized Scripture. Never missed a morning devotional.

Jonah could talk doctrine with anyone, equipped to evangelize the unbeliever, defend his faith, and communicate God's truth in a relevant way. Jonah would have been a prayer warrior and avid church attender. He was faithful in his service and pious in his behavior.

Jonah also possessed a sterling reputation. Well-mannered, respectful, charismatic, a natural-born leader there was a lot Jonah had going for him. He'd never gotten into trouble or compromised. He was a good man, above reproach. Didn't drink, smoke, chew or hang out with those that do! All the moms wanted their sons to grow up and be like Jonah.

Outwardly, Jonah demonstrated all the marks of a good man; and yet, his resistance to this one command to go and demonstrate grace to the wicked Ninevites tore down that facade and revealed Jonah for who he really was — judgmental, unloving, and hard!

Not only does Jonah resist “the word of the Lord” and proceed to defy a direct command of God, but in doing so we saw his moral prejudice and ethnic bigotry rise to the surface. As we noted last Sunday, the way he handles himself in this “mighty tempest” further revealed an apathy towards the lost and brazenness in the face of obvious divine involvement.

It’s simply a fact, and Jonah illustrates this reality concerning the devoted, dedicated, devout, and diligently religious person, the command to demonstrate grace to the sinner will reveal the true heart of the supposed saint! Though religiously devout, Jonah’s reaction to the presence of grace revealed he was nothing more than a selfish punk!

Jonah’s resistance of grace revealed two things about the man and mainly his religion. Note: Religion can be defined as a set of things you do or refrain from doing in order to earn God’s favor. In a sense, it’s mans attempt to reach up and reconnect with God.

Sadly, the way Jonah responds to the grace God wanted to show the Ninevites made clear his religion hadn’t effected his heart and had actually failed to bring him closer to the God he claimed to serve. Ironically, it is in the way Jonah treated others that he presents a very religious person who actually lacked a tangible relationship with God.

I know it’s provocative, but there will be a lot of devoutly religious people, even “Christians” in hell because while doing things for Jesus, they missed the importance of actually knowing Jesus. Matthew 7:21-23 Jesus said, “Not everyone who says to Me, 'Lord, Lord,' shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father in heaven. Many will say to Me in that day, 'Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in Your name, cast out demons in Your name, and done many wonders in Your name?' And then I will declare to them, 'I never knew you; depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness!’”

In Matthew 22 Jesus is challenged by the Pharisees and Scribes with a difficult question. They asked Him, "Teacher, which is the greatest commandment in the law?" This is how Jesus answered. He said to them, "You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind. This is the first and greatest commandment."

And while this response was a brilliant retort, Jesus doesn't stop there, He then challenges the essence of their failed religion by saying, "And the second is like it: You shall love your neighbor as yourself. On these two commandments hang all the Law and the Prophets."

What Jesus is saying is rather incredible and honestly was designed to be a direct rebuke of the religious men like Jonah in His midst. By tethering love for God to love for one's neighbor, Jesus is saying a genuine love for God will be made evident by the love you show for your fellow man. Note: It is impossible to love God and hate your neighbor!

To his credit Jonah understood what so many religious people fail to realize. The very essence of God's grace makes religious devotion and piety pointless! It's either God's grace and a relationship or it's man's religion. I either open my hand to receive and enjoy His favor or I defiantly close my hand because I believe it should be earned.

This is why when Jonah is faced with the inconvenient truth that God desired to demonstrate grace to the Ninevites, people he absolutely hated, he ends up rejecting his religion, leaves the land of Israel, and immediately attempts to "flee from the presence of the Lord." Jonah would rather die apart from God than be God's instrument of grace to the Assyrians.

Beyond this, it should also be pointed out that while Jonah was religiously zealous as it pertained to the things he did for God, things he could control and feed his own sense of self-rightness, his unwillingness to obey this one command to demonstrate grace to others revealed the brutal but honest truth — Jonah didn't actually know or love God.



Since God's grace is by definition something you cannot earn (which completely counters the importance of religious adherence), demonstrating grace to others can only manifest as a natural response to a grace you've already received and accepted in your own life.

This is what makes your reaction to God's grace so pivotal and in the end truly revealing. Resisting the demonstration of God's grace through your life to your neighbor is actually evidence you're resisting the very demonstration of God's grace to you. Grace received will manifest as a grace shown. You simply can't have one without the other.

The Apostle John adds to this idea writing in 1 John 4:7-11, "Beloved, let us love one another, for love is of God; and everyone who loves is born of God and knows God. He who does not love does not know God, for God is love. In this the love of God was manifested toward us, that God has sent His only begotten Son into the world, that we might live through Him. In this is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins. Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another."

Because grace transforms the recipient and then naturally manifest from his or hers life, if you're struggling to demonstrate grace the problem resides on the receiving end. You see it's impossible to show grace to others if you're not receiving grace yourself. Keep in mind, we call it "showing grace to others." It's hard to show something you haven't received! Which explains why legalistic Christianity produces so many judgmental Christians.

This is important: Jonah's core problem was not his unwillingness to demonstrate grace to the Ninevites. This was the symptom of his illness and not the illness itself. Instead, Jonah's core problem was what this unwillingness revealed about himself. Though a religious man, Jonah was resisting the reception of God's grace in his own life.

As such Jonah, the goodie-two-shoes church kid, was just as lost as the wicked Assyrians. Jonah had forfeited a relationship with God on the altar of religion. His moral acumen was

based in his performance, his goodness, his obedience to God's commands and not a relationship with the LORD. Ironically, to reveal to Jonah the depths of his own sin, God asked him to do the one thing his religion wouldn't allow — show grace to a sinner!

Friend, there are two quick points of application: First, how you treat others says everything about your relationship with God. Religion fosters prejudices, a judgmental spirit, moral comparisons, hierarchies, strife, envy, jealousies, even hatred. But a relationship with Jesus yields love, compassion, forgiveness, restorations, service, and selflessness.

Secondly, if you're struggling to show grace to someone or love your neighbor, the remedy isn't to try harder, but to instead come back to the cross — the place where grace is received. The problem with your output is in actuality one of input. Never forget experiencing God's grace will yield the manifestation of that grace being shown to others.

J. Allen Blair wrote, "One of the greatest delusions that has entered the minds of Christians is to think they can live the victorious life. You have never lived the victorious life. The only One who has is Jesus Christ. The victorious life is not a life we experience, but rather one we live out. It is the out-living of the indwelling Christ. And He indwells the believer, He lives out His life from within. Our part is to let go and let God do the work. Our obligation is not to try to get victory, but to die to self and yield to Christ's control — and experience victory."

In John 13, Jesus builds upon this by saying to His disciples, "A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another; as I have loved you, that you also love one another. By this all will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another." Jesus is clear the love we have for God and therefore to one another stems from His great love for us!

As we've noted, Jonah's resisting of grace was taking him down, down, down. Jonah was on the run and God was in hot pursuit. Though God had sought to use the "tempest" to get his attention and the events on that ship were designed to drive Jonah to his knees in repentance, sadly he remained defiant. Jonah would rather die than go to Nineveh.

Even then, most amazingly, the crew on this ship still demonstrated great grace by refusing to initially throw Jonah overboard as he'd suggested. The man resisting grace was being shown once again the power of grace by pagan Gentiles. And yet, because the storm worsened the crew finally relented. Over Jonah went and the storm ceased!

**Jonah 1:17-2:1, "Now the Lord had prepared a great fish to swallow Jonah. And Jonah was in the belly of the fish three days and three nights. Then Jonah prayed to the Lord his God from the fish's belly."**

Though I don't want to get side-tracked from the core narrative, as mentioned this is not a story about a fish, but rather one concerning God and Jonah, admittedly, since this is one of the more incredible details recorded in the Bible, it does demand our quick consideration.

First, let's address what the Scriptures are actually describing. While there have been some who've tried to soften the supernatural elements of this story by claiming the Book of Jonah should be viewed as either mythological or allegorical, the truth is it can only be read as literal history. In no way does the context of our story lend any other conclusion.

For further evidence of the historicity of Jonah and the fish look no further than what Jesus said in Matthew 12:38-41. We read, "Then some of the scribes and Pharisees answered, saying, 'Teacher, we want to see a sign from You.' But Jesus answered and said to them, 'An evil and adulterous generation seeks after a sign, and no sign will be given to it except the sign of the prophet Jonah. For as Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of the great fish, so will the Son of Man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth. The men of Nineveh will rise up in the judgment with this generation and condemn it, because they repented at the preaching of Jonah; and indeed a greater than Jonah is here.'"

Jesus not only confirms Jonah was a real person, an actual revival takes place in the city of Nineveh, but Jesus claims Jonah indeed spent "three days and three nights in the bell of the

great fish.” As a matter of fact, Jesus even points to this event as being a foreshadowing of his own death, burial, and resurrection after spending three days in the “heart of the earth.”

The second consideration is that the text establishes this event as being abnormally natural and not necessarily supernatural. Notice we’re told “Jonah was in the belly of the fish three days and three nights” — a “fish” mind you that “the Lord had prepared to swallow Jonah.” Consider what’s actually being described here.

One... Contrary to lore and the way the story is portrayed in Sunday School, this was not a whale, but a unique “fish” or in the Hebrew “dag” or “sea-creature”. Though unlikely a human being could actually survive three days in the belly of a whale, this is not what’s claimed.

Two... This “fish” we’re told was specifically “prepared” (past tense) by God “to swallow Jonah”, keep him alive for three days, and then vomit him onto shore. In the Hebrew this word “prepared” doesn’t mean God simply picked out a random fish to commission for such a task. Instead the word means God “carefully designed” the fish for this specific purpose.

Though we don’t know when God “prepared” such a sea-creature, the Jewish Rabbis taught that on the 5th day of Creation when “God said, ‘Let the waters abound with an abundance of living creatures’” He created this “fish” with the specific intention that Jonah would one day be “swallowed” and preserved alive for “three days and three nights.” Most amazingly, this means this specific “fish” swam the seas for thousands of years waiting for Jonah!

Aside from this, if you believe there is an active God in the world, then what’s being describe really shouldn’t be an issue. The truth is that there are far greater miracles in the Bible than Jonah being swallowed by a fish. Case in point, this isn’t even the greatest miracle record in the book of Jonah. The far greater miracle ends up being the salvation of the Ninevites!

Finally, there are some who theorize Jonah actually died — the fish preserved his corpse — and then upon his resurrection he was vomited onto dry land. Though interesting (and this

does add an even deeper meaning to what Jesus said of Jonah), the problem is that “after three days and three nights in the belly of the fish” we’re told “Jonah prayed” to God.

The reason this is problematic is that it would imply Jonah’s soul cried out to God after his death and that God heard his prayer and granted him a second chance to obey. Not only would this lend some credence to the Catholic heresy of Purgatory, but the text never says Jonah died. In actuality, the idea is that after being alive for days Jonah finally prays. With all that being said, let’s read the entire chapter which records Jonah’s prayer.

**Jonah 2:2-10, “And Jonah said: ‘I cried out to the Lord because of my affliction, and He answered me. Out of the belly of Sheol I cried, and You heard my voice. For You cast me into the deep, into the heart of the seas, and the floods surrounded me; all Your billows and Your waves passed over me.’**

**Then I said, ‘I have been cast out of Your sight; yet I will look again toward Your holy temple. The waters surrounded me, even to my soul; the deep closed around me; weeds were wrapped around my head. I went down to the moorings of the mountains; the earth with its bars closed behind me forever; yet You have brought up my life from the pit, O Lord, my God.**

**When my soul fainted within me, I remembered the Lord; and my prayer went up to You, into Your holy temple. Those who regard worthless idols forsake their own Mercy. But I will sacrifice to You with the voice of thanksgiving; I will pay what I have vowed. Salvation is of the Lord.’ So the Lord spoke to the fish, and it vomited Jonah onto dry land.”**

As we seek to unpack what Jonah prays you need to know I see this differently than most commentators. Though undoubtedly Jonah repents of his sin and there are specifically three aspects to his repentance that demand our consideration, in the end I believe Jonah makes a terrible mistake in his approach. Sadly, his repentance only ends up bringing him back to the point he initially left from and Jonah will then be forced to learn the lesson all over again.

In regards to the positive elements of his prayer, there is no doubt three things contributed to Jonah's repentance, and if you're on the run please consider them: First, Jonah conceded that life was miserable apart from God. Second, Jonah confesses that his misery was on account of his idolatry. And finally, Jonah remembers that salvation is of the Lord.

First, Jonah conceded that life was miserable apart from God. I don't know how long it took, but it couldn't have been long before Jonah realized he was not dead. As a matter of fact, I'm sure he quickly realized something far worse than death had overtaken him. Imagine what these "three days and three nights" in the "belly of the fish" were like for Jonah.

In his prayer Jonah actually describes his experience as an "affliction" or literally a "grave distress". Consider what it must have been like to have "the floods surround" him as he slides into the fishes belly with the "billows and waves" constantly "passing over him." Jonah is in a living cement mixer. He rises up, is turned over, and sent back down again!

Jonah continues by describing his struggle with the "weeds wrapped around his head" as he descended down into "the mooring of the mountains." No matter what Jonah did or how he fought his descent he was so overwhelmed he felt as though "the earth with its bars" were "closing behind him forever." Jonah ultimately defines his experience as if he were in "the pit" or "the belly of Sheol." Literally, this "affliction" was what he imagined hell being like.

Aside from the practical suffering Jonah was experiencing, it's clear his greater torment was spiritual. Though his life was filled with hopelessness, he attributes this to the separation he was experiencing with God caused by his rebellion. He uses phrases like "You cast me into the deep" and "I have been cast out of Your sight" to relay this alienation. This reality was so tormenting that Jonah sums it up by saying his "soul fainted within himself."

When Jonah boarded that boat in Joppa "fleeing from the presence of the Lord" I'm sure this was not the way he saw his life playing out. And yet, what is hell but life apart from God? It

didn't take long for Jonah to realize he'd been stupid. His rebellion led him to a place he never imagined he'd end up. In the belly of this fish Jonah attained the life he sought.

Friend, I hope you know the original lie has never changed. Satan always seeks to get men and women to buy into the idea that it's possible to create a better life apart from God. It was Jonah's pursuit, but only wrestling, alienation, and utter hopelessness resulted.

Second, Jonah confesses that his misery was on account of his idolatry. In the midst of this affliction Jonah comes to see this was all a prison of his own making. To his credit Jonah doesn't blame God for his misery. Instead, he owns the fact he was in "the pit" because of the consequences of his own poor choices. Rebellion had led him to this destination.

Along these lines, verse 8 is rather fascinating, Jonah says, "Those who regard worthless idols forsake their own Mercy." Though on the surface, it would appear Jonah may be referring back to the failed attempts of the pagan sailors calling out to their false gods while in the storm, if you dig deeper into the language and sentence structure this isn't the case.

The reality is verse 8 is one of the more difficult verses in all of the Bible to translate. Case in point the ESV translates this verse as, "Those who pay regard to vain idols forsake their hope of steadfast love." The NIV has a different twist, "Those who cling to worthless idols turn away from God's love for them." I even ran across one scholar who translated verse 8 as, "Those who pay regard to the vain idols forget the grace that could be theirs."

In the Hebrew this word the New King James Version translates as "Mercy" (interesting that in some Bibles the word is even capitalized) doesn't actually speak of mercy, but rather spoke of God's covenant love — something intrinsic to the person of God Himself.

The reason this is fascinating is that, in context, Jonah was speaking therefore of the love God had for the Hebrew people. This is significant because Jonah's acknowledging that his rebellion against God was not only an act of vain idolatry, himself sitting on the throne as god, but that the act itself separated himself from the steadfast love God had for him.

Friend, though the Bible says in Romans 8:39 that there is nothing that can “separate you from the love of God” the one exception is you. Jonah knew God loved him, but he also knew the course he’d set for himself would render that covenantal love of no effect. Never forget, while the grace of God is amazing in its own right, it’s powerless if you don’t receive it.

Finally, Jonah remembers that salvation is of the Lord. Yes, Jonah had created the mess he was in and it was true, his idolatry had alienated him from the lasting effects of God’s love, but it was also true God was more than willing to save him if he’d ask. He says, “I cried out to the Lord because of my affliction, and He answered me... I cried and You heard my voice... You have brought up my life from the pit, O Lord, my God... Salvation is of the Lord.”

How truly amazing it is that while Jonah had made a mess of things God was still willing to hear his cries and not only answer them, but save him from his affliction. J. Allen Blair wrote, “Praise God, no one can go so low that Christ cannot save! No matter how far down one may go in sin, God’s grace can raise him up!” We should all find this incredibly encouraging!

It’s been said verse 9 may be one of the more important verses in the entire Bible. Simple, but brilliant. You see the truth is that all of humanity really falls into one of three basic categories: You have the irreligious who don’t believe they even need salvation. You have the religious who see salvation as something they can earn. But then you have a third, are those who rightly believe “salvation” only comes “of the Lord.”

There is little doubt Jonah’s concession that life was miserable apart from God, his confession that his misery was on account of his idolatry, and his acknowledgment that “salvation is of the Lord” prompted God to “speak to the fish” and have “it vomit Jonah onto dry land.” And yet, while all of these things were significant, the sad truth is that Jonah’s repentance fell short of God’s intended desire!



Notice in response to everything that has happened, Jonah declares, “But I will sacrifice to You with the voice of thanksgiving; I will pay what I have vowed” before then adding that “salvation is of the Lord.” I know it’s a subtle detail, but don’t miss how off this really is.

Though Jonah understands only the Lord saves, he appeals for God’s salvation to be extended as a response to the promises he just made! “I will sacrifice... I will pay... What I have vowed” so that the Lord will save. Jonah is repenting, but his repentance is leading him back to religion and not grace. God’s favor based on his merit, not God’s goodness.

It’s my conviction that as Jonah is being regurgitated out of the fish he believed his final destination would be Israel, not Nineveh. How surprised he’ll be that the moment his head hits the sand, **Jonah 3:1-2 “the word of the LORD came unto Jonah the second time, saying, ‘Arise, go to Nineveh, that great city, and preach unto it the message that I tell you.’”**

Because Jonah has yet to fully learn the lesson God is seeking to teach him, the last two chapters of the story return from its intermission with literally the exact same plot-line of the first two! And you know, it’s not an accident the Ninevites will end up being saved — not because of the “sacrifices, vows, or promises” they made, but simply on account they were willing to receive God’s grace and the salvation that grace affords.

Sadly, in this second act, though we’ll find Jonah obeying God’s commands, he still fails to reflect God’s heart. He goes to Nineveh and begrudgingly delivers God’s message. Then he goes up on a hill hoping to witness judgment when instead the greatest revival in all of human history occurs. Yes, Jonah is released from the prison of his rebellion, but his continued resistance of grace will eventually shackle him in a whole new type of misery.

# Jonah 3:1-9

Before we dive into Jonah chapter 3 I want to begin our study in a unique place... Acts 10:1, "There was a man in Caesarea named Cornelius, a centurion, a devout man, one who feared God with all his household, who gave alms generously, and prayed to God always. About the ninth hour of the day Cornelius saw clearly in a vision an angel of God coming in and saying to him, 'Cornelius!' And when he observed him, he was afraid, and replied, 'What is it, lord?' So the angel said to him, 'Your prayers and alms have come up for a memorial before God.

Now send men to Joppa for Peter. He is lodging with Simon, a tanner, whose house is by the sea. He will tell you what you must do.' And when the angel had departed, Cornelius called two of his servants and a devout soldier, and when he had explained all these things to them, he sent them to Joppa.

The next day, as they went on their journey and drew near the city, Peter went up on the housetop to pray, about the sixth hour. Then he became very hungry and wanted to eat; but while they made ready the meal, he fell into a trance and saw heaven opened and an object like a great sheet bound at the four corners, descending to him. In it were all kinds of four-footed animals of the earth, wild beasts, creeping things, and birds of the air.

And a voice came to him, 'Rise, Peter; kill and eat.' But Peter said, 'Not so, Lord! For I have never eaten anything common or unclean.' And a voice spoke to him again the second time, 'What God has cleansed you must not call common.' This was done three times. And the object was taken up into heaven again. Now while Peter wondered within himself what this vision meant, that behold, the men who had been sent from Cornelius stood before the gate. And they called and asked whether Peter was lodging there.

Now while Peter thought about the vision, the Spirit said to him, 'Behold, three men are seeking you. Arise therefore, go down and go with them, doubting nothing; for I have sent them.' Then Peter went down to the men who had been sent to him from Cornelius, and said, 'Yes, I am he whom you seek. For what reason have you come?'

And they said, 'Cornelius the centurion, a just man, one who fears God and has a good reputation among all the nation of the Jews, was divinely instructed by a holy angel to summon you to his house, and to hear words from you.' Then Peter invited them in and lodged them. And on the next day Peter went away with them..."

Though I'm not going to provide a full expose of Acts 10, there are 3 things essential to your understanding of this story. First, God's plan had always been to reach the world (Jew and Gentile) with the Gospel. It'd been His purpose in calling out the Jews to be a holy people.

Secondly, the mechanism by which Jesus would accomplish this Great Commission would be through Jewish men who, sadly, held long standing prejudices towards the Gentile world.

Thirdly, knowing what it would take for Peter, a good Jew to be obedient to cross this racial barrier, Jesus has spent the last several years preparing him for this very important moment. The vision Peter receives as he's sitting on the roof top was the final act of his preparation.

While many teach that this vision was designed to illustrate to Peter that the church would be made up of both Jews and Gentiles, clean and unclean, I'm not sure this vision had anything to do with the Gentiles or church and instead had everything to do with Peter! As we've seen with Jonah, God's commands always challenge something in the messenger.

We must consider... Why would Peter when being presented with this sheet full of animals refuse to obey God's direct command to kill and eat on three separate occasions? Answer: As a good, religious Jew eating these animals was completely forbidden by the dietary restrictions laid out in Law of Moses — specifically Leviticus 11!

So, why would God ask Peter to do something that seemed on the surface to be wrong? Once again, while I could take the entire study to address this question, the short-end of the answer is that God was challenging a pervasive misunderstanding that existed in a predominately Jewish church as it pertained to the full nature of salvation.

Though everyone in the first church agreed that salvation, justification before God, only came through Jesus' atoning work on the cross, many saw God's continued favor, ones sanctification, as still being based in ones obedience to the Law. In essence, salvation was seen as a combination of faith in God plus obedience to God, which explains why most believed that in order to be a Christian you also had to become a practicing Jew.

While Peter undoubtedly understood his salvation was based in his faith in Jesus' work on the cross, the text is clear he still held to a belief that his favor with God was intertwined with his obedience to the Law. His reply, "I have never eaten anything common or unclean."

With this in mind, God's point in commanding Peter to "kill and eat" was not to change his diet, but to instead challenge his perspective! Look at God's reply to Peter's justification. We read, "A voice spoke to Peter a second time saying what God has cleansed you must not call common." In context, what had God cleansed? Had God somehow cleansed the animals the Law had declared unclean? I don't think so.

It seems to me that "what God had cleansed" was in actuality Peter! Think about how these words would have reverberated in his heart. "Peter your obedience to the Law didn't make you clean. I did this work! At this point what you eat has no effect on this reality!"

The truth is that this vision was God's way of telling Peter that his obedience to the Law, eating things clean or unclean, had, past tense, still had, present tense, and would never have, future tense, any barring when it came to his favor with God. Justification and sanctification were both a result of Jesus' work for him and never his work for Jesus!

To prep him for what was coming, Peter needed to know being Jewish, obeying Jewish Law, holding to Jewish customs had no impact on God's favor! God's favor had been given to him, not earned by his obedience. It was a work of faith based in God's grace alone.

Understand this was an important lesson for Peter — especially in the context of what was to follow. Peter now knows that if justification and sanctification were both a work of God, independent of an individual's adherence of the Law, then the doors of salvation had now swung wide open for all of humanity. Being an obedient Jew was no longer a prerequisite to receive God's favor and be apart of His chosen people! It was all grace!

Before we connect this event to the story of Jonah, I should also point out that it's not an accident "this was done three times." In presenting this vision three times, Peter couldn't help but recall what? The incredible grace Jesus had already demonstrated towards him!

Don't forget Peter had denied Jesus three times and then it took Jesus asking "Peter do you love me" three times before the old guy finally relents and was restored! "Three times" told him, "Peter, do you really want the basis of My favor to be your performance or My grace?"

Peter's story in Acts 10 illustrates a truth of pivotal importance. When you come to the realization that your righteous standing with God is based only on His grace, showing moral prejudice towards another becomes a baseless proposition. The only segregation that exists on Mount Calvary is the Man on the cross and the rest of us on our knees!

Imagine Peter's reaction when at the door he discovers that the men God sent for him were two Gentile servants and a military man! And to make matters worse, not only had God commanded that he "go with them," but the destination was the home of a Roman centurion!

Don't overlook the significance of this detail that Peter "invited them in and lodged them." In the original language "lodged them" meant Peter "entertained them as an honored guest." Most amazingly this very pajama party and Peter's obedience would have been inconceivable if not for the vision he'd just received and accepted. The magnitude of God's grace in Peter's life transcended anything that might have previously prohibited fellowship.

For the sake of time let me tell you what happens next. Peter obeys God's commands, goes to the house of Cornelius, preaches the Gospel, and this man along with his entire family place their faith in Jesus, are filled with the Holy Spirit, and baptized. And it's through this singular event that the Gospel jumps from Jewish communities into the Gentile world! Peter's obedience in Act 10 was instrumental in determining the direction of Christianity.

And do you think it's an accident this entire ground-shaking, world-changing development began in Joppa — the exact same port city in Israel where some 800 years beforehand God would call another devoutly religious man to carry the Gospel to the Gentiles? As we've seen with Jonah and now Peter the key to their obedience was receiving the implications of grace.

I bring up this story because Peter is the Anti-Jonah. He presents a man who received God's grace, allowed it to change his heart, obeyed God's command, submitted to His will, and was used in a mighty way. In contrast, Jonah resisted God's grace, refused to allow it to effect his heart, disobeyed God's command, resisted His will, and ends up being swallowed up.

Christian, the fundamental difference between emulating Peter or experiencing the plight of Jonah is what you do when God challenges you with the nature of His grace!

Where we left off our story of Jonah is interesting. Though Jonah has repented of his rebellion, tragically his repentance fell short of God's intended desire! Unlike Peter, while Jonah understands only the Lord saves, he appeals for God's salvation to be extended as a response to the promises he just made to God! Don't overlook how Jonah's prayer ultimately ends "I will sacrifice... I will pay... What I have vowed" so that the Lord will save.

Yes, Jonah is repenting, but his repentance is leading him back to his religion and not grace. God's favor based on his merit, not God's goodness. Jonah misses the identical lesson Peter so readily accepted. As we're about to see because he's yet to fully learn the lesson God has been trying to teach him about grace, the last two chapters of Jonah's story presents the exact same plot-line of the first!

**Jonah 3:1-2, “Now the word of the Lord came to Jonah the second time, saying, ‘Arise, go to Nineveh, that great city, and preach to it the message that I tell you.’”**

Though chapter 2 closes with Jonah being vomited onto a beach by this fish, the text leaves out a few details. One, we have no idea where Jonah now finds himself. Jewish historian Josephus claims Jonah was puked-up somewhere in the region of the Black Sea meaning he now finds himself 400 miles from Nineveh as opposed to 900 miles. Others still have postulated that he actually finds himself back in Joppa. Honestly, we have no idea!

Secondly, we also don’t know how much time transpires between chapters 2 and 3. Though it’s most likely verse 1 occurs the very moment Jonah’s head hits the sand leaving no gap between the chapter breaks, it is at least theoretically possible Jonah could have settled back into his usual routine in Israel thinking the entire situation was behind him.

Either way the one thing that is clear is “the word of the Lord came to Jonah a second time” presenting him with the identical marching orders as the first! God was calling Jonah to “arise, go to Nineveh, and preach” the “message” He’d been given from the Lord. Though Jonah had attempted to run from a divine calling, the call itself was inescapable.

Personally, I see the very fact there was even a second calling of Jonah to be nothing shy of an act of God’s amazing grace. One author writes, “By paralleling the book’s opening remarks, almost word for word, the author skillfully conveys the idea that Jonah is being offered a new beginning.” How encouraging we serve a God of second-chances!

And while that is a glorious reality in its own right, there is a caveat that should be pointed out. Jonah’s new beginning began the identical place of his previous failure. If Jonah thought his fresh start would circumvent his past mistakes, he was sorely disappointed. Because he failed the class, there was no mistaking he’d have to re-enroll in the same grade!

Before you recoil at this fact, consider would it have been in Jonah's best interest for God to have simply capitulated to his rebellion and stubbornness? Though Jonah had repented of his attempt to "flee the presence of the Lord," it's a truth that simply allowing him to settle back into his former life would have failed to address Jonah's core issues.

It's been correctly said of repentance that "God always takes you back to the place you said no." As such Jonah, while learning several lessons of importance through his experience in the "tempest" and in the "belly of the fish", had still failed to accept the power of God's grace.

Friend, here's a reality you need to grasp, God is way more stubborn than you are! As any loving parent quickly learns, if you don't develop a greater stubbornness than your children it's going to be nearly impossible to win any significant battles. Friend, know you can resist God, but He will resist you right back. You can wrestle and He'll wrestle right back. You can fight Him, but know He will fight back because He loves you!

**Jonah 3:3-4, "So Jonah arose and went to Nineveh, according to the word of the Lord. Now Nineveh was an exceedingly great city, a three-day journey in extent. And Jonah began to enter the city on the first day's walk. Then he cried out and said, 'Yet forty days, and Nineveh shall be overthrown!'"**

"So Jonah arose and went to Nineveh..." Regardless of which beach Jonah was up-chucked, because of the location of Nineveh there was a significant journey involved regardless. Note: Contrary to many Bible commentaries (and I don't understand how they miss this) the city of Nineveh was not a port and was rather hundreds of miles from an ocean. Geographically, we know the ancient city of Nineveh exists today under the Iraqi city of Mosul.

Aside from the fact it would have taken Jonah several weeks to walk from any shore to this city, we also know from archeological digs that Nineveh was about 60 miles in diameter. Since it's likely Jonah could probably walk about 20 miles a day, the detail Nineveh was "a three-day



journey in extent” interior wall to wall, served to demonstrate that after the completion of the “first day’s walk” Jonah “cried out” as he approached the city center.

Before we get to the essence of Jonah’s message, I should reiterate that Nineveh was a massive metropolis — the first of its kind to be later rivaled by only Babylon. In the very last verse of the book, God will actually affirm that 120,000 young children lived in Nineveh bringing the overall population of the city as high as potentially 1.5 million.

Imagine the scene, Jonah, who don’t forget hates the Assyrians, walks into Times Square and begins “crying out” declaring, “Yet forty days, and Nineveh shall be overthrown!” In the original language the Hebrew word translated “and he cried out” is in the active tense implying Jonah was simply repeating the same message over and over again.

Not only was the message incredibly simple (8 words in English, but only 5 in Hebrew) and if we’re to be honest quite vague on specifics (how was Nineveh to be overthrown when it was the impregnable capital of the predominate world power, why 40 days, etc), it’s likely Jonah cried out in Hebrew — a language completely foreign to the Assyrians who spoke Aramaic.

Imagine you’re a Ninevite going about your daily activities when you notice a foreigner has set up in the city square and is repeating the same five words over and over again. Though you maybe able to recognize the dialect to be Hebrew, the reality is you have no idea what he’s saying. You’re initial assumption is that Jonah’s just another one of the crazies!

Even when someone finally does translate his message, if you’re honest it yields more confusion than clarity. Is this man making a threat? Does he know something we don’t and how would he? Has God actually sent him or worse an approaching army? Is there any credence to what he’s saying? How would this even happen? On and on the questions go.

Beyond this, what do you think Jonah's tone was as he repeats this message over and over again? We know he detests the Ninevites. There is no doubt that while Jonah is being obedient to preach he's hoping the message is ignored and Nineveh destroyed.

The last thing Jonah wants to see happen is repentance. Jonah would have probably preferred he was killed on the spot, taking solace in the knowledge that at least God's judgment would soon follow. I think it's safe to assume Jonah's tone wasn't pleading. There was no compassion in his voice. In all likelihood Jonah's declaring this warning with a grin on his face. And yet, in spite of all of these things, check out what happens next.

**Jonah 3:5-9, "So the people of Nineveh believed God, proclaimed a fast, and put on sackcloth, from the greatest to the least of them. Then word came to the king of Nineveh; and he arose from his throne and laid aside his robe, covered himself with sackcloth and sat in ashes. And he caused it to be proclaimed and published throughout Nineveh by the decree of the king and his nobles, saying... 'Let neither man nor beast, herd nor flock, taste anything; do not let them eat, or drink water. But let man and beast be covered with sackcloth, and cry mightily to God; yes, let every one turn from his evil way and from the violence that is in his hands. Who can tell if God will turn and relent, and turn away from His fierce anger, so that we may not perish?'"**

In a twist literally no one would have ever seen coming, especially under the circumstances, we read, in response to Jonah and this message, "the people of Nineveh believed God!" For reasons we'll soon discuss the people of Nineveh become so confident judgment was actually coming in 40 days that they organically "proclaimed a fast" so that all of the citizenry "from the greatest to the least of them" ends up "putting on sackcloth" in collective mourning.

What's happening naturally in this city is so astounding as soon as "word came to the King of Nineveh" he also immediately "arose from his throne", joined in this national act of repentance, even going so far as to then issue an official proclamation for everyone to "cry

mightily to God” and “turn away from their evil way and violence.” These Ninevites undoubtedly believed God was communicating an important message through Jonah!

Don’t overlook the magnitude and radical nature of what’s taking place. Historically, what we find recorded in these verses is the first great and maybe the greatest spiritual awakening in all of human history. An entire city of a million plus wicked, vile, brutal Assyrians repent of their sin and collectively appeal for the salvation of the true and living God!

As we consider how such an unlikely turn of events is even possible, please keep in mind this awakening was ultimately the byproduct of two things: The message and the messenger of the Lord. First, notice the message Jonah delivered fundamentally possessed two central components: one direct and the other implied.

No doubt the central theme of the message was the coming judgment of God. “Yet forty days, and Nineveh shall be overthrown!” It would seem the idea of a coming judgment struck an immediate cord in the hearts of the Ninevites. Though they were an evil and depraved people, they weren’t ignorant of this fact. They knew they were cruel and savage!

What’s interesting about their reaction is that the Ninevites never once question Jonah’s claim that judgement was immanent! In actuality, they don’t even inquire that Jonah provide them some specific reason God found it necessary to judge them in 40 days!

What’s suggested is that the Ninevites knew deep down they were guilty of unspeakable crimes against humanity. They knew their brutal actions were worthy of a swift judgment. They rightly knew the divine wrath of God would have been just all things considered.

And yet, a coming judgment was not all Jonah’s message conveyed. In addition to a day of reckoning, you can’t escape the incredible measure of grace implied in the very fact God was giving them a 40 day warning. Think about it. If the Ninevites understood their actions warranted judgment, they also knew the very fact God was affording them 40 days meant He

was intentionally giving them time (mercy — withholding what they deserved) and an opportunity to repent (grace — providing what they didn't deserve).

In writing on this passage Biblical scholar and commentator Sandy Adams makes this very interesting observation, "In oriental culture the number 40 had special significance. The number is the product of 5 (the number for grace) and 8 (the number of new beginnings)." As such "the number 40 denotes the period of testing that usually precedes an outpouring of God's grace in the form of a revival. The Ninevites heard that in 40 days God would judge their city. They must've reasoned, 'Why is God waiting 40 days? He must be giving us time to repent. Perhaps if we repent, God will have mercy on us and spare us?'"

Friend, if you know deep down that who you are and what you've done would rightly demand the judgment of a holy God, the very fact He hasn't brought down His wrath is evidence of His mercy and grace. In His mercy God is affording you time and by His grace He's giving you an opportunity to repent, receive Jesus, and be saved from the very punishment you deserve. This was a fact the Ninevites recognized and they acted accordingly.

Aside from this, there is another component to this story you can't deny. There is incredible power in "the word of the Lord." God's perfect timing combined with the way His Word speaks to the human soul can move anyone to repentance! As Jonah so aptly stated at the end of the previous chapter, "salvation is of the Lord."

Christian, there is a reality of evangelism often overlooked. Your job is not to save people. In actuality, you have zero power to do so! "Salvation is of the Lord." The ultimate saving of the sinner and subsequent transformation of the sinner's life is God's job and His alone.

You see, your job as an instrument of Jesus in this world is to simply expose people to the most powerful spiritual force on earth — God's Word, and then let that Word do its thing. Honestly, this should be liberating! Your job is to share God's Word (sure speak honestly of

judgment, but also emphasize the incredible mercy and grace of God) knowing this wonderful truth. What results is entirely God's responsibility!

And while the power resided in the Word, it's also evident the messenger also played an important role. In Luke 11 Jesus said something interesting, we read, "And while the crowds were thickly gathered together, Jesus began to say, 'This is an evil generation. It seeks a sign, and no sign will be given to it except the sign of Jonah the prophet. For as Jonah became a sign to the Ninevites, so also the Son of Man will be to this generation... The men of Nineveh will rise up in the judgment with this generation and condemn it, for they repented at the preaching of Jonah; and indeed a greater than Jonah is here.'"

While there is no doubt the Ninevites "repented at the preaching of Jonah", this phrase that "Jonah became a sign to the Ninevites" is rather fascinating. I should point out that this one phrase has led most commentators to attribute much of this spiritual awakening in Nineveh to the unique physical appearance of Jonah himself. Some even reason that since the Assyrians worshipped the fish god Dagon, Jonah being vomited onto shore by a fish only to then walk into Nineveh must be the "sign" Jonah "became" — what Jesus is referencing.

There are several problems with this theory. One, Nineveh was not a port city and was at least 400 miles (a several weeks journey) from a body of water. As such no one living in Nineveh would have seen Jonah deposited onto the shore. Two, in an age when communications traveled slowly, it's also highly unlikely enough time expired whereby the sailors or witnesses on the beach would have been able to carry word of Jonah to Nineveh.

Three, proponents of this belief reason that Jonah would have been terribly bleached by the acid juices of the "fish" making him whiter than Casper the Friendly Ghost. In a sense this bleaching would have created a literal "sign" — arguing that Jonah's bizarre physical appearance would have then served to contribute to Nineveh's most unlikely repentance.

The problem with this is that the text actually makes zero mention of Jonah's appearance and it's illogical to extrapolate out the conditions and effects of being in the "belly of the fish" if you conclude this was a unique animal specifically designed by God to preserve Jonah.

Beyond all of this... I personally don't like any of these theories because they're basically designed to provide some logical explanation for a supernatural occurrence. God's Word was preached and it changed the lives of the Ninevites. God didn't need to bleach out Jonah's appearance or have him thrown-up out of a fish for this to happen. Not to mention, if this is true it would have meant the Ninevites believed in Dagon and not the God of Israel.

So, how did Jonah "become a sign"? Notice Jesus connects this idea with the fact that "the Son of Man will also be a sign to this generation." Yes, there is no doubt the resurrection of Jesus was the ultimate sign, but this can't apply to Jonah who wasn't resurrected and who's story of being in the "belly of a fish" the Ninevites would only come to learn after the fact.

Instead, in the most simplistic interpretation, it would seem the real "sign to Nineveh" Jonah fulfilled was the very fact God loved these Assyrians enough to send a prophet all the way from Israel — just like "God so love the world that He sent His only begotten Son." Jonah's very presence in Nineveh was a "sign" — not some goofy physical appearance.

I hope you know a powerful reality is communicated when you step out of your comfort-zone and share the truth of God's Word with a neighbor, co-worker, family-member, or fellow parent on the soccer or football team. Whether they accept the Word or not, which isn't your responsibility, there is one "sign" they cannot deny: The God of the universe just practically demonstrated His love for them by sending you to speak into their life!

We see this in Nineveh — the fact Jonah was sent by God with such a message was the sign they needed to see in order to know that God really loved them and preferred grace over judgment. We also witnessed this in Acts 10 when Peter laid aside his moralism to go to the untouchables. The fact Peter entered the home of Cornelius said more than his message.

In conclusion, chapter 3 presents a truth that should encourage all of us to be bold in our mission and brave enough to reach out to those we might see as the unreachable. If God's Word could change the Assyrians there is literally no one who the power of His Word and the saving nature of His grace can't reach. As Paul wrote in Romans, "I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ, for it is the power of God to salvation for everyone who believes!"

Friend, if a spiritual awakening can come to Nineveh it came come to America! And if Jonah, an unwilling prophet, could be used, think of the impact you can make if you're willing!

Jonah 3:9 leaves us with a tragedy. Though the Ninevites have repented via the message God had delivered through His prophet Jonah, the King of the Assyrians is tormented with a grand question. In spite of their repentance he wonders, "Who can tell if God will turn and relent, and turn away from His fierce anger, so that we may not perish?"

The irony of this question is that there was a man in Nineveh who could have told them God would "turn away" His wrath because they repented. His name was Jonah. Sadly, instead of filling this divine role, unlike the Apostle Peter who told Cornelius about Jesus and the salvation of the Lord, Jonah will continue to resist grace robbing himself of the joy he could have experienced being in the center of the greatest revival in human history!

# *Jonah* 3:10-4:11

Jonah chapter 3 records one of the most incredible and most unlikely events in all of human history. We're told Jonah enters the city of Nineveh and delivers a simple but direct message from the Lord... Jonah 3:4, "Yet forty days, and Nineveh shall be overthrown!"

What follows is really astounding... Jonah 3:5-9, "So the people of Nineveh believed God, proclaimed a fast, and put on sackcloth, from the greatest to the least of them. Then word came to the king of Nineveh; and he arose from his throne and laid aside his robe, covered himself with sackcloth and sat in ashes. And he caused it to be proclaimed and published throughout Nineveh by the decree of the king and his nobles, saying...

'Let neither man nor beast, herd nor flock, taste anything; do not let them eat, or drink water. But let man and beast be covered with sackcloth, and cry mightily to God; yes, let every one turn from his evil way and from the violence that is in his hands.'" Reasoning, "Who can tell if God will turn and relent, and turn away from His fierce anger, so that we may not perish?"

While vague on specifics, there is no doubt God was communicating through Jonah, two simple ideas to the citizens of Nineveh, one direct with the other being implied. First, God is crystal clear that the wickedness of the Assyrians could no longer be tolerated.

In Jonah 1:2, God commands Jonah to "arise, go to Nineveh, and cry out against it" explaining that "their wickedness had come up before" Him. Since God is by His very nature holy and just, He can only allow human injustices to continue unabated so long. In regards to the wickedness of the Assyrian people divine judgment could no longer be withheld.



And yet, realizing this to be the case that God's judgment was not only just — but warranted, the Ninevites came to see this "forty day" delay as being evidence of God's mercy and a manifestation of His amazing grace, the opportunity to repent and be saved.

Don't temper the magnitude of what results, the promise of judgment coupled with the existence of God's mercy and grace cause an entire city of a million plus wicked Assyrians to repent of their sin and collectively appeal for the salvation of the true and living God! Indeed Nineveh was "overturned" for what had been upside-down was flipped right-side-up.

One of the most amazing aspects of the communal repentance of the Ninevites to the revelation of God's coming judgment and the extension of His grace is the fact they had zero guarantee the Lord would actually forgive and spare them His wrath. In actuality, this question posed by the King of Nineveh in verse 9, "Who can tell if God will turn and relent" reveals a deep uncertainty as to what would come at the close of these "forty days".

You see the fact these Ninevites repent not knowing if God would still judge or extend His forgiveness illustrates the genuineness of what was occurring. As a nation they decided to "cry mightily to God" and "turn from their evil way" not in order to deter God's wrath, but out of an authentic grief concerning their sin. As such the Ninevites repented, not to escape an immanent judgment. They repented because it was a logical reaction to God's Word.

In 2 Corinthians 7:10 Paul observed that "godly sorrow produces repentance leading to salvation... but the sorrow of the world produces death." His point is that there is an intrinsic difference between "being sorry concerning the consequences of sin" and genuine "sorrow over sin." We know with certainty these Ninevites were genuinely sorry over their wickedness because they immediately repented.

Well, as a result of all this we read... **Jonah 3:10, "Then God saw their works, that they turned from their evil way; and God relented from the disaster that He had said He would bring upon them, and He did not do it."**

In the Bible, "repentance" is a word that describes a changing of the mind that leads to a change in direction. Repentance begins with a choice, but is then made evident by an action. God knew they repented because He "saw their works, that they turned from their evil way." Note: Actual repentance is something that can be actually seen! By its very definition repentance yields a tangible evidence manifesting from an individuals life. J. Allen Blair remarked concerning their repentance, "Their works proved the reality of their words."

Keep in mind, it was not "works" that saved the Ninevites from God's wrath. What saved the Ninevites was what their "works" revealed about their hearts. They end up being saved from judgment because repentance flowed from the fact they "believed God." It was a belief in what had been communicated through "the word of the Lord" that manifested a genuine repentance — a "turning away from their evil way." Repentance yielded a real result.

Repentance is not simply a turning from something, it's a turning to Someone. Sadly, most sermons on repentance reek of legalism because they miss this point entirely. When pastor's speak of repentance only to then emphasize the ceasing of a sinful behavior they've inadvertently minimized the power of the Gospel by focusing on the wrong action.

Repentance (in the New Covenant context) isn't an exhortation for you to stop what you're presently doing; rather, it's an appeal that you come back to the cross. The primary focus of repentance is returning to a relationship you've presently departed from.

To this point Pastor David Guzik writes, "In the Christian life, repentance does not describe what you must do to turn to God; repentance describes the very process of turning to God. When we truly turn to Him, we turn away from the things that displease Him."

Friend, if Nineveh repented on a hope that just maybe God would relent from His judgment, how much more should you be willing to repent since you've been given a guarantee? In Acts 3:19 Peter issues this appeal, "Repent therefore and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out, so that times of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord."

And Christian, always remember, if repentance began when you first came to Jesus it will always manifest through a decision to return to Jesus. The key when you stumble is simple, come back to your Savior knowing His love is not deterred by your failure!

In his book, *The God Delusion*, atheist Richard Dawkins writes a scathing rendition of God as he sees Him in the Old Testament. Dawkins says, "The God of the Old Testament is arguably the most unpleasant character in all fiction: jealous and proud of it; a petty, unjust, unforgiving control-freak; a vindictive, bloodthirsty ethnic cleanser; a homophobic, racist, genocidal bully." The truth is that I'm not sure Richard Dawkins has read the book of Jonah.

One of the macro-lessons from the story of Jonah is how God lovingly pursues sinners for it directly contrasts this misconception. Aside from His patient dealings with Jonah, the grace God demonstrated to these wicked Ninevites who deserved to be punished illustrates how His chief desire for all of humanity is salvation and restoration, not judgment.

In 2 Peter 3:9 we're told that God is "not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance." In Ezekiel 33:11 the prophet actually quotes God as saying, "I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but that the wicked turn from his way and live!" Aside from the fact I take solace knowing that God's patience with wickedness can last only so long, it's simply a fact of Scripture that God's judgment is always a matter of last resort!

As we seek to transition to the final act of this story, it's important you keep in mind this great awakening in Nineveh intended to stir an awakening within Jonah. The prophet should have been in awe of God's love and amazed at His mercy. Sadly, the repentance of the Ninevites and the extension of God's grace stirred something else entirely.

**Jonah 4:1, “But it displeased Jonah exceedingly, and he became angry.”**

What a reaction from someone who’s just been used by God to bring about the greatest spiritual awakening in human history! Jonah’s response is raw and real. The very fact the Ninevites repented, God forgave, and judgment was spared “displeased Jonah exceedingly.”

The idea presented in the Hebrew is that these things caused him to literally tremble or be broke up with a violent action. Jonah’s perception was that God’s grace being demonstrated towards these wicked Ninevites was flat out evil. Jonah believed God had allowed His compassion to supersede His justice. It wasn’t right, therefore Jonah “became angry.”

In the original language this phrase indicates Jonah’s wrath was kindled. The word means he become very hot. Literally, Jonah is stewing at what he’d witnessed. Note: Who was Jonah mad at? He wasn’t angry with the Ninevites. Instead his anger was directed towards God.

What a contrast between Jonah’s heart towards the Assyrians and that of the Lord’s. Jonah wanted judgment — God desired salvation. Jonah hated these people — God loved them. Jonah craved vengeance, but God pursued forgiveness. The truth of the matter is that Jonah’s reaction demonstrated he was completely out of touch with the heart of God.

Pastor J.D. Greear made this observation of Jonah. He said, “A spirit of unforgiveness and a lack of generosity is the indication you are out of touch with the grace of God in your own life.” Jonah’s anger to God’s grace being demonstrated to these undeserving Ninevites was actually evidence he’d failed to experience the grace of God for himself.

Have you ever noticed the longer a married couple lives together slowly overtime they begin to look alike? There’s actually science that explains why this phenomena occurs. Married people who share a myriad of life experiences with one another (laughing, crying, sorrow, frustration, etc.) end up mirroring and developing the same facial features as their partner.

Aside from this it's simply a truth that human beings are incredibly impressionable. Because we're creatures of comfort it's only natural that we end up seeking out people that foster the most comfortable environment. We gravitate to people who share our like interests and passions, which then only serves to reinforce these same character traits.

Consider attire, If you dress like a biker, it's highly likely everyone you're friends with also dress like bikers. If you're sporty, my guess is most of your friends wear athletic gear. If you're outdoorsy, you can expect most of your associates to be decked out in camouflage and Carhartt. Shoot, it's easy to tell when Atlanta United has a Sunday game, because half the congregation is all geared up in either AU jerseys or at a minimum black, red, and gold!

Understand this reality is the brilliance of the New Covenant. Whereas the Law gave you rules to obey in the attempts of manufacturing Godliness, because grace affords you the opportunity to hang out with Jesus, Godliness can now be attained through the natural manifestation of a relational association with God.

If you naturally emulate the people you spend the most time with, it's then only logical that the more time you spend with Jesus the more of Him you'll reflect. And since Christ-likeness is the natural result of a relationship with Christ, the implications are profound. (1) If you're failing to reflect Christ, the key isn't to try harder but to spend more time with Him. And (2) If your life looks nothing like Christ, then maybe you don't have a relationship with Him at all.

Such was the case with Jonah. This prophet's reaction to the Ninevites in contrast with God's heart for the Ninevites was designed to emphasize a serious disconnect. Because Jonah saw his rightness with God being based in his religious obedience to the law (Jonah 2:9, "I will sacrifice, I will pay what I have vowed"), the salvation of the wicked Ninevites manifesting simply because they "believed God" and received His grace was an affront to his moralism.

Jonah “became angry” because he perceived what had taken place was not fair or just. The Ninevites had been given something he’d spent his whole life earning. Faced with this reality Jonah was left with really only one of two conclusions: Either salvation is a gift from God to be received and not earned — meaning he needed to repent of his moralism and experience God’s grace or God was completely inequitable and he was justified in his anger.

Sadly, because Jonah was not willing to let go of his moral-rightness, he chose the later and “became angry” with God. Jonah did not believe God was being equitable. Because Jonah’s anger was ultimately rooted in religious moralism in place of a transformative relationship with God, what would immediately follow was all designed to address this core issue!

**Jonah 4:2-3, “So Jonah prayed to the Lord, and said, ‘Ah, Lord, was not this what I said when I was still in my country? Therefore I fled previously to Tarshish; for I know that You are a gracious and merciful God, slow to anger and abundant in lovingkindness, One who relents from doing harm. Therefore now, O Lord, please take my life from me, for it is better for me to die than to live!’”**

How audacious that in his anger Jonah finds himself upset over five things he knew to be true concerning God? Look at this list, Jonah’s upset because God was “gracious, merciful, slow to anger, abundant in lovingkindness,” and was “One who relents from doing harm.” Jonah would be the guy sitting in a pew during worship fuming over God’s goodness!

Jonah is not only upset at what God has done, but he actually accuses God of being a victim of His own nature. And the grand irony is that Jonah’s anger is based in a correct understanding of who God is! “God, You just can’t help Yourself! I knew You’d forgive the Ninevites if they repented which is why I wanted no part of Your plan from the beginning!”

How interesting Jonah’s ultimate conclusion is the same as the one he’d had on the boat. “God, if You’re determined to be this way just kill me! I’d rather die!” What a punk! Yet, though

no one would have blamed God for taking Jonah up on his request, God instead poses a question aimed at getting Jonah to think through this situation more fully.

**Jonah 4:4, "Then the Lord said, 'Is it right for you to be angry?'"**

Because Jonah's anger manifested from his own sense of moral rightness and was based in what he viewed as an inequity within God, the Lord immediately challenges Jonah's perception of self. In light of the events of the first two chapters this question "Is it right for you to be angry" pricked a nerve. It's as though God is asking, "How can it be right for a recipient of My grace to then be angry when that same grace is extended to someone else?"

**Jonah 4:5, "So Jonah went out of the city and sat on the east side of the city. There he made himself a shelter and sat under it in the shade, till he might see what would become of the city."**

Jonah was far from a righteous man. In actuality, apart from God's grace Jonah would have perished in the sea. Clearly, Jonah had no "right to be angry!" Sadly though, he refuses to admit this because he knows what the implications would be. Instead of repenting, Jonah declines to answer the Lord's question and intentionally gives God the cold shoulder.

Aside from this, since it was clear God wasn't going to grant him his request to die, the prophet decides to leave the city and basically throws himself a pity-party! Though I'm sure he knew Nineveh would be spared, Jonah is still holding out hope God would judge anyway!

**Jonah 4:6, "And the Lord God prepared a plant and made it come up over Jonah, that it might be shade for his head to deliver him from his misery. So Jonah was very grateful for the plant."**

Because Jonah is still resisting grace and is giving God the silent treatment, the Lord employs a new strategy. He's going to provide an object lesson for Jonah with the specific intention of illustrating the emptiness of religion and rightness of grace. On a side note, you can't help but see the relentlessness of God. He's still not giving up on Jonah.

Notice, while Jonah has built himself some type of "shelter" aimed at providing "shade", it would seem his best attempt ends up failing to yield relief from the intense sun and heat of this region. Though Jonah "made himself a shelter" he still finds himself miserable.

Enter God, seeing Jonah's "misery" and the inadequacy of his "shelter" we read "the Lord God prepared a plant and made it come up over Jonah, that it might be shade for his head to deliver him from his misery." There are three interesting words being used here.

First, this Hebrew word "misery" is a loaded term. In it's context there is no doubt the word describes the physical discomfort Jonah is experiencing under the intense heat of the sun; and yet, the word means so much more. Of the 663 times the word "ra" is used in Scripture in more than 500 instances it's translated as either "evil" or "wickedness".

Secondly, notice "God prepared a plant." In the Hebrew this is the identical word we find describing the "great fish" at the end of chapter 1. No doubt we find a deliberate contrast being established between the "shelter" Jonah "made" and the "plant God prepared."

Which leads to the third word that explains the purpose of the plant. We're told God "prepared a plant" to "deliver Jonah from his misery." Once again in the Hebrew the word "deliver" means "to rescue or save" and implies an act done on one's behalf.

Consider the underlying lesson, Jonah is completely miserable, but his "misery" is much greater than a physical ailment caused by the sun. Jonah is miserable on account of his sin, his evil, and the alienation he's experiencing with God. Jonah knows he's not right!



So what does Jonah then do? In seeking to remedy this “misery” he’s experiencing Jonah builds for himself a “shelter”; and yet, it doesn’t take long for his best attempt at providing relief to prove inadequate. His “shelter” failed to “deliver him from his misery.”

Still hopelessly miserable God then intervenes by “preparing” a supernatural covering. Not only is this “plant” a result of God’s direct involvement — completely independent of Jonah, but it accomplishes what his “shelter” failed to remedy... The covering God “prepared” proved to be able to “deliver Jonah from his misery!” Are you picking up on the larger theme?

**Jonah 4:7-8, “But as morning dawned the next day God prepared a worm, and it so damaged the plant that it withered. And it happened, when the sun arose, that God prepared a vehement east wind; and the sun beat on Jonah’s head, so that he grew faint. Then he wished death for himself, and said, ‘It is better for me to die than to live.’”**

**“The Lord gives and the Lord takes away.” After the failure of his own “shelter” God gave the plant to deliver Jonah from his misery only to the very next morning “prepare a worm” to destroy the plant He had made. Not only does Jonah immediately find himself back in the miserable conditions he’d been in before - with “the sun beating on his head”, but couple it with this “vehement east wind” and Jonah’s reaction is understandable.**

In a matter of hours Jonah goes from being “very grateful” to now, once again despairing of life itself — he’s absolutely miserable. Because of the loss of this plant and the deliverance it afforded, Jonah has grown so “faint” we’re told “he wished death for himself.” His misery is so great and his outlook so bleak, Jonah concludes life is no longer worth living!

**Jonah 4:9, “Then God said to Jonah, ‘Is it right for you to be angry about the plant?’ And Jonah said, ‘It is right for me to be angry, even to death!’”**

Keep in mind all of this has occurred between these two questions. Jonah ignores question one, the scene takes place, then God asks a second question intending to build off the first. In verse 4 God asked Jonah, "Is it right for you to be angry?" Was Jonah's anger at the grace God had extended to the Ninevites righteous in light of the grace he'd received?

Now after this object lesson God asks Jonah, "Is it right for you to be angry about the plant?" to which Jonah replies, "It is right" or literally in the original language, "Damn straight I have every right to be angry!" Jonah is so direct in his response he boards on the profane!

Please realize Jonah's answer has nothing to do with the plant and instead seeks to answer the original question. Such a strong response is only understandable when you realize the very basis for his moralism is under attack. Jonah justifies his anger because he refuses to accept that the basis of God's favor is grace and not a rightness to be earned.

**Jonah 4:10-11, "But the Lord said, 'You have had pity on the plant for which you have not labored, nor made it grow, which came up in a night and perished in a night. And should I not pity Nineveh, that great city, in which are more than one hundred and twenty thousand persons who cannot discern between their right hand and their left - and much livestock?'"**

In order to understand the larger point, don't forget Jonah didn't want the plant to die for one reason: It delivered him from his misery. And yet, God is pointing out that the plant itself was a manifestation of His grace alone. God had given Jonah the plant in spite of him, not because of him. His covering was a work of God in place of the failure of his "shelter".

It's not an accident the Ninevites were saved — not because of the "sacrifices, vows, or promises" they made to God like Jonah in the "belly of the fish", but simply on account they were willing to receive God's grace and the salvation that grace affords. "Jonah, the effective covering came not because you labored or made it grow. It came because I gave it!"

Jonah was holding fast to his works because he felt right, but God was trying to get him to see that his works were inadequate and he was wrong. Jonah was religious and self-righteous, but he was miserable. The irony is that Jonah was angry with God for delivering the Ninevites from their misery, when God was more than willing to deliver him from his misery. The same grace God had shown the Ninevites was equally available to Jonah!

One of the more incredible aspects of the story of Jonah is that while his final words record him seeking to justify his anger, the book ends with God presenting an open-ended question. "Should I not pity Nineveh?" What makes this question so telling is what his answer would reveal. If Jonah answered, "Yes!" then what basis did he have for God pitying him?

Resisting the salvation of someone else calls into question the basis for your own salvation! It's interesting but the book closes without recording Jonah's reply. Aside from this, there isn't even a mention of what follows next. The book ends abruptly with God asking Jonah whether or not His desire to save the Ninevites through an act of grace was just.

Historically, there seems to be ample evidence the story of Jonah didn't end here. According to Jewish tradition following verse 11 Jonah fell to his knees and said, "God, govern your world according to the measure of mercy." Then he got up, went back into Nineveh, and proceeded to spend the rest of his days ministering to these people. Note: Near the site of ancient Nineveh, you'll find what is believed to be the location of Jonah's tomb.

Aside from this the very fact we even have the book of Jonah at all implies the prophet ultimately repented and received God's grace. Truthfully, the only way the story could have been recorded would have been from Jonah's first-hand account. With that in mind, only a man who finally got it would write with such candor and transparency. Jonah tells the story as it occurred. He does not excuse any of his behavior. He's completely honest.

As it pertains to the Ninevites there is no doubt God worked mightily in this generation. And yet, it didn't take long for this people to revert back to their wickedness. The prophet

Nahum would warn them of a coming judgment. Sadly, this time they failed to heed the warning and 100 years later, in 612 BC, Nineveh would be “overthrown” by the Babylonian Empire.

One of the other bits of irony is that the book was written by Jonah for those living in the Northern Kingdom of Israel. Not only did this story seek to emphasize God’s love for all of humanity, but its purpose was to draw the Israelites away from their religious moralism and into the power of God’s grace. Like Nineveh, the Lord would withhold judgment if His people would “believe God”, repent of their sins, and return back to their relationship with Him.

Tragically, this message would not be received and the Northern Kingdom would be judged by God using none other than the Assyrians! Even today, at the close of Yom Kippur (the Day of Atonement) the Jewish people read the book of Jonah declaring at the end of the reading with one voice, “I am Jonah.” I’m not sure they even know what they’re actually saying!

As we close our study there are four points that need to be made. First, in no way can you say the sovereign will of God trumped Jonah’s ability to make his own free will decisions. Jonah was free to run, but Jesus was free to pursue. The tempest and fish were instruments of chastening, but Jonah still had to respond to the second call to go to Nineveh.

From my perspective this is what makes the end of the book so brilliant. God wrestles with Jonah every step along his journey, but you can’t say God determined how the story ends. The tale closes with God asking Jonah a question — he still must make a decision.

Secondly, how you respond to God’s grace being demonstrated to people you don’t believe deserve it, will always reveal where you stand with God. How do you know if a person’s relationship with God is based in a work God did or a work they’re seeking to do? Watch how they treats others. Grace received will always manifest in a grace bestowed.

Third, resisting grace leads only to greater misery. Jonah resists grace and was worse for it. His life went down and even when he decided to be obedient his life lacked joy! Like Jonah you

can seek religion to be a substitute, but it will fail to deliver. Religion does nothing but alienate you from God, fosters a prejudice towards others, and makes you miserable.

As I consider Jonah, I'm struck by the similar way his story closes with another told by Jesus: The Parable of the Prodigal Son. As you read the conclusion of this tale the story-arch of this parable takes a fascinating twist at the end, one son — the Prodigal Son, rejects the father for carnal reasons only to return and enjoy the grace of his Dad.

Then, because the obedient older son perceives his father's grace as being unjust and unfair, he proceeds to reject his father's invitation to the feast on moral grounds. Jesus ends the story with the prodigal restored to his father and this religious older brother now alienated.

While it made sense to the Prodigal to repent and come home and even greater sense to enjoy the feast, the truth is this older brother rejected his father and his invitation because he wouldn't accept the terms for entry. Hearing that his father had given his brother something he'd been working so hard to attain was more than he could stomach.

You see the fundamental problem with religion is that it presents salvation as a reward, not a gift. Something we work hard to attain, not something God lovingly bestows. This is why grace is such an offense to the moralist like Jonah. The only prerequisite for salvation is that you receive something you could never have earned on your own.

For the Prodigal Son (the failure, sinner, Ninevite) this is wonderful news. Sadly for the Prodigal's Brother and men like Jonah this reality was simply a bridge too far to cross. The story of Jonah ends with the same challenge: Do you want your relationship with God to be based on what you deserve or on a free gift you're offered to receive?

Finally, true deliverance is only found in a Deliverer! Jonah sought deliverance in a shelter made by man, when true deliverance can only come from a work of God. If you're miserable

and it's the result of your wickedness (the Ninevites) or your false sense of moral standing (Jonah), God wants to set you free! Jonah's misery was one of his own making!

Friend, one thing is clear — "Jesus is a better Jonah!" In his pride Jonah resisted grace and would rather die than see the Ninevites saved, while in His humility Jesus willingly laid down His life so that the grace of God might be made available to all mankind!

Jonah closed his hands and with a raised fist resisted God's grace making in the process, a mess of his life. But Jesus willingly opened His hand to be nailed to a cross so that sinners like you and I might be able to receive a grace no sinful man deserves.

In a profound sense, I believe Jonah deliberately ends the story with this grand question left unanswered for we all must reach our own conclusion. Will you continue resisting a grace that saves or will you humble yourself and receive a grace that changes everything?