

A Shocking Response | Jonah 3

God sends Jonah to Nineveh to proclaim judgment, and the people respond by repenting, fasting, and turning from evil. The passage shows that God mercifully uses his word to bring sinners to repentance.

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Automatic Shownotes

Chapters

- 0:46** Jonah Goes to Nineveh
- 2:27** Mercy Begins in Prayer
- 3:09** Nineveh's Great Contrast
- 6:17** Three Movements of Mercy
- 15:58** Nineveh Repents
- 20:23** What Repentance Looks Like
- 35:44** God Relents in Mercy
- 42:28** Greater Than Jonah

Long Summary

Jonah 3 | Jonah 3 YYYY-MM-DD• Speaker unknown• Jonah 3 Main Point: God mercifully brings sinners to repentance through his word. Outline: 1. Jonah is sent again to Nineveh (vv. 1–4) - The word of the Lord comes to Jonah a second time, showing mercy to Jonah and to Nineveh. - Jonah is told to go to Nineveh and proclaim the message God gives him. - He obeys and announces that Nineveh will be overthrown in forty days. - The sermon emphasizes that God uses his word to pursue both religious rebels and open sinners. 2. Nineveh repents (vv. 5–9) - The people believe God, fast, and put on sackcloth from the greatest to the least. - The king leaves his throne, removes his robe, and sits in ashes as a sign of mourning. - He issues a decree calling the city to turn from evil and violence and to call out to God. - The passage is presented as a picture of conviction, repentance, humility, and urgent turning from sin. 3. God relents (v. 10) - When God sees their turn from evil, he relents of the disaster he said he would bring. - The sermon explains this as God's unchanging purpose working through his word and his people. - The chapter is contrasted with Jonah's resistance and with Jesus as the greater Jonah, who brings a clearer word of mercy and salvation.

Brief Summary

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Tags

Jonah 3, God, mercifully, sinners, repentance, word, main point, speaker unknown, scripture, salvation

Transcript

[0:29] Today's scripture reading is from Jonah 3. It can be found on page 775 in the Pew Bible in the Rack before you.

Jonah Goes to Nineveh

[0:46] Let's hear God's word. Jonah goes to Nineveh. Then the word of the Lord came to Jonah the second time, saying, Arise, go to Nineveh, that great city, and call out against it the message that I tell you. So Jonah arose and went to Nineveh, according to the word of the Lord. Now Nineveh was an exceedingly great city, three days' journey and breath. Jonah began to go into the city, going a day's journey. And he called out, Yet forty days, and Nineveh shall be overthrown. And the people of Nineveh believed God. They called for a fast and put on sackcloth, from the greatest of them to the least of them. The people of Nineveh repent.

[1:34] 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 men nor beast, herd nor flock, taste anything. Let them not feed or drink water, but let man and beast be covered with sackcloth and let them call out mightily to God. Let everyone turn from his evil way and from the violence that is in his hands. Who knows, God may turn and relent and turn from his fierce anger, so that we may not perish. When God saw what they did, how they turned from the evil way, God relented of the disaster that he said he would do to them, and he did not do it. This is the word of the Lord.

Mercy Begins in Prayer

[2:27] Let's pray. Lord, we thank you for your word today. Thank you that we can read it, we can hear it, and now dedicate time to thinking about it together. Pray that we do more than just think. We pray that we would receive it, accept it as true and rest in your character. Help us to have focus upon it. We know there are many distractions and items that vie for our attention, but nothing more important than hearing from your word. So grant us clarity of mind, an open heart, a willing spirit. We pray in Jesus' name. Amen.

Nineveh's Great Contrast

[3:09] The picture on the sermon graphic is a rendering of the city of Nineveh, that ancient city. And you'll notice there's a great contrast between the two sides. On the one side, it looks like a wonderful place you might want to go on vacation. And on the other side it looks like a scene out of an apocalyptic dystopian movie, but it's the same city. But we're doing a series between Jonah and Nahum. Jonah is the scene where it is looking wonderful and serene and peaceful, and Nahum is the picture of judgment. Same city, about 125 years apart. Same God, different result. Mercy in Jonah, judgment in Nahum. The passage where mercy is really put on display is Jonah chapter 3. It's been leading to this through Jonah.

[4:04] And it helps us to see that God is a God of mercy and he's a God of judgment. And he's free to show that however he wants, however he pleases, however he wills, according to his good pleasure. And here we get to learn about God, the God of mercy, and Jonah 3. He's been trying to get Jonah to Nineveh since chapter 1. You might have noticed the same words that opened chapter 3, that started chapter 1. The difference being, of course, a second time. The second time is because he sent him the first time in chapter one. God sends Jonah, the prophet, to Nineveh to go and to cry out against it because their sin, their wickedness had come up to him. But Jonah didn't want to go to Nineveh. And he went everywhere else he could go but Nineveh. He went complete opposite direction, found himself jumping overboard of a ship.

[4:58] Into the water, and eventually into a great fish's mouth, where he descended even deeper into the belly of the fish, where he cried out upon the Lord. The God showed mercy to him, and he ended up getting vomited out of this great fish and landing on the seashore. And there he stood at the end of chapter 2 into chapter 3, as he's covered in, whatever's in a giant fish's stomach, certainly a lot of bile and filth and nastiness all over him. And he's drenched in that to remind him, no doubt, of his sin and rebellion against God. And that's what it looks like. That's what it smells like. And that's what it is. And God comes to him, drenched in that sin, reeking of his filth, and God speaks to him. It's remarkable, isn't it? The chapter is about God's mercy to Nineveh, but there's mercy for Jonah in Jonah 3 as well.

[6:03] That's really the main point, I think, of the passage, is that God mercifully brings sinners to repentance through his word. That's what he does. We see it in Jonah 3. We see it in our lives as well.

Three Movements of Mercy

[6:17] We'll walk through the passage in three movements of mercy. I'd like to change the first point because I came up with something better than I think is in the bulletin from earlier in the week. So it's Jonah resent, verses 1 through 4.

[6:35] And then in verses 5 through 9, Nineveh repents, and then in verse 10, God relents. So Jonah resent, Nineveh repents, God relents. Let's look first at Jonah resent. We see again that mercy is in the driver's seat here for this chapter. First for Jonah, the word of the Lord came to Jonah a second

time. It comes to him again. This is a second chance, if you will, for Jonah. If he would have just obeyed the first time, it would be chapter one right to chapter three. The word of the Lord came to Jonah the prophet and said, go to Nineveh. And then he goes to Nineveh, but he didn't go. He disobeyed. But now here comes God again. Okay, Jonah, in the midst of his sin, in the midst of his filth, God's mercy hanging over him and says, okay, Jonah, it's time to go. Arise and go to Nineveh, that great city, verse 2, and call out against it the message that I tell you. So Jonah arose and went. So he's reset to go. But it's also mercy for Nineveh.

[7:43] He's telling him to go to Nineveh to call out against it and to bring a particular message to Nineveh, to call out. He's to speak to it. He's to tell it something. He's got a message for Nineveh. Nineveh is a great city, a strong city, powerful city, opponents of Israel. It wouldn't have been Jonah's favorite place to go. That's why he literally would rather die than go to Nineveh because he didn't want to be there. He didn't want to obey God and to bring the message there. But this is what God does. He brings the message to unworthy people. He brings the message of his word to unworthy people. And so he sends Nineveh again. I send Jonah again to Nineveh. What persistence. This is the God of mercy. What does this tell us about God? It tells us that he is a God of mercy. He gives another chance. For Jonah, he's getting a second chance. For Nineveh, he's going and bringing the message to their doorstep so they will hear it.

[8:50] This is the God of second chances. This is the God of reset. This is what the gospel is. It's a reset. It restarts. Isn't that good news? Have you ever, am I the only one in the room that's ever wanted to reset a day? Or a week? Or a month? Maybe a decade. Maybe decades. That's what the gospel brings. It actually brings a restarting, a clearing of the deck, a reset. Who you were, what characterized you.

[9:29] Who you've been? Reset. As Paul says in 1 Corinthians, after he lists a laundry list of flagrant, odious sins, such were some of you, but you've been washed. You've been sanctified. You've been justified. You've been cleansed in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ. Reset. That's the gospel brings. And this reset comes through the word. So that's why God tells Jonah to go to Nineveh and to call out against it the message. The emphasis in this whole passage is on the word going forward. You see it in verse one, the word of the Lord came to Jonah. In verse two, go and call out against it the message that I tell you. Verse three, so Jonah went to Nineveh according to the word of the Lord. Verse 4, he called out that message.

[10:25] Then they respond to the word in verse 5. Verse 6, the word that Jonah preached that God gave him to bring to Nineveh actually reaches the king. It's all about the word. This is what God wants to do. He wants to get the word in this city to do its work. So he sent Jonah again. Jonah is resent to Nineveh to bring the word to them. He calls it a great city. Twice in the passage, calls it a great city. We should think about that. God repeats twice, a great city. It's great in reputation. It's been called a great city. It's great in size. It's great in accomplishment. But if we're honest, it's great in idolatry and wickedness as well. This is a valuable lesson for us to think about God's perspective on Nineveh. Because actually, the most repeated word in the passage is Nineveh, seven times. Called the great

city twice, repeated the name seven times. Get our attention. It's an old city all the way back to Genesis 11. And God teaches us something about it.

[11:36] If we're going to have God's attitude towards cities, cities we live in, cities in this world, it would be unbiblical and inconsistent with God's character to just hate the cities. Wicked, evil, pure hatred. But it would also be inconsistent and ungodly to love it, love it in all of its wickedness, so that we are worldly. The way that God approaches it seems to be that he has love for the people, even to send the gospel there, and even an appreciation, perhaps, of some things about it, without an embracing of its idolatry, such that it needs to be saved out of it. So there should be some, let's just say for Boston, there should be something about this place that causes you to say, this is a great place.

[12:39] But it really needs God's grace. If it's just destroy it and torch it, be done with it, that doesn't seem to have the heart of compassion, but if it's just, I love it and all of it's sin, that's not the heart of holiness. You see the tension living in this world? God renew, restore, rebuke, bring them to faith. And the means by which God is going to bring about that action is to send his people here, Jonah, with the word into that place. And so Jonah obeys. And he goes. He goes to Nineveh. He obeys that word. That word does its work on him. God says to Jonah, go to Nineveh and he goes to Nineveh and he preaches. Verse four, he begins to go into the city, going a day's journey and he calls out yet 40 days and Nineveh shall be overthrown.

[13:38] Probably not the best sermon you've ever heard, but that's what he preached. Perhaps it's just an abbreviation of the entire sermon. Maybe that's his main point that he was bringing. Or maybe he didn't say a whole lot. But he did give the warning, 40 days and Nineveh shall be overthrown. He provides a countdown clock in the town square. 40 days, put it up. This place is going down. God sees, he's angry. you got 40 days. You see the mercy? He didn't say, one second, and it's done. 40 days. The implication is there's time to respond. You got 40 days. Get your house in order because there's a king that's coming, and he's going to do something. The countdown clock is the crisis in the passage. That's the whole issue. How is this going to get fixed? How is this judgment going to be getting taken care of? What's going to happen? 40 days and Nineveh will be overthrown.

[14:50] God is a God of mercy. He brings the gospel, he brings the law, and he brings it to Nineveh. It's remarkable how relentlessly he's pursuing Nineveh, a city that was rebelling against him. It's remarkable how relentless he pursues Jonah, a religious guy that rebels against him. What a God of mercy. We have a one-size-fits-all application for us. If you're the religious person that rebels against God, look at Jonah. God pursues him in mercy. If you're the unbeliever that hasn't submitted yourself to God, you look at this and you say.

[15:33] I'm like Nineveh, and he pursues me, and he does. To every single person, God brings the message of the gospel, and he says, listen, you don't have eternity. You must turn. If you don't turn from your sin, you're going to be judged. That's mercy. So whether Jonah or Nineveh, religious or irreligious, the answer is the same. Turn and receive him.

Nineveh Repents

[15:58] Let's look what happens to Jonah and to Nineveh in verses 5 through 9. So Jonah's resent. Now Nineveh repents. Verses 5 through 9. We see the message remarkably, perhaps shockingly, is received. Look at the people in verse 5. The people of Nineveh believed God. They believed God. Jonah comes and preaches the message, and they believed it.

[16:27] Can you imagine Jonah's face? yet 40 days, and Nineveh shall be overthrown? And they receive that word and believe it? His face must have been shocked as they called for a fast and put on sackcloth from the greatest of them to the least of them. The fasting and the sackcloth were demonstrations of mourning. It's an outward demonstration of inward remorse. They're broken by their sin. It's like somebody died. So they're saying, no more eating and take off these clothes and put on something that demonstrates the mourning of my heart. They're broken over the sin. And it wasn't just like a couple of guys or a couple of families. It says, from the greatest of them to the least of them. This is a comprehensive reception of the word. Jonah comes in, kicking rocks, going to Nineveh, and they believe what he says. What a shock.

[17:26] But it doesn't stop with the people. Look at verse 6. The Word, that same Word that God gave Jonah, that Jonah gave the town, now made its way to the ear of the king, the king of Nineveh. The Word reached the king of Nineveh. It's almost like the Word is a character in the story. The Word is working through. God gives the Word to Jonah, and Jonah gives it, and then And the word just goes and it goes to the greatest, to the latest, at least. And then it makes his way into the king's palace. The word reached the king of Nineveh, verse 6, and he arose from his throne, removed his robe and covered himself with sackcloth and sat in ashes. You see, this is so visual. The king is there and it hits him. It's almost a picture of him sitting on his throne, kind of enjoying his authority and his place of significance and prominence as he's exalted up in his robe upon his throne as the king of Nineveh in the great Assyrian capital city.

[18:30] And the word comes to him, and he got up from his throne, stands up. He takes off his robe, his outward demonstration of his royalty, and he puts on a new robe, a sackcloth. And then he sits in ashes to demonstrate humiliation and mourning. The king has been broken. And he got out of his throne and went and sat down, and he didn't stop there. He issued a proclamation, verse 7, an official kingly edict, a proclamation, and published it throughout 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 every man and beast be covered with sackcloth, and let them call out mightily to the Lord. 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.

[19:36] He issues this decree. What's his decree? He's basically issuing the message. Repent. He's taking the message that God gave Jonah, that Jonah gave the people, that made its way to the king, and now he's turning that thing around, and he's publishing it with his authority, and he's saying, listen, repent. Turn from your sin and your evil ways, every single one of you, and maybe God will spare us.

It's quite amazing. Every single one, turn from your evil and your violence. And it's a little bit of hope. Maybe God will turn. If we turn, maybe he'll turn. And we'll live. We won't perish.

What Repentance Looks Like

[20:23] That's the scene. What do we make of it? Well, let's just think about this. What happens in this scene? What's going on in verses 5 through 9? Well, it seems at its core there's a conviction over sin, right? It seems really clear. Strong conviction. There's repentance. There's turning from sin. So we say conviction of sin. What we're talking about, what I mean by conviction of sin is that there's a sense that something we're doing is wrong. And more than it's wrong, it's actually offensive to God and it shouldn't be done. This is different than just saying something's wrong and I don't like the consequences it brings me. It's really wrong and it's offensive to God. It's deep down conviction. When we do something wrong, we may feel it in our conscience and think, ooh, that wasn't really the way I should have spoken or acted or done this particular thing. But we may be able to get away with that without anything else. But conviction of sin from God actually gets in so deeply that you can't function without dealing with the sin. And that's what's happening to the king, and that's what's happening in Nineveh. There's an overwhelming conviction from sin, and they want to turn from this sin.

[21:47] They turn from it and it's comprehensive it's far-reaching it goes literally from the king to the cows it's interesting how the animals and nature worked their way into jonah's story, it's it's an emphasis it's a great expansive repentance the king all the way down to the animals don't don't even let them feed or drink water or beast be covered with sackcloth everybody's walking around. The cow's got sackcloth on. The people have sackcloth on. The king has. This is comprehensive. The whole city is in mourning for their sin. Well, how did this happen? How? Well, it certainly didn't happen because the sermon was so awesome. Or because the guy was such a great preacher and lover of the people. He doesn't really want to be there. We're going to see in chapter 4, he's still got issues with Nineveh and with God. The sermon on its face was pretty average.

[22:49] He doesn't care for them and love them. He doesn't preach a stellar sermon. It's not Jonah. It's God. The reason why the people respond in the way that they do is because God accompanied his word with his power and brought about the conviction. That's the only reason why anybody ever responds to the gospel. There's no other explanation how somebody could receive the word of God. How? How? How does he make the arrow fit? Theologians talk about a general call and a particular or an effectual call. A general call means that the message goes out, generally speaking, and it falls on everybody who's in earshot of it. It falls on everybody. So in this room, every single person hears the gospel. Affectual call means that there are people who really hear it. Not just that they really understand it, but God accompanies the words with power. And when power accompanies the word, then people get lit up and they are broken over their sin and they have a sense of God's holiness and they respond in faith. That's what happens.

[24:08] In my own life, wow, it's hard to believe, almost 30 years ago, I walked out of the house in the morning, going to work, with a heavy burden on my back, with God's name on my tongue, taking it in vain, angry at God. Walked back the same door, nine hours, ten hours later, praising God. What happened? The word of the gospel hit home. That day I met and talked with a believer about the gospel, and he explained it to me, and I received it by faith. How?

[25:00] God accompanies his word with his power, and people receive it. That's why, brother or sister, you're a Christian. Isn't that great news? Listen to what had happened in 1 Thessalonians. Paul was trying to explain to this young church about what in the world has happened there when pagans received the gospel. And this is what he says, 1 Thessalonians 1, verse 5, The gospel came to you not only in word, general call, but also in power and in the Holy Spirit and in full conviction. And you turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God and to wait for his son from heaven, whom he raised from the dead, Jesus, who delivers us from the wrath to come. God sends his word.

[25:53] This is what happened. This is what happens in 2 Kings when Josiah finds the book of the law and he's ripped apart in his heart. He's broken over it in Nehemiah 8-10. This is what God does through his word. Why? How? Because the word of God, as Hebrews says, is living and active and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing the divisions of the soul, joints, and marrow, discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart. And no creature is hidden from his sight, but all are naked and exposed to the Him with whom we must give account. The Bible, as Spurgeon said, is not just a book that we read.

[26:36] The Bible is the book that reads us. It tells us who we are and lays us open before Him. And mercifully, God shows us Christ through that book. Praise the Lord. So how did this happen? Because God used the message of Jonah, the word of God, accompanied it with his power, and they received it. Even Nineveh received his word. Jonah's walking around, if we admit it, he's a broken arrow, walking around trying to hit a bullseye, but God can hit the bullseye with broken arrows. And he went right into the target. And from the king to the cows, the whole town is mourning before him. This is supernatural. This is what God does. That's the scene. So what can we learn from it? I think these people in Nineveh become very instructive for us. We talked last week about Jonah, his repentance. Let's just be honest. We've seen better, right? Nineveh, we're seeing better. Notice what they do.

[27:56] It says in verse 5, they believed. That's first. They hear the word and they believe. So what can we learn from Nineveh? What can we learn about Jonah 3 that helps us with our repentance? Believe the word. Hear the word and believe it. This is how God brings about repentance. This is how he brings mercy. This is how he turns us from walking this way in sin, turning from sin, and walking back to God. That's what repentance is. It's a turning from sin and turning to God. It's a turning in the mind. This is wrong. It's turning in the heart. This is foolish and not valuable. And it's a turning in life. This is what it looks like to do the right thing. So he believes God's word. He also does something else. They do something else. They name their sin. Again, like we said last week, not in sanitized language that kind of makes it sound not so bad. I mean, look at the words that are used. Verse 8.

[28:57] Let everyone, the king says, turn from his evil way, from the violence that is in his hands. What characterized in classic Nineveh? Evil, violent people. That's their sins. Call it what it is. Evil and violent before the God of Israel. Turn from it. Another image. So we see believe the word, name it. There's also a need to get off your throne. We're not all kings in this room, but we're all walking around with a bit of a kingdom complex, if we admit it. Let's think about it. This king hears the word and he immediately gets off his throne. Yes, it was practical to put on the sackcloth, but it's also spiritual to demonstrate the fact that he is not number one. He's not the king. He needs to get off his throne. So he gets off his throne, he takes off his robe, and he humbles himself. You know what repentance is? It's a getting off of your throne. That's what it is. We sin when we look at God's word and what God says to do or not do and say, actually, God, I kind of feel like being king of this area in my life. I know what you say.

[30:14] But I'm going to do what I want to do because I'm in charge of this one. Repentance says, no, no, you're in charge. I take the robe off. I step down off the throne and I say, you're the king. Please forgive me. Grant me mercy. Call it what he calls it and confess the sin. Repentance is a declaration that I've been a self-worshipper and I want to be a God-worshipper. And repentance is not just the day of conversion, repentance is every single day because, regrettably, in this life, sin is every day. So we turn. So get off the throne. They also instruct us that sin has offended God. It's not just an inconvenience to us. It's not just something we might be embarrassed about. It actually offends God. Look at verse 9. Who knows? God may turn and relent and turn from his fierce anger so that we may not perish.

[31:18] This is something that I think as Christians in particular, we need to see, that just because our sin has been paid for at the cross and it has been wiped away and, we're not going to be punished for our sin, it doesn't make the sin any less offensive and odious and sinful. It actually offends God. It says here that this is fierce anger. So we actually want to see that our sin is not just something that's kind of in a morally neutral category. It's not. It actually offends God. And when we repent, we have to agree with God about our sin. Like it says in Romans 4, let God be found true and every man be found a liar. We have to confess our sin before him. Then in verse 8, the pot of repentance is forsaking sin, turning from it. But let man and beast be covered with sackcloth. Let them call out mightily to the Lord. Let everyone turn from his evil way. Turning, that's a forsaking. I don't want to keep it. I'm done with it. No more.

[32:31] No trying to keep a little bit of sin, say, I'm sorry for this. Please forgive me for this. meanwhile, trying to hold on to the sin and planning for the sin and feeding the sin. No, kill it. Destroy it. Remove it. Forsake it. Turn from it. Hate it. Forsaking sin, but they also call out to God. Look at verse 8. Let everyone turn from his evil ways. I'm sorry, verse 8. Let them call out mightily to God. It's not just walking around saying, I've sinned and I've fallen short and sin is wrong, but it's actually crying out to God and saying, God, I've sinned against you. I see this is evil. It's something that offends you. I deserve judgment for it. Lord, forgive me, please. Agreeing with God about sin.

[33:24] We also see this whole passage in 5 through 9, that they make a radical break from their sin. The radical break is demonstrated not only by calling out to God, but the public display, sackcloth and ashes and fasting and everyone's walking about. It's the whole town is walking about in repentance. Make a radical break from sin. End the sin. Repentance looks like a break from sin. It's drastic. It's drastic measures to get rid of sin. It's also urgent. They didn't wait around and say, well, it's day one. We got 40 days. Let's get some good sinning in for the next 38, and then we'll round it out at the end and try to escape. It's, this is horrible. Let's not presume upon grace, urgent repentance. So as we just think about our own lives, when we sin, believe the word, we name our sin, we get off our throne, we realize we've offended God, we forsake our sin, we call out to God, we make radical breaks, and we do it right now, urgently, because it's so serious.

[34:39] These guys at Nineveh, they got something to teach us. They received the word and they responded with repentance. Jesus actually highlights this repentance in Matthew 12, verse 41. He's walking around preaching and people are asking for signs like, what are your credentials, Jesus? What can you do? And he tells them, he draws them back to Jonah. And he says, three days in the belly of the earth, just like Jonah was in the fish for three days. so the son of man will be. And then he says, the people of Nineveh will stand up at the judgment and condemn this generation because they, Ninevites in Jonah's day, repented when Jonah preached. But you won't repeat, repent, he says. So the response that Jesus was driving for is in the face of Jesus's preaching. Repent, turn from sin, believe his word and call out to him. That's the response. Receive his word and turn from sin. That's where Jesus wants us to apply this passage.

God Relents in Mercy

[35:44] Well, why? What motivates it? Well, look at verse 10. God relents. He relents. You see what happens. 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. He relents. He turns. He doesn't bring judgment. He shows mercy to evil and violent people. That's what he does in the passage this is what he does he forgives sinners that really sin against him, they believed god they turned from their sin and he shows them mercy he holds back the justice that's due to them this brings up some questions doesn't it, i think you probably have some questions on this, the first one that i think jumps right off the page is does god change his mind, Does he change his mind? Verse 10 When God saw what they did How they turned from their evil way How they repented God relented of the disaster that he said he would do to them, He didn't do it Did he change his mind?

[36:52] This is an important question because from time to time, this comes up in scripture. You'll see it in Exodus 32 with the golden calf. You see it in passages in 1 and 2 Samuel, where it seems like is God changing his mind? What's going on here? A couple of things to note. God's outside of time. When we say God's infinite, that means he's not constrained by anything or anyone, including which time. He existed before time began. Genesis 1, 1, time, space, and matter begin. God is before it. He's the creator. He's over all of that. So he's outside of time. And before even the foundation of the world,

he has decreed all that's going to come to pass. Everything that comes to pass is part of his decree. He's already said what's going to happen. He's decreed it in one action. God knows everything possible and actual throughout all history. That's amazing. He knows it all. And in one action, He's decreed everything that's going to come to pass. There are no question marks. There are no let's see what happens. It's just an amazing reality that God knows everything. As one preacher said, did it ever occur to you that nothing occurred to God? He knows everything in one instant act. He decreed also the end, what would happen, and he decrees the means how it's going to happen.

[38:16] And then God condescends and works in time. He enters into time and he works with people.

[38:24] Now, we're very different. We're finite. We exist in time. We have a birth. We live a little while, then we die. And before us, some people were born, lived a little while, and they died. And people after us will do the same thing. And God's been dealing with people. He's been dealing with humans this whole time. And he enters into that.

[38:43] And God works with us in such a way in his word that he accommodates our finiteness, in the midst of his infiniteness so that we can understand him. So he uses, fancy word, anthropomorphic language where he takes on human characteristics, to communicate in a way that we could understand because if he just speaks in his way, we would not even know anything and revelation would be pointless. So a passage like this, God relented of the disaster he said he would do to them because they repented, is a way of showing that God has ordained, decreed their repentance and the means Jonah's preaching. He's in control. This is sometimes hard for us to get our minds around. I love what John Calvin, the famous theologian, says about this concept. He says, God communicates in his word to us by using baby talk so that we can understand it. You've heard moms and dads talk to babies and it's really cute to listen, but you would never talk to another human being like that. You know, did you get a boo-boo? You're talking all this stuff to them to try to communicate in a tender way so you know exactly what they're saying. That's what God's doing.

[40:01] He's saying, the word came, you received it, I showed mercy. Did he change his mind? No. He's been getting Jonah to this place for that purpose. God doesn't change his mind. Malachi chapter 3 says that God never changes. He's immutable. And for that, we can rest in him, that his word is true.

[40:27] The second question that comes out of this is, why mercy to Nineveh? Can we just be honest? They've done nothing to deserve this. They've done everything to deserve judgment. Why mercy? God's free to show mercy whoever he wants to, whenever he wants, however he wants. That's what he does. And nobody deserves it, if we're honest. Jonah or Nineveh. But God has a heart for the nations. This is his plan from the beginning, that he's going to save the nations. And he continually, throughout the Bible, is pursuing the nations until the New Testament, where we see the gospel, Jesus sends it to the nations. And now the people of God are gathered around through Jesus Christ, and on one day, every tribe and every tongue will confess that Jesus Christ is Lord. This is God's heart for the nations.

[41:22] Well, how does this help you and me to live like Christians? What helps us by showing us again and again the power of the word. This is the power of God's word. Receive this word today. Bring this word to other people. This is God's heart. He's a merciful God who shows mercy to people. Even sinners like us. It also reminds us that nobody is outside of God's grace. Let's be honest. Nineveh, bad place. Big sinners. God, big mercy. Tons of grace. So you have to realize that if you're here today and you've never bowed before God, before Christ and repented of your sin, it's not because he lacks mercy to forgive you. It may just mean you need to get off the throne and see your sin and see his mercy in Christ and be forgiven.

Greater Than Jonah

[42:29] I also think that there's a connection where Jesus says someone greater than Jonah is here. See, Jonah went and he preached, and he preached judgment. And the response to the judgment proclamation by Jonah was this, by the king. Who knows? God may turn and relent and turn from his fierce anger so that we may perish. Who knows? Maybe, possibly. Jonah preaches and they respond with, who knows, maybe. The greater Jonah comes and he preaches and he says, whosoever will, let him come. The greater Jonah comes and says, take my burden upon you. My burden is light. My yoke is easy. I'll give you rest. The greater Jonah comes and He says, it is finished. The greater Jonah comes and he doesn't go into a fish. He goes into the ground and defeats death and comes out victorious and proclaims the gospel.

[43:35] It's not who knows.

[43:38] It's we know. He will turn and relent from his fierce anger so that we will not perish, but have eternal life because Christ paid the penalty for us. There's certainty there. Your eternity is as certain as the empty grave in the Middle East. Christ is risen. And it's that word of proclamation that has come to us, his merciful word that brings sinners to repentance. What a great Savior. Big mercy for Jonah, big mercy for Nineveh, and it should cause us to rejoice. And next week, we'll see why Jonah is really mad at God. He really doesn't like what happened in chapter 3. But that's next Sunday. In the meantime, let's pray. Lord, we thank you now for your word. We thank you for this snapshot of mercy in history where the word of the gospel went forward so powerfully that you forgive sinners like us. And Lord, may we recognize our sin and sinfulness in need of forgiveness every day. We see that just like the thief upon the cross that needed mercy in his day.

[45:06] Or the religious hypocrites like Matthew needed mercy or the apostle Paul that you forgive great sinners even us, so may we marvel and may we share this word with others we pray in Jesus name Amen.