

**Armagh Baptist Church**  
**Sunday 15<sup>th</sup> August 2010 – 6:30pm**  
**'The Repentance Chapter'**  
**Jonah 3:1-10**

**Introduction**

In chapter 1 we saw Jonah experiencing the storm which brought him back to his senses, and to the point of surrender, as far as God's purposes for his life were concerned.

In chapter 2 we saw his experiences in the belly of the great fish which taught him many lessons. We saw that God was disciplining or chastening Jonah, not to punish him for his sins, but rather to prepare him for future service.

So as we come into chapter 3 tonight, the punishment of the storm is over, the preparation in the fish is over, and Jonah is left lying washed up on a beach, but now he's ready for service.

God brings us through a lot of trying experiences sometimes in order to prepare us properly for the task he has ahead of us.

There's a whole change of mood and tempo as we come into ch.3. The drama and the storms of chs.1 & 2 are past. The storms, and the turmoil that come, when we disobey God, have subsided, and in ch.3 we now see the calm and the peace that come when we submit to God's Will and humbly seek to obey Him.

**Jonah Chapter 3 is a Chapter of Change** - a chapter of changed hearts and minds. In the Bible, a change of heart, mind and behavior is called Repentance. So Jonah chapter 3 is a chapter all about Repentance.

- 1. Jonah Repents (vs.1-4)**
- 2. The People of Nineveh Repent (vs.5-8)**  
And we're even told in vs.9-10 that...
- 3. God Repents! (A.V.)**

Now if you're awake and alert this evening, that should cause you some problems! How can God repent?

God has never sinned, so how can He repent?

God cannot change, so how can He change His mind and repent?

Well, just keep those questions stored up at the back of your mind and come with me through this chapter, and we'll deal with the problem of God repenting at the end.

- 1. The Repentance of the Preacher (vs.1-4)**

In vs.1-2 God gives Jonah an opportunity to show just how genuine his cry for mercy was in ch.2; just how genuine was his promise to fulfill his vow to God; in short, just how real was his repentance?

In Jonah ch.1:3 we read of Jonah's disobedience as he headed for Tarshish. Now in Jonah ch.3:3 we read of Jonah's obedience as he goes to Nineveh.

It's all very matter of fact – not much is made of his obedience, but it shows he has changed; it shows he has repented:

- From Disobedience to Obedience
  - From Tarshish to Nineveh
- He had completely changed direction!

That's what's involved in true repentance – a complete change of direction!

Let's not underestimate the fact that God gave Jonah a second chance. (3:1) *'The Word of the Lord came to Jonah a **second time**...'*

- Jonah didn't *deserve* a second chance
- God didn't *have* to give him a second chance
- Jonah had been disobedient the first time
- He could have forfeited the blessing of ever being used in God's Service again.
- God could have found somebody else for the job
- But No! God came back to Jonah (v.1)
- Gave him practically the same calling (v.2)
- Jonah obeyed (v.3)
- And God used him to bring blessing to others (v.5)

### **God's Second Chance is not Second Best!**

That's how gracious, and forgiving, how faithful and generous our God is! He is rich in mercy, and he reinstates repentant Jonah to full service.

I called this the repentance of the preacher, and sometimes preachers need to repent. They are not perfect. But that's exactly what Jonah was – a preacher! God sent Jonah to wicked Nineveh as a preacher. Here we see the place of preaching in God's plan & purposes for his world.

The task was great – Nineveh was a vast city! (NIV – 'a very important city')

(AV - 'an exceedingly great city') – a visit required 3 days. (Mosul - photo).

(4:11) – *'More than 120,000 who cannot tell their right hand from their*

*left.'*

Does that mean just the children – it might do – so add on the parents too!

It was a massive city, a huge job, and yet God sent just one man – Jonah – but he sent him as a preacher! He was to preach the message that God would give him.

And when he got there, that's exactly what he did.

He started into the city on the first day's journey.

Then he opened his mouth and he proclaimed God's message.

**'Forty more days and Nineveh will be overturned!' (v.4)**

It seemed a foolish message, but Jonah preached it nevertheless.

You see, *'God has chosen by **the foolishness of preaching** to save those who believe.'* (1 Corinthians 1:21)

God sent a preacher, and he used the preacher, but look at how the message got around:

(3:4) – Jonah **preached**

(3:5) – The people **proclaimed** a fast

(3:6) – **Word got around** to the King

(3:7) – The King **proclaimed** a decree

So Jonah preached God's message, the people who heard him responded and spread the message – by gossip! The gossip got to the king, he responded, and the whole nation heard through his proclamation!

Yes, God has chosen to use preaching, but let's never be guilty of sitting back and letting the preacher get on with it, or of thinking that people can only get saved in a church service like this on a Sunday evening, as they listen to a preacher preaching to them from a pulpit like this!

**YOU** can proclaim the message by gossiping the Gospel with your friends!

The power is not in the eloquence or the slick presentation of any preacher.

The power is in the message of the Gospel itself, and as long as the message is getting out, God can use it. In that way, whole towns and cities can hear the Gospel. Never in 40 days could Jonah have personally spoken to the 120,000 people mentioned in ch.4. To do that he would have had to speak to 3000 different people every day!!

So I want each of you, to see your responsibility to proclaim this message, to gossip the Gospel. That way Armagh will hear, Ireland will hear, and this world will hear, if each of us plays our part.

See Acts 8:1-4 - It was the non-Apostles who preached the word, and gossiped the Gospel, wherever they went. We need to do the same! So we've seen the repentance of the preacher and how God used his preaching, but now let's see...

## **2. The Repentance of the People (vs.5-9)**

Jonah's message was a message of doom and judgement for the people of Nineveh. But we don't read of them attacking Jonah or trying to silence him, or persecuting him, or laughing at him, or mocking him. Quite simply we read in v.5:

***'The people of Nineveh believed God.'***

They took God at His Word and they did something about it– they repented.

Their repentance involved four things:

### **(i) They were convicted of their sin (v.5a)**

They believed **God** – not Jonah. They took **God** at His Word. Nineveh was to be overthrown – as punishment for their sins.

Jesus says in Luke 11:30 that *'Jonah was a sign to the Ninevites.'*

The commentaries I have read on this believe that Jonah himself was the sign. i.e. that the Ninevites were *aware* that Jonah had been 3 days and 3 nights in the belly of a great fish, after being thrown overboard in the storm at sea – simply because he had disobeyed God's command for him to go to Nineveh.

They were aware of God's wrath on Jonah because of his sin, and so they knew that when God said 'Nineveh would be overthrown in 40 days' it would happen because God was angry with them because of their sin.

So Jonah's experience was a sign to the Ninevites of what God would do:

- So they took God at His Word
- They believed God
- They accepted his verdict on their lives
- They were convicted of their sins
- And they accepted it.
  - o They believed God
  - o They were gripped by his wrath
  - o They realised their spiritual danger

But fear of God's wrath and conviction of their sin was only the first step.

### **(ii) Then they were sorry for their sin (v.5b)**

Conviction was followed by sorrow for their sin:

*'They declared a fast, and all of them,  
from the greatest to the least, put on sackcloth.'*

This was the traditional expression of a time of mourning. They mourned over their sins. They had grieved a holy God and now they were grief-stricken because of their offences. How often do we see that today?? At times of Revival we hear of people falling to their knees, broken with the weight of their sin, and genuinely grieving and being sorry for their sins. That's what happens when the Holy Spirit really shows us the extent of our sin. Do you know what it is to be really sorry for your sin, to mourn over your sin?

But it's not just enough to be convicted of our sins and to be sorry for our sins, what's really needed is a change of behaviour...

### **(iii) A Change of Behaviour (v.8)**

That is at the heart of repentance. That is the real meaning of the word. A change in your behaviour.

(v.6) – The king had joined the people in their mourning over their sins.

(v.7) – Then he issues a proclamation to the nation calling for a change in their behaviour.

(v.8) – *'Let everyone call urgently on God.*

*Let them give up their evil ways and their violence...'*

If repentance is to be real, and if we are to be assured that we have forgiveness, our sins must be forsaken. We must have nothing more to do with them. We must *'give up our evil ways.'*

We can't expect God to **forgive**, if we won't **forsake**, our sin.

Jesus said to the woman caught in adultery in John 8, *'Go, and sin no more'*

Repentance means turning our back on our sins, having nothing more to do with them, forsaking them completely.

What about you and me this evening?

- Have we really forsaken our sin?
- Have we turned our back on them?

Or do we still return to the same old sins, even after we've asked for forgiveness?

How do we expect God to forgive our sins, if we won't forsake them?

But when we are convicted of our sin, and are sorry for our sin, and change our behaviour, then all we can do is...

### **(iv) Cast ourselves upon the mercy of God (v.9)**

...in the hope that He will withhold his punishment.

God has every right to punish us for our sins.  
It's only out of his great mercy that he withholds that punishment.

The Ninevites had no way of knowing that God would be merciful to them.

But they felt the weight of their sin so much, and they were so deeply grieved because of their sin, that all they could do was repent, and **hope** that God would be merciful! Their king expressed it well in v.9. They had a glimmer of hope that God would not destroy them.  
How? - Two possible reasons.

- **'Forty more days...'**

God had set a time-limit, and had given a warning.  
A warning usually implies a way of escape.

For example, if you get a final demand for your electric bill, it will usually say something like:

'If you do not pay this bill, your electric will be cut off in so many days time.'

But the implication is, that if you do pay up, you will not be cut-off.

- **Jonah was a sign to the Ninevites (Luke 11:30)**

The fact that Jonah was standing there before their very eyes was proof that God was a merciful God.

If God had spared him from a watery grave in the storm, and from death in the fish's belly, then surely he could spare a repentant nation if he chose to.

*'It is of the Lord's mercies that we are not consumed...they are new every morning – great is thy faithfulness!' (Lamentations 3:22-23)*

And so, hoping against hope, they cast themselves in repentance and faith upon the mercies of a loving God.

The People of Nineveh could only **HOPE** that God would show mercy to them if they repented, but we can be absolutely certain that He will.

How? Because we live this side of the cross!

We know that God has already poured out all his anger for our sin upon His Son, Jesus. Therefore the penalty has been paid, the punishment has been taken for us, and so mercy is available to us in Christ.

It's ours, if only we will repent and believe, and put our trust in Christ!

So we've seen **the repentance of the preacher.**

Jonah obeys, whereas before he had disobeyed.

And we've seen **the repentance of the people**.  
And all that that involved.

But what about the problem of...

### **3. The Repentance of God (vs.9-10)**

How can God repent?

God cannot sin, so how can God repent?

God cannot change, so how can he change his mind, or heart and repent?

Twice in vs.9 & 10 in the Authorised Version it says that...

*'God might turn and repent'* (v.9) and that

*'God repented of the evil that he had said he would do unto them.'* (v.10)

How can God *'repent of evil?'*

The New King James Version softens the problem by saying,

*'God relented.'* (v.10) - instead of *'God repented.'*

The New International Version almost paraphrases here and says:

*'God had compassion and did not bring upon them the destruction he had threatened.'* (v.10)

The NKJ and the NIV have tried to deal with the real theological problem here, but the word in the original language used of God here, does mean to repent in its normal usage.

Malachi 3:6 says *'I am the Lord, I do not change.'*

1 Samuel 15:29 (AV) says specifically,

*'The strength of Israel will not lie nor repent, for He is not a man, that He should repent.'*

So God cannot repent, and God cannot change his mind!!

But Jeremiah ch.18:7-10 (in the AV) I think will give us some help here:

*'[At what] instant I shall speak concerning a nation, and concerning a kingdom, to pluck up, and to pull down, and to destroy [it];*

*If that nation, against whom I have pronounced, turn from their evil,*

***I will repent of the evil that I thought to do unto them.***

*And [at what] instant I shall speak concerning a nation, and concerning a kingdom, to build and to plant [it];*

*If it do evil in my sight, that it obey not my voice,*

***then I will repent of the good, wherewith I said I would benefit them.'***

The point is that God doesn't go back on his word, he hasn't changed

his mind. Whenever God threatens a nation or a city with destruction as He did with Nineveh, the very threat itself is to be a warning to them to repent of their evil, and if they do, God will not send His punishment of destruction upon them. The very fact that God has given a warning shows that He wants to be merciful to them.

Our God is a God who takes great delight in being merciful. He delights to show mercy! Praise God!!

Likewise with us in the N.T. era God has said:

*'The soul that sins shall die.'*

*'The wages of sin is death.'*

But does He go back on His Word when he forgives us, and gives us eternal life, and not death? Of course he doesn't!

It's because Jesus has taken God's just wrath and punishment; the punishment of death for us on the cross; that we can say that God hasn't gone back on His Word.

God's justice has already been satisfied, and he can now show us mercy, because Jesus has already taken the punishment for our sins. Praise God!!

Our God withholds His wrath whenever we repent and cast ourselves upon His mercy.

### **Conclusion**

The God who spared wicked Nineveh will spare us too, if we repent and cast ourselves upon Him.

Here is real concrete hope for each one of us tonight. If we've repented and trusted in God's love and mercy demonstrated in Christ, we know His forgiveness and we can be sure that He has repented of the punishment that we know we justly deserved!

We will never have to face that punishment, because Jesus has taken it in our place instead!

Now let's really appreciate the truth of God's mercy and grace as we sing this great hymn: *'In Christ alone, my hope is found...'*

