

Harris Creek Baptist Church
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Series: Jonah
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God of Second Chances

Jonah 3:1-10

“¹Then the word of the Lord came to Jonah a second time: ²“Go to the great city of Nineveh and proclaim to it the message I give you.” ³Jonah obeyed the word of the Lord and went to Nineveh. Now Nineveh was a very large city; it took three days to go through it. ⁴Jonah began by going a day’s journey into the city, proclaiming, “Forty more days and Nineveh will be overthrown.” ⁵The Ninevites believed God. A fast was proclaimed, and all of them, from the greatest to the least, put on sackcloth. ⁶When Jonah’s warning reached the king of Nineveh, he rose from his throne, took off his royal robes, covered himself with sackcloth and sat down in the dust. ⁷This is the proclamation he issued in Nineveh: “By the decree of the king and his nobles: Do not let people or animals, herds or flocks, taste anything; do not let them eat or drink. ⁸But let people and animals be covered with sackcloth. Let everyone call urgently on God. Let them give up their evil ways and their violence. ⁹Who knows? God may yet relent and with compassion turn from his fierce anger so that we will not perish.” ¹⁰When God saw what they did and how they turned from their evil ways, he relented and did not bring on them the destruction he had threatened.”

Come on! Hey, have you ever gotten an undeserved redo in life? Anyone had one? No, I'm the only one. Okay, a few other people. I'm not talking about, when you were playing T-ball and you got another at bat that you didn't deserve. I'm talking something in your life where you truly did not deserve a redo, and you got one. And I had one of these right after I graduated from Baylor. I spent about a year in this ministry training program, and about halfway through that year, we had this test that we called “the stand and deliver.” And so, I showed up to this stand and deliver on the mentality of, ‘I'm just going to wing it’. But here's why, just trust me, I showed up like, “I'm going to wing it. Why? I graduated from Baylor, right? I've already taken Christian Scriptures and Christian Heritage. This year long ministry training program that I'm showing up to, of course, I can just wing this stand and deliver.” And so, I ended up winging it, and I ended up failing it. And this truly, that might not sound like a big deal to you, but to me, it was. What I learned is that I was the first person in the history of the program to ever have to redo their stand and deliver. I'm like, “Are you serious?” This was so embarrassing. And this is one of those moments in your life, I don't know if you've ever had one of these tests, where you tell everyone about it. You're like, “Hey, will you pray for this test, this stand and deliver? Will you pray for this thing?” And so, everyone's like, reaching out to me, they're like, “Hey, how was your stand and deliver? We've been praying for you.” And I'm like, “You didn't pray hard enough, or you prayed for my humility, and it worked.”

And I start with that, and if I could even tell that story of a redo and just let you in on my life that truly is one of the most meaningful moments of my life. Because I had spent so much of my life

just winging it, just showing up and getting by. And I got an undeserved redo. And I'm so grateful for it. And I know we just got serious real quick this morning, but we're going to look at Jonah's redo. We're in this series of Jonah, and we're seeing that Jonah was given a call to go to Nineveh. Jonah 1, as Nate taught us, he ran away from God's call, he goes to Tarshish instead of Nineveh. He goes the complete opposite wrong way. And then God and His kindness brings him back and even preserves his life as the sailors throw him overboard into the sea to his death, God saves him through a fish. Then we see in Chapter 2, as we learned last week, this turnaround that Jonah had. In prayer, he turns around, he cries out to God, and we get to continue on in this series.

As we look to Jonah 3 today, we're going to get to learn from Jonah's redo. Again, Jonah 3, and we're going to learn from Jonah, we're going to learn from Nineveh, and we're going to learn from God. That's who we're going to get to learn from today. But before we jump to the text, I just want us to acknowledge, I think in life, we kind of unintentionally or don't realize that we go around disqualifying people from redos or disqualifying ourselves. Like we don't really feel like we deserve a redo because of all the things that we've done in our past or in our lives, all the bad stuff, insert whatever it is, we're like, "Ah, I can't be used by God for this reason, insert whatever the reason is." Those lies from the enemy that we hear. It's about our past, it's about our gifting, it's all the ways that God can't use us. We disqualify ourselves from redos. And then we go about our days, and we disqualify others. We're like "God could never reach them! They're too crazy. They're addicted. They're too much of a gossip. God can never change them! God could never save them." We disqualify ourselves, and we disqualify others. We go about not allowing God to redo and I want us to just acknowledge, that's just all about us and what we think. That's a really, really big view of man, and a really, really small view of God.

And so that's what I love about this text today. Is God's going to show us just how powerful He is, and just how He can do and use anyone. He can change and save anyone. In fact, that's His heart. Let's look to Jonah 3, verse 1.

"¹Then the word of the Lord came to Jonah a second time: ²"Go to the great city of Nineveh and proclaim to it the message I give you."³ Jonah obeyed the word of the Lord and went to Nineveh."

This is his redo! He gets it right. And just so you know, I got it right, that second time when I got the redo, I don't think I included that, but that's beside the point.

"³ Jonah obeyed the word of the Lord and went to Nineveh. Now Nineveh was a very large city; it took three days to go through it. ⁴ Jonah began by going a day's journey into the city, proclaiming, "Forty more days and Nineveh will be overthrown."⁵ The Ninevites believed God."

Let's just observe this text. Let's stay in the text, verse one, God and His kindness recommissions Jonah. He gives him the redo. This is the epic, undeserved redo. Notice what God didn't say. God could have been like, "You disobeyed, you're disqualified. I'm never going to use you again. In fact, I'm not even going to speak to you again." That's what God could have done, and that's not what God did. Verses 2 and 3, we see this mention of Nineveh being both great in size and

population. It was probably the largest city in the world at this time, it had about 120,000 people. Was three days walk in breadth, that probably would include suburbs, you know. Nineveh was both great in size and your footnote may say, “great to God.” So, Nineveh is this great place. Remember what Nate taught us? Nineveh was evil. It's interesting that Nineveh was great to God. And verse 4, we see the message that Jonah gives. It's short, it's likely just a summary. It likely shows us that still Jonah is a little reluctant to serve the Ninevites. He's a little reluctant to give this sermon to them. And then this word overthrown, yet forty days and Nineveh will be overthrown. This word overthrown, is the same word used to describe Sodom and Gomorrah in Genesis. It's interesting. It's God's wrath. And so, verse 5, we see that God uses a runaway prophet, who disobeyed God, to reach the people of Nineveh. Verse 5, “**and the people of Nineveh believed God.**” Which brings me to my first point today, which is God can use anyone.

1. *God can use anyone.*

God can use anyone. We have a God of second chances. Even third and fourth sometimes, and this is not meant for us to take advantage of. But God's showing us even in all of our mistakes, and all of our past, and all the ways that we've disobeyed God and run from God; God can use anyone. Our past does not disqualify us.

And as I was reading about Jonah, and how he reached the Ninevites, something I learned is that he likely would have been bleached from the stomach of this fish. Like everyone in Nineveh would have heard his message and also been like, “You look like a ghost, something is wrong with you.” There's something that has happened to him that made him look like a ghost. And in fact, that's what they said of James Bartley, who was the man who was swallowed by the whale for two days, and then the whale was killed. JP mentioned it last week, we have a picture of this whale. [photo of whale shown] They said of James Bartley, as well, that he looked bleached. And it also was possible that he had lost his hair from the stomach acid of the fish. And so, here's the good news, that God could use a pasty white person without any hair to proclaim the gospel in a place where it needs it, right? I just found that to be extremely comforting. [crowd laughs] And my hair is out of control right now, and I still found this to be extremely comforting.

But I say that, like he was walking around, his mess was on him. Like his past he was walking around with his past. He was bleached because of the stomach of the whale. And so, they were quick to listen to whatever he had to say that was from God. And I think it shows us that God can use a runaway prophet that had been in the stomach of a fish, he can use anyone. Our past does not disqualify us. And in fact, this is all of our stories. We've all fallen short of God's glory. In one way or the other, we all have a mess in our past that God has forgiven and does not disqualify. In fact, this is something we say around here a lot, He takes our mess and He makes it our message. He takes Jonah's mess and he makes it his message. And in fact, He goes on to take the message and make it our ministry and makes it Jonah's ministry. And he takes a ministry, and he makes more ministers. I've even heard it said, it takes our paths and allows us to be pastors, to those around us. And yet, we are busy walking around disqualifying ourselves. That is a low view of God. God can use anyone.

And in fact, in my past, it was filled with just performance-based works, and love and value, all I could find value and love from was performance. Where I turned for pleasure was pornography.

And what God has done is removed all of those things. He's taken my mess, and made it my message, that I might be a minister to college students, who tend to oftentimes struggle with performance and approval, pornography in the pursuit of pleasure. And that's what I get to do. He takes our mess, and He makes it our message.

And in fact, this is what even Jesus does in the book of John 18. Peter denies Christ three times. And then John 21, Christ goes out of his way to ask Peter three times, "Do you love me?" Three times, Peter says, "Yes, Lord, I love you." And Christ reinstates Peter. Christ says, "Hey, I'm not going to hold that against you, in your past, I'm going to reinstate you. I'm going to give you a redo. I'm going to use you." Friends, this is so encouraging. The entire church is built on a person that denied Christ three times. Not just once, not just twice, three times. This is what God does. He uses anyone.

And so, I just want you to take a moment. What is it that you think disqualifies you? And I want you to write it down. Right now, just think to yourself, write it down. What do I think is disqualifying? I want you to write that down. No matter your past, you aren't disqualified. So go and tell and share your story. Because God can use anyone. First point God can use anyone. Let's jump back into verse five.

"⁵ The Ninevites believed God. A fast was proclaimed, and all of them, from the greatest to the least..."

And these next few verses are a description of verse five.

"⁶ When Jonah's warning reached the king of Nineveh, he rose from his throne, took off his royal robes, covered himself with sackcloth and sat down in the dust. ⁷ This is the proclamation he issued in Nineveh: "By the decree of the king and his nobles: Do not let people or animals, herds or flocks, taste anything; do not let them eat or drink. ⁸ But let people and animals be covered with sackcloth. Let everyone call urgently on God. Let them give up their evil ways and their violence. ⁹ Who knows? God may yet relent and with compassion turn from his fierce anger so that we will not perish.""

This is what happens in Nineveh, the Ninevites believe God. Notice, they didn't believe Jonah. That's an interesting observation. They didn't believe Jonah. They listened to what Jonah said, and they believed God. God uses a disobedient prophet to bring revival to an evil people. And fasting and sackcloth, these are forms of mourning. They were mourning their sin, and their evil and their violence. As the king shows us, they knew they were evil. And so, they were changing, they were turning, they were repenting, quickly. And revival breaks out in the old, and the young, the rich and the poor. I love that. Verse six, the king of Nineveh, here's the warning, believes and humbles himself, commands everyone in Nineveh to repent, and even forces the animals into sackcloth.

I think this is where we can just realize Jonah is a fun story. I think there's some funny parts of Jonah. I think God is humorous. And I think this is humorous. Like this is God, put clothes on animals as a form of punishment. Like I mean, that's what the Bible says, like, I think that's funny. Like, there is humor here. That's how willing the Ninevites were to humble themselves.

And so, Nineveh, despite being brilliantly brutal in their violence, turn to the Lord. Nineveh turns to the Lord. My second point is that God can change anyone. God can save anyone.

2. *God can change anyone.*

I think so often, we look around and just think, God, there's no hope for them. There's no hope for a co-worker, there's no hope for our family member, there's no hope for that person. That our neighbor, that we know is just constantly out late, constantly partying, all these things. We bind to those lies and we miss that God can change anyone. And in fact, God can change anyone, and it can lead to a revival of a city. I was thinking about this, like the modern day of this would be if God just brought revival in Sin City, in Vegas. And then the mayor was like, "Hey, in fact, we're going to all fast. We're going to stop eating, we're not going to drink any water. And we're just going to turn to the Lord. And maybe the Lord will protect us and not bring his wrath on us." Like, that'd be the modern-day version. God can change anyone.

And I also want us to take away something else from this passage. I want us to learn from Nineveh here. Nineveh has real repentance that leads to real change. Nineveh has real repentance; they are broken because of their sin, and it leads to real change. And I think so often, we forget that real repentance looks like making real changes in our lives. I see this most often in cultural Christianity. That's what we see all around us in Waco, is this cultural Christianity. Where it's like, "Hey, yeah, I'm a Christian. Yeah, I believe the Bible. Yeah, I go to church. Yeah, I pray every once in a while," but nothing in our lives looks like change. Like we say all these things about Jesus and maybe intellectually, like yeah, we believe, but that belief doesn't have any life change. Something we can learn from the Ninevites is that real belief, comes with real repentance, and leads to real change. That's what real repentance is. That's what it really looks like. And the Ninevites have this, this Godly sorrow that leads to a real repentance.

2 Corinthians 7:10 talks about this.

"¹⁰ Godly sorrow brings repentance that leads to salvation and leaves no regret, but worldly sorrow brings death."

Worldly grief produces death. And one of the ways I see this play out here at Harris Creek, is I've been interviewing some potential and future life group leaders for college. And as I interview leaders, they'll talk about some of their sin struggles and this and that. And I'll just press them, "Hey, you've been addicted to pornography. What have you done, as Jesus says, to cut out, cut off your hand, gouge out your eye; Or, as Paul says in Romans 13:14 make no provision for sin. Hey, I'm just curious, what have you done to remove access?" And that question has been very revealing in so many interviews because there are people who are doing whatever it takes to run from sin to have real change and real repentance. And there are many who were like, "Oh, I haven't done anything. I haven't done any- I've maybe told a friend. Maybe told my life group, but I haven't done anything about it." That's not real repentance. That is a worldly repentance. And it's easy to pick on college students, but how about in our marriages? Or even among our roommates when we're struggling with selfishness, but we're not doing anything to pursue those around us, to serve them, to do the dishes, take out the trash, to clean, to care.

Real repentance leads to change. Our belief must have action. And so, we see first that God can use anyone, second God can change anyone, and even that God ought to change us. That's what it ought to look like in our lives. And verse 10, we see our last point.

“¹⁰ When God saw what they did and how they turned from their evil ways, he relented and did not bring on them the destruction he had threatened.”

If you're like me, this begs the question, did God change His mind? Like, is this allowed? Did He lie? He said He was going to overthrow the Ninevites in 40 days. In Jonah 4:2, we won't jump ahead and look at it, but just know, that God's wrath was a warning if they didn't repent. He was warning them. And in fact, God overturning Nineveh was conditional. Nineveh wouldn't need to be overturned if Nineveh turned, which Nineveh did. So, God being a good and kind God relented.

I was just thinking about this week, it'd be like, remember when you're a kid, and your mom or your dad was like, if you don't clean your room by noon, you're grounded. Right? It was something like that. Or a Saturday morning, I just remember being told, “Hey, you're grounded at noon.” If I had even just heard “You're grounded at noon,” I'd have been like, “What do I need to fix? What do I need to fix?” “Oh, my room, okay, I need to take ownership for the things that I have done.” And if I clean my room, I wouldn't be grounded. And in the same way, Nineveh doesn't need to be punished because Nineveh turns. Nineveh responds to the warning that God gives through Jonah.

So, we don't need to worry about God. Here we get to trust and even see that He is good, here. You see, God's ultimate desire is right here in verse 10. And it's our third point that God has a heart for everyone. God has a heart for the lost.

3. God has a heart for everyone.

2 Peter 3:9 tells us,

“⁹ The Lord is not slow in keeping his promise, as some understand slowness. Instead, he is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance.”

God's heart is for the lost. God's heart is for Nineveh. And God relented because Nineveh repented. And it's interesting to see God's heart compared to Jonah's heart in Jonah one and two where Jonah is running. Jonah doesn't want to see Nineveh repent, and God does. That's what God wants. He wants the Ninevites to know Him. Jonah wanted them to get God's wrath, and I'll just add a little bit more context, Jonah would have known that the Ninevites had skinned, not just people, but at one point, Israel. At one point, Nineveh had overthrown an Israelite city and skinned Israelites. So rightfully, Jonah is like I want them to get what they deserve, God's wrath. And God's heart is for everyone. Even those friends or not friends that we look at and we say, “There's no hope and they don't deserve it.” Friends, we don't deserve it. We don't deserve God's kindness, and grace, and compassion. God's heart is for everyone. That all should reach repentance.

Jonah didn't think Nineveh deserved God's grace. Jonah didn't have a heart for the lost. We too often are the same way. We often even struggle to have a heart for those that we disagree with, in politics or sports. Much less the lost. And so, there's really this question of "Who is our Nineveh?" Like, who are the people that we don't really want God to reach? Or who is it that we don't think God can reach, but really, we are called to reach. We are God's method of reaching them. God wants to use us to reach Ninevites. That's actually God's call on our life to go and make disciples of all nations, to go and be fishers of men. So, it just begs the question, "How can we have more of a heart for the lost?" And who do we need to share the gospel with this week? Like, who is it? And I'll start with our neighbors. Is it a family member? Is it a friend? For me, the hardest person, for me to believe God can work in their lives are family members that live far away. I'm like, "Man, how will they ever come to the Lord? They live in New York. They live in Colorado, they're so far away, like how can I even how can I be apart...?" First, our neighbors, just the people around us, just in our places, who are the people that God wants to use you to reach them?

And then I think there's also an application for the nations here. First neighbors, then the nations. And here's what I mean. I want to invite you to just consider praying for a nation to know God. Praying for the nation that doesn't have access to the Gospel, you see, Nineveh was a people that didn't have access to who God was. They didn't know who God was. They needed a messenger to come and tell them about who God is. And these still exist to this day, they're called "unreached people groups." In fact, we just had Secret Church on Friday night, where we got to learn and pray for countries that do not have access to the Gospel and are actually persecuted for gathering like this. That's what we did on Friday at Secret Church. And so, I'm just curious, how can we have more of a heart for nations that do not have access to the Gospel? It's God's heart. And I think we can pray, give, or go. And right now, I'm just asking you to pray.

How can we have a heart for the lost in our world? And how can we have a heart for the lost in our neighbors? Twofold application of having a heart for lost. So, in summary, God can use anyone. God can change anyone. And God has a heart for everyone.

Years after I failed that stand and deliver, friends started to call and text me. And they're like, "Hey, bro, I just heard that you failed your stand and deliver." It's like, "what?" I became this butt of a joke. And I just heard over and over again, that they would say, "Hey, don't... Hey, make sure to prepare, don't mess up, or else you'll have to redo it like Dale. I became the person that they used to remind people in this program to actually prepare. In fact, being the entrepreneur that I am, I actually reached out to the guy in charge of the program. I was like, "Hey, I'm going to start taking royalty fees on this story. Because I hear about you using this story so often, you're going to owe me \$20 every time you use this story. If you use it again." Like it was that often.

And I think the story of Jonah is that reminder for us, and even my story of having to have the redo. There's something here, to first time obedience. There's something here to not having to have another chance at it, but to being obedient the first time, when the Spirit of God gives you the urge or the nudge to go share the Gospel with that person. Go and do it. Go and do it. When the Spirit of God gives you the urge to step in faithfulness, to go to ReGen tomorrow night, you go. To join a life group. To be used by God. To go to another nation, I don't know. But let us be a

people that are known for first time obedience. That we're actually led by the Spirit of God. Because there are people everywhere who are lost. Our neighbors and the nations. And they're longing and eager to hear the good news. And we see that all throughout the Scriptures, the Gerasene demoniac, the woman at the well, Zacchaeus. This story encouraged me of how the lost are eager.

A story of some missionaries who went to an unreached people group in China that had never heard the Gospel, and they share the Gospel with these people. And they all just started to turn to Jesus. They all respond to the Gospel, they're like, "Man, I want to follow this Jesus, who is this Jesus?" And one of the people that came to know the Lord came up to this missionary who was like, "Hey, this is amazing. When did this happen? When did this Savior come to die for us and raise from the dead, like when did this resurrection happen? Was this like two weeks ago? Was this two years ago, like I was just curious. You never said when did this happen?" And the missionary says, "It happened two thousand years ago." "What?" It was a village elder; he was baffled. "What?" he said, "What took you so long? What took you so long?" And that phrase, "What took you so long?" is what I believe many of our neighbors, our families, our friends, the nations are just wondering of Harris Creek. "Hey, what took you so long?" Will we be a people who understand God can use anyone, He can use us. God can change anyone, no one is too far from His love. And God's heart is for the lost. And the lost are eager, they're wondering what took us so long. Let me pray that we would respond.

God, would you use us. In your kindness will you use us. Lord today is a redo in some ways, it's just an opportunity to acknowledge the ways that we've fallen short of your glory, and we want to be used by you. Help us to truly believe that you can use us. Help us to really believe that you can reach anyone with the Good News of your Gospel. Lord, I just pray that you would help us get out of the way. We get in our heads, we overthink, we wonder what people might think. We just assume they don't care. Lord, forgive us. Help us to have a heart for our neighbors and the nations. Help us to have a heart for the lost. May we remember there are many eager to hear the Good News of the Gospel and they're wondering what took us so long. God send us out from here to Nineveh. Would you use us by your grace, in Jesus' name. Amen.