

Wheelersburg Baptist Church 9/4/11  
Jonah 3 “When an Entire City Turned to the Lord”\*\*  
Current Series: “*Revive Us Again!*”

Brad Brandt

Main Idea: God’s grace is seen in two dramatic ways in Jonah 3.

- I. Jonah experienced God’s grace (1-2).
  - A. Jonah blew it the first time.
  - B. The Lord recruited Jonah a second time.
- II. Nineveh experienced God’s grace (3-10).
  - A. Jonah responded to God’s Word (3-4).
    1. He went where God told him to go.
    2. He preached what God told him to preach.
  - B. The people responded to God’s Word (5).
    1. If you believe God’s Word, you are believing God.
    2. If you believe God, it will show.
  - C. The king responded to God’s Word (6-9).
    1. There was humility (6).
    2. There was conviction (7).
    3. There was calling on God (8a).
    4. There was a call for change (8b).
    5. There was a clinging to God’s character (9).
  - D. God responded to God’s Word (10).
    1. Contrary to open theism, God has not limited Himself.
    2. Contrary to fatalism, God responds when people repent.

The Bottom Line: The grace of God is what makes revival possible.

1. Proud people don’t experience revival.
2. Unbelieving people don’t experience revival.
3. People that cherish grace experience revival.

This past week I received an email update from our missionary, Betty Lacey, who serves in France. Listen to what she said at the beginning:

Dear praying friends,

As France celebrates its 75th anniversary of paid vacations this year, I am reminded of what a sacred cow this particular “right” is in the minds and hearts of the people. Since 1936 when the first two weeks of paid vacation came into law, along with the 40 instead of 48-hour work week, the cry has been for more and more free time. Today’s rights have increased to five weeks of paid vacation (since 1982) and a work week of 35 hours (passed into law in 2000). Despite the fact that “rest” is in God’s plan for man, we’ve long dreaded the period of summer vacation because too often it meant that Christians simply took vacation from their walk with the Lord. Bibles left unopened for weeks on end, little if any Christian fellowship cultivated because of the difficulty of finding the few Bible-believing churches that existed, and perhaps the greatest challenge of all was the unspoken idea that God did not have His place in these earned vacations. How often our hearts were broken as the church family came back together, and we learned of those who had fallen away from the Lord during these periods of free time that had not included Him.

Praise the Lord that much of that has changed, and believers today are living their faith wherever they are and whatever they may be doing. Not only are they learning the necessity of maintaining a life of communion with the Lord

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\*\* Note: This is an unedited manuscript of a message preached at Wheelersburg Baptist Church. It is provided to prompt your continued reflection on the practical truths of the Word of God.

despite the change in activities, but they are also seeing the opportunities that vacation periods give to share their faith and reach out to others. What a breakthrough and source of encouragement this has been!

Interesting, isn't it? We can take a good thing that God has privileged us to enjoy, like a summer vacation, or a hobby, or sports for our kids, and let that good thing push the Giver of that good thing right off the throne He deserves in our lives.

So how are you doing as we say goodbye to summer and head into the fall? Perhaps you've drifted from the Lord. Perhaps not. In either case, there's something we need on a continual basis, and it's the reason for our current series, "*Revive Us Again!*" We need the reviving work of the Spirit of God.

We've looked at four biblical examples thus far. The first week we pondered the revival in Hezekiah's day in 2 Chronicles 29. In week two we looked at the revival under King Josiah in 2 Chronicles 34. In week three it was the revival that happened in the middle of Asa's life in 2 Chronicles 15, and the tragic decline that happened in his life *after* the revival. Last time we explored the nation-transforming revival that occurred in Nehemiah 8-10, and saw the essential role that God's Word has in true revival.

All four of these revivals happened in Judah, and more specifically, they all began in Jerusalem. That raises some questions. Is the Lord's work restricted to that particular city? Has He ever brought about a spiritual awakening in any other city?

This morning, we're going to investigate the account of a pagan, wicked city that turned in repentance from its sin to the Lord. And I mean the *entire* city turned to the Lord, from the king himself to the lowest slave. It's a tremendous story, and it has much to say to us about the nature of God and what it is about God that makes true revival possible.

You'll find the story in Jonah 3. To be accurate, what you're about to see isn't a revival per se because revival is something that happens to *God's* people. Lost people need a spiritual awakening, and that's what happened to the city of Nineveh in Jonah 3.

To begin, I want to draw your attention to three of the most hope-giving words in the Bible, the final three words of Jonah 3:1, "Then the word of the LORD came to Jonah *a second time.*" Oh, the beauty of that sound, *a second time!*

The truth of the matter is, the Almighty God used a prophet who had blown it big time to initiate what may well be the greatest spiritual awakening recorded in the Bible, if not in the history of mankind. A man of God named Jonah had thumbed his nose at God, yet God didn't give up on him, not because God couldn't find another prophet and simply needed Jonah. No, God didn't give up on Jonah for one reason, the one-word same reason there is hope for you and me today, even if we've been slighting Him in our lives.

*Grace.* I'm not sure you'll find any more vivid and compelling illustrations of grace than the two we're about to see in the third chapter of Jonah.

#### I. Jonah experienced God's grace (1-2).

Verse 1 declares, "Then the word of the LORD came to Jonah a second time." If you'll look back at the beginning of the book you'll notice a similar statement in 1:1-2: "The word of the LORD came to Jonah son of Amittai: 'Go to the great city of Nineveh and preach against it, because its wickedness has come up before me.'"

Jonah, of course, was a prophet of God in Israel about eight hundred years B.C. God called him to be His spokesman. But Jonah didn't like this assignment, so he ran from God and headed west for Tarshish. To put it bluntly...

**A. Jonah blew it the first time.** God said *Go!* And Jonah, by his actions said *No!* In fact, he made it clear he'd rather die than obey when, instead of repenting on the deck of the ship, he told the pagan sailors, "Throw me into the sea."

It wasn't that Jonah's faith needed reviving. It's that his theology needed correcting.<sup>1</sup> Like his fellow Israelites, Jonah had come to view God as being only the God of the Jews, *our* God, off limits to the Ninevites.

So the Lord provided a great fish to swallow the runaway prophet, not to punish him but to rescue him, and not rescue him merely from the sea but *from himself*. The Lord gave Jonah three days and nights inside that fish, with time to reflect and pray. His prayer? "I called for help!" says Jonah in 2:2. And God helped him by telling the fish to deposit Jonah on the shore.

Now picture Jonah. With the words "Salvation comes from the LORD" just off his lips, the prophet stands to his feet on the shore of the Mediterranean Sea. He's exhausted, but alive, perhaps with threads of clothing clinging to his back. My guess is, he smells like vomit. His skin looks scarred and discolored, an unearthly pale white. He's never going to be the same again, but he's alive, standing on the shores of his beloved homeland.

And then he hears a familiar voice. How much time elapsed we're not told. Chapter three begins, "*Then* the word of the LORD came to Jonah..." And so...

**B. The Lord recruited Jonah a second time.** The divine instructions were similar to the first set, only this time without explanation. Verse 2—"Go to the great city of Nineveh and proclaim to it the message I give you."

It's not that God had run out of other options. Again, He didn't *need* Jonah. To the contrary, Jonah needed Him. Throughout the entire book God keeps going after and capturing the attention of undeserving people: the pagan sailors in chapter one, the Ninevites in chapter three, and Jonah throughout the book.

That's the message of the Bible. The God who created the universe delights in pursuing and rescuing undeserving rebel sinners. That's why He sent His own Son, Jesus, into the world who in His own words said He came "to seek and to save the lost" (Luke 19:10). That rescue mission cost the Messiah His own life, as the Scriptures declare, "Christ died for our sins, was buried, and raised on the third day (1 Cor. 15:3-4)."

My friend, perhaps you can relate to Jonah. Perhaps you too have blown it. Then hear the sweet music in these words, "Then the word of the LORD came to Jonah *a second time*."

By the way, the fact that God gave Jonah a "second" chance at life doesn't mean He must do so or always does. The Bible is full of accounts of *no second chance*. Remember the disobedient prophet in 1 Kings 13 who was mangled by a lion?

Nevertheless, beloved, because of God's great mercy today you *are* hearing His Word again. Will you respond as you have in the past, *or* will today be different? You say, "How can it be different?" By putting your trust, not in yourself, but in the God of grace and the grace of God. "By grace are you saved," says God's Word.

So there's the first illustration of grace in Jonah 3. *Jonah* experienced God's grace. Here's the second, and it's almost beyond comprehension.

## II. Nineveh experienced God's grace (3-10).

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<sup>1</sup> Terence Fretheim, *The Message of Jonah*, p. 79.

We'll talk about Nineveh in a moment, but first, let me point out something about grace that in Jonah 3. God worked through His Word to accomplish the purposes of His grace. That's the way He does it today, too. He works *through His Word* to transform people *by His grace*.

We're going to see four different responses to God's Word.

**A. Jonah responded to God's Word (3-4).** Verse 3 begins, "Jonah obeyed the word of the LORD and went to Nineveh." Hurray for Jonah! God said *Go!* And Jonah said *Okay! I'll go!* In response to God's Word, he did two things.

1. *He went where God told him to go.* Don't underestimate the cost of his obedience. The trip from Joppa to Nineveh was between 500 and 600 miles, depending on the route chosen. If Jonah traveled in a donkey or camel caravan, that trip took him about a month. If he walked, we're talking five weeks or more.<sup>2</sup>

Notice what he found when he arrived. Verse 3 states, "Now Nineveh was a very important city—a visit required three days. On the first day, Jonah started into the city." Notice the description of Nineveh. It was an "important city." Back in 1:1 God called it "the great city of Nineveh," an adjective God repeats in 3:1 as well as in the last verse of the book.

Why does God call this city 'great'? Perhaps it's a reference to its geographic size, for the text indicates "a visit required three days." In other words, this city wasn't like Wheelersburg. If a stranger came to our town and wanted to get a message to the community, it wouldn't take him three days to accomplish it.

Not so in Nineveh. If you had walked the city wall around the Nineveh proper, it would have taken you six miles.<sup>3</sup> And beyond that, archaeologists tell us that the region of "Greater Nineveh" had a circumference of sixty miles. At a rate of twenty miles a day it would take three days to walk around it.

Why did God call Nineveh a "great" city? Perhaps because of its huge dimensions, but perhaps not. After all, to God the entire universe is as a speck of dust. Perhaps He assessed the city to be great because of the vast number of His image-bearers that lived there. In Jonah 4:11 God Himself declares that at least 120,000 human beings lived in Nineveh. To put that in perspective, I read that Samaria, the capital city of the northern kingdom of Israel where Jonah lived, had a population of about 30,000 (and that Samaria was even larger than Jerusalem at the time).<sup>4</sup>

Did you realize that there are 3,400 cities in today's world in excess of 100,000 inhabitants?<sup>5</sup> Here's how the list starts: Aachen, Aba, Abaeteluba, Abakan, Abeokuta, Aberdeen, Abijan, Abiko, Abilene... I had to read nine cities alphabetically just to find one that's in our country. Beloved, God sees the cities. Do we? Do we see the teeming masses of lost people? God does.

Jonah did something else in response to God's Word. First, he went where God told him to go. Once there...

2. *He preached what God told him to preach.* Verse 4 says, "He proclaimed: 'Forty more days and Nineveh will be overturned.'" I wonder where Jonah preached. On the streets? Did he go door to door? We're not told. I wonder how many times he delivered his message. Perhaps many, but we're not told. Maybe only once

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<sup>2</sup> Time frames suggested by John Walton, p. 36.

<sup>3</sup> In statistical records written about 75 years after Jonah's trip, the Assyrian ruler Sennacherib said he enlarged the circumference of Nineveh from 9300 cubits (a little under three miles) to 21,815 cubits (a little over six miles). John Walton, p. 37.

<sup>4</sup> Observation by H. L. Ellison, p. 380.

<sup>5</sup> <http://www.travelgis.com/default.asp?framesrc=/cities>

which makes the results staggering. What we are told is that Jonah did exactly what God told him to do. He preached the message God told him to preach.

“Yea, he sure preached a hell-fire and brimstone message!” some would say. That’s true, but there’s grace in this message, too. “Grace?” you ask. “There’s grace here?” Yes. Think about it. Why did God give the Ninevites *forty* days? He gave Lot and his family only a few *hours* to get out of Sodom. In the Bible the number forty is a typical *waiting and testing period*.<sup>6</sup>

I read an intriguing comment by God in Jeremiah 31:20, “Is not Ephraim my dear son, the child in whom I delight? *Though I often speak against him, I still remember him.* Therefore my heart yearns for him; I have great compassion for him.” To speak *against* someone, to warn someone about judgment, is an expression of love to that person, if they’re in sin.

So there’s the power of grace. Jonah responded to God’s Word. Here’s an even bigger display of grace...

**B. The people responded to God’s Word (5).** “The Ninevites believed God. They declared a fast, and all of them, from the greatest to the least, put on sackcloth.”

Incredible! The whole city responded, and look again at Jonah’s message. It’s only eight English words, “Forty more days and Nineveh will be overturned.” That’s just five words in Hebrew, *Ode arbaim yom veNineveh nehpatchet*. And think what it sounded like to the Ninevites, since I would assume that few in Nineveh spoke Hebrew and it’s questionable whether Jonah knew their language. And knowing that Jonah didn’t want God to spare the Ninevites anyway (based on his response in 4:1-2), my hunch is that Jonah wasn’t inclined to make it any easier than necessary for them. “Lord, you told me to say, ‘*Ode arbaim yom veNineveh nehpatchet,*’ so that’s what I said!”<sup>7</sup>

Apparently, Jonah didn’t tell them why the judgment was coming, nor what they should do about it. He didn’t mention that *Yahweh*, the God of Israel, had sent him. He didn’t even introduce himself. He just gave them God’s message. I get the sense that he obeyed the letter of the law, and that was it. And his heart apparently wasn’t in it.

Yet what happened? The people heard God’s Word and *believed God!*

Here’s Terence Fretheim’s assessment, “No preacher has ever met with such success. Little effort, poor skills, a terrible sermon—and total success...God had prepared a way for this message so that in spite of the missionary it found its way into the hearts of the Ninevites. God *can* write straight with crooked lines.”<sup>8</sup>

You say, “What made the Ninevites so receptive?” It’s possible the Lord had just done some things to get their attention. Bible scholars suggest that Jonah made the trip to Nineveh around 760 B.C. Just five years before that, a serious plague swept through the country, and many Assyrians died. Just three years earlier, on June 15, 763, a total eclipse of the sun occurred, causing fear to spread.<sup>9</sup>

No sermon is ever preached in a vacuum. When people respond like they did in Nineveh, it’s because God has been preparing the soil. I love the explanation Peter Craigie offers, “As though primed by some divine hand, the suburbanites immediately respond to Jonah’s preaching.” And then adds, “Like a brush fire whipped by the wind, the message travels quickly through the suburbs to the heart of the city.”<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Leslie Allen, p. 222. Israel was in the wilderness *forty years*. Jesus was tempted in the desert *forty days*.

<sup>7</sup> Terence Fretheim points out that some in Nineveh would have known a closely related language to Hebrew; p. 108.

<sup>8</sup> T. Fretheim, pp. 108-9.

<sup>9</sup> Leon Wood, *The Prophets of Israel*, p. 289.

<sup>10</sup> Peter Craigie, p. 230.

That's the way God works today, too. He's been doing things in our lives to prepare us for this message.

I want to make a couple of observations at this point. Here's the first...

1. *If you believe God's Word, you are believing God.* Jonah preached God's Word, and the Ninevites believed, not just Jonah, but *God*. They recognized that Jonah was delivering to them the word of God Himself, and they believed *God*.

2. *If you believe God, it will show.* The Ninevites did two very tangible things to demonstrate that they believed God. One, they started fasting. And two, they put on sackcloth, a coarse material usually made out of goat's hair that was uncomfortable to wear. In other words, they stopped eating and started wearing burlap!

Why? Because they just heard that in a little over a month they were going to perish, and they believed that message came from God. And if you believe what God says it's going to show up in your life. They believed God, and it showed!

Does the fact that the Ninevites *believed God* mean they became regenerate, truly born again people? I'm not sure, any more than we can be sure today when a person professes faith in God and makes some initial changes. Profession is no guarantee of possession.

The NASB actually translates the phrase "believed *in* God," but that's adding a thought not in the Hebrew text. There's a difference between believing a message from God and believing *in* God.

For instance, years later many people came to Jesus because they heard the message that this miracle-worker could heal them. They believed the message. That's why they flocked to Him, so He could heal them. But did they believe *in* Him? Many did, but many did not. As soon as He stopped His free lunch program they left Him.

Yes, the Ninevites believed God, that is, they believed the message of God Jonah proclaimed, saying that judgment was coming. And they did some religious deeds and, as we'll see, tried to clean up their act in order to appease Jonah's God. But does that mean they turned from their other gods (remember, they're pagan polytheists) and made a commitment to love and serve only the LORD God?

We can't be sure. The fact that about forty years later in 722 B.C. the Assyrians attacked, conquered, and deported the Jews from the northern kingdom would suggest that the transformation in Nineveh was short-lived. And that may suggest that the response to Jonah's message produced temporal moral changes, rather than fundamental spiritual changes.

Nevertheless, on this day God's Word did a staggering work! After a one sentence sermon, an entire city dropped to its knees. Thirdly, even...

**C. The king responded to God's Word (6-9).** "When the news reached the king of Nineveh, he rose from his throne, took off his royal robes, covered himself with sackcloth and sat down in the dust. Then he issued a proclamation in Nineveh: 'By the decree of the king and his nobles: Do not let any man or beast, herd or flock, taste anything; do not let them eat or drink. But let man and beast be covered with sackcloth. Let everyone call urgently on God. Let them give up their evil ways and their violence. Who knows? God may yet relent and with compassion turn from his fierce anger so that we will not perish.'"

Notice five characteristics of the king's response.

1. *There was humility (6).* Verse 6 says the king got up from his throne (an admission that he's not in charge), took off his royal robes (a self-debasing act), put on sackcloth (which identified him with his people who were already wearing sackcloth), and sat down in the dust (an act of self-humiliation for a powerful king).

2. *There was conviction (7)*. Verse 7 states that the king made a proclamation, and even got Capital Hill involved for it says “his nobles” joined him. No one was to eat a bite of food or drink even a sip of water, not a taste! The proclamation applied to every living creature in the city, including the animals.<sup>11</sup> The word “beast” covers the animal world in contrast to humans, while “herd” and “flock” are sub-classifications of all large and small domesticated animals.<sup>12</sup>

I suggested that Jonah’s preaching may have been half-hearted, but for the Ninevites even the animals got involved! A total fast, with every man, woman, child, and beast wearing sackcloth. That’s what I call conviction!

3. *There was calling on God (8a)*. The king said, “Let everyone call urgently on God.” Back in chapter one, when under conviction the pagan sailors called on “the LORD” (*Yahweh*). But notice the Ninevites called, not on *Yahweh*, but on “God,” the text uses the general name for God, *Elohim*.

Just imagine the noise going up to God, the people crying out, and the hungry animals bawling. And by making themselves physically miserable they were trying to show God how serious they were in their prayer for mercy.

4. *There was a call for change (8b)*. “Let them give up their evil ways and their violence,” ordered the king. Evil and violence, God hates them both.<sup>13</sup> “Evil ways” refers to anything condemned by law and conscience. “Violence” was the national sin of the Assyrians—they were known for brutality and treachery. So often people slip into the notion that one’s position gives him the right to dominate others. That thinking is at the heart of prejudice and discrimination.<sup>14</sup>

“No more!” said the king. “Let’s stop violating the laws of God (“evil ways”) and violating the dignity of man (“violence”). It’s time to change!”

Did the king really think it would make a difference? After all, Jonah said, “In forty days Nineveh *will* be overturned.” What motivated the king to make these changes? Listen to verse 9 again, “Who knows? God may yet relent and with compassion turn from his fierce anger so that we will not perish.” There’s the incentive for this edict...

5. *There was a clinging to God’s character (9)*. Ponder that. The Ninevites didn’t possess even a shred of God’s written revelation, yet having heard this spoken Word (and that was a word of judgment!), they saw a glimmer of hope.

That’s amazing. A wicked and violent city received just a tiny bit of God’s Word, yet they believed it, and the result was, in the least, massive moral reform, if not full-fledged spiritual transformation!<sup>15</sup>

Think of it this way. Throughout the Old Testament when God’s chosen people, the Jews, got out of line, and when God warned them, and when they responded rightly to that warning, what did they do? They exhibited humility, fasted, got rid of sin, called on

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<sup>11</sup> H. L. Ellison, p. 383, shares an account where the Persians, after the death of Masistius, “shaved their heads” and “cut the manes of their horses and mules.” Ellison adds, “The concept of a common Creator, today so often replaced by an impersonal idea of evolution, saw man and animal far more closely linked than does the modern concept of a purely biological link.”

<sup>12</sup> Freitheim, p. 111.

<sup>13</sup> In fact, in God’s first message to Jonah back in 1:1, He gave this reason for the impending judgment, “Because its wickedness has come up before me.”

<sup>14</sup> Observation by H. L. Ellison, p. 383.

<sup>15</sup> What about us? We’ve been given the complete canon of Scripture, sixty-six God-inspired, hope-giving, life-changing books. How are we responding to this precious gift?

God, and clung to His character.<sup>16</sup> And here we see these “unsavable” Gentiles doing the same thing.

How do you explain that? It’s the difference *grace* makes.

Yet there’s more. In Jonah 3, Jonah responded to God’s Word. So did the people of Nineveh. And the king. Now watch this, verse 10, “When God saw what they did and how they turned from their evil ways, he had compassion and did not bring upon them the destruction he had threatened.” Who responded to God’s Word that time?

**D. God responded to God’s Word (10).** I hesitated to use the word “responded” in connection with God. God doesn’t *respond*, does He? He’s God. He initiates. He causes things to happen. He doesn’t *respond*, does He? He did here. He said He was going to judge Nineveh, but when Nineveh turned from its evil, He chose not to destroy the city. The KJV even says that God “repented of the evil that He said He would do.” How do you explain that? Simply put, the explanation is that God responded *to God*, namely, to the promise that God Himself made in His Word.

Let’s put a couple of guardrails in place that will keep us from veering off of the road into heretical destruction. Here’s the first guardrail, on the left side of the road.

1. *Contrary to open theism, God has not limited Himself.* Open theism is a label that describes a teaching that hit the American church a decade ago. Open theism says that God, in order to protect man’s free will, limited His foreknowledge. Its premise is that God does not perfectly know the future before it happens. The future is an “open book” for everyone, including God. Here’s a statement taken from the Open Theism website:

God has, in *sovereign freedom*, decided to make some of his actions contingent upon our requests and actions. God elicits our free collaboration in his plans. Hence, God can be influenced by what we do and God truly responds to what we do. God genuinely interacts and enters into dynamic give-and-take relationships with us. That God changes in some respects implies that God is temporal, working with us in time. God, at least since creation, experiences duration.<sup>17</sup> So according to Open Theism some aspects of the future remain unsettled, owing to human freedom. God knows everything that could be and might be but He cannot know everything that will be.

Does Open Theism square with Scripture? No, it doesn’t. It undermines the truths of God’s sovereignty and omniscience presented throughout the Bible. For instance, David prayed in Psalm 139:16, “All the days ordained for me were written in your book before one of them came to be.” Hebrews 4:13 states, “Nothing in all creation is hidden from God’s sight. Everything is uncovered and laid bare before the eyes of him to whom we must give account.”<sup>18</sup>

So there’s the guardrail on the left side of the road. Contrary to open theism, God has not limited Himself. But lest we yank the steering wheel and end up in the ditch on the right side of the road, let’s put another guardrail in place.

2. *Contrary to fatalism, God responds when people repent.* That’s what happened in Jonah 3:10. The people that God said would perish repented, and He spared them. And of course, whenever sinners doomed for destruction repent, it’s because God graciously gives them the ability to do so.

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<sup>16</sup> For instance, 1 Samuel 7:2-14; Ezra 8.

<sup>17</sup> <http://www.opentheism.info>

<sup>18</sup> God even knows things that are *possible* but do not take place. For instance, in 1 Samuel 23:11-13 David asks God whether the men of Keilah would surrender him to Saul if they were given the chance. God said they would, so David fled the city.

In Jonah 3, God responded to His own Word.<sup>19</sup> Does that mean He *changed*, or turned to Plan B? No, for as Numbers 23:19 states, “God is not a man, that he should lie, nor a son of man, that he should change his mind.”<sup>20</sup>

Let’s look at this from a little different perspective. In a real sense, the Nineveh that God said He was going to destroy ceased to exist after hearing Jonah’s message. That sinful Nineveh turned from its sin and became a new Nineveh. So there was no sinful Nineveh for God to destroy, only a repentant Nineveh to bless with new life.<sup>21</sup>

The truth is, God didn’t change. He did precisely what He announced through Jonah. He announced through Jonah, “Forty more days and Nineveh will be *overturned*.”<sup>22</sup> The Hebrew word for “overturned” is *hapak*, which can mean to destroy, but also to change, or turn over, or flip over, or turn around. And that’s what happened. As it turned out, Nineveh *was overturned*, not by judgment, but by revival.

But wait. Sin must be punished. God said so. Justice must be served. So how could God *not* punish Nineveh with the judgment its evil deserved? The answer is, He chose to take the judgment for that evil on Himself. Not that day, but eight centuries later when He sent His own precious Son to the cross. As James Boice explains, “In Jesus, God took the world’s evil on himself precisely so that he might repent of the need to visit the outworking of that evil on men.”<sup>23</sup>

The Bottom Line: The grace of God is what makes revival possible.

Which means three things.

1. *Proud people don’t experience revival.* They don’t think they need it, or they won’t admit they need it. They’re good people. But friends, if we’re going to experience revival, we must take to heart James 4:6, “God opposes the proud, but He gives grace to the humble.” Will you, like the people of Nineveh, humble yourself before God today?

2. *Unbelieving people don’t experience revival.* For this point I’m thinking of the person who says, “I’m too far gone. The Lord could never forgive me, or bless me, or revive me.” My friend, if that’s you, you need to start *believing* in the Lord rather than in your own feeling-based assessments. Who says you are too far gone? Not God!

Isn’t it amazing that the preacher whom God used to bring about perhaps the most amazing transformation of a city in world history didn’t even want to go? Jonah resisted and ran from God, but God didn’t give up on him. And God didn’t give up on Nineveh either. How do you explain that? There’s only one explanation. It’s grace.

Friends, God doesn’t save and use *worthy* people, for there are none. He saves and uses the *unworthy* for His worthy purposes. The question is, will you, as did the people of Nineveh, believe that today? It boils down to this...

3. *People that cherish grace experience revival.* Not just know about grace, but cherish grace, as if your life depended on it, which it does!

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<sup>19</sup> In Jonah 3 God is simply doing what He said He would do in Jeremiah 18:6-8.

<sup>20</sup> Here’s H. L. Ellison explanation, “When he does not do what he said he would, we as finite men can say only that he has changed his mind or repented, even though we should recognize, as Jonah did (4:2), that he had intended or desired this all along.” H. L. Ellison, pp. 383-4.

<sup>21</sup> I’m indebted to James Boice for this thought. See his commentary, p. 297.

<sup>22</sup> The Hebrew word for “overturned” is *hapak*, which can mean to destroy, but also to change, or turn over, or flip over, or turn around.

<sup>23</sup> James Boice, p. 298.