

“Jonah” Pt 12

A Wayward Prophet

Jonah 4:1-11

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Jeff: Our gracious Father, we thank You as we bow before You even this morning to remind ourselves that You are a great and mighty God. And Lord, we are thankful for Your word that tells us that, and we're thankful for the way it was received under divine inspiration of the Spirit. We're also thankful that as we open it and read it that Your Holy Spirit who inspires it continues to illuminate it and show us the way. And we're thankful for that and we praise You for it.

Father, as we bow before You this morning we ask that You would lead us throughout this coming day. Lord, whether we face disappointments or discouragements, whether we face joys and great abundance and happiness, we pray, Lord, that You will always remind us that these things are from Your hand and that You are the One who straightens and bends. And Lord, we ask that You would help us to receive every providence whether good or difficult in faithfulness.

And Lord, as we come now we pray that You'll bless us as we study Your word. And we ask, Lord, that the message of Jonah would be impressed deeply upon our hearts. There are many lessons to be learned here, and Father, we just pray that You'll help us to glean a few of them as we walk our daily lives.

Father, we certainly pray for our brother Bruce as he is now in the home. We just pray that You would strengthen and encourage him. We pray, Father, for his wife as well. Lord, we pray for Tab and ask that You would be with her and strengthen her and give her encouragement and even healing. And Father, we pray that Your hand would be upon us today as we study. Lord, encourage our hearts and knit us together in a bond of peace and love for one another and strengthen us even for the work of the day, for we ask it in Jesus' name. Amen.

Brave Men: Amen.

Jeff: All right. Well I think we were a little past this slide, but I want to say a couple of things. I think we're still on the last outline, maybe the last point of the last outline.

And I said the last time we were together that repentance is certainly ours, but I want to remind you of a couple of things: that it's part of the life-giving grace of God to us. That is to say that repentance is a gift and we need to keep that in mind.

There were certain passages I wanted to remind you of the last time we were together that show us that. For instance Acts 5:31: “*God exalted Him*”—that is, Christ—“*at His right hand as Leader and Savior to give repentance to Israel and forgiveness of sins.*” That is, He gives repentance.

Acts 11:18 is similar. “*And they glorified God, saying: ‘Then to the Gentiles also God has granted repentance that leads to life.’*” So God grants the repentance that leads to life.

And then in 2 Timothy 2:24-26 again you catch another glimpse of the nature of repentance. “*And the Lord's servant must not be quarrelsome but kind to everyone, able*

“Jonah” Pt 12

to teach, patiently enduring evil, correcting his opponents with gentleness. God may perhaps grant them repentance leading to a knowledge of the truth.” So the reason why the servant of the Lord—the pastor, the teacher—is to be gentle and not quarrelsome, kind, and so on, is because maybe God, through His ministry, will grant repentance. That is to say that repentance is ours; we do the repenting. God uses means to bring about repentance in the lives of people. For instance He uses the ministry of the Word. But it is ultimately God who grants repentance; repentance is a gift from Him. And we can’t escape that; it’s in our confessional documents; it’s certainly in the Scriptures, and that’s why it’s in the confessional documents. And so I wanted to remind you about those things; I think those things are important.

And so when we talk about the dual nature of the word “overturn”—that is that Nineveh will be overturned, or that Nineveh will overturn itself in repentance—one of the things that we have to remember is that the reason why the Ninevites overturned themselves is because they were granted repentance from God. And so we’re going to look next at that description of repentance that we find God granting to the Ninevites, and so that’s what I want to look at next. I think it’s the last point in this particular section.

But I want to compare the repentance that we find in chapters 2 and 3, because therein we find the comparison between what Nineveh does and what Jonah himself did. And it’s not a very flattering comparison when you compare it with Jonah. So first of all, the first comparison I want you to notice is *the reception of God’s word*.

Now this is an interesting thing when you think about it. And I didn’t read the text to you, so let me read the text to you. *(Laughter)* Let me read Jonah 3 and maybe have that in mind a bit as we start to talk about this.

“Then the word of the LORD came to Jonah the second time, saying: ‘Arise, go to Nineveh that great city, and call out against it the message that I tell you.’ So Jonah arose and went to Nineveh, according to the word of the LORD.

“Now Nineveh was an exceedingly great city, three days journey in breadth. Jonah began to go into the city, going a day’s journey. And he called out, ‘Yet forty days and Nineveh shall be overthrown!’ And the people of Nineveh believed God. They called for a fast and put on sackcloth, from the greatest of them to the least of them.

“The word reached the king of Nineveh. And he arose from his throne, removed his robe, covered himself with sackcloth, and sat in ashes. And he issued a proclamation and published through Nineveh: ‘By the decree of the king and his nobles, let neither man nor beast, herd nor flock, taste anything. Let them not feed or drink water. But let man and beast be covered with sackcloth, and let them call out mightily to God. Let everyone turn from his evil way and from the violence that is in his hands. Who knows? God may turn and relent and turn from His fierce anger, so that we may not perish.’

“When God saw what they did, how they turned from their evil way, God relented of the disaster that He had said He would do to them, and He did not do it.”

Don Maurer: This is the word of the Lord.

Jeff: This is the word of the Lord; that’s right.

Brave Men: Thanks be to God.

“Jonah” Pt 12

Jeff: That’s right; it is. Very good, Don. *(Laughter)* So the first comparison is the reception of the word. And I want to think about how it was that Jonah received the word of the Lord when it was spoken to him and how the Ninevites received the word of the Lord. And you can see how the Ninevites received the word of the Lord when it was spoken in 3:5: *“And the people of Nineveh believed God.”*

Now that’s amazing when you think about it, because when you think about their reception of the Word you think about it being a reception of pagans, whereas Jonah is a son of the covenant; he’s a child of Israel. And you would expect that he would receive the Word and believe. Now we’re going to see that he did believe, but there was a difference in his reception, and that has to do with the result.

So not only did the people of Nineveh believe, but the people of Nineveh gave fruit of their belief. And when you see the fruit of their belief, it’s what? It’s that they put on sackcloth and they fasted. And here you find that it’s not actually the sackcloth and the fasting that saves them, but it’s a sign that something has been granted to them inwardly.

You know, oftentimes we can see the tree and recognize whether it’s a good tree or a bad tree by its fruit. That’s not always the case. Remember that the Pharisees gave forth some fruit, and yet they were a rotten tree. And Jesus said they were like the fruit tree that didn’t produce any fruit. So we can be fooled by the fruit, or at least people can be fooled by the fruit. But typically a good tree will bring forth good fruit. And the Ninevites were a good tree at this point; they brought forth good fruit.

The king is an interesting point of comparison I want you to see. Look at what it says. In verse 6 it says: *“He arose from his throne, removed his robe, and covered himself with sackcloth and sat in ashes.”*

Now there are a number of things here that I think ought to strike us. But the point of comparison is in the difference; it’s in the response. I want you to see the response.

Look at what it says: *“He arose.”* Now I’m going to draw your attention to that; look at this. Jonah went to arise, but Jonah arose to flee. Jonah 3:2: *“So Jonah arose and went to Nineveh.”*

But what does it say about the king? The king arose and believed and called for a proclamation to be sent out to all of Nineveh. So there’s a huge point of difference between the king arising from his throne and believing, and Jonah arising and fleeing.

There’s something else here that I want you to notice, and it’s this idea that he covered himself with sackcloth and ashes. I want you to think about that for a minute because that’s going to become important in just a couple of minutes. So there are some interesting differences here, and the differences here are in the responses. The king and Jonah, when you make that comparison—and Jonah is making that in the text—he’s making the comparison that he arose to flee and the king arose to repent. There’s a big difference.

So Jonah arose to flee. Jonah repents though, and Jonah arose and went to Nineveh. So the important thing we need to keep in mind is that Jonah does arise and do what he’s supposed to do. Now we’re going to see that there are some questions raised about that in the next outline. But it takes Jonah some time to do what he’s supposed to do.

“Jonah” Pt 12

But I want you to notice this: Both believed the Word. But there were two separate responses in their believing. Jonah believed the Word; that’s why he fled. But the king believed the Word and he repented.

I think the question we have to ask is: Which describes us? When we think about this text it challenges us. We’re covenant children. And when we’re called to obey, do we obey?—not for the sake of meriting our salvation,—but when God tells us to do something, do we arise and do it? Or are we like an unbeliever? And in this case the comparison with the unbeliever is shameful to us because the unbeliever actually arises and obeys because he has been granted repentance.

So you know, I think it’s a challenge for us to think about ourselves. Which describes you?

Transcriber’s Note: Don Maurer raises his hand.

Jeff: For Don that’s rhetorical. *(Laughter)* He’s about to tell us. *(Laughter)* Don, you’re about to tell us. Go ahead.

Don: Last week you were talking about the two different ways that could be translated: that in forty days either Nineveh will overthrow itself or it shall be overthrown.

Jeff: Yeah.

Don: In light of Jonah’s response in chapter 4, do you really think that the way most translations translate it is the correct way: that it shall be overthrown? There’s no hint of grace or mercy or anything in Jonah. It’s as if he’s hoping that Nineveh will be overthrown.

Jeff: That’s an interesting question when you ask about the correctness of it. I think either way could be correct. I think the context kind of drives how one might choose to translate that. And you’re indicating for instance that the context would indicate that there was no desire for Jonah to see them turn. And so the way it’s translated reflects the way Jonah may have preached it. He may have preached it with a passive sort of inflection. Yet one can’t help but wonder—

Don: God has a sense of humor.

Jeff: Yeah. Well, one can’t help but wonder if there wasn’t more of an explanation given to the people as they asked Jonah, “What happens?” I mean, you can see Jonah being faithful to his task and not necessarily happy about it. *(Laughter)* And that’s true for sure.

The second comparison is *the consequences of their response*. Notice this; this is what I was telling you about earlier. In Jonah 2:3 we were told that the waves engulfed him and swept over him. We were told that they covered him, and that was the word that was used there; he’s saying that he was swept over or covered. And notice that Jonah pulls that word up into chapter 3 and says that the king covered himself. There’s the reflexive nature of overturning oneself in repentance. The reflexive nature of it is seen in the fact that the king covers himself with sackcloth, a symbol of his repentance, whereas Jonah had to be covered with waves in order for him to finally So that’s interesting.

Don Nemit: Jonah believed and did it grudgingly. But the king did it practicing humility.

“Jonah” Pt 12

Jeff: Yeah.

Don: The ancient people knew that there was a God in Israel, and they just laughed. “He’s there; we’re here.” But then when someone says, “Forty days,” he believed it and acted in a humble way.

Jeff: Yeah. You know, you kind of move jumping outside of that typical believing but not caring. He believes and he cares in directions that maybe he shouldn’t have cared (about.) But he certainly knew there was an all-powerful God, for sure.

And so I then ask: What’s covering you? If that first challenge was a challenge to us, certainly the second is as well. That is to say, does God engulf you and cover you in the waves of His providence? Or are we ready to repent and cover ourselves in those signs that indicate an inward turn?

The third comparison is that *God hears*. Now sin doesn’t look the same in every individual; it looks different. We know that; we’ve talked about this along the way. For instance, the thing that someone else struggles with may not be the sin that I struggle with. We all heard earlier how Don struggled with taking the second sniff. *(Laughter)* That may not be my problem, but it certainly is Don’s. *(Laughter)*

Don Nemit: In a big way. *(Laughter)*

Jeff: But Hermann Bavinck says this. *“Repentance is, despite its oneness in essence, different in form according to the person in whom it takes place, and the circumstances in which it takes place. What a difference there is in the conversion of Manasseh, Paul and Timothy! How unlike the experiences of a David and a Solomon and a John and a James.”*

Now the reason I bring this up is because one of the things that I want us to consider, one of the things that I want us to keep in mind, is that we are now dealing with two different individuals who are repenting. We are dealing with Jonah who is repenting, and the king who is repenting.

And I don’t think that we should discount Jonah’s repentance. I think he is repenting. I think he’s had a struggle in his repentance, whereas not so much with the king; at least we don’t see him struggling with his repentance. And I guess my point is to say that both are legitimate, but one is probably ideal.

And so when you look at Jonah, I think the problem we have is that we either put him in an all-or-nothing category. We say, “Well, he’s either a believer in the story or he isn’t.” And I think that it’s a little more nuanced; Jonah struggled. And I think it’s not either or. Here’s where I put him: I put him in the category of a covenant child who is struggling in his repentance. And if you’ve ever struggled in your own repentance, you can relate to that. You know that your struggle in repentance doesn’t nullify your faith, but it’s not ideal. And I think that what we have with Jonah is an example of a person who is struggling to repent, and we’ll see why. We’ll talk about some of the reasons why he may struggle.

I don’t know about you, but for instance there have been times that I’ve repented where I’ve repented grudgingly about my repentance. I knew that I had probably done something that I shouldn’t have done or said something I shouldn’t have said or even thought something I shouldn’t have thought. It’s actually that that’s probably the more

“Jonah” Pt 12

difficult thing of all, because you may think something or be engaged in a conversation with God about it. You say something that you know you shouldn't have said. And so what I mean is, you thought something you shouldn't have thought. And you say, “Lord, do you know what? I'm going to repent of that because I know it's wrong. I shouldn't have said that, but that's how I feel right now; I'm working through that,” right?

I don't know if you've ever been there. I've been there; it's a struggle. And so I think that's what we see related to Jonah probably more than an either/or kind of dynamic. Yes, Don?

Don Maurer: Well that brings up an interesting point concerning the repentance of the king. Was this repentance unto salvation? I mean, obviously God regards his repentance. What do you think of that?

Jeff: Well, the next time you read about Nineveh it's a hundred years later and they're being overturned. It's the passive now instead of the reflexive. So you know, I think that there could have been a generation or two that were believers. I don't have any reason to doubt that this is a repentance unto life. I mean, this is the gospel call on these people, and why not believe it, right?

Don: Right.

Jeff: Why not believe it to be that?

Don: Yeah.

Ted Wood: Why would you think it was repentance unto life? I think they were just repenting because they had done bad things. And the king's repentance is carnal repentance. He's repenting out of his flesh because it's not the repentance of the Christ in you. I mean, you look at the Assyrians. These were the Assyrians; they were the worst guys. There is not a single shred of evidence in archaeology and history that says anything good about the Assyrian religions and beliefs. It was all just as grossly pagan as it could be.

Jeff: Yeah. And I gave you some bullets up there about how brutal they were.

Ted: I know. And Assyriology is one of my favorite subjects.

Jeff: Here's why I say that. One of the things that I struggle with in the book is that it seems that a direct comparison is being made between Jonah and the king of Assyria. And when I look at that I think to myself: What is he communicating? Is he communicating a false repentance and a false repentance? We always think about Jonah as being a false repentance because he later has struggles with it, and is this a false repentance with the king? Or is it a genuine struggle and then a genuine repentance? Or is it a genuine repentance and a false repentance? That's kind of what you're suggesting that maybe it is. When I look at it I struggle—

Ted: It was a true repentance on the king's part, but it came out of the flesh. And fleshly repentance will always collapse in the end because the flesh is interested in preserving itself.

Jeff: I acknowledge the legitimacy of what you're saying. Could it be that this was a false repentance? I see it more as a legitimate repentance that did not take root and last. And so if we can think about it in individuals, it grew up for a time and then the worries of the world snatch it away. And here's a civilization. I mean, if you compare t it's sore

“Jonah” Pt 12

of Like Josiah, right. The evil, the darkness of the world around them, the evil within the church at that time was so evil that Josiah tried to make reforms. But the best he could do was outward reforms before the darkness closed in on him.

So I think it's more like that. Is there a lasting repentance? Certainly not, because a hundred years later they are overthrown.

Ted: Maybe a year later.

Jeff: Maybe. But you're thinking of the prophecy, right?

Brave Man: I understand that the prophecy doesn't come until a hundred years.

Jeff: That's right. And there has to be a time for a just God, right? They have a full hundred years, and next year he's not going to—

Ted: I don't think that his servants would last a hundred years.

Jeff: No, that's right. Okay, so what matters is that John baptizes Jesus unto a baptism of repentance. Remember what I said: I said that repentance is despite its oneness in essence. In other words, the idea is that we are baptized into Christ who was baptized into a baptism of repentance for us—not because He was sinful, but because He was our Representative. He was baptized into that kind of baptism that He might save us. And so in a sense there is the essence of repentance. It is one but it is diverse in terms of the way it works itself out in God's people. And so He is able to save sinners because He is sinless. And yet that salvation and that repentance looks different in each one of us. And so God's work doesn't depend on me, but it depends on His work apart from me. Okay, that is that. Any questions at all, or thoughts before we—

Don Maurer: Are we going into chapter 4 now?

Jeff: We are going to the next chapter.

Don: Okay, because it obviously raises the question. God did not bring the judgment that He threatened to bring. What do we have here? Is this an anthropomorphism. I'm really asking this: Did God change His mind?

Jeff: Aha; did God change His mind? I think that when we think about God interacting with us we have to think about it in terms of anthropomorphic language, which is that we ascribe to God language that resembles humanity. And so for instance God is described as having an emotional response toward us, even a rage in His wrath. And God is a passionless God, right? He doesn't have passions like we do. God is described as having arms so He can cradle us as a father cradles his child or a shepherd cradles his sheep. Yet He doesn't have arms.

What those anthropomorphisms are doing is that they are trying to communicate to us that God is in a relationship with us, and we call that a covenant. Here we find God sending a prophet to preach to a people that they might repent. And yet God is the One who grants repentance just like He grants salvation. But He uses a prophet to do that. So here we're being told that God is saying to this prophet: “Go and preach to this people, that they might repent.” And yet God knows if they're going to repent or not.

That's why I said the last time that I indicated that “overthrown” is either a reflexive or a passive. There's a conditionality to it. God knows which condition is going to be met because He has appointed it to be met. But they don't know that. And so the preacher preaches and the people are called to repentance. But God knows the end.

“Jonah” Pt 12

And so the way it’s put to us, that God relented, is perfectly acceptable because the message, even though it had conditionality to it, it looked as if the condition of repentance wasn’t met that God would overthrow it. But the condition of repentance was met because God granted it. And so God didn’t overthrow it. And so there’s a sense in which this is perfectly descriptive for us to understand any story. So God accommodates Himself to the way we understand in order to tell the story.

That’s how I see God relenting. I don’t see it as God sort of changing His mind, not expecting this. “Wow, I really didn’t expect the Ninevites to do that!” He’s sort of like Jonah at that point. *(Laughter)*

Ron Baling: Wasn’t this the idea? He didn’t say that He was going to do it. He was going to do it if—

Jeff: Yeah.

Ron: We say—

Jeff: There’s a conditionality to it, you know? We don’t know it; certainly God knows it. I’ll not pursue that anymore unless you want to pursue that. That’s a quagmire that just gets ever deeper.

Okay. So what I want us to think about is a brief introduction, a failure to reflect, God is still gracious, and lessons learned.

So first of all the introduction. When I was growing up, one of the things that I remember doing is that I remember that my dad seemed always to pester me about taking the weeds out of the garden. And one of the things that I hated to do was that I hated to pick the weeds; I just hated that. But my parents were always about the primitive way of doing things.

So for instance I remember my dad. Every year we would get up in the yard with a shovel. And shovelful by shovelful we would overturn the earth. And then we would kind of smash it up and hoe it.

And there was a guy across the street doing that with a roto tiller. *(Laughter)* And every once in a while he would bring the roto tiller over. And he would say to my dad, “Do you want me to roto till your garden?”

And when we were young my dad would always say, “Sure!” And the guy would roto till it up. And then when we got to be teenagers my dad would go, “No, no!” *(Laughter)*

But I learned a valuable lesson. I learned that when you were weeding that what you had to do was that you had to get down to the ground and pull it up by the root. I hated that. Anyway, I realized later n—

Ted: Why did you hate it? I hated it too, but why did you hate it? Why did you hate getting down to the root?

Jeff: I didn’t hate getting down to the root. But I hated getting down and garden weeding because my friends were very typically in the next lot playing football or something. *(Laughter)* But you know, it’s easier just to pluck them up. It’s easier just to grab hold of them and pluck them up, and if it didn’t come up by the root, who cares?

Brave Man: Dad cared. *(Laughter)*

Jeff: Dad cared. He would see nothing you know, and he would yell, “Get over here!” And that was a real pain because there wasn’t much to hold onto, right?

“Jonah” Pt 12

Jonathan Edwards had resolutions that he lived by. He would read them fairly regularly throughout his life. And one resolution struck me and caused me to think about that time growing up. He said, *“When I sin, the thing that I need to do is to get to the root of that sin.”* In other words, I need to think about what caused me to do this sin so that I can not just treat the symptom of the sin in my life, but I can get to the very root of it and pluck it up.

Brave Man: Amen.

Jeff: And I thought to myself, that sounds like my dad. *(Laughter)* And it’s an interesting thing how God does these things and gives us these things in life that later have these spiritual lessons. And we need to pluck up the root of our sin.

So far in Jonah we’ve noticed that there has been disobedience, repentance and then obedience. And we’ve been following the trend of that. And I think that in chapter 3, even if we call it begrudging obedience, there has been obedience. But in chapter 4 we’re going to get to the root of things. And I think that is the issue that we’re going to look at. So why don’t we turn to chapter 4? Let me read this text.

“But it displeased Jonah exceedingly, and he was angry. And he prayed to the LORD and said, ‘O LORD, is this not what I said when I was yet in my country? That is why I made haste to flee to Tarshish, for I knew that You are a gracious God and merciful, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love, and relenting from disaster. Therefore now, O LORD, please take my life from me, for it is better for me to die than to live.’

“And the LORD said, ‘Do you do well to be angry?’

“Jonah went out of the city and sat to the east of the city, and made a booth for himself there. He sat under it in the shade till he should see what would become of the city.

“Now the LORD had appointed a plant and made it come up over Jonah, that it might be a shade over his head, to save him from his discomfort. So Jonah was exceedingly glad because of the plant.

“But when dawn came up the next day, God appointed a worm that attacked the plant so that it withered. When the sun rose God appointed a scorching east wind. And the sun beat down on the head of Jonah so he was faint. And he asked that he might die and said, ‘It is better for me to die than to live!’

“But God said to Jonah, ‘Do you do well to be angry for the plant?’ And he said, “Yes, I do well to be angry, angry enough to die!”

“And the LORD said, ‘You pity the plant for which you did not labor, nor did you make it grow, which came into being in a night and perished in a night. And should I not pity Nineveh, that great city in which there are more than one hundred twenty thousand persons who do not know their right hand from their left, and also much cattle?’”

So what we have here is that we are face to face with a genuine question. And that is, was the repentance of Jonah genuine? Now I said earlier that when you look at this text and you think about it in light of Bavinck’s quote that the essence of repentance is one, and yet it’s diverse in different people; it looks different in different people, I don’t know if you’ve ever had this very conversation with God, but I know that I have.

“Jonah” Pt 12

You know how it is, right? It’s the voice of Scripture, because you know Scripture. It divides bone and marrow, the soul and spirit within you. Have you ever had that, where a Scripture text would come to mind? Providentially the right text will come to mind because the living Spirit of God is in you. And you respond to the text that comes to your mind. “All right; I’ve had enough of that!” (*Laughter*) And you know, you have that Jonah experience.

so maybe I’m getting ahead of myself. But I want you to at least be thinking sympathetically along with Jonah even if you don’t agree with what I’m saying to you. So is this a genuine repentance?

I think that what we now have is that I think the weed is back because it wasn’t pulled up by its root. I think Jonah, obviously begrudgingly, did what God said. But I think he was like the child in the garden who just kind of pulled it up by the midsection, and the root was still there. And so the weed is back; we know it’s back.

How do we know it’s back? We know it’s back because of the parting prayer. Now let me show you the prayer I’m talking about in verse 2. “*And he prayed to the LORD and said, ‘O LORD, is not this what I said when I was yet in my own country?’*”

I think that what we see is that we see Jonah saying, “Look, I told you. This is exactly what was going to happen.” And here’s the interesting thing. The interesting thing is that he says, “Steadfast love.” That’s the word *chesed*. In other words that’s God’s covenant, faithful love. In other words, when I preach the gospel and people repent, “I knew that You are a steadfast, covenant faithful God. And I knew that You would receive them.” And so in verse 5 he goes out of the city. And what we find is, this man goes out of the city and what? He wants to die, but not before he looks at the city to try and see whether or not his final hope, his final wish might come true; that is that Nineveh would be destroyed.

So again I’m a little more sympathetic to Jonah at this point. I want you to think about a child. There’s a difference between a child doing something that he’s supposed to do and feeling right about it. How many of us have kids and we’ve said, “Now say you’re sorry.”

“I am sorry!”

“Now say it like you mean it.” What are we asking for? We’re asking for the feeling. We say, “Okay, we see you doing it.” But we’re asking them to elicit an emotional response, a feeling response that corresponds with the doing.

And you know as well as I do that you can only command that so far. You can only command that until about the year 13. At about 13 then it starts to get like oh, I don’t think I have the authority to command affection. And by 18 or 19 you realize you don’t have the authority, which is why every smart parent—and I wasn’t one of them; I’m not putting myself in that category!; please don’t feel that way!—but when you’re a parent, what you try to do is that you try in those teenage years you try to transition from authoritarian to coach as quickly as possible, because you realize that authoritarianism only lasts so long. It doesn’t last throughout that child’s life. But if you can make that switch from authoritarian to coach, that will have lasting results, or at least you hope it will.

“Jonah” Pt 12

And so one of the things that is funny—and my wife would not hesitate to affirm this, so I’m not telling tales out of school,— (*Laughter*) my wife and I are very much opposite. My wife loves the authoritarian approach. (*Laughter*) And even though our kids are 18-plus, she still loves that authoritarian approach.

And I always like the coaching strategy more. But I’ll tell you: this is a funny story. My son is 26. He had to go to an appointment where she didn’t feel safe with him going there alone. And she said, “Would you go with him?” And I said, “No.”

And she said, “Why?” And I said, “Because he doesn’t want me to go with him.”

And she said, “But it’s not about him; it’s about me!” (*Laughter*) Tom, you can tell her I said that. (*Laughter*)

So you know what I’m saying: it’s a doing or a feeling. And oftentimes we can command the one but not the other. And so here we find Jonah. And he’s doing the right thing but he’s not feeling the right way. And so he’s a child; he’s a covenant child at this point.

Why this reaction? Well there are three possibilities why there is this reaction; I give them to you in your outline. First of all, *character*. Character is an issue here. He’s a prophet of God. When you think about a prophet of God I don’t know what you think about. But years ago I read a book by Abraham Heschel, his two-volume work on the Prophets. It stuck with me and I’m going to share it with you. This is what Heschel says.

Heschel was a Jewish man, not a Christian. He was a liberal Jewish man, but this is what he said. “*A prophet is a man who feels fiercely.*” I love that line. He says, “*God has thrust a burden upon his soul. And he is bowed and stunned at man’s fierce greed.*”

A prophet is stunned by what he sees. He feels fiercely about the injustice he sees. So when you think about what Ted was saying earlier about the Assyrians, here’s a man who is called to go to a very wicked people who have committed atrocities, and to preach a gracious gospel to them.

Again I want you to have some sympathy for Jonah. I’ll never forget. It was in six months of my brother being killed. It was within six months of someone winding up doing the shooting that a prison called me. A maximum security prison within an hour of us called me up and said, “What we would like you to do is that we would like you to come and talk to the inmates. And I said, ““why would you like me to do that?”

And they said, “Well, we would like you to do that because oftentimes our inmates need to see the actual effect that their actions have had on victims’ families.”

Ted: Yeah.

Jeff: And so I talked a little while with them. And you know, you can imagine six months in, still dealing with a lot of grief and anger. And then this person said this to me: “We don’t want you to come and abuse these men.”

And I said, “I am the wrong man for the job, because at six months out I’m sure I will.”

Ted: Yeah.

Jeff: And so I didn’t go. But you know, around that time I felt too fiercely to go and to speak to them the kindness of the gospel. Now that’s probably a fault on my part more than anything else. But what I’m saying is, I get it.

“Jonah” Pt 12

He goes on to say this. *“To us injustice is injurious to the welfare of the people. To the prophets it is a death blow to existence. To us an episode, to them a catastrophe, a threat to the world.”*

In other words, Heschel is saying that we don’t feel the way the prophet feels. And the prophet feels in a way more intense than we can possibly imagine.

And so Jonah feels fiercely. This is a city of blood. And I think that when you think about Jonah and why it is that Jonah had this response, I don’t think that we can negate or nullify that as being important in our thinking.

The second thing is, he had an eye to the future. If Amos 3A:7 holds true, and I believe it does, that God does nothing without first revealing it to His prophets, then Jonah completely understood that not only would God grant repentance to the Assyrians, but the Assyrians would at some point overthrow Israel.

Do you remember this? Do you remember Elisha the prophet? Elisha the prophet is in the area. And the king of Syria, Ben-Hadad, is ill. And he sends his servant Hazael to talk to Elisha the prophet of God in the land of Israel and ask, “Will I make it through this illness?”

And so Hazael goes and he says to Elisha, “Ben-Hadad wants to know if he’s going to live through this illness.” And Elisha looks at him, and it’s like this. And Hazael is getting uncomfortable. He’s sniffing his armpits, you know? (*Laughter*) “What’s up?”, you know?

And Elisha says to him, “Tell him that he’s going to live through the illness, but he’s not going to live.” And remember that he starts weeping. And he’s looking at Hazael and he says, “I know the things that you’re going to do to my people.”

Now I don’t know about you, and this is just an aside. But if the man standing in front of you was the man that was going to go home and lay a black cloth over his king’s face and kill him so he would become king, and commit a bunch of atrocities to your people, wouldn’t you take out your sword right there and hack that guy to pieces? I mean, that would be a natural response, right? The guy who is going to persecute my people is standing right in front of me, and I can take him out.

And yet the prophet knows the will of the Lord, and so he stands there and weeps before anything else. And so think about Jonah. He has an eye to the future. He is Elisha standing before Hazael. And if Elisha weeps, can we accommodate a response on Jonah’s part where he’s mad, angry as all get-out? He would like to take the sword and hack up the people who are going to persecute his people. I think we have to accommodate that kind of response.

But there’s also a social reason, right? He’s the prophet, and he understands better than anyone else. The thing about this is that the people aren’t stupid. They know that Assyria is the big dog on the block, and it’s going to come. They can read the signs if they are halfway cognizant, and he knows it. “I’m going to go back to Israel, and they’re going to hear that I preached t4o these. And what are they going to think of me? How am I ever going to justify my actions before them?” So that’s the idea.

And then there’s a reminder. Butte will take it up here the next time we’re together. Yes, Don?

“Jonah” Pt 12

Don Nemit: Do you think that Jonah’s attitude may be a precursor to the attitude of the Pharisees? “What are the people going to think of me when I say that I preached to Nineveh?”

Jeff: I think this is probably a worse response than the previous response. But I think you could turn it and say this, and think about the prophet saying, “I believe You, Lord. But when I go home and tell them that You sent me, they may not believe it.” Do you know what I mean? So it could be not a Pharisaic response, but it could be a response where he knows the heart and the condition of Israel always being an ambivalent people, you know? If you don’t agree with that we can take it up next time. *(Laughter)* Well let me pray.

Ron: Jeff, before you go, I think you’re absolutely right, because many of the people that I know are so quick to forgive. There is this idea that Lot in Sodom was vexed in his righteous soul.

Jeff: Yeah.

Ron: He was angry about sin. There should be righteous anger.

Jeff: Yes, very much so. Father in heaven, thank You for the day and for the time You’ve given us. Lord, as we look at this prophet and we see him from a variety of different angles, we pray that You’ll help us not only to explore his repentance but our own. And Father, we pray that we’ll emerge from this study not like him in some of his more negative ways, but like him in some of his more positive ways, and certainly more like Jesus Christ which is better than his. And so, Father, we pray in Christ’s name. Amen.

Brave Men: Amen. *(Applause)*