

6/9 Acceptance

Jonah 3:1-3

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- 2 “Go to the great city of Nineveh and proclaim to it the message I give you.”
- 3 Jonah obeyed the word of the Lord and went to Nineveh.

Special Music: “Yet Not I But Through Christ In Me” CityAlight

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zundjUFazfq>

JONAH

Mirror for a Christian Life



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STEPPING INTO ACCEPTANCE

Judge Trudy Darling sat in her office staring at all the paperwork she needed to finish. One would think that there wouldn't be that much for a judge to do in a small town like Parable, but the truth was that the town couldn't afford more than a part-time clerk for her. This meant she had to keep on top of things to just keep from falling behind. And much of the work seemed almost silly at times. She knew that the paper trail for even minor offences was important. The summons she had just signed was to bring Tony Harris to court. Tony owned Harris Hardware and somehow it must have gone to his head because he insisted on parking in the handicapped spot in front of his store. Sheriff Thom and his deputies had written him multiple tickets and Tony just tore them up and threw them away, treating them as a nuisance. So, now she had to force Tony to deal with the problem. Trudy knew he was going to throw a fit when Alfred Spinnaker, the Justice of the Peace, delivered the summons. Trudy decided it would be best to send deputy Forrester along with Alfred, just in case Tony decided to give Alfred trouble. Alfred was eighty-two years old and wasn't really up to fending off Tony if he got obstinate.

Becky Noble, Trudy's clerk, stuck her head in the door. "He's here, Trudy. Do you want me to keep him in the hall until you are ready?"

"It's okay, Becky, I just finished up. Would you be so kind as to take all this paperwork and make sure it gets into the right hands? I would appreciate it," Trudy responded.

“Of course, Trudy. That’s what I’m here for.”

“You can go ahead and send Myron now. I’m ready for him.”

Becky grabbed the files from Trudy’s desk and replied, “I’ll tell him to come on in.”

Myron wasn’t sure why Judge Darling had asked to see him. After all, things had been going great with Mr. Sanders, and the plumber seemed pleased with Myron’s work. Myron had been learning a lot from Mr. Sanders, and the elderly plumber had been a patient teacher.

Myron had been keeping up with all of his payments on his debts from the accident. Mr. Sanders had chosen to take in a Border Collie from Peter Jarvis’ rescues, and Myron had paid all the costs. Max had named her Patches because it was obvious that she wasn’t pure Border Collie, and had several unique brown and gray spots on her torso. Whenever he was working for Mr. Sanders, Patches would ride with them, and it was obvious that Max had quickly grown fond of her. Myron didn’t want to admit it, but he had become attached to Patches as well.

When he wasn’t working for Mr. Sanders, Myron was helping his mother in the diner. He even got to deliver food over to the occasional visitor at the jail cells in the Sheriff’s office. Myron found it a little awkward when he did so, remembering the time that he had spent as one of its occupants. He had kept his nose clean and done more than expected. So, why did Judge Darling want to see him?

“Come on in, Myron. Take a seat. I will be with you in just a minute.”

Still not knowing why he was there, Myron did as he was instructed, took a chair, and waited. After a couple of minutes, Trudy cleaned off her desk and put things away. One might have thought this was a little manipulative of the judge, but she had her reasons. When she had finished, she stood up and came around the desk, taking a seat near Myron.

“Do you know why I asked you here, Myron?”

“No, mam. I mean your honor.”

“Mam is just fine here in my chambers, Myron. And of course, you don’t know why. It is time to talk about your community service. Do you remember when we talked about that at the sentencing hearing?”

“Yes mam, and I figured you would get around to it sooner or later,” Myron said though he admitted to himself that he had been secretly wishing she had forgotten about it. He didn’t really want anything more added to his plate at this time.

“I thought about having you help keep the park clean by picking garbage and maybe doing some maintenance work for a few months, but you know, folks around here are pretty good at picking up after themselves. I also thought about assigning you to the maintenance crew over at the swimming pool, but they seem to have things under control over there and I don’t want to throw a monkey wrench into their operations. I know you can swim well, so I also considered making you a lifeguard for the summer. Truth be told, we have too many

volunteer lifeguards right now. But I realized that all those things are a wasted opportunities for both you and the community.”

“Well, any of those things would have been fine, mam. Just tell me what you would like for me to do,” Myron said.

“No, none of those will do, Myron. I just bring them up because I want you to know where I am coming from. I’ve got a much better plan. Here’s what I propose. You did such a great job helping Sheriff Thom over at the Sheriff’s office while you were there, and I have talked it over with the sheriff and you are going to continue taking care of the office work as needed. But the sheriff is going to expand your role a bit. He’s going to have you doing more than just cleaning. You are going to learn how the sheriff’s office works and what they do. You have only seen a fraction of everything that really happens there.”

“Well, that sounds interesting, mam. I think I would enjoy that.”

“But wait, there’s more!” Trudy gave him an evil grin that was more of a smirk than a grin. It also made Myron uncomfortable when he saw it.

“Myron, you are going to tell your story.”

“What do you mean, tell my story, mam?”

“Just what I said. You are going to tell your story. The sheriff’s office has an ongoing program with the schools in the county. A deputy goes to the schools for various occasions as well as offering instruction through various programs. You will be accompanying that deputy, and you will be telling your story to the

students regarding recent events. My hope is that you can relate to the students at a level that the deputies cannot. I think that they will listen to you when you tell them about driving under the influence and the trouble and pain that can result.”

“But mam, I’m not a speaker. I didn’t even take speech. It wasn’t a requirement. I get very nervous when I have to speak to a crowd. Can’t you think of something else?”

“Myron, are you telling me that you don’t want to do this and that I should reinstate the court costs and fines?” Trudy questioned with a firm tone.

“Uhhh... I mean... No mam. I don’t mean that at all.”

“Then it is decided. Mr. Sanders and your mother have agreed to make this work within your schedule. Mr. Sanders has even agreed to keep paying you when you are on these assignments. I want you to report to Sheriff Thom tomorrow afternoon and let him know that you are on board with this. He will help you work out the details. I might even suggest that you show him a little more enthusiasm for this project than you have shown me. He will act as your supervisor and coordinator. Are we clear on all this?”

“Well, uhhh..., I guess so, Trudy..., I mean mam.”

“You are going to do fine, Myron. Everything will work out. You are going to excel! Now, Mr. Sanders is waiting for you over at Jeff Appleton’s place. Seems his water heater has gone out and he needs it replaced as quickly as possible. And Myron, please keep me informed of your progress.”

Trudy stood up and returned to her desk. She took out a legal pad and pretended that she was looking over some notes. Looking up, she saw Myron was still sitting there. “Uhhh... Myron. That’s it. You can go. Tell Mr. Sanders I said ‘hi’.” She returned to looking over her blank notepad. Myron stood up and quietly exited her chambers. Although he couldn’t see it, he would have sworn that the judge was hiding a smile as he left.

And she was. Just not for the reason he imagined. Trudy had watched Myron grow up. She had been his babysitter before she had left for college. It was so very satisfying watching him grow into the man that she always knew he could be.

Everyone makes mistakes. Responsibility doesn’t come naturally. It has to be learned. And the best teacher for learning responsibility is learning from our mistakes. Responsibility means accepting that we need to hold ourselves accountable for our actions. Acceptance is retraining ourselves to move in the direction that God has for us, and he often uses the people and events around us to help us see that. Trudy couldn’t help but smile as Myron stepped into accountability and accepted his new course in life.

The last message we had on Jonah focused on the fish vomiting Jonah onto dry land. Let's read that passage again in context with today's scripture:

Jonah 2:10

10 And the Lord commanded the fish, and it vomited Jonah onto dry land.

Jonah 3:1-3

1 Then the word of the Lord came to Jonah a second time:

2 "Go to the great city of Nineveh and proclaim to it the message I give you."

3 Jonah obeyed the word of the Lord and went to Nineveh.

Do you notice something missing in this passage of scripture? I know, it's much easier to see what's there than what is missing. But something very important is missing. Did you notice that the book of Jonah does not tell us where the fish vomited Jonah, other than that it was on dry land? It could have been anywhere. It could have been where he started. It could have been near Nineveh. The Bible doesn't tell us, so we don't really know. We just know that he found himself safe on dry land. Sometimes, I think it would be helpful for the Bible to give us a few more details. But we don't always have that luxury.

What we do know is that God called out to Jonah a second time:

2 "Go to the great city of Nineveh and proclaim to it the message I give you."

And he tells Jonah the same thing, to go to Nineveh and preach. But we don't know how far away Jonah is from Nineveh. It could have been 10 miles. It could

have been a thousand miles. We don't know. We also don't know how that knowledge would have played into Jonah's decision. We don't even know if he knew where he was. But we don't hear Jonah asking any of these questions. "Where am I, Lord?" "How do I get to Nineveh, Lord?" "Which direction do you want me to go, Lord?"

What we do read in this third chapter of Jonah is that God tells Jonah to go to Nineveh and preach, and Jonah says, "Got it. I am on my way!" What a turnaround for this man. First running away from the task God has given him when he actually knew where he had to go and how to get there, to suddenly embracing the task even though he had no clue where he was or how he was going to get to Nineveh.

But these lessons on Jonah have not been about claiming the obvious, but instead, digging for some deeper understanding. When we talked about Salvation last time, we looked at the possibility that the fish swallowing Jonah was not a punishment, but possibly the gift of salvation. A rescue from a raging sea. And while these events may have given greater clarity to Jonah, it doesn't mean that God has changed his position or desires in the least.

If we see the fish as Jonah's salvation, then we need to see this second message from God as another opportunity being offered to a man who has been given clarity of purpose through his salvation. Jonah doesn't jump on the beach, kiss the sand, and then head directly to Nineveh, even if that is how we see it on the surface. When we examine the passage, God is giving Jonah a second opportunity to do the right thing, but it is up to Jonah to take it from that point.

Think about it. God could have had the fish spit Jonah up on the beach at the port in Nineveh. But we don't see that. What we see is God giving Jonah that opportunity to say "no" again, perhaps to see if he has learned anything from his experience. Jonah could easily have said, "Lord, I messed up. I appreciate you saving me from my own indiscretions. Thanks for sending the fish. Thanks for the ride. I truly appreciate it. But, if it's all the same to you, I think I will pass on this whole Nineveh thing. I still don't think they will listen to me even if I do show up. Why would they? And it is not as if they don't deserve what is coming to them. These people hate Jews!"

Do you see the parallel with our own Christian lives here? I see it all the time. People will post online how sold out to God they are. Jesus is their everything. There is nothing that they won't do to advance the kingdom of God. And then they turn right around and say, "But I won't go here, I won't do that, I won't help them. God would never expect me to go there, do that, or help those people."

And we look at Jonah, who has come to understand that it isn't about what he wants, but what God wants. As a Jew, people would tell him that he is out of his mind to go to a city that hates Jews and try and convince them that they are all going to die if they don't change their ways. But it really doesn't matter what people are telling him. None of them just saved him using a big fish in the middle of a storm.

I have to be very blunt about this. Nothing brings salvation for our souls other than the sacrifice of Jesus Christ. Nothing. Being good won't save us.

Having lots of money won't save us. Being charitable won't save us. The Bible can't save us. Nothing but the blood of Jesus Christ can bring us into a right relationship with God. And if we truly understand that, then why do we listen to people who tell us to ignore the voice of God because what God is telling us doesn't make sense to them. It's not about them. It's about our own relationship with the Creator of the universe. We are not able to save ourselves or anybody else. Only Jesus can do that. The way that God speaks to us is a matter that only exists in our own relationship with our Creator. We don't need another opinion.

God gave Jonah a path to a right relationship with him. He provides each of us with a path that leads to a right relationship with him. And if we truly, truly understand and believe that, then the only voice that makes a difference for us is his voice. And if he wants us to go across the street to tell our neighbors about the gracious love that he offers us all, or maybe mow their yard, or fix their fence, or take them some food, then we need to heed that voice. And if he tells us that we should go to Timbuktu to tell others about the gospel of Jesus Christ, then we should be packing our bags.

But he isn't going to make us go. He didn't MAKE Jonah go to Nineveh. God just made it clear that going to Nineveh was what he wanted Jonah to do. Going to Nineveh was as much for Jonah's sake as it was for Nineveh's. We pray for clarity in our Christian service, but we often plug our ears when we don't like what God is telling us. We all do that at some point. We balk at what God wants from us, mostly because it is out of our comfort zone.

This is where acceptance comes in. When we finally decide to stop arguing with God about what he wants from us and take the time to listen to what he is telling us. We get to make the choice. Do we do what he is telling us to do, or do we tell him ‘no’ and do our own thing, pretending we didn’t hear him speaking to us? Are we going to step into accepting his will for our lives? Are we going to step into allowing him to use us as he sees fit?

“But preacher, how do we do that? How do we listen for God’s voice? How do we step into his purpose for us?”

There are several things that will help us do that.

- 1) Stop talking and start listening. So often we talk over God’s voice. Sometimes we aren’t paying attention and keep interrupting him. Sometimes we start saying “La, la, la” as loud as we can to block his voice. We need to stop doing that. We need to sit calm and quiet and listen for his whisper. That whisper will help us to grow closer to him, and his voice will become more obvious.**
- 2) Be intentional in our prayer lives. Go before God intending to hear what he has to say. Turn prayer into a conversation rather than a rant or a list of gimmees. Make our prayers about doing what he needs for us to do, lifting others towards him, accepting his words as he encourages us.**
- 3) Make time to learn. It amazes me how many Christians fail to take a few minutes of every day and read from their Bible, whether it is through a devotional or reading directly. I encourage all of us to take time to read**

our Bibles. It is difficult to stay on the correct path if we don't bother to read the street signs.

- 4) Be still. You know, sometimes God just wants to sit with us rather than push us. There are times when we are in pain, that we hurt, that our emotions are getting the best of us, that we are grieving, or maybe we are just confused. In those times, what God wants most from us is to be still and let him sit and comfort us. It is astounding the things that he will whisper to us during those times.**
- 5) Look for the opportunities that he places in our path. Sometimes, God just needs us to reach out to someone with a kind word or a gesture. Nothing grandiose. Just letting somebody know that we see and hear them. That God sees and hears them. All so they can see the light of Jesus in their darkness to help calm their fears and worries.**

There is no greater satisfaction in our Christian lives than knowing that we are serving in the capacity that God intends for us. But many of us don't ask God to show us our purpose. I suppose that is because we are afraid he might tell us. How many of us believe we are fine, just as we are, and there is nothing more we need to do? That there is no longer a need for growth as Christians for us?

We must learn that acceptance of the path that God has chosen for us is always the best path, both for our well-being and the people around us. It is in that acceptance that we can embrace the blessings that lie along that path he has chosen for us. I want us all to think about that this week. Myron could have said 'no' and taken the old path he was on. Jonah could have said no and tried to run

away from God again. We can do the same thing. We can say no to the path that God wants us on, but to do so means that we won't enjoy the depth of the relationship and the blessings that come with that relationship. It is only by accepting God's true path for us that we are able to grow in our relationship with him.

1 Then the word of the Lord came to Jonah a second time:

2 "Go to the great city of Nineveh and proclaim to it the message I give you."

3 Jonah obeyed the word of the Lord and went to Nineveh.

God bless you all!

AMEN

(use this time to mention the needs for the people in Sanderson and what the Ministerial Alliance is attempting to do)

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