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C0822 – July 9, 2008 – Jonah 3:1-4 – Jonah Obeys The Lord

Let's start with a review of the doctrine of divine discipline. There are six points to the doctrine of divine discipline and we used Jonah as a motif. The news report we get of Jonah and the great fish is a captivating story, it's one of the most common stories told to our children but the postmodern church has been too playful with it and while it sort of captures our imagination as young children, when we've come of age, when we've been thoroughly indoctrinated and enveloped by the anti-supernatural worldview of secular academia then we read Jonah as smart people and we trivialize it as the stuff of myth and legend. It's very subtle how this happens but when this happens, when the historicity of the event is denied, then the doctrine is denied as well because these stories, these events are given to teach us doctrine and if the events didn't happen in reality then the doctrine isn't attached to reality. It's just a cute little story but we know it's not really true. Now, we're fighting against that by emphasizing the historicity of the biblical events. And this one, like so many in the OT, is so graphic, its so colorful, its there to capture your imagination as you think what it must have been like out on that Phoenician ship, one of the finest ships of the ancient world filled with seafaring men who'd been sailing those waters for 30 years and they've seen storm after storm after storm on that sea and yet here's a storm that obviously stands out in their mind. The drama is ripe for the Christian mind. And if you transfer that idea over to the divine side, think from the divine side, God is pursuing Jonah fiercely as a loving father pursues his son to restore him to the right track. That's the picture here. Isn't that the point we gathered from Heb 12, that God disciplines His sons and if anyone is without discipline they are not His son? We can rebel against our heavenly Father, we can run from Him but look at how fiercely He pursues us. And that's the first point to the doctrine of divine discipline, that God disciplines all of His children and only His children. Put another way, He doesn't discipline the

whole world; He only disciplines a subset of the world, those who have been set apart unto Him by the gospel. So there's a perfect discrimination in the area of divine discipline. Why does He discipline us? Because he loves us.

The second point has to do with the warning passages and we looked at the Book of Hebrews. Think this through with me because this is a point of contention, there's a bonafide debate going on right now over these warning passages. But think about it, if He disciplines all of His children, and only His children then, as Hebrews says, when we read the warning passages there don't we conclude that they're directed toward genuine believers? In which case they're warning us lest we come under divine discipline and lose rewards. It's not a warning of loss of salvation, that's the Arminian position, that a) you have a believer and b) if he does not persevere until the end in good works then he loses his justified status. The problem with that is that try as you may you cannot bring that into harmony with the rest of the Scriptures. People try but in the end after they've twisted numerous texts they always end up with a gospel that says faith + works of perseverance = justification. Then on the other hand you have the Calvinists who interestingly end up in the same position. And I'm speaking of the system of Calvinism as expressed in the *Westminster Confession* of 1648, and their approach to the warnings is that they are addressed to professing unbelievers, that what you have is a whole group of people who a) think they are believers but really are not because b) if they were they would be persevering in good works. So they are to analyze themselves and see if they are performing the good works and if they are not they are to conclude they are not really justified, they never had saving faith. The problem with that, once again is that in the final analysis, "What have you said is required to be justified?" Faith + works of perseverance. If either of those is lacking you were never justified to begin with. Now, they express it very slickly saying, "Its faith alone that saves but the faith that saves is never alone," by which they mean it's always accompanied by works. So they get into different kinds of faith and it gets real convoluted. But in the end it's always s an evaluation of your fruit, this introspection. The Puritans, as godly as they were, got trapped in this because they kept turning in to find assurance of salvation, "Do I have the right works, do I have the right stuff." The problem with that is your experience is subjective and fluctuates and that means you can never be 100% sure you are saved. Like John MacArthur, he was asked by a couple of friends of mine how sure he was he would go to heaven and he said, 99%.

Why not 100%? Because he can never be sure that he might not have just had temporary faith and the fruits of temporary faith which are, according to them, indistinguishable from true saving faith. So that's what I mean when I say it gets convoluted. It gets that way because they're talking in non-biblical categories. They've played with the term 'faith.' The Bible doesn't talk about different kinds of faith (temporary, spurious and so forth). Either you believe or you don't believe the gospel. Salvation is a free gift with no strings attached. People have a hard time believing that. It just can't be. But what the gospel is saying is that salvation is totally free, it can only be received like a gift. Our works, what we bring to the table is not a part of the equation. Our works contribute nothing, in fact they can't contribute anything. It is always Christ's work and His work alone. That's the source of the righteousness which is imputed to a person's account at the moment of faith alone in Christ alone. Now what I mean by faith is this: *volitional intellectual assent to a proposition*. A) it's volitional, that is, there's a personal choice involved. B) it's intellectual, the mind (which is the heart in biblical thinking) is the instrument involved in the choice. There's no difference between head belief and heart belief. That's a division made by secular psychology. 95% of the uses of heart, *leb* and *kardia* refer to the "thinking part of man" "the mentality" "the location of thought." This is why Paul tried to persuade men to believe. What was he appealing to? The mind. C) faith is intellectual assent, it's intellectual agreement, that's what we mean by assent, that you agree with something, some statement and we call those statements D) propositions, that's the content, there must be content. This is why you can't just say, "believe in Jesus" or "you need a personal relationship with Jesus". Neither of those is the gospel. If a person does that they will spend eternity in hell. Jesus must be filled with the proper content, verbal propositions about Him and a person must believe those verbal propositions. So faith is *volitional intellectual assent to a proposition*. Have you made the choice to agree intellectually to the statement that Jesus Christ was the God-man who died on the cross for our sins and was raised from the dead on the third day? If you haven't believed that then you do not have salvation. If you haven't preached that Jesus you haven't preached the Jesus of the Bible. So that's what we mean by faith alone in Christ alone; volitional intellectual assent to the propositions concerning Christ. When that happens a person is justified before God. He's legally declared righteous. He hasn't become righteous, He's been declared righteous by God. Now, as to works. Because we're making a separation here between faith and works. Are works required to go to

heaven? Absolutely not. Not our work at least. What's the role of works? They have to do with rewards. Faith alone is required for justification, works are required for rewards. As Paul says, "For by grace are you saved through faith and that not of yourselves it is the gift of God, not of works lest any man should boast" (Eph 2:8-9). You have to make a divide between faith and works or you will end up muddling the gospel, destroying the gospel, it's no gospel at all once you add works as a necessary fruit of the faith that saves. So, once you've made this division you can talk about divine discipline because divine discipline only for genuine believers. And for goodness sake, if you don't know for sure whether you're a believer or not then what level of certainty can you have whether you're under divine discipline. It certainly can't supersede your level of assurance that you're a believer. If you thought 99% that you were a believer then you can't get any better than 99% certainty that you're being disciplined. So we're arguing that the warning passages in Hebrews are written to believers and relate to divine discipline.

Third point, when the believer knows the word of God he's responsible to obey the word of God. You can't obey what you don't know.

Fourth point, when the believer disobeys the word of God he loses fellowship with God. Fellowship is an either/or state. Either you are in fellowship or out of fellowship, there is no in-between state. Parallel expressions in Scripture; abiding or not abiding in Him (John 15), filled by means of the Spirit or not filled (Eph 5), walking by the Spirit vs walking by the flesh (Gal 5), all identical expressions.

Fifth point, being out of fellowship the believer suffers temporal divine discipline. That is, in time God disciplines him, this could be spiritual depression, it can be physical illness, it can be sin unto death. But God loves us so He disciplines us so we will confess our sin.

That's our sixth point, when the believer confesses God restores Him to fellowship. 1 John 1:9, "If we confess our sins (and he's talking to believers here)," "If we confess our sins He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness."

Now, that's all looking at Jonah 1-2 from the human side, but look at this from the divine side now. In Jonah 1:1-3 Jonah disobeyed yes but what do we

see about the Lord? What attribute? His authority. His Lordship. That He issues commands and expects believers to follow them. Not only does He expect us to but He provides the means for us to do so. Second thing we see about God is in vv 4-16, we already see Jonah running from the Lord but what do we see the Lord doing? Pursuing him. The Lord fiercely pursues His disobedient child so he will return to Him. Third and finally, in 2:9 what does the Lord do? He saves. Salvation is of the Lord. Every time the believer confesses his sin to the Lord he is instantly restored to fellowship. And that's a perfectly good use of the word "salvation". We typically don't think of it when we get back in fellowship that we just got saved but we have. What have we been saved from? From the deadly consequences of sin. Where was Jonah going? Death. What is death a consequence of? Sin. Was he saved from that? Yes. So every time you confess your sins the Lord saves you.

So now we want to turn to chapter 3. If chapters 1-2 are one side of the coin then chapters 3-4 are the other side of the coin. Chapters 1-2 record Jonah's disobedience, chapters 3-4 record his obedience. Now, apparently he's on the beach here, he's just been vomited out by the great fish that saved him. Now, verse 1, "Now the word of the Lord came to Jonah the second time, saying, ²"Arise, go to Nineveh the great city and proclaim to it the proclamation which I am going to tell you." ³So Jonah arose and went to Nineveh according to the word of the Lord. Now Nineveh was an exceedingly great city, a three days' walk. ⁴Then Jonah began to go through the city one day's walk; and he cried out and said, "Yet forty days and Nineveh will be overthrown." A few observations, v 2, "Arise, go" that dual command is very strong in the Hebrew. There's a strong sense of urgency there that Jonah high tail it to Nineveh. But notice v 4, when he arrives he parks outside the city and then, v 4, "Jonah began." Now that verb is a hiphil verb. What it means is its causative. In other words, "Jonah had to force himself to go into that city," What the Hebrew text is communicating is that Yes, Jonah obeys but he does it grudgingly, he doesn't want to do this. "I'll go but I'm not going because I'm so concerned about the Ninevites. I'd rather them rot in hell!" That's his mentality as we see later in the passage. And some of you don't like Jonah because of that. But I want you to put your spiritual bifocals on here. Think of the people he's being sent to. These are the Assyrians. They were the nastiest, bloodiest, cruelest, most idolatrous people in the world at that time, always warring with somebody, always killing somebody. To get a feel for the bloodthirstiness of these people I want to quote from Dr Daniel Luckenbill.

Dr Luckenbill was Professor of Semitic Languages and Literatures at the University of Chicago for many years. He was an expert in ancient Assyria and Babylon. He's done all the research and this is one of his quotes from King Ashur-nasirpal II which typifies the era. *"I stormed the mountain peaks and took them. In the midst of the mighty mountains I slaughtered them; with their blood I dyed the mountain red like wool. With the rest of them I darkened the gullies and precipices of the mountains. I carried off their spoil and their possessions. The heads of their warriors I cut off, and I formed them into a pillar over against their city; their young men and their maidens I burned in the fire!...I built a pillar over against the city gates, and I flayed all the chief men who had revolted, and I covered the pillar with their skins; some I walled up within the pillar, some I impaled upon the pillar on stakes, and others I bound to stakes round about the pillar."*¹ Nice group of people, eh? Obviously these people were rotten to the core. Obviously we can understand why God was about to judge them. This was an evil culture. They had let their sin natures run rampant, they had seered their consciences and God will let this kind of a pagan culture run its course for awhile, there's grace, grace, grace but they'd grown into a big wart on planet earth that God was about to cut off.

Here's a modern illustration of what Jonah faced. Think of the modern Iraqi who occupies the same region. They're a pretty sick lot. They've broadcast all over the internet execution style beheadings. I don't know if you've ever watched one of those but it will make you sick at your stomach. Now suppose the Lord told you, "Alright now, I want you to get off your tail and go minister to those Iraqi's, tell them I'm about to judge if them if they don't straighten up" think you might have a problem? See, I can guarantee you that's not on your agenda no matter how grateful you are for your salvation, and Jonah's just been saved for crying out loud and now he doesn't want them to be saved. We would not want to go minister to those Iraqi's. "What are they going to do to me? They might pluck my eyeballs out and have them for breakfast." Most Americans do not have the slightest clue as to the depravity of these people. Just ask some of our soldiers who've been over there and they'll tell you. These people are horrific. What these people do to human flesh is extremely disturbing to the western mind. You can't imagine it. So you may be down on old Jonah but give the guy a break. He knew very well the diseased state of these people. I doubt seriously any of us would have run off to Nineveh, "Oh, isn't this great, the Lord's given me a missionary opportunity." You'd

probably prefer like Jonah that God just wipe them off the face of the earth, get rid of that disease over there. So before you pass judgment just realize the kind of people Jonah was told to go to. They're a people that in 1:2, this is the Lord's evaluation of them, and what does he say, "Their evil has come up before Me." Now it has to get pretty bad for God to say that. But what does the command for Jonah to go imply? What does it say about God?

Let's read Jonah 3:1-2 and ask yourself, "What does this tell me about God?" **Now the word of the Lord came to Jonah the second time, saying, ²"Arise, go to Nineveh the great city and proclaim to it the proclamation which I am going to tell you."** And v 4 is the proclamation, **"Yet forty days and Nineveh will be overthrown!"** Now, it's not a good message is it? This is not good news. This is not the gospel. This is a message of judgment. So why would God want to send them this message? If God wanted to judge them wouldn't He just do it? Why this warning? Why forty days? Forty days is always the period of testing in the Bible. Why does God send them this message? Isn't it because He doesn't want to judge them? Didn't Jonah know God didn't want to judge them. What does 3:10-4:2 say? ¹⁰When God saw their deeds, that they turned from their wicked way, then God relented concerning the calamity which He had declared He would bring upon them. And He did not do *it*. ¹But it greatly displeased Jonah and he became angry. ²He prayed to the Lord and said, "Please Lord, was not this what I said while I was still in my *own* country? Therefore in order to forestall this I fled to Tarshish, for I knew that You are a gracious and compassionate God, slow to anger and abundant in lovingkindness, and one who relents concerning calamity." So Jonah obviously got pretty ticked off about this. He didn't want to go because he knew who God was. We want to turn back to that thought in a minute. But for now, isn't the fact that God sent them this message revelatory of His character? What does it reveal? That He loves all the nations. What this gets back to is one of the attributes of God. Love. God is love. He loves eternally within His own triune nature. That's why you have to have a Trinity. Don't ever be ashamed that you have to defend the trinity. The trinity is essential to Christianity. If you don't have a trinity then who does God love before He creates? Love needs an object. You don't just love yourself. That's not love. But because He's triune, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, they could love one another as Jesus says in John 17:24, "Father...you loved me before the foundation of the world." Love is a component of God's eternal being. He didn't start loving when He created. If

He did then He changed. That would be an essential change in His being. But God is immutable, He never changes. So if God is love then He must have loved eternally before creation. Who did He love, God the Father could eternally love God the Son, God the Son could love God the Spirit and so forth. So for an attribute of God to be classified as an attribute it has to be exercisable eternally. The second aspect of God's love is temporal. He loves things in creation. That's our point here. He even loves the nasty Ninevites. He doesn't want to judge them. He wants to bless them. This is startling because if you're anything like me you look out on the world and there are some pretty nasty people out there, you've got apartheid going on in South Africa, ethnic cleansing, great people, then you've got extremist Muslims trying to take over the world, bombing innocent civilians. It's difficult to warm up to the idea of evangelizing Muslims. Most of us would just rather see an atomic bomb fall on them. This is a hard passage to come to grips with. What this passage shows us is that God is long suffering, He's gracious, he let these people corrupt themselves and corrupt themselves to the point where you start to wonder, "Where is *Your* justice God? How can *You* let these people live? Where is *Your* wrath?" So we learn something about God but don't we also learn something about ourselves? When we call down God's judgment on a nation or people group, and that's obviously what Jonah wanted, "Wipe'em out God. Just slaughter'em. Terrible Ninevites." But God says, "No, I want you to get up off your duff and go to Nineveh with a message that they've got forty more days until I judge." When we want a people group judged by God what does that say about us? It says that we're not like Him. He's longsuffering, He's patient, He loves these people. He doesn't want to judge them. He doesn't want to judge evil. Yes, there comes an hour when He does judge evil but there's going to be grace, grace, grace before He judges. Judgment is His last resort. We call it down right away.ⁱⁱ He works with them and works with them and works with them and we say "Lord are you seeing this down here? Hello, look at the mass destruction of these people. Aren't You going to do something. Kill'em." That's what Jonah wanted.

And so I challenge you with this question, "Are you really all that different from Jonah?" I think we're like Jonah all the time. I think we often know who God is but we don't like who He is. That's the issue in Jonah. We get fed up with the character of God. "Oh yes, we like it when we're on the receiving end. Give me more grace God." But we don't want those Muslims to receive

one ounce of the grace of God.” Isn’t that what’s going on here? It’s a startling picture of our own hearts. Just remember, when you are calling down judgment what you’re doing is calling for the end of grace. You want the game to be over. And when the game is over there’s no more opportunity for those people.

Think of this, what has Jonah just experienced in chapter 2? Hasn’t the Lord been gracious to him and saved him? Jonah loves to receive the grace of God but now he doesn’t want the Ninevites to get any grace? No. What’s behind that? Isn’t it a sense that “I deserve the grace of God and they don’t?” Uh, uh, uh. We all do this don’t we? We all think subconsciously that we deserve grace. But if you deserved grace it wouldn’t be grace at all but what is due. See, grace is undeserved favor. It’s receiving something you don’t deserve at all. Did the Ninevite deserve it? No. Did Jonah deserve it? No. Do you and I deserve it? No. We received it and we should be glad when others receive it. In fact, we should be overjoyed if we get to play a part in it. This sticks out like a sore thumb in Jonah and I think we all need to take spiritual inventory every once in awhile. We’re here by the grace of God and for no other reason. And as long as the Lord Jesus Christ hasn’t returned and destroyed all unbelievers and set up His kingdom we’re in a day of grace. Was Jesus serious when He said, “Go therefore and make disciples of all nations?” Are we serious. You may not like Egypt too much. But is not the fact of their present existence evidence that God is still giving them grace? You may not like modern Assyria (Syria/Iraq) too much. But the Bible states that by the end of the Tribulation both Egypt and Assyria will be converted from Islam to Christianity. Isa 19:24-25, “In that day Israel will be the third *party* with Egypt and Assyria, a blessing in the midst of the earth, ²⁵whom the Lord of hosts has blessed, saying, “Blessed is Egypt My people, and Assyria the work of My hands, and Israel My inheritance.”

Does all this mean we (America) should not wage war against nations that attack us? No. But what it does mean is that we should not be like Jonah and not want to share the grace of God with other people groups. When we read the final book of the Bible, the Revelation, we find in Rev 5:9 that there will be people of every tongue, tribe, people and nation represented in heaven (also cf Rev 7:9; 14:6). How do they get there unless someone goes to them and shares the gospel with them? Paul quoting Isaiah 52:7 says, “How blessed are the feet of those who bring good news of good things!” And Jesus

says, “The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few; therefore beseech the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into His harvest.”

So let me just conclude here by asking you, “Do you think you deserve the grace you received? Do you have a problem with God’s grace toward Black people, Hispanics, Muslims, Chinese? Would you willingly engage these people and share God’s grace before judgment? Do you have a problem with the character of God, that He is longsuffering with evil in our world; with those involved in abortion, euthanasia or apartheid? Are you much different than Jonah? Am I?”

ⁱ James E. Smith, *The Minor Prophets* (Joplin, Mo.: College Press, 1992).

ⁱⁱ The fact this is in the OT is a refutation of the whole argument that the God of the OT is a bloodthirsty God, He just wipes people out. “Excuse me but what do you do with this?” Isn’t this a portrait of His graciousness, His longsuffering, His compassion, His love?

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