

Jonah Pt 4 A Second Chance and a Five-Word Sermon

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Jonah / Jonah 3:1-5

I. Introduction

Have you ever blown it and wished you could start over?

Most of us have. We've failed at something important. We've hurt someone we care about. We've made a decision we wish we could take back.

The good news of the Bible is that God is a God of second chances. And nowhere is that clearer than in Jonah chapter 3.

Jonah has run from God. He's been thrown into the sea, swallowed by a fish, and vomited onto dry land. By all accounts, his career as a prophet should be over.

But God is not done with Jonah.

II. God's Word Comes a Second Time (3:1-2)

Read Jonah 3:1-2:

Jonah 3:1-2 ESV

¹ Then the word of the LORD came to Jonah the second time, saying,

² “Arise, go to Nineveh, that great city, and call out against it the message that I tell you.”

Notice that simple phrase: **"the second time."**

God could have given up on Jonah. He could have chosen someone else. He could have moved on to a more willing prophet.

But He doesn't.

God's call comes to Jonah again. The same call. The same city. The same mission.

The Command

The words are almost identical to Jonah 1:2:

- "Arise, go"
- "Nineveh, that great city"
- "Call out against it"

The only difference is that this time, God adds: **"the message that I tell you."**

God makes it clear that Jonah is not free to make up his own message. He must say what God tells him to say.

Grace Does Not Mean Low Expectations

God's second chance is not permission to do whatever Jonah wants. It's a renewed call to obedience.

God's grace gives us fresh starts. But grace also calls us to faithful action.

When God forgives us and gives us another chance, He still expects us to listen and obey.

III. Jonah Finally Obeys (Outwardly) (3:3a)

Read Jonah 3:3a:

"So Jonah arose and went to Nineveh, according to the word of the LORD." (ESV)

This time, Jonah obeys.

He doesn't run to Tarshish. He doesn't argue. He doesn't make excuses.

He goes.

But there's a problem: his feet are moving in the right direction, but we will soon see that his heart is still hard.

Outward Obedience vs. Heart Obedience

It's possible to do the right thing with the wrong attitude.

Jonah is about to preach God's word to Nineveh. But he doesn't want them to repent. He wants them to be destroyed.

This is a warning for us.

We can serve in church, give money, read our Bibles, and still have hearts that are far from God.

God wants more than compliance. He wants our hearts.

IV. Nineveh: An Exceedingly Great City (3:3b)

Read Jonah 3:3b:

"Now Nineveh was an exceedingly great city, three days' journey in breadth." (ESV)

The author calls Nineveh "an exceedingly great city."

In Hebrew, it literally says "a great city to God." Some translations say "a city great to God" or "an exceedingly great city."

The phrase "three days' journey in breadth" is part of the exaggeration we've seen throughout the book.

Historians tell us that Nineveh was about seven miles around. You could walk across it in a few hours, not three days.

So why does the author say three days?

Because everything in this book is **huge**:

- A huge storm
- A huge fish
- A huge city
- Huge repentance
- Huge anger

The exaggeration is on purpose. It shows that everything in this story is massive in scale, including God's mercy.

God Cares About Big, "Bad" Cities

God does not write off Nineveh just because it is violent and wicked.

He sees it. He cares about it. He sends a prophet to it.

This should challenge us.

What cities or groups of people do we write off as "too far gone"?

God does not share that attitude.

V. The Shortest Sermon with Huge Impact (3:4)

Read Jonah 3:4:

Jonah 3:4 ESV

⁴ Jonah began to go into the city, going a day's journey. And he called out, "Yet forty days, and Nineveh shall be overthrown!"

Jonah walks one day into the city. Not three days. Just one.

And then he preaches.

Here's his entire sermon:

"Yet forty days, and Nineveh shall be overthrown!"

That's it.

In the original Hebrew, this sermon is only **five words**.

Let that sink in. Five words.

And here's what's missing:

- No mention of **what the Ninevites have done wrong**
- No mention of **who will overturn them**
- No call to **repent**
- No mention of **God**

This is the worst sermon ever preached.

It begs the question: Is Jonah Trying to Sabotage His Own Message?

It sure looks like it.

Jonah gives the bare minimum. He walks only one day in. He says five words. He leaves out every detail that might help the people respond.

It's almost like he's trying to ensure their destruction.

He's technically obeying God, but there's no effort. No heart. No compassion.

You Can Obey and Still Have a Hard Heart

Jonah is a warning to all of us who serve God while resenting the people we're called to serve.

You can teach a Bible study and secretly hope certain people don't show up.

You can give to the poor and look down on them at the same time.

You can preach the gospel and still be angry that God loves people you don't like.

Jonah shows us that going through the motions is not the same as love.

VI. The People Believe God (3:5)

Read Jonah 3:5:

Jonah 3:5 ESV

⁵ 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.

Despite Jonah's terrible sermon, the people respond.

And they don't just respond. They **believe God**.

Notice the text does not say they believed *Jonah*. It says they believed **God**.

Somehow, through Jonah's five-word message, the Spirit of God moves in the hearts of the Ninevites.

The Response

- They call for a **fast** (giving up food to focus on God).
- They put on **sackcloth** (a sign of mourning and repentance).
- Everyone participates, "from the greatest of them to the least of them."

This is immediate, citywide repentance.

And it happens in response to the worst sermon ever preached by the most reluctant prophet in history.

God's Word Carries Power That Is Not Limited by the Weakness of the Messenger

This is a very encouraging truth in the book of Jonah.

God can use:

- A short message.
- A reluctant messenger.
- An incomplete explanation.

And still accomplish His purposes.

Paul says the same thing in 1 Corinthians 1:18

1 Corinthians 1:18 ESV

¹⁸ For the word of the cross is folly to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God.

The power is not in the preacher. It's in the message.

God can use a five-word sermon to save a city. He can use your fumbling, imperfect witness to reach someone's heart.

Don't wait until you have all the answers.

Just speak the truth you know, and trust God to do what only He can do.

VII. The Ironic Wordplay: "Overturned"

Here's a brilliant detail that most English readers miss.

The last word of Jonah's sermon, "**overturned**," is a Hebrew word that can mean two different things.

Meaning #1: Destruction

The word can refer to a city being overthrown or destroyed.

This is how it's used in Genesis 19:21, when God destroys Sodom and Gomorrah. The cities are literally turned over, flipped upside down, and demolished.

This is probably what Jonah means. He's hoping Nineveh will be destroyed.

Meaning #2: Transformation

But the same word can also mean transformation.

Something being turned over and changed into its opposite.

It's used this way in 1 Samuel 10:6, when God promises to transform Saul's heart.

The Irony

Jonah says, "Nineveh will be overturned."

He means it as a threat of destruction.

But God uses it as a promise of transformation.

Nineveh does get overturned. But not in the way Jonah intended.

The city is turned over through repentance. Their hearts are flipped. Their evil is transformed into humility.

Jonah's words come true, but in a way that reveals God's mercy instead of His wrath.

God's Plans Are Bigger and Better Than Ours

Jonah wanted destruction.

God wanted redemption.

Jonah said one thing with a bitter heart.

God used those same words to bring about grace.

This is what God does. He takes our small, broken, self-centered plans and weaves them into something far greater.

Romans 8:28 says:

Romans 8:28 ESV

²⁸ And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose.

Even when we're doing the right thing for the wrong reasons, God can still use it for His good purposes.

That doesn't excuse our bad attitudes. But it does show how powerful and gracious God is.

VIII. Application and Discussion

Theme 1: God Gives Second Chances

Jonah failed. He ran. He disobeyed. He slept through a storm. He had to be thrown into the sea and swallowed by a fish.

And God still came back to him and said, "Arise, go."

If you've failed, you need to hear this.

God is not done with you.

Your past does not disqualify you from your future.

God specializes in second chances.

Theme 2: Outward Obedience Is Not Enough

Jonah went to Nineveh. But his heart was still hard.

God wants more than compliance. He wants transformation.

Ask yourself:

- Am I serving God with resentment in my heart?
- Am I going through the motions while secretly hoping certain people fail?
- Am I obeying on the outside while harboring bitterness on the inside?

If so, ask God to change your heart, not just your actions.

Theme 3: God's Word Is Powerful, Even Through Weak Messengers

You don't have to be perfect to be used by God.

You don't need a seminary degree or a perfect testimony.

You just need to be willing to speak the truth God gives you.

The power is in the message, not the messenger.

Theme 4: We Should Not Assume We Know Who Will Respond to God

Jonah assumed the Ninevites were too far gone.

He was wrong.

Who have you written off?

What city, what person, what group do you think is beyond God's reach?

The story of Jonah says: you might be surprised.

God's grace reaches further than we think.