

## ***TURNING AROUND, JONAH 3***

A Fish, a Man, and God's Grace #3

◆**Intro:** In a video on Youtube, [Dr. Michelle Cretella explained](#).

"If I walk into my doctor's office today and say, 'Hi, I'm Margaret Thatcher,' my physician will say I am delusional and give me an anti-psychotic... if instead, I walked in and said, 'I'm a man,' he would say, 'Congratulations, you're transgender.' If I were to say, 'Doc, I'm suicidal because I'm an amputee trapped in a normal body, please cut off my leg,' I will be diagnosed with body identity integrity disorder. But if I walk into that doctor's office and say, 'I am a man, sign me up for a double mastectomy,' my physician will. ...See, if you want to cut off a leg or an arm you're mentally ill, but if you want to cut off healthy [sexual organs] you're transgender." Everything she said is medically and scientifically true. Yet that video has been removed from YouTube after being labeled as "hate speech".

◆In our world today, if you say something is "wrong", the popular complaint today is that it's "hate speech". And you can be sure nobody in the media would ever think of using the term "sin." But we're going to face the concept today. God isn't so wishy-washy as we are. When he told Noah to build the ark, Noah's message from the door wasn't "Something good is going to happen to you!" The prophet Amos was not countered by the corrupt High Priest for proclaiming "God's happy when you're happy." Jeremiah the prophet was not thrown into a pit for preaching "Im OK, You're OK." Daniel was not thrown to the lions for telling people "Possibility thinking will move mountains." John

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the Baptist, the forerunner of Christ, was not beheaded by Herod for saying, "Smile God loves you." No, all these people preached the same message: you're living wrong, and it's going to destroy your life! You need to repent.

◆ You can imagine then that Jonah's assignment was risky. It would have been like a lone Pro-Life advocate attending a Planned Parenthood rally with an "abortion is a sin" poster. Or as Tim Keller points out, a Jewish rabbi, walking through Berlin in 1941 proclaiming that Nazi Germany needed to repent. You're not necessarily in friendly territory. It was no more politically correct for Jonah to preach God's way in Nineveh than it is for us to speak it today. And yet he was sent to Nineveh to do just that.

◆ **1. God's followers are on mission to speak the truth of God's way, no matter the opposition.** Nineveh, the capital of Assyria, was not friendly territory for an Israelite. They were the opposition. Assyrians were violent people and, along with the Babylonians, one of the two world power in Jonah's day. After capturing enemies they would typically cut off their legs and one arm, leaving one so they could shake the victims hand in mockery as he died. They forced families to parade with decapitated heads of loved ones on poles. They stretched prisoners bodies with ropes so they could be skinned alive, and the skins were hung up on the city walls. Assyria exacted tribute from Israel during most of Jonah's life and about 20 years after he died completely destroyed the northern 10 tribes of Israel

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altogether. And Jonah had to tell these people that there is so a true God, and God says there is a right way to live: His. And, that's it's better!

◆ David said in Ps.16:11 "you have shown me the path of life...eternal pleasures are at your right hand."

◆ *"he said to them, "Take to heart all the words I have solemnly declared to you this day, so that you may command your children to obey carefully all the words of this law. They are not just idle words for you--they are your life. By them you will live long in the land you are crossing the Jordan to possess." Deuteronomy 32:46, 47, NIV.*

◆ Jonah couldn't stomach the risk perhaps, but we also know he couldn't stomach the possible grace his enemies could receive from a gracious God (more about that in chapter 4). The question for Israel in Jonah's day, and for Jonah himself, and for us as well is: will I as a follower of God, take the **risk** of speaking his message, his truth in my city, much less an enemy one? When Jonah finally did go, he did not go to Nineveh to quietly do social work. He went to warn them that their evil and violent way of life had dire consequences.

◆ For example lets return to the pediatrician Dr. Cretella. She points out that if families reinforce and support their kids' biological gender through puberty, "the vast majority of gender-confused children [[as many as 98 percent!](#)] get better." But here we are, she warns, rushing to "chemically

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castrate gender-confused children with puberty blockers. Then we permanently sterilize many of them by adding cross-sex hormones, which also put them at risk for heart disease, strokes, diabetes, cancers, and even the very emotional problems that the gender experts claim to be treating.”

◆ But that’s just one of the fad issues right now. Read the headlines. The California State Assembly has passed a resolution telling pastors to affirm homosexuality in violation of their biblical beliefs. Mayor London Breed announced that city employees in San Francisco are now forbidden to take work trips or do business with companies in 22 states that have “restrictive abortion laws.” Parents in Scotland have challenged Education Secretary John Swinney over sex education materials that “promote pornography” in the school curriculum. A Christian couple in Canada was denied adoption because of religious beliefs. Farmers Steve and Bridget Tennes in East Lansing, MI were banned from selling their goods at the farmers market because of they affirm traditional marriage.

◆ This is the world all around us, and it’s disquieting to say the least. But... how many followers of God in the room will ever say anything about any of these things out loud, publicly, based on the truths we know from God’s Word? The Church is a group on mission to speak God’s good commands into their city.

Sometimes that comes in warnings. Jonah’s story highlights this.

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God wants his people to speak for him, and turn people back from their destructive choices. Some other examples from scripture:

- ◆ "But if the watchman sees the sword coming and does not blow the trumpet to warn the people and the sword comes and takes the life of one of them, that man will be taken away because of his sin, but I will hold the watchman accountable for his blood.' ... When I say to the wicked, 'O wicked man, you will surely die,' and you do not speak out to dissuade him from his ways, that wicked man will die for his sin, and I will hold you accountable for his blood. But if you do warn the wicked man to turn from his ways and he does not do so, he will die for his sin, but you will be saved yourself." Ezekiel 33:6-9, NIV.
- ◆ Do you remember how God appeared in a blinding light to Paul, who was out killing Christians?

◆ *"Now get up and stand on your feet. I have appeared to you to appoint you as a servant and as a witness of what you have seen of me and what I will show you. I will rescue you from your own people and from the Gentiles. I am sending you to them to open their eyes and turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan to God, so that they may receive forgiveness of sins and a place among those who are sanctified by faith in me."* Acts 26:16-18

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◆ Israel was told multiple times that they were to be a "light to the gentiles". God sends his Church just as he sent Israel. That's us! He says, "Be my light. Speak my name. Who knows what I might do with that?!"

◆ There's something else highlighted here. These things are destroying peoples lives. We are not free to merely soak up prosperity and leave the corruption of the world to itself.

### **◆2. Storms always accompany sins, so take sinning seriously in your city and in yourself.**

◆ A. What did God say to Adam and Eve about disobeying his good commands? "You will surely die." And humanity has been dying ever since. We don't necessarily die right away, just as Adam and Eve did not. But the dying always accompanies the sin. I should tell you that Jonah 3-4 is an exact parallel and repeat of Jonah 1-2. Jonah gets the same instructions, again. (Arise, go.) In ch1-2 a "great" storm came, and a "great" fish swallowed Jonah. Now Jonah is in the "great" city of Nineveh predicting a coming storm of destruction from God. In chapter 1 the sailors respond on the ship, and in chapter 3 the people respond in the city. Just like the ship captain, the king of Nineveh is said to "issue a cry" (v7), to God, and with the same reasoning: "who knows, maybe God will relent and we won't perish." (1:6, 4:9). And so also in both episodes we see the same lessons, one of which is, when you turn your back on God,

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life gets worse. It's built into the nature of the world. God brings life, sin brings death.

◆cf. Rom6:23 The wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life!

◆B. Now some assume that the Ninevites became converted to Israel's god. We don't know that from the text. People easily accepted multiple gods as valid in that culture. We do know that they did repent at least of their current behaviors, specifically violence, at the warning of Israel's God.

◆"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." Jonah 3:8, NIV.

◆Take note! Believers sometimes assume that because they have believed in Jesus, and confessed their sinful nature, and asked for forgiveness through Jesus' meritorious death on the cross, and are bound for eternity with God, -that behavior doesn't really matter all that much. We're saved, oh blessed condition! They figure since our destiny is secure, that God's blessings are also as cemented as possible in this life. Therefore it matters not what they watch, read, or dream about during the day or night. Or what they tell their friends, or don't tell them. It matters not the language they use when they're "really ticked off", or how they abuse another person with their comments and negativity. Aren't they saved after all? It matters little how little they share with others, or if they cut some corners here or there, or fib a

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little on this question or that, or how many hours of their existence are consumed by what they will purchase next. They think to themselves, "a little of this won't really affect me."

◆ This is not true, friends. I want you to NOT believe it! God's good ways are programmed into the universe. They are the ways of life. And storms accompany sin as surely as sparks fly upward. As one commentator puts it,

◆ "God has created the world so that cruelty, greed, and exploitation have natural disintegrative consequences that are a manifestation of his anger toward evil." (Keller, p.94)

◆ Believers can live lives full of death and misery on the way to God's final Kingdom, and it has consequences for our capacities for joy and reward both here and there. Look at all the misery Israel had to live through because of their daily choices! A whole generation of them never got to set foot in the Land of Promise because of behaviors. They were still God's people. But they lived life in wilderness. What beauties they gave up! And what beauties are you and I giving up because of the choices we are making?

◆ **3. The solution of repentance. What is it?**

◆ **A.** It's turning around. I need to turn my back on sins, not just sin in general. God is free to be merciful. Who knows perhaps he will take away consequences of our sin. "If you are on the wrong road, progress means doing an about turn and walking back to



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the right road; and in that case the man who turns back soonest is the most progressive man." CS Lewis.

◆**B.** It something I need to do. No one else can do it for me.

◆*Let the wicked forsake his way and the evil man his thoughts. Let him turn to the LORD, and he will have mercy on him, and to our God, for he will freely pardon. (Isaiah 55:7, NIV).*

◆If at any time I announce that a nation or kingdom is to be uprooted, torn down and destroyed, and if that nation I warned repents of its evil, then I will relent and not inflict on it the disaster I had planned. (Jeremiah 18:7,8 cf.26:3)

◆**Conclusion:**

◆Here's the good news. God is a relenting God even though he needn't be. So do not fear! Admitting and repenting of wrong does not mean you are hopeless. And it is commanded by a God who loves you wants what's best for you!

◆'As surely as I live, declares the Sovereign LORD, I take no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but rather that they turn from their ways and live. **Turn! Turn from your evil ways!**  
**Why will you die? Ezek 33:11**

◆As a result of Nineveh's turning from their violence, God did not bring the destruction they deserved. That same God sent our Savior Jesus to take the dying your sinning and my sinning deserve.

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**◆The Praise Team is going to lead us in a song of surrender to God. And I invite you to do business with God right here, today during the song. We don't have sack cloth and ashes for you. But You can come down to the front and bow in prayer if you like. Kneel where you are if you like, but break the power of specific sins over you by specifically turning from them to live! Name them to Jesus and ask him to carry them to the cross for you. Break the power of sins of your city as well. Let's not be fooled. The paycheck for sin is always some kind of deadness. But the free gift of God is eternal living!**