

Judgment is Coming

[Announce Text] Please keep your Bibles open to Jonah 3:1-10 (p. 775).

[Scripture Introduction] My name is Brett Sweet and I'm one of the pastors at Grace Christian Fellowship- though I'm normally at the Central Campus. It's my joy to return to be with you for a few weeks. If you're new we're in a series on the book of Jonah- one of the most well-known stories in the Old Testament.

[Prayer for Illumination] Please pray with me...

[Illustration] Recently my wife Ali and I watched the film "The Farewell" which has a storyline that has been judged to be worthy of prestigious awards. The storyline is essentially this: a Chinese grandmother known as Nai Nai has been diagnosed with terminal lung cancer- but, since nothing can be done to treat the disease- this pronouncement of death is hidden from her by her family and even by her doctors to allow her to enjoy her final weeks on earth. A doctor, at one point, calls it a "good lie." It is, apparently, a common phenomenon in Chinese culture.

But Nai Nai has a granddaughter named Billie who was raised in America- where you would never do this. And while her whole family gathers in China under the excuse of her cousin's wedding, Billie wrestles with whether hiding Nai Nai's impending death is the right thing to do. The movie creates an ethical conundrum: When is it okay to lie to someone? When is it okay to deceive someone? Is it loving to be silent when death is coming? What about when suffering is coming? What about when judgment is coming? What if that person would change things about her life in light of the fast approaching end? Better yet, put yourself in Nai Nai's shoes- Would you want to know?

Our passage, in many ways deals with the same dilemma- but from a divine perspective. What would God do if 120,000 people in the city of Nineveh were going to meet their end? God would be within His rights to stay silent. But here we see that God doesn't stay silent. In Jonah 3 God sends his prophet Jonah to Nineveh to tell them and us a simple truth:

[Proposition] Judgment is coming.

Despite what you might hear in many churches the Bible spends a great deal of time talking about judgment- in a variety of forms. We get a picture of it here.

Judgment is coming on Nineveh. What will God do? God is going to show us through this chapter as we follow its story. There is going to be action from start to finish. So we'll look at four actions around the idea that judgment is coming.

[Main Point 1] Action 1: God sends a messenger of Judgment

Look with me at vv. 1-2

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."

God restates his command to Jonah in the first verses of the book. The command that led to Jonah fleeing from God's presence and then living through a fierce storm and surviving inside a fish. So God sends His messenger, Jonah. And Jonah the messenger is to call out against it- not with his own thoughts. Not with the headlines of the newspaper or website- but with what God tells him. It could be translated: Proclaim the proclamation. The messenger is to speak. Some of you, when you are angry or displeased with someone, you give them the silent treatment. Yeah, that'll teach them a lesson! But when judgment is coming, our Holy God acts. And He speaks. But what will He say? We'll soon see.

Judgment is coming. And there are things to be done. Action 1 is God's action- he sends a messenger of judgment.

[Main Point 2] Action 2: Jonah proclaims the message of Judgment

Look with me at vv. 3-4

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!"

Jonah finally takes action in the right way. For the first time we see Jonah obey. He went according to the word of the LORD- the covenant God of steadfast love and faithfulness but who also won't clear the guilty. And Jonah arrives in the city. Most scholars estimate that the trip was not short. Maybe it would have taken him about a month. And we're told that Nineveh is a great city. What is fascinating to me is something that one commentator said- no cities in Israel were considered great. Even Jerusalem was basically just a decent sized town. But this

city is great. And Jonah continues to act. He proclaims the proclamation that God told him. "40 days and Nineveh shall be overthrown!" That term "overthrown" often means to be overturned like you would flip a delicate plate of china off the table with all its contents onto the hard floor to shatter and break. This is the word that described Sodom and Gomorrah being destroyed. This is a message of judgment. It's a statement that judgment is coming.

It's intriguing to me how short this message of judgment is. It's a one sentence sermon. I'm sure the nursery workers would like appreciate that! Some argue that Jonah must have said more than this- perhaps. But that's conjecture. The only action that God cares for us to know is that Jonah proclaimed this sentence of judgment. And Jonah gets to it right away.

[Illustration] When I was a kid, the Beach Boys had a hit song called "Kokomo" about a fictional Caribbean island where all your troubles would melt away. And there's a line in the song that says this, "We'll get there fast and then we'll take it slow." I mean, why not? Get away from your troubles, get to paradise quickly and then relax! But Jonah does the opposite. He takes forever to get there and then he takes it fast. He's going to pronounce his judgment and get out of town. It's as if God is the executioner of the coming judgment and Jonah is His prosecutor and he states God's case quickly.

[Application] This is really the only section of the book where Jonah behaves somewhat admirably. As an example. If you are a Christian, God has given you a message to proclaim- the good news about Jesus Christ and how salvation comes through Him to deliver you and even your enemies from judgment- have you delivered your message? Have you proclaimed the proclamation? Or do you keep putting it off? With your parents? With your friends? With that wandering sheep? Do you think that you are loving them by being silent and deceptive about coming dangers like Nai Nai's family was? When Jonah got to Nineveh he went to work right away. There are times to be prayerfully patient and there are times to proclaim. Judgment is coming, for Nineveh and for us. This requires action.

Action 1- God sends a messenger of judgment. Action 2- Jonah proclaims a message of judgment. And if God is the executioner and Jonah is the prosecutor, now it's time we meet the defendants who are on trial. What will they do? What

action will they take when they hear that judgment is coming? The answer should surprise us.

[Main Point 3] Action 3- Nineveh seeks mercy from God's judgment.

Let's read vv. 5-9 together

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."

A lot of action here. Verse 5 summarizes it and verses 6-9 give the details. When the message of God's judgment comes, every person in Nineveh acts. From the least to the greatest, all seek mercy from God. And it begins in v. 5- they believed God- which carries a meaning of saying that they trusted a person. They trusted God. And they repent. Do you see how faith and repentance go together?

Notice further the actions of the king of Nineveh. How does he act when he hears that judgment is coming? He gets up from his comfortable throne. He takes off his comfortable robe. He puts on rough, coarse, rash-inducing sackcloth. And he sits down in ashes- the dirtiest- least dignified place possible. He renounces comfort and pleasure. And this is the king! He spreads an order- everyone is to do the same. Eating doesn't matter. Drinking water doesn't matter. The same goes for your animals. Judgment is coming! This is serious business.

Notice how far Nineveh is willing to go as they take action. As they seek mercy. It's not just changing their outerwear from Nineveh's classic collection to the dirty farmhand fashion as if it's all the rage this season. To seek mercy from God's judgment means taking action in every part of their lives. It's like everyday life has stopped to try to prevent death. They're to turn from their evil way, turn from their violence. Now this is significant- Pastors John and Jeff stated in chapter one

that Nineveh was the capital of an evil nation- Assyria. Violence was their way of life! Violence was, in many ways, what made Nineveh Nineveh. It was their identity. It's almost as if the king is saying to the resident of Nineveh: if you want to be saved from judgment the action necessary is nothing less than becoming a new person!

[Illustration] We have a number of members who are from other countries- but most of us were born and raised in the USA. We Americans are an interesting group. We think we can identify however we want. I spent a summer working at SeaWorld San Diego. There was a massive training for hundreds of new hires. What was interesting was that there was a large group of young twenty-something people from Ireland who just wanted a minimum wage part-time job so that they could all afford to live together, hang out on the beach, and party most nights. What was comical to me was how, more than once, I'd see some redheaded American walk up to someone with an Irish accent and say, "You're Irish! I'm Irish too!" To which this was always the answer, "No you're not. You're American." They'd never been to Ireland. They didn't live through the Troubles. All they'd done is listen to U2 or the Cranberries a bit when they were kids. Yet they wear a "Kiss me, I'm Irish" T-shirt.

[Application] Many of us are the same way. We run up to people and claim we're Christians. We've got the T-shirt! But underneath, we're the same old person we've always been. If it feels like I'm picking on you religious types, you're right. But I'm doing it with love because I'm one of you. You see, this passage picks on religious people. When the Israelites would have heard this story, most of them were indifferent to the law of God. They didn't care about what the prophets said. And here's a true story of bloodthirsty Pagans repenting. Taking God's judgment seriously. And taking action. They were supposed to see that God's grace can come to anyone- even violent murderers. They were supposed to see that salvation from judgment comes by repenting of a whole way of life if it's sinful. They were supposed to wonder if they were like Jonah- someone who lacked obedience and refused to repent. Maybe God's judgment was coming toward them. I think we're supposed to wonder the same thing. Will we take action? Will we repent? Will we seek mercy from God's judgment?

This story shows us that judgment is coming. Action has been taken and action is needed. Action 1 was God's action- As an executioner, He sent a messenger of judgment. Action 2 was Jonah's action- like a prosecutor he proclaimed God's message of judgment. Action 3 was the action of the city of Nineveh- as defendants, they sought mercy from God's judgment. Now we return to the first and most important Actor in this true story- God.

[Main Point 4] Action 4- God relents of judgment

Look with me at v. 10

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.

God has gone to great lengths to make the Ninevites aware of the coming judgment- He did so because their evil had come up before him, chapter 1:2 said. He acts by sending a man from another country. He acts by saving that man's life by sending a fish to swallow Jonah alive. And now God acts again. God sent Jonah to tell Nineveh that judgment is coming, and now. In verse 10. In response to the repentance of Nineveh. Judgment was coming. But now it's not. And this would have struck home to the Israelites who first heard v. 10 out loud. Because He had said that before in exactly the same words.

In Exodus 32 Moses was on the mountain with God to receive the law of God. But down the hill, things were not going well. God was ready to wipe Israel off the face of the earth because they were worshipping the golden calf. But Moses interceded for the reputation of God's own name and v. 14 said this:

And the LORD relented from the disaster that he had spoken of bringing on his people.

This would have pricked the conscience of every disobedient Israelite. God seems to be treating evil Nineveh the way He treated Israel. There is debate as to whether the Ninevites were truly converted. There's no evidence of them putting their other idols away which is characteristic of conversion in the Old Testament. There's no use of the covenant name of God as we see the sailors do in chapter one. But verse 9 has shown that these Pagans had an accurate view of God in that they knew that God is active in this world. These Pagans had an accurate view of God in that they knew that God had the freedom to do as He pleases. He has the

freedom to bring judgment for their sins and He has the freedom to relent of judgment if He chooses. In fact, that's very typical of His character!

You see, being told that judgment is coming is actually a loving thing for God to say to us. It's Him telling us that the cancer we have is fatal. It's loving because it's a warning. In fact, writing after the time of Jonah, the great prophet Jeremiah could have been summarizing this whole story when he wrote in Jeremiah 18:7-8 as he declared the word of the LORD:

If at any time I declare concerning a nation or a kingdom, that I will pluck up and break down and destroy it, and if that nation, concerning which I have spoken, turns from its evil, I will relent of the disaster that I intended to do to it.

Judgment is coming. But there is hope if you take action like the Ninevites did. But you're better than the Ninevites right? You're spiritual. You're tolerant. Maybe these backward primitive Old Testament prophets who had no education might pronounce a judgment from God but that's certainly not relevant to us. To Christians. To people who follow Jesus Christ! He wouldn't say that, would he? Let me read from Matthew 12 as I did last week- where Jesus speaks to religious people

vv. 38-41

Then some of the scribes and the Pharisees answered him, saying, "Teacher, we wish to see a sign from you." But he answered them, "An evil and adulterous generation seeks for a sign, but no sign will be given to it except the sign of the prophet Jonah. For just as Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of the great fish, so will the Son of Man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth. The men of Nineveh will rise up at the judgment with this generation and condemn it, for they repented at the preaching of Jonah, and behold, something greater than Jonah is here.

[Gospel] Judgment is coming. Jesus says it. The Ninevites repented at the preaching of Jonah. But with Jesus, something greater than Jonah is here. Jesus talked about judgment a lot. He stated that there is a time coming when He will return and come and the prosecution will be over. It will be time for Him to be judge and executioner. Judgment is coming. Standing before that judgment is unavoidable. But there is a way to be preserved forever from the condemnation

that Jesus speaks about. It's by doing what the Ninevites did- they believed God- they trusted a person. Specifically, it's believing and trusting the One who is greater than Jonah- Jesus Christ who suffered on the cross to take the judgment for Jonah's running, the sin of the Ninevite who truly believed, and for anyone here today who trusts in Him. Do it today. And the evidence that you have trusted in Him will mean you take action the way the Ninevites did. You turn in repentance from everything that the Bible calls an "evil way." That's evidence that you've become a new person.

[Application] So how do we Christians live in light of the coming judgment? We live lives of freedom and wonder and joy knowing that our God is this God. The God who, when we sin, relents of the disaster and judgment He has warned us about. We think about how our God is so gracious that He didn't just send Jonah to Nineveh, but that He sent a chain reaction of Christians over thousands of years to bring the good news of Jesus to us. And we repent again. And we trust in Jesus again. And we find power to make progress.

The fact that judgment is coming should also challenge us to live like the Ninevites. Knowing that judgment was coming, the king and his citizens renounced all comfort and pleasure in order to survive the coming judgment. Are you living in light of the fact that judgment is coming? Are you willing to give up some measure of your comfort in order to lay up treasures in Heaven that will last forever. Bank accounts and sporting events and grades at the top of tests won't matter then- what will matter is if we recognize that by trusting Christ we can be sure that Nineveh won't rise up to condemn us from this wicked generation.

Since judgment is coming, this text should motivate a renewed sense of mission and evangelism in all of us. If the Ninevites can repent by God's grace then so can your children or your parents or your gay family member or the bully at school or the militant Muslim or the atheist professor or the socialist presidential candidate. God and the prophets weren't afraid to tell Nineveh that judgment was coming. Jesus wasn't afraid to stand up to spiritually dead politically powerful religious leaders to tell them that judgment is coming. We don't need to be scared either- likely, many will repent when they see that God acts by relenting of bringing judgment. All through the grace of Christ.

[Conclusion] I'm convinced that it's wrong to give an outright lie about a cancer diagnosis. It's wrong to hide it. But by stating that reality and by stating the reality that judgment is coming, lives will be saved. Because God acts and is active in this world. Judgment is coming. Those who refuse to trust Christ will find that He won't relent of the Hell He describes. If that's you I recommend you turn to the final pages of the Bible and read about the final judgment in Revelation 20:11-15. But for those who do trust Christ, listen to what comes immediately after judgment in Revelation 21:1-4

Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and the sea was no more. And I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, "Behold, the dwelling place of God is with man. He will dwell with them, and they will be his people, and God himself will be with them as their God. He will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning, nor crying, nor pain anymore, for the former things have passed away."