

Sovereignty, Election, And Grace (Part Three)

Examples of Jeremiah and Jonah

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We're going to begin this sermon by turning to Ephesians 2:8.

Ephesians 2:8-10 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. For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God has before ordained that we should walk in them.

I've been attempting to show in this most recent series on sovereignty that some of the practical aspects of God's sovereignty (and mainly, in this regard, God's grace) are much more encompassing in His salvation process than merely the forgiveness of sin. We can see in verse 8 that even faith is a gift of God.

I found a very interesting comment regarding this verse that I am going to read to you. It involves, specifically, the grammatical structure of this sentence. I got it from my Study Bible. I thought that I would pass it along to you as evidence as to how deeply grace is involved in the whole salvation process.

The grammatical gender of the word "**that**" [in verse 8] occurring in the expression "**that** not of yourselves," is neuter. Hence "**that**" cannot refer to the preceding grace or faith, both of which are feminine nouns. Nor can it refer to "you are saved," which is a masculine participle. Instead, the neuter "**that**" refers back and embraces the entire foregoing "grace you are saved" and "faith." This means then that no part of salvation is of yourselves, or due to what we do. The whole of salvation is the gift of God.

Grace, in all of its cognates, as it is used in Scripture, is the term used to indicate unmerited (unearned) divine favor, or gifts. *Zodhiates Complete*

Word Study Dictionary uses almost three pages giving technical definitions, combined with specific biblical references, showing how the Bible uses this word *grace*.

It's primary meaning is "*to rejoice*." This is very interesting because one has to think, accept, understand grace ("to rejoice") with two inferences understood as part of the word's usage. The first is that grace is that which *causes* rejoicing. This is why they frequently give as a definition to the word grace: "a gift," because does a gift not cause rejoicing? That is the first inference. The second is that grace (the gift) must be understood as having been given without constraint. It is *freely* given. No one forces the giver to *cause* the rejoicing.

Here comes a quote from the very first paragraph regarding the usage of the word "grace" in the Bible from Zodhiates.

Grace: particularly that which causes joy, pleasure, gratification, favor, acceptance for a kindness granted or desired, a benefit, thanks, gratitude, a favor done without expectation of return in absolutely free expression of the lovingkindness of God to men.

...

God's grace affects man's sinfulness, and not only forgives the repentant sinner, but brings joy and thankfulness to him. It changes the individual to a new creature without destroying his individuality.

I'm going to give you two biblical examples of how the Bible uses the word "grace." (1) The Bible uses it in a broad application sense, and comes from II Corinthians 9:8. This is a section of scripture that is often used during offering sermonettes.

II Corinthians 9:8 And God is able to make *all* grace abound toward you: that you, always having all sufficiency in all things, may abound to every good work.

Here "grace" is used in its broadest form. It represents that whatever is needed God is able to give. Grace includes free moral agency. Having the knowledge of the right to choose is a gift of God.

We're going to go to another scripture in which grace is used very specifically. This is going to come from Romans 1:5.

Romans 1:5 By whom we [the "we" meaning generally the ministry, and specifically the Apostle Paul; sort of the royal plurality—"we."] have received grace and apostleship, for obedience to the faith among all nations, for his name.

Here grace refers to the calling, forgiveness, and apostleship that the Apostle Paul received. Why was it given? It was given for obedience to the faith among all nations for His name's sake.

We're going to back off in time, and I want you (in thought) to go all the way back to the beginning. By that I mean the real beginning of creation. This will help us to understand what I mean when I say that grace is involved in the entire process from the beginning. God did not have to, nor was He constrained to, create the starry heavens and the earth. He didn't have to create us and to give us life; not only life, but also the opportunity to be like Him. He was not forced to do so. Nobody held a gun to His head. He has done what He has done because He is motivated by His very nature to share what He is and what He has with others. He is *full* of grace. We run into this expression in John 1:14. Here it is in reference to Jesus.

John 1:14 And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us, (and we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father,) full of grace and truth.

Because He is full of grace and truth He gives, and He shares of His loving powerful creative genius. It is His grace that, without constraint, decided to create, and to create beings in His image. Try as you might, you're going to be unable to think of anything that creates itself. Evolutionists dream of a creation without a Creator. They want a freely operating creation without intervention and guidance from on high. Most importantly, they want

mankind to appear to be sovereign over all. The thought behind this is that *they* want to be free of having to answer for their conduct to the true Creator.

God is creating a family in his image—sons and daughters who will be *full of grace*, even as Jesus is described in John 1:16.

John 1:16 And of his fulness have all we received, and grace for grace.

This is an interesting expression. I think the *King James* translators didn't exactly know how to translate it, because that phrase in the Greek literally means, "*Grace heaped upon grace. Grace piled on top of grace.*" In other words, "endless grace." It is what motivates Him to do what He does. His love actually can be understood to be an aspect of His grace, or His grace can be understood to be an attribute of His love. You can just turn them around. Grace and love are both action that accomplish His will.

Anybody ought to be able to tell that there is nothing haphazard about this creation. As God created it, it was designed as His gift in a balanced fashion to provide the right environment for the end product (His children) to be created in. The Creator knows what He wants. He knows what He wants to produce, and He has been moving in that direction for a long, long time. He knows the end that He has designed from the beginning, and He has been gifting men and women right along, to bring them individually, and His entire purpose generally, to that end.

Let's narrow this down. Did Abraham just raise himself up, fully equipped to do what he did? How about Jacob, or Joseph, or Moses, or Joshua, or Gideon, or Samuel, or David, or Jeremiah, or Paul? We just saw that Paul's apostleship was a gift from God. His calling was a gift from God. Every one of them was a product of God's creative effort, as David so brilliantly described in Psalm 139. Every biblical book, every God-inspired author of those books, is unanimous in showing that God is out in front, equipping and preparing the way for the development of His children and purpose, and the carrying out of His plan to accomplish these things.

Perhaps the most obvious and best example of this is our Savior. He was foreordained before the foundation of the world. God knew that Adam and Eve were going to sin. He didn't *make* them sin, but neither did He stop them from sinning. God set the stage, and they *chose* to sin. I want you to think of Jesus. He knew He was foreordained. Did this stop Jesus from praying even though He knew better than anybody else that He was foreordained?

Did Jesus appeal before His crucifixion with all of His being that this cup (meaning His crucifixion) should be removed from Him? Did David pray? Of course he did. Did any of those God was preparing for His kingdom—people who were far closer to God than we—stop making choices because they believed, as David expressed in Psalm 139? By that I mean they believed the same way that David did. None of what God does removes our responsibility to choose. Choosing, yes, even to sin, and therefore being punished is involved in the creative process.

Did David choose wrongly and sin by committing adultery? Yes. Was he punished for that? Yes he was. He lived with the pain of that sin for the rest of his life. Everybody has done the same, and all need a Savior. God anticipated this, and He was prepared.

On a much smaller scale of importance, others are shown to fit the same general pattern. I want you to answer something for your own benefit. Does David not say in Psalm 139:14, "We are fearfully and wonderfully made"? He said this in reference to himself, but it applies to you and me as well. David was referring to his physical body; to your physical body. We are *fearfully and wonderfully* made. It's amazing the way we are put together. The *Living Bible* translates that phrase: "Thank You for making me so wonderfully complex. It is amazing to think about. Your workmanship is marvelous! And how well I know it!"

Before God created Adam, He had to design him to be able to function within the environment God also designed. The basic unit of the body's construction is the cell. God designed the body to consist of billions of cells. Although each cell is basically the same, they do not, however, all function in exactly the same way. Some cells function as skin. Other cells function as

a liver, or a kidney, or an eye, or a brain, even though they all follow the same general pattern. But an eye cell cannot function as a piece of skin, nor can a liver cell function as part of the kidney. There is specific design even though the general design is the same. The body was designed with infinite care, and each part *predestined* to be present and function in a life-supporting manner when God created Adam.

When God created Adam and breathed into him the breath of life, and put into operation the next stage—the spiritual stage of His vast purpose—every cell predestined functioned exactly as He designed it.

Following Adam's creation, God said, "I will make a helper comparable to him," and He then created Eve. She was taken from Adam's side, and so she was like him. She too was designed *exactly* the way God intended, and yet she was a different individual. She was perfectly designed for the role that she was predestined for.

I Corinthians 15:45-49 And so it is written, The first man Adam was made a living soul: the last Adam was made a quickening spirit. Howbeit that was not first which is spiritual, but that which is natural: and afterward that which is spiritual. The first man is of the earth, earthy: the second man is the Lord from heaven. As is the earthy, such are they also that are earthy: and as is the heavenly, such are they also that are heavenly. And as we have borne the image of the earthy, we shall also bear the image of the heavenly.

Here Paul compares Christ to Adam from whom all the rest of mankind sprang. Christ, though a living spirit, is the second Adam from whom will spring all the rest of God's spiritual creation. The church is Christ's bride at present, but it is predestined to be His wife. The church is now described by Paul as being *in* Christ, even as Eve was *in* Adam before she was fully formed apart from him. We, like Eve, are predestined to be like Him. That's what it says in I John 3:2. "We will be like Him," and we will, like Eve, be a helper comparable to Him. But like Eve, we will function in a somewhat different role than He.

Do you think that God is going to devote any less care to preparing Jesus Christ's wife than He did with Adam? Are not the stakes exceedingly greater with us than they were with Eve? Can you begin to understand why David said what he did in Psalm 139, showing the infinite care that God was taking with him to make him to be like Christ? Do you think He's going to give you any less care than He gave to David? Absolutely not! You, like David, are a cell in that body that is going to function as Christ's wife in the Kingdom of God.

How far back in time (in the mind of God) does predestination go? I do not know. In one sense, I don't even care. I look backward only to better understand what is going on in the present and in the future. What I do know, and am thrilled with, is that God is working with me like He did with David in giving infinite loving care and attention to preparing me to be His Son's wife.

When we left off the last time, we had gotten to Jeremiah—a man set apart for a certain office before he was born. Once again, brethren, I remind you that all of these things are written for our instruction. We are to look for parallels. As God did with Jeremiah, God may be doing with you, and with me.

Jeremiah 1:4-5 Then the word of the LORD came unto me [Jeremiah], saying, *Before I formed you in the belly* I knew you;

Did you see that? "*Before I formed you in the belly ...*" That goes back before conception.

Jeremiah 1:5 Before I formed you in the belly I knew you; and before you came forth out of the womb I sanctified you, and I ordained you a prophet unto the nations.

There is more contained in the word "knew" than readily meets the eye. It means more than merely being aware of beforehand. I think that we all understand that this word carries with it the sense of intimacy. We all know pretty well that it can include, depending upon the context, sexual

intercourse, as in Genesis 4:1 where it says "Adam *knew* his wife," and she became pregnant and gave birth to Cain. And so it means more than to be merely aware of, or to be acquainted with.

Genesis 18:17-18 And the LORD said, Shall I hide from Abraham that thing which I do; Seeing that Abraham shall surely become a great and mighty nation, and all the nations of the earth shall be blessed in him?

This is interesting because you have to think of the context. You even have to think of the time. This was before the sacrifice of Isaac on Mount Moriah.

Genesis 18:19 For I *know* him, that he will command his children [he didn't have any children yet; maybe Ishmael was born, but he didn't have Isaac yet] and his household after him, and they shall keep the way of the LORD, to do justice and judgment: that the LORD may bring upon Abraham that which he has spoken of him.

God was not merely aware of Abraham. He knew Abraham inside and out. He had a thorough knowledge of Abraham's proclivities, methods, attitudes, leanings, inclinations, strengths, weaknesses, perspective, his character. Even as David shows in Psalm 139, God *knew* Jeremiah before he was formed in the womb.

Let's make a couple of practical applications of this principle and see them in other places. The first one we're going to look at is in Psalm 1:6. Everybody knows Psalm 1.

Psalm 1:6 For the LORD *knows* the way of the righteous.

He knows us just like He knew Abraham—upside, downside, inside, outside, every which way. He knows us just like He knew David. He knows the way of the righteous. It's not the pattern or the path they are following, but the way—the manner, the method—that they are living.

Now we're going to look at it in another context in Hosea 13:4-5.

Hosea 13:4-5 Yet I am the LORD your God from the land of Egypt, and you shall know no god but me: for there is no saviour beside me. I did *know* you in the wilderness, in the land of great drought.

Here "*know*" indicates "*cared for you.*" "*I cared for you. I took care of you. I provided for you. I knew what you needed under every circumstance, every step of the way* [as they were going through the wilderness]." Is He going to take any less care with you and me than He did those unconverted people in the wilderness? I don't think so. It's the same God.

Amos 3:2 You only have I known of all the families of the earth: therefore I will punish you for all your iniquities.

In this case it comes full circle and indicates marriage, intimacy with, as though He was living with them. In every case, God is showing Himself as intimately, sovereignly—from on high—involved in what is going on. This is what God is saying in Jeremiah 1:5. He knew from on high, as Creator, exactly what He wanted in Jeremiah even before Jeremiah was conceived.

You know, we think nothing of human beings inventing, developing, designing, and creating something—some machine, something electronic, a gadget or whatever it is—for a specific reason. If men can do that, why can't God? There is no reason why He can't. When men are doing that, they are predestining that object to fit in a certain place and to perform a certain work for them. Should God, who is so much smarter than us, be any different? Of course not.

God knew from on high, as Creator, exactly what He wanted in Jeremiah, and men do the same thing. Much of what we do along these lines is done in a "hit and miss"—"trial and error" way. That's the way we are. We don't know everything, like God does. He knows how to function within His laws and to bring about exactly what He wants. We follow the same pattern, but we don't know things as well as He does.

Let me give you another example of a general application of this. It's really comforting to know that this is happening.

I Corinthians 10:13 There has no temptation taken you but such as is common to man: but God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above that you are able; but will with the temptation also make a way to escape, that you may be able to bear it.

How many times do we say, "*Whoops! I forgot about that*"? Or something will happen while our back is turned that we didn't anticipate, and we have to hurry up and quickly make adjustment to make up for our stupidity or lack of foresight, or ignorance, or whatever it happened to be. But God shows, throughout the Old Testament especially, that He, from on high, from His sovereign position in the heavens, is watching what is going on. He is actively involved in bringing what He has designed to pass. If we can only have faith in that and live out our life believing it, our lives will be immensely enriched. God knows what is going on.

Isaiah 46:9-10 Remember the former things of old: for I am God, and there is none else; I am God, and there is none like me, Declaring the end from the beginning, and from ancient times the things that are not yet done, saying, My counsel shall stand, and I will do all my pleasure.

God was working out His purpose. We see it unfolding step by step from Genesis 1. When we get to Jeremiah, He has something for Jeremiah that He wanted him to do. There are reasons why God said what He did to Jeremiah.

We're going to go back now to Jeremiah, picking up from where God said, "Before I formed you in the belly I knew you."

Jeremiah 1:6-10 Then said I, Ah, Lord GOD! Behold, I cannot speak: for I am a child. But the LORD said unto me, Say not, I am a child: for you shall go to all that I shall send you, and whatsoever I command you shall speak. Be not afraid of their faces: for I am with you to deliver you, says the LORD. Then the LORD put forth his hand and touched my mouth. And the LORD said unto me, Behold, I have put my words in your mouth. See, I have this day set you over the nations and over the kingdoms, to root out, and to pull down, and to destroy, and to throw down, to build, and to plant.

There was a reason that God said what He did. The reason He said what He did was because of something that was *in* Jeremiah. We might call it a psychological problem.

Jeremiah, like Moses and Gideon before him, had a peculiarity it seems that many of God's servants have. He was timid. He was very reluctant to face such an awesome responsibility. When Jeremiah said, "I am but a child," it does not mean that he was very young, because Solomon said the same thing almost exactly. He said it before God, and we know that Solomon was thirty when he said it. It's simply an expression that can mean "*I am but a weak boy among men,*" or "*I am weak in the face of events of great importance.*"

It's to his credit that he said what he did (meaning "*I am not up to this*"), because it shows that he wasn't flippantly confident, that even at the age that he was (and he was fairly young), there was enough maturity and awareness of God. His being aware of the nature of the circumstances of the cultures around him, there was enough maturity to comprehend a fair measure of the difficulty that was going to face him. He was humbled, and afraid, and he felt insignificant in the face of it. He was paralyzed by his insecurity, because he is almost entirely focused on himself.

God responded to Jeremiah in a way that is different from the way God responded to Moses. You might remember when Moses said, "*I can't speak. I'm a stutterer,*" God was rather gruff in what He said to Moses. We have to remember, "*to whom much is given, much is required.*" Moses was a man whom God provided to walk in the halls of power in Egypt. He was accustomed to a great many more things than Jeremiah was.

As with us, there is no indication that Jeremiah had done any such thing, and so God's response to Jeremiah is done fairly well in the King James version. God's response to him was a calm and firm assurance, that "*Yes, Jeremiah, you will go,*" but it is combined with a personal touch of His finger on Jeremiah's lips. There is nothing specific in God's reply. No message is given to Jeremiah. No nations are named, and no time element either. God's reply is simply assurance, not command. Jeremiah's security was restored by a dose of being able to comprehend by what God said and what He did, that Jeremiah would go in greater strength than his alone.

I kind of paraphrased what God has said up to this time, and it goes something like this: "*It will happen, Jeremiah, even though you are no match for the job I have given you. All my intention will be realized. This really will work out, so do not be afraid because I, who even prepared you in the womb and oversaw your development after birth, will be with you all the way.*"

Doesn't that sound like "*I will never forsake you, nor leave you*"? And it worked. There was no reply from Jeremiah. Even though Jeremiah had a few downer times, he went on in the face of stiff opposition from virtually every side, to live a life of rugged, persistent obedience to his commission.

Let's back away again, and we're going to consider God's role in what has been revealed so far as compared to Jeremiah's. God formed him in the womb. God set him apart. God appointed him as prophet to the nations. God will send him so that he will go to everyone to whom he is sent. God will command him so that he will say everything he is to say. God will be with him. God will rescue him. God reaches out and touches his mouth symbolically, putting inspired words there. God appoints him over the nations and kingdoms to announce their *destruction* and *construction*. None of this takes away Jeremiah's free moral agency. Jeremiah's role is to respond.

None of us has been given a calling anywhere near the magnitude of Jeremiah's, but nonetheless the general pattern is similar. All that God does comes under the general heading of His grace. It was God's *grace*, His gift, His enabling, His opening of doors, His inspiration that enabled Jeremiah to do what he did. God is out in front of us giving us what we need to do our job. Is God with us as our defense and Savior? In this I don't mean to imply that either Jeremiah or we do not matter in this whole process. Rather, what I am emphasizing is that what God does matters a great, great deal more than what we do.

Those familiar with the book of Jeremiah I think will agree that Jeremiah's response was in no way merely passive. Despite all that God did on His part, Jeremiah was not an automaton, dumbly walking through a series of events. He had the same kind of doubts and fears that we do.

Turn now to Jeremiah 20:7. This is pretty far into his commission.

Jeremiah 20:7-18 O LORD, you have deceived me, and I was deceived: you are stronger than I, and have prevailed: I am in derision daily, every one mocked me. For since I spoke, I cried out, I cried violence and spoil; because the word of the LORD was made a reproach unto me, and a derision, daily. Then I said, I will not make mention of him [he resisted], nor speak any more in his name. [Bad choices.] But his word was in my heart as a burning fire shut up in my bones, and I was weary with forbearing, and I could not stay. For I heard the defaming of many, fear on every side, Report, say they, and we will report it. All my familiars watched for my halting, saying, Peradventure he will be enticed, and we shall prevail against him, and we shall take our revenge on him. But the LORD is with me as a mighty terrible one: therefore my persecutors shall stumble, and they shall not prevail; they shall be greatly ashamed: for they shall not prosper: their everlasting confusion shall never be forgotten. But, O LORD of hosts, that tries the righteous, and sees the reins and the heart, let me see your vengeance on them: for unto you have I opened my cause. Sing unto the LORD, praise you the LORD: for he has delivered the soul [or the life] of the poor from the hand of evildoers. Cursed be the day wherein I born: let not the day wherein my mother bare me be blessed. Cursed be the man who brought tidings to my father, saying, A man child is born unto you: making him very glad. And let that man be as the cities which the LORD overthrew, and repented not: and let him hear the cry in the morning, and the shouting at noontide; because he slew me not from the womb; or that my mother might have been my grave, and her womb to be always great with me. Wherefore came I forth out of the womb to see labour and sorrow, that my days should be consumed with shame?

You can see that Jeremiah is not insensitive to all that was going on around him, and happening to him. He is deeply affected by the pains of his responsibility, and he feels betrayed, because in counting the cost of his appointment he had not considered that it would be anywhere near physically and emotionally draining as it was. And Jeremiah is torn by inner turmoil in the midst of almost continuous persecution.

God had warned him, and on several occasions, even prior to this point, He reassured him. We in our trials must come to the point of trusting Him regardless of the circumstances, like Jeremiah did. We see here in Jeremiah 20 a particularly low point in his life. You can see he made wrong choices as well as right ones. The right ones were overwhelmingly greater than the ones that were wrong, but all of God's working with him did not remove Jeremiah's responsibility to choose. He made wrong choices, and he repented and went on, rejuvenated by the repentance and the infusion of the desire to do the work of God. Jesus said, "He that endures to the end, the same shall be saved."

Brethren, there are prices to be paid for having been given such a holy possession and responsibility as we have. Brethren, God's strength is made perfect in our weakness as He works us through these character-forming circumstances, just as He did with Jeremiah. Jeremiah succeeded in what God set him to do.

We're going to take a look at another Old Testament book and a character from this same perspective as we did with Jeremiah. Again we're going to see that God was out in front of events, causing them to happen. He is in the event while they happen, and it is His purpose that is reached through the event.

We're going to go to the book of Jonah. The book of Jonah provides a provocative illustration of God's sovereignty in the life of an individual called to do a work for God. Jonah displays a consistent failure for God who called him to do the work, and for the work's purpose. I specifically wanted to go through this because I think, brethren, we have a tendency to be far more like Jonah than like Jeremiah.

I think we all know that the work the book of Jonah describes was accomplished, but with little or no thanks to the uncooperative Jonah. The book gives us a clear insight into God's efforts to work through our lack of cooperation, because each and every one of us has a measure of the same characteristics as Jonah reveals. The book gives many specific affirmations of God's sovereignty. Let's begin in Jonah 1:1.

Jonah 1:1-2 Now the word of the LORD came unto Jonah the son of Amittai, saying, Arise, go to Nineveh, that great city, and cry against it; for their wickedness is come up before me.

First notice that it is God, like all the other servants in the Bible, who initiates Jonah's calling, gives him his commission to go to Nineveh to proclaim before it its sin, and to give warning. God did both the calling and the commission.

Jonah 1:3 But Jonah rose up to flee unto Tarshish from the presence of the LORD, and went down to Joppa; and he found a ship going to Tarshish: so he paid the fare thereof, and went down into it, to go with them unto Tarshish from the presence of the LORD.

Jonah immediately resists. If you are familiar with the geography of that area, Assyria was north and a little bit east of Jerusalem, or Joppa, which was on the coast. So which direction did Jonah go? Jonah went west. He wanted to get to Tarshish. He wanted to go in the opposite direction that God wanted him to go. So the solution Jonah, says is, "*Let's get out of here!*" Bug out, see!

In verse 4, God reacts.

Jonah 1:4 But the LORD sent out a great wind into the sea, and there was a mighty tempest in the sea so that the ship was like to be broken.

The *King James Version* translates that very weakly. The words "sent out" is closer to the English "hurled." "God *hurled* [*whoom!*] a great tempest!" Another translation says, "God **flung** it out!" God allowed Jonah to just get far enough way, and "Bam!" He reacted. Now why did God react? We have to consider that. He could have gotten somebody else. No, God had chosen Jonah to do the job. Who is sovereign? God or Jonah? But God reacted in a way in the hope that Jonah's mind would be changed so that he would make the right choice, turn 180 degrees, and head on back toward Assyria.

I'm saying this because I want you to see that God's reaction did not remove Jonah's choices; but what God did was follow His own instruction that is given in Proverbs 22:36: "Train up a child in the way that he should go." That word "train" means, "*hedge him in, narrow him in, constrain him; narrow his choices.*" He left him with the choices to make, but He narrowed them in.

Jonah 1:6 So the shipmaster came to him [Jonah], and said unto him, What mean you, O sleeper? Arise, call upon your God, if so be that God will think upon us, that we perish not.

Look at Jonah 3:9. Here it's not the shipmaster who is speaking, but the king of Nineveh.

Jonah 3:9 Who can tell if God will turn and repent, and turn away from his fierce anger, that we perish not?

Both the ship's captain and the Ninevite king understood this important principle—that man is subject to God's will. Man proposes; God disposes. God is sovereign. He cannot be forced by the will of man. God cannot be forced against His better judgment. He is going to do the right thing regardless. He would not be God if He didn't do the right thing.

It's so interesting that these pagan kings understood this. Jonah—the man of God—had forgotten it in his anger, in his desperation to get away from his calling. He was doing this because he hated the Ninevites with a passion, and he didn't want to follow through because he didn't want the Ninevites to repent. He didn't want the Ninevites to be blessed by God, because they were pagans.

Jonah 1:14 Wherefore they cried unto the LORD, and said, We beseech you, O LORD, we beseech you, let us not perish for this man's life, and lay not upon us innocent blood: for you, O LORD, have done as it pleased you.

Do you know who's speaking this? The pagans! They understood that it was God who hurled out the storm. They understood now that the cause of the

storm was the sin of Jonah, and they were about to throw him into the sea, and they did not want to be held responsible for his death.

Jonah 1:15 So they took up Jonah, and cast him forth into the sea: and the sea ceased from her raging.

The context implied that as soon as Jonah hit the water and sank, the storm stopped just like that. So you see, God is sovereign over the sea, just like Jesus was over the Sea of Galilee. "Peace! Be still!" and the storm stopped just like that!

Jonah 1:17 Now the LORD had prepared a great fish to swallow up Jonah. And Jonah was in the belly of the fish three days and three nights.

This word translated "prepared" in the King James is kind of interesting, because modern translations translate this word as "appointed." "*God appointed a great fish.*" There is one interesting difference in the King James translation that appears in Isaiah 65 where the same word appears in verse 12. God is speaking here to the Israelites.

Isaiah 65:12 Therefore will I *number* you

That word "number" is the word translated "prepared" in Jonah, and also translated "appointed." What is so interesting is that this word also means "destined." "*I will destine you to the sword.*" That's what God was telling the Israelites in this case. "*I am appointing you to the sword.*" I bring this up because this thing about God's sovereignty is all through the book. God is running the show. We'll see more of this before the sermon is over.

Go back to Jonah again, to chapter 2. Jonah is praying now from out of the belly of the fish that God appointed to swallow him up.

Jonah 2:1-2 Then Jonah prayed unto the LORD his God out of the fish's belly, and said, I cried by reason of my affliction unto the LORD, and he heard me: out of the belly of hell [or the grave] cried I, and you heard my voice.

All I want you to see here is that Jonah is now clearly stating in his prayer that he understood it was God who threw him into the sea, it was God who threw out the great storm, and it was God who brought the fish that swallowed him up. Those men actually threw him off the boat, but he is attributing it to God.

Jonah 2:7-9 When my soul fainted within me I remembered the LORD: and my prayer came in unto you, into your holy temple: They that observe lying vanities forsake their own mercy. But I will sacrifice unto you with the voice of thanksgiving, I will pay that that I have vowed. Salvation [or deliverance] is of the LORD.

Jonah's mind is changing, and he is acknowledging God's sovereignty to do what He is doing to him (to Jonah).

Jonah 2:10 And the LORD spake unto the fish, and it vomited out Jonah upon the dry land.

God commanded the fish, and it did what God wanted it to do. In chapter 3:1 God again initiates His word to Jonah the second time. We're going to jump to chapter 4 and verse 6.

Jonah 4:6 And the LORD God prepared [appointed, destined] a gourd, and made it to come up over Jonah, that it might be a shadow over his head, to deliver him from his grief. So Jonah was exceeding glad of the gourd.

God appoints a plant and makes it grow rapidly in order to cover Jonah.

Jonah 4:7 But God prepared [appointed] a worm when the morning rose the next day, and it smote the gourd that it withered.

Jonah 4:8 And it came to pass, when the sun did arise, that God prepared [appointed] a vehement east wind; and the sun beat upon the head of Jonah, that he fainted, and wished in himself to die, and said, It is better for me to die than to live.

Let's summarize. Overall, the book of Jonah witnesses to us of the compassion of God's sovereignty. God doesn't lose His cool with the recalcitrant Jonah, but He works with him to bring him around to make the right choices. Look at the detail that the book gives as to how God worked with him to bring him around. If God had just left Jonah to his own devices, both Jonah and the Ninevites would have been lost. The book then gives the implication that the entire creation stands ready to do the Creator's will. Fish, gourds, worms, wind, it matters not. The Creator speaks, and they respond.

It is God who controls the destiny of everybody on the ship, as well as everybody in Nineveh. He put the ship in such danger that it was ready to sink, and at the same time He is the One who spares them. There was a great deal on the line here, and as a result Jonah paid dearly in pain, in fear, in embarrassment. I dare say that perhaps some of us are just as opinionated, intolerant, hardheaded, and sulky as Jonah. The book shows that it was God's compassion, and that He takes no pleasure in the death of the wicked.

Jonah is certainly not a man whose example we should follow. If we do, we invite God, who, because of His mercy, will react much like He did with Jonah—calling on the forces of the creation, as well as people or demons, to narrow our choices to the right ones in order that He might transform us. Jonah's recalcitrant attitude doesn't frustrate God, and God is ultimately shown in this book to be sovereign. He is the ultimate in all things.

Listen to what Job has to say.

Job 12:13-25 With him [with God] is wisdom and strength. He has counsel and understanding. Behold, he breaks down, and it cannot be built again: he shuts up a man, and there can be no opening. Behold, he withholds the waters, and they dry up: also he sends them out, and they overturn the earth. With him is strength and wisdom: the deceived and the deceiver are his. He leads counselors away spoiled, and makes the judges fools. He loosens the bond of kings, and girds their loins with a girdle. He leads princes away spoiled, and overthrows the mighty. He removes away the speech of the trusty, and takes away the understanding of the aged. He pours contempt upon princes, and weakens the strength of the mighty. He discovers deep things out of darkness, and brings out to

light the shadow of death. He increases the nations, and destroys them; he enlarges the nations, and straightens them again. He takes away the heart of the chief of the people of the earth, and causes them to wander in a wilderness where there is no way. They grope in the dark without light, and he makes them to stagger like a drunken man.

Proverbs 21:30 There is no wisdom [no insight, no plan] nor understanding nor counsel [that can succeed] against the LORD.

Isaiah 14:24 The LORD of hosts has sworn, saying, Surely as I have thought, so shall it come to pass: and as I have purposed, so shall it stand.

Isaiah 14:27 For the LORD of hosts has purposed, and who shall disannul it? And his hand is stretched out, and who shall turn it back?

We're called to participate in the purpose of God, not on a par with Him, but subordinate to His finality. He is the Sovereign; we are the subjects. He is the Creator. We are the responder.

In the book of Jonah, Jonah is a marked man, and God is after him because God loves him. He intends to win and change Jonah. The drama of this book primarily consists of God's pursuit of Jonah, but Jonah must first be confronted with evidence of his disobedience. He's got to *know* that he is a sinner. It's not just an intellectual thing. He is a *rebel* to the core! So Jonah has to first be confronted with the evidence of his disobedience, and then with God's merciful release and deliverance.

God doesn't make Jonah sin, but He did accurately pick the right man to produce this book, and I think that's what God had in mind. God really *knew* Jonah inside and up, inside and out, up and down. He knew all Jonah's attitudes, his inclinations, his intolerances, his hatred, his likes and dislikes. God knew everything about him. If Jonah, with his prejudiced intolerance of the Ninevites, has been saved from the consequences of *his* disobedience, how can he possibly begrudge the Ninevites being saved from the

consequences of *their* disobedience? Because of God's working with Jonah, all of mankind receives a tremendous lesson, because Jonah needed this personal and individual display of God's sovereign grace.