

004 The God of Second Chances

Jonah 3:1-10

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Our youth are currently studying the book of Genesis
And we have come to chapter 15 where Abram gets saved.

It is the famous verse:

Genesis 15:6 "Then he believed in the LORD; and He reckoned it to him as righteousness."

It is the remarkable reality that God declares men righteous
Even while they are still sinners.

And this is a truth that must be grasped and certainly rejoiced in.

David contemplated this reality and he wrote:

Psalms 32:1-2 "How blessed is he whose transgression is forgiven, Whose sin is covered! How blessed is the man to whom the LORD does not impute iniquity, And in whose spirit there is no deceit!"

It is a blessing to understand

- That even though I am a sinful man, God will justify me. That God will consider me righteous even when I am a sinner.

And certainly we rejoice in this personally.

But this also is: THE HOPE OF MISSIONS

Certainly we understand that there is an element of missions that is really simply ABOUT OBEDIENCE.

- We learned that from chapter 1.
- God tells you to go, so you go.

And we understand the SOVEREIGNTY of God aspect.

- Only God can save and ultimately whether or not people believe is up to Him, not us.
- And we've seen how active God is in the book of Jonah

And we understand that the priority of missions is the GLORY OF GOD.

- Men are saved so that they might bring glory to Him.

We understand those things.

AND YET, WE ALSO KNOW THAT WHEN WE GO,

We have a definite desire; A DEFINITE HOPE.

When we take the gospel to another individual

We certainly go with the hope that the individual will be saved.

Even Jesus in His earthly ministry said:

Luke 19:10 "For the Son of Man has come to seek and to save that which was lost."

Now the reality is that when we take the gospel to the lost,
THEY MAY REJECT IT.

- They may love their sin.
- They may want to stay in their sin.
- They may not fear God.
- They may reject the offer.

But what will NEVER HAPPEN is this:

When a sinner repents of their sin and places faith in Christ,
God will never turn that sinner away.

There have been plenty of people
Who have heard the plea of God to repent who have rejected Him,

But there has never been a time when
A sinner made a plea to God for mercy that God rejected that sinner.

HE IS A GOD OF SECOND CHANCES.

Think for a moment of Psalm 107, that's what it's all about.

Psalms 107:4-7 "They wandered in the wilderness in a desert region; They did not find a way to an inhabited city. They were hungry and thirsty; Their soul fainted within them. Then they cried out to the LORD in their trouble; He delivered them out of their distresses. He led them also by a straight way, To go to an inhabited city."

Psalms 107:10-14 "There were those who dwelt in darkness and in the shadow of death, Prisoners in misery and chains, Because they had rebelled against the words of God And spurned the counsel of the Most High. Therefore He humbled their heart with labor; They stumbled and there was none to help. Then they cried out to the LORD in their trouble; He saved them out of their distresses. He brought them out of darkness and the shadow of death And broke their bands apart."

Psalms 107:17-20 "Fools, because of their rebellious way, And because of their iniquities, were afflicted. Their soul abhorred all kinds of food, And they drew near to the gates of death. Then they cried out to the LORD in their trouble; He saved them out of their distresses. He sent His word and healed them, And delivered them from their destructions."

Psalms 107:23-30 "Those who go down to the sea in ships, Who do business on great waters; They have seen the works of the LORD, And His wonders in the deep. For He spoke and raised up a stormy wind, Which lifted up the waves of the sea. They rose up to the heavens, they went down to the depths; Their soul melted away in their misery. They reeled and staggered like a drunken man, And were at their wits' end. Then they cried to the LORD in their trouble, And He brought them out of their distresses. He caused the storm to be still, So that the waves of the sea were hushed. Then they were glad because they were quiet, So He guided them to their desired haven."

(The sailors in Jonah 1 could have written that stanza)

That is who God is.

Psalms 103:8-13 "The LORD is compassionate and gracious, Slow to anger and abounding in lovingkindness. He will not always strive with us, Nor will He keep His anger forever. He has not dealt with us according to our sins, Nor rewarded us according to our iniquities. For as high as the heavens are above the earth, So great is His lovingkindness toward those who fear Him. As far as the east is from the west, So far has He removed our transgressions from us. Just as a father has compassion on his children, So the LORD has compassion on those who fear Him."

We could give so many examples of this; we could tell so many stories.

- We think of the woman caught in adultery
- We think of the woman at the well
- We think of Zacchaeus
- We think of Saul of Tarsus
- We think of Matthew the tax collector
- We think of the prodigal son

Over and over we see the mercy of God
Not only promised but demonstrated.

And yet nowhere in Scripture there is a more shocking demonstration of the mercy of God than what we read in Jonah 3.

It is such shocking mercy that
Even after Jonah found a new appreciation for the mercy of God,
The mercy God offers here will prove to be too much for him.

We talked about how vile the Assyrians were.

- We talked about their brutality.
- We talked about how in a few years they would come and destroy the Northern Kingdom of Israel and greatly afflict the Southern Kingdom of Judah.
- Nahum actually calls Nineveh “the bloody city”

We know what they are.

Could God really show mercy to them?

Let’s look at Jonah 3 and see this God of second chances.

3 points

#1 JONAH’S DECISION

Jonah 3:1-4

Verses 1-2 simply says, “Now the word of the LORD came to Jonah the second time, saying, “Arise and go to Nineveh the great city and proclaim to it the proclamation which I am going to tell you.”

THIS IS WHAT WE CALL A SECOND CHANCE.

It might have gone easier for Jonah had he listened the first time,
But even in his rebellion God has NOT ABANDONED him.

Jonah has repented and so we are now back on track.

And so this time Jonah seizes his second chance.

(3) “So Jonah arose and went to Nineveh according to the word of the LORD.”

That is a good decision.

Jonah seized his second chance.

And so now we see what chapter 1 SHOULD HAVE looked like.

“Now Nineveh was an exceedingly great city, a three day’s walk. Then Jonah began to go through the city one day’s walk; and he cried out and said, “Yet forty days and Nineveh will be overthrown.”

Historians tell us that

- Nineveh was a city of somewhere around 600,000 people.
- That is determined from the fact that there are 120,000 children in it who don’t know their right hand from their left (4:11)
- Archaeologists have discovered the city walls and the circumference of the city was about 7 ½ miles.
- And it would take a person 3 days to walk throughout the whole city.

SO JONAH BEGINS

And on day 1 Jonah has a very simple message for the people.

“Yet forty days and Nineveh will be overthrown.”

THAT’S IT.

It is simply an announcement of coming judgment.

- Notice that no reason for the judgment is given.
- Notice that no mercy is offered.

This is about as simple a message as one can give
Regarding the wrath of God on sinful men.

Jonah is grateful to God for saving his life
And Jonah is fulfilling his vow to the LORD,
But Jonah’s heart toward the Ninevites has not changed.

HE IS ANNOUNCING THEIR JUDGMENT AND THAT IS ALL.

That is Jonah's decision
#2 NINEVEH'S DECISION
Jonah 3:5-9

Verse 5 is remarkable: "Then the people of Nineveh believed in God..."

These are vile pagans who now believe in God.

I WOULD HERE REMIND YOU
Of the pagan I told you about to begin the sermon who did the same thing.

Genesis 15:6 "Then he believed in the LORD; and He reckoned it to him as righteousness."

- You do realize that Abram was also a pagan.
- You do realize that Abram also worshiped other gods.
- You do realize that Abram also lied and sold off his wife.
- You do realize that Abram also owned slaves and was greedy, etc.

And yet when Abram believed God, God
"reckoned it to him as righteousness."

Jonah 3:5 is the EXACT SAME THING.

These people SIMPLY BELIEVED the message of God.
God said they would be destroyed and they believed Him.

Now, everything else you will see in these 5 verses
Is merely THE PROOF of their faith.

It is easy to say that they believed, but how do you know they believed?
• Well because they fasted and prayed and repented and called on God.

All of those things are merely EVIDENCE that they truly believed.

And as we said earlier, when sinners believe
God declares them righteous even though they remain sinners.

BUT CAN WE ALSO ADDRESS ANOTHER IMPORTANT POINT.

Every time I hear the story of Jonah preached

- And it comes to the point of Nineveh's response
- I hear about how the Ninevites worshiped the fish God named Dagon.
- And I hear them speak of how Jonah probably smelled fishy
- And how he was probably bleached white from the stomach acid of that great fish he was in.

And I'm not denying that any or all of that COULD BE TRUE.
And I'm not denying that if it is true
That it may have certainly made an impact on the Ninevites.

But the Bible says nothing of Jonah's smell or Jonah's appearance.

The focus of the story is not all the extra-curricular things
That occurred to influence the faith of the Ninevites.

According to the story ONLY ONE THING INFLUENCED the Ninevites.
WHAT WAS IT?

THE WORD OF GOD.

Hebrews 4:12-13 “For the word of God is living and active and sharper than any two-edged sword, and piercing as far as the division of soul and spirit, of both joints and marrow, and able to judge the thoughts and intentions of the heart. And there is no creature hidden from His sight, but all things are open and laid bare to the eyes of Him with whom we have to do.”

I'm NOT SAYING Jonah's appearance had no effect,
But if it did, the Bible doesn't mention it.

What we know is that when God's word was spoken
The people of Nineveh instinctively knew it was true
And they believed it.

WHAT IS MORE they instinctively knew the word Jonah preached WASN'T the word of Dagon.

- Dagon's word never pierced their heart.
- Dagon's word never exposed their soul.
- Dagon's word never resonated like this.

THIS IS THE POWER OF THE WORD OF GOD.

Even an incomplete message of judgment like Jonah's
Has more power than all other gimmicks and strategies combined.

Isaiah 55:11 “So will My word be which goes forth from My mouth; It will not return to Me empty, Without accomplishing what I desire, And without succeeding in the matter for which I sent it.”

There is such a misconception today
That if we are going to win sinners to salvation
That we really need to preach a message that will please them.

- You should AVOID that old “hell fire and brimstone” message.
- Talk about the GOODNESS of God.
- Talk about the mercy and LOVE of God.
- COERCE SINNERS to come to God because of how WONDERFUL He is.

THAT IS SUCH A FAULTY APPROACH.

The whole problem is that you are approaching people
Who are in rebellion against God.

They ARE sinning against Him.
They AREN'T seeking Him.
They AREN'T longing for Him.

Romans 3:11 “THERE IS NONE WHO UNDERSTANDS, THERE IS NONE WHO SEEKS FOR GOD;”

Romans 3:18 “THERE IS NO FEAR OF GOD BEFORE THEIR EYES.”

You are dealing with spiritual death
You are dealing with a rebellious heart

THERE IS ONLY ONE THING with the power to convert a sinner into salvation and that is the word of God.

Jonah preached God's word to the Ninevites.

- He offered no explanation
- He offered no additional input
- He offered no application
- Based on Chapter 4 we can assume he didn't even try that hard.

He simply announced the truth of the coming judgment upon that city.

These people heard what God had spoken and they “believed in God.”

BUT LET’S LOOK A LITTLE CLOSER AT IT.

Let’s break this down into 3 points.

1) THE PARTICIPANTS (5-6)

This is nothing short of the MIRACULOUS working of God here.

When we read that faith occurred it was NOT A SINGULAR expression.

“Then the people of Nineveh believed in God; and they called a fast and put on sackcloth from the greatest to the least of them.”

THIS IS EVERYONE.

And we realize what must have happened here.

- It was a 3 days walk through that city.
- Jonah only completed one day of that walk.
- What happened is that as Jonah preached those who heard him believed
- And then they did what believers do. They became evangelists as well.

They started sharing the message they had heard

And in no time at all the entire city

Had become acquainted with Jonah’s message of judgment.

In fact, someone even had the conviction to take this message to the king.

(6) “When the word reached the king of Nineveh, he arose from his throne, laid aside his robe from him, covered himself with sackcloth and sat on the ashes.”

There is no other way to describe this

Except as a sovereign work of God.

When have you ever seen an entire city repent?

- WE MARVEL at Pentecost because when Peter preached 5,000 believed.
- We see the miraculous hand of God that churches were established in places like Ephesus or in the region of Galatia.

But this is a city of 600,000 and they all believe “from the greatest to the least of them.”

EVEN THE KING BELIEVES.

If you’re wondering who this is, it is most likely Ashur-Dan III

- He’s the grandfather of Tiglath-Pileser III (who would attack Israel and Aram)
- He will be the great-grandfather of Shalmaneser V who destroyed Israel.

This pagan king believed in God.

Everyone.

2) THE PLAN (7-8)

“He issued a proclamation and it said, “In Nineveh by the decree of the king and his nobles: Do not let man, beast, herd, or flock taste a thing. Do not let them eat or drink water. “But both man and beast must be covered with sackcloth; and let men call on God earnestly that each may turn from his wicked way and from the violence which is in his hands.”

This explains why everyone in Nineveh fasted.

The king issued a decree.

This explains why we pray for the salvation of our leaders.
A political leader who fears God can have a huge impact on a nation.

But what is interesting here is that you see
A very pagan response to God.

- While things like fasting and wearing sackcloth and prayer are certainly elements of a true response to God
- We see nothing anywhere else of God ever requiring animals to wear sackcloth or to be held from water or anything like that.

What you have here is a pagan people who have only a pagan understanding of God.

- They know nothing of the true God.
- They know nothing of His expectations or desires.
- They are just responding to this message of judgment in the most sincere way they know how.

It is clear that Jonah has told these people nothing
About the requirement of God.

All they had was general revelation and 1 specific revelation.

Romans 1:18-23 "For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men who suppress the truth in unrighteousness, because that which is known about God is evident within them; for God made it evident to them. For since the creation of the world His invisible attributes, His eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly seen, being understood through what has been made, so that they are without excuse. For even though they knew God, they did not honor Him as God or give thanks, but they became futile in their speculations, and their foolish heart was darkened. Professing to be wise, they became fools, and exchanged the glory of the incorruptible God for an image in the form of corruptible man and of birds and four-footed animals and crawling creatures."

- The Ninevites do not know God specifically, but they have gained a basic knowledge of Him through general revelation.
- They understand "eternal power and divine nature" and they are thus responding to Him the best way they know how.

THEY HEARD THE SIMPLEST MESSAGE POSSIBLE.
THEY RESPOND WITH THE SIMPLEST FAITH POSSIBLE.

(8b) "...and let men call on God earnestly that each may turn from his wicked way and from the violence which is in his hands."

Now this is another interesting point to be made.

- Jonah told them that judgment was coming.
- Jonah NEVER told them why.
- Jonah NEVER told them what God was upset about.

But the king immediately knew that everyone in Nineveh had to "turn from his wicked way and from the violence"

- How did they know what their wickedness was?
- How did they know that their "violence" was wrong?

Paul also explains this.

Romans 2:14-15 "For when Gentiles who do not have the Law do instinctively the things of the Law, these, not having the Law, are a law to themselves, in that they show the work of the Law written in their hearts, their conscience bearing witness and their thoughts alternately accusing or else defending them,"

The answer is that not only did they have creation as general revelation
But they also had the TESTIMONY OF THEIR CONSCIENCE
Which is also part of God's general revelation.

- The Ninevites knew they were wicked.
- The Ninevites knew they were violent.
- The Ninevites knew this was wrong.
- The Ninevites knew that this offended the God who created them.

NOW IT HADN'T MATTERED TO THEM UNTIL TODAY.

But when Jonah announced that God was upset
They immediately knew that God was able to judge
And they knew why God was angry.

SO WE HAVE

- People who were as pagan as could be.
- They have heard only the simplest message possible.
- They have given the simplest response possible.

3) THE PURPOSE (9)

"Who knows, God may turn and relent and withdraw His burning anger so that we will not perish."

The purpose of this city-wide fast and turning from sin is clear.
They hope to appease God.

They hope that He will "turn and relent and withdraw His burning anger"

But again we see their LIMITED UNDERSTANDING.
Their hope begins with the statement "Who knows..."

DO YOU UNDERSTAND THAT:

- They had no assurance whatsoever that God would relent?
- They had no knowledge at all as to if God ever showed mercy?

They didn't have 1 John 1:9

1 John 1:9 "If we confess our sins, He is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness."

They didn't know what David wrote

Psalms 51:16-17 "For You do not delight in sacrifice, otherwise I would give it; You are not pleased with burnt offering. The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit; A broken and a contrite heart, O God, You will not despise."

Interestingly enough, who did know that?
Jonah knew that.

Jonah will say in the next chapter "for I knew that You are a gracious and compassionate God, slow to anger and abundant in lovingkindness, and one who relents concerning calamity."

But Jonah didn't tell the Ninevites that.

BUT THEY REPENTED ANYWAY!!!

I FIND THIS ABSOLUTELY ASTONISHING.

We have a world filled with people today who have heard the promise of God that if you repent and trust in Christ you will be saved and still they refuse to repent.

Here we have a people who are repenting JUST IN CASE it might work.

IS IT ANY WONDER Jesus used the Ninevites as an example that would ultimately condemn Israel?

Matthew 12:38-41 "Then some of the scribes and Pharisees said to Him, "Teacher, we want to see a sign from You." But He answered and said to them, "An evil and adulterous generation craves for a sign; and yet no sign will be given to it but the sign of Jonah the prophet; for just as JONAH WAS THREE DAYS AND THREE NIGHTS IN THE BELLY OF THE SEA MONSTER, so will the Son of Man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth. "The men of Nineveh will stand up with this generation at the judgment, and will condemn it because they repented at the preaching of Jonah; and behold, something greater than Jonah is here."

Jesus stood in front of Israel and promised to save them if they would repent and they dared to ask for proof.

- Before we pay the extreme price of giving up our sin why don't You work a sign so that we know that You are telling us the truth.
- I mean, we'd hate to give up our sin and then find out that we didn't have to.

So many refuse to repent because they love their sin so much.

But the Ninevites.

- They were never told what their sin specifically was.
- They were never told to fast or to pray.
- They were never told to repent.
- They were never promised that if they would repent they would be saved.

And yet, their faith was great in God that they did those things
Just in case God might see it and extend mercy.

What a great picture of faith and repentance they are!

SO WE HAVE

- A pagan people
- Who have heard a simple message
- They respond with simple faith
- They are not aware of God's merciful nature

WHAT WILL GOD DO WITH PEOPLE LIKE THIS?

Jonah's Decision, Nineveh's Decision

#3 GOD'S DECISION

Jonah 3:10

"When God saw their deeds, that they turned from their wicked way, then God relented concerning the calamity which He had declared He would bring upon them. And He did not do it."

What do you call that?

A SECOND CHANCE

This bloody city

This pagan city

This ignorant and foolish city

And when they believed God, God extended mercy to them.

"God relented concerning the calamity which He had declared He would bring upon them. And He did not do it."

Some get all up in arms here because it appears like God is confused.

One minute He's going to judge and now God changes His mind.

Liberal theologians who embrace what is called "Open Theism" – the belief that the future is open and even God doesn't know what it is because He is waiting to see the human response before He writes it.

They love to use this story and this statement.

That is NOT what is happening.

The explanation is found in the hardness of Jonah
Not in the fickleness of God.

God had sent Jonah to warn Nineveh of judgment.

- Jonah did,
- He just failed to include the truths he also knew of God's great mercy.

Had Jonah given them the whole truth you would see that
God's warnings of judgment are ALWAYS redemptive in nature.

If they weren't redemptive then why warn?
If God wasn't giving opportunity to repent then why tell them?

God didn't decide on a whim to go ahead and forgive the Ninevites.
God sent Jonah to warn them
Because He had determined to save them.

When God saw the repentance and faith He required,
He acted in PERFECT HARMONY with His will and offered them mercy.

GOD HAS ALWAYS BEEN MERCIFUL TO REPENTANT SINNERS
His response isn't strange, it is who He is.

Matthew 5:3-7 "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. "Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted. "Blessed are the gentle, for they shall inherit the earth. "Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be satisfied. "Blessed are the merciful, for they shall receive mercy."

Isaiah 57:15 "For thus says the high and exalted One Who lives forever, whose name is Holy, "I dwell on a high and holy place, And also with the contrite and lowly of spirit In order to revive the spirit of the lowly And to revive the heart of the contrite."

James 4:6 "But He gives a greater grace. Therefore it says, "GOD IS OPPOSED TO THE PROUD, BUT GIVES GRACE TO THE HUMBLE."

And the point is emphasized that our God is a merciful God.
Our God saves sinners.
Our God declares sinners righteous while they are still sinners.

And all He requires from them is faith.

Now we'll get back to missions and Jonah's issues next week,

But we would fail if we didn't take the opportunity
To make sure you understand the saving nature of our God.

Are you a sinner?
Have you offended God?
Have you offended Him in an incredible way?
The answer to all of those questions is "yes" by the way.

BUT DO YOU KNOW THAT?

- Are you concerned that perhaps you have sinned too much?
- Are you concerned that you are a lost cause?
- Are you convinced that it's too late for you because you've been too bad?

Well look at the Ninevites.
They were so wicked even the missionary who went to them
Didn't want them to receive mercy.

But even they were granted mercy when they believed God.

The promise was just as true for them as it was Abram.

And that promise is still true for you and for me.

Romans 10:13 “for “WHOEVER WILL CALL ON THE NAME OF THE LORD WILL BE SAVED.”

The apostle Paul understood this marvelous reality.

1 Timothy 1:12-16 “I thank Christ Jesus our Lord, who has strengthened me, because He considered me faithful, putting me into service, even though I was formerly a blasphemer and a persecutor and a violent aggressor. Yet I was shown mercy because I acted ignorantly in unbelief; and the grace of our Lord was more than abundant, with the faith and love which are found in Christ Jesus. It is a trustworthy statement, deserving full acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, among whom I am foremost of all. Yet for this reason I found mercy, so that in me as the foremost, Jesus Christ might demonstrate His perfect patience as an example for those who would believe in Him for eternal life.”

Paul said, look at me as an example.

- If Jesus can and will save me, then He can and will save anyone.

The Ninevites would undoubtedly say the same.

No one should read the story of Jonah

And then think they are beyond the merciful arm of God.

GOD SAVES SINNERS.

If that is you, then place your faith in Him.

What does that faith look like?

- It looks like repentance from your sin.
- It looks like brokenness for what you’ve done.
- It looks like desperately crying out to God for mercy.

THAT IS WHAT FAITH LOOKS LIKE.

Give it to God and He will declare you righteous

And spare you from the coming judgment too.