

Jonah 3:1-10

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#1106A

*Jonah: Man On The Run
The God Of Second Chances*

Fifty years ago this month the headlines in every newspaper in our country read Five Missionaries Killed In South American Jungle. Suddenly Nate Saint, Jim Elliot, Pete Fleming, Ed McCully and Roger Youderian became household words.

The five had taken their young families to Ecuador and had purposed to reach a fierce native tribe known as Aucas or Waodani.

That could have been the end of the story right there. But Jim's young widow Elizabeth, and Steve's sister Rachel did what looked impossible. They went back to the tribe, settled there and began sharing the message of Jesus Christ.

Their example of responding to bloodshed with love inspired the rapid spread God's message of forgiveness that ending internal warfare among the Waodani and ensured the tribe's survival.

Because they slaughtered each other they were on the verge of extinction. It also inspired generations of people to follow the call to become missionaries.

In another improbable sequel, one of the killers, Mincaye, became a virtual substitute father to Nate's son, Steve Saint.

You can see the story in the movie "The End of The Spear" which is currently in theaters.

As kind of a sidebar, Steve Saint said he initially declined to assist the "Spear" movie because the Waodani Christians said they opposed the project. But the Waodani changed their minds when he told them about the Columbine High School massacre. They wanted to help Americans overcome violence like they had.

Mincaye the murderer got something of incredible value. A second chance. Today God is using him both in the jungle and in other parts of the world to spread God's truth.

We worship an amazing God don't we? We worship the God of second chances.

Were in a study of the OT book of Jonah. Jonah was a man on the run from God.

What we've seen so far was that Jonah is really a book about us. And the most important lesson that we can learn is how much we are like Jonah because once we really learn how much we're like him, then we will stop making excuses for ourselves.

Jonah was a man who ran from God. Every one of us in this room this morning have run from God at some time in our lives. The story of Jonah is our story.

Jonah was chosen by God for a special mission. And Jonah said, "No thanks, God. That's not something I'm interested in doing."

So he got on a ship headed the other direction. The rest is history. Violent storm. The lot falls on Jonah. The sailors throw him overboard. A very big fish swallows him. Jonah finally says "I guess I'd better listen to God." The fish barfs Jonah out on the shore.

That brings us to our passage for today. **Turn to Jonah 3 pg 817**

I. God Is A God Of Second Chances

Read vs 1

I don't know how that hits you but it sure encourages me. It's not that I'm happy about the sins of others, but it's sure encouraging to see how many people in the Bible messed up big time and God gave them a second chance.

Think about Abraham. He's the father of the Jewish people, specially chosen by God, the receiver of the promise of Messiah.

He gets scared and tries to pass his wife off for his sister so the king doesn't kill him to take his wife. It's OK that the king takes his wife, it's just not OK that he gets filleted in the process.

He even tried to use his wife's servant girl to bear him a child after it looked like God's promise of an heir wasn't going to work out.

But God came to Abraham a second time.

How about David? He was appointed king by God but he got involved another guy's wife, got her pregnant, had her husband killed, and married the woman to try and pretend the baby was his.

God came to David the second time.

How about the Apostle Peter? He spat on the ground and swore when people questioned whether he was one of Jesus' followers. In fact he denied Jesus 3 times in a row.

Yet the Word of the Lord came to Peter a second time and he became a great leader in the early church.

We serve a God of second chances. He doesn't hold grudges. He doesn't give up on us. He didn't give up on Jonah and that means he won't give up on you and me.

God's message to Jonah didn't change. In Chapter 1:2 God says, "Arise, go to Nineveh, that great city, and cry out against it; for their wickedness has come up before Me."

Now look what He says... **read vs 2**

As we read on in this chapter we're going to see that when Jonah finally does what God tells him to, Nineveh, which was a really wicked place, changes. People listened.

Could it be that a big part of the problem in this country is that God has said "Get out there and share your faith with people," and the church has said "Don't bother us, we're sleeping in the bottom of the boat?"

What's it going to take to cause us to see the wisdom of obeying God? For Jonah it was a near death experience, more frightening than anything we could even imagine.

I would hope that it doesn't take that for us.

But now I want you to notice Jonah's response to this second call of God... **Read vs 3**

The first time Jonah knows what He's supposed to do he runs the other way. He learns the consequence of running and now Jonah obeys.

In chapter 1 and verse 2 God says "Go preach to your countries sworn enemy, the Assyrians."

The next verse says "But Jonah..." Jonah said no and took off the other way. But then the next verse says "But God the Lord sent a great wind..."

Now here in chapter three after God says Go we read "So.." So Jonah got up and went.

When Jonah voiced his “but” God came back with an even bigger “but” (b-u-t).

Now when Jonah responds with a “Yes” God pulls off and even bigger “yes.”

I wonder, can you think of anything in your life that you know God wants you to do that’s still undone. Maybe it’s been days. Maybe it’s been years, but you’re running.

Maybe it’s getting rid of an area of sin in your life. Maybe it’s a relationship issue that you don’t want to face. Maybe you need to ask for forgiveness from someone. Maybe you need to forgive someone.

God forbid that any of us walk out of this room this morning being a Jonah like he was in chapter 1.

He said “no” but a few verses later he says, “I fear the LORD, the God of heaven.”

Like Peter in Acts 10 when God wanted him to go to the non-Jewish world and talk to them about Jesus the Jewish messiah. In Acts 10:14 Peter says, “Not so, Lord.”

The phrases, “No, I wont,” and “He’s my Lord,” don’t go together. They’re contradictory. If you say “no” then your not acknowledging Him as Lord, so why pretend?

That’s called hypocrisy. That’s saying words but contradicting them with your actions.

Are you trying to walk on both sides of the fence today? That can be really painful.

God sent His son Jesus Christ to pay for our sins. The Bible says He *“bore our sins in His own body on the tree.”* I Peter 2:24 The Son of God suffered the punishment and degradation of our wrongdoings.

God says, *“And by Him everyone who believes is justified from all things from which you could not be justified by the law of Moses.”*

Everyone who received Jesus Christ as Savior, who trusts His death , burial, and resurrection, is forgiven because of the cross.

If your a believer today God says *“For you were bought at a price; therefore glorify God in your body and in your spirit, which are God’s.”* (I Cor 6:20)

How could I refuse to obey a God who would forgive me?

Romans 15:4 says, *“For whatever things were written before were written for our learning, that we through the patience and comfort of the Scriptures might have hope.”*

Did you hear that? God gave us the story of Jonah so that we might have hope. God shows us Jonah’s failures to bring about our blessings and God shows us his blessings so that we can experience even greater blessings.

So Jonah got up and went and *“Nineveh was an exceedingly great city, a three-day journey in extent.”*

Nineveh was on the eastern bank of the Tigris River, not too far down from its source on Mount Ararat. It’s just outside Mosul, in northern Iraq.

As so often happens people used to dismiss the Bible’s description of Nineveh as unrealistic. In fact, just like most places mentioned in the Bible critics used to deny it even existed at all. In the 1840’s a British archeologist, Sr. Austin Layard, uncovered the ruins of ancient Nineveh.

He found that the original walls had been 100 feet high, 50 feet thick at the base, 90 miles long, and fortified with 1500 defence towers, some up to 200 feet tall. The city had 15 mammoth gates and a moat 150 feet wide.

Add to that all the people who lived in the suburbs surrounding the city and you can see it would take a while to walk through it.

Jonah does, and as he walks through the streets he brings God’s message. **Read vs 4**

If you were reading verse 4 in the original Hebrew you’d see something that most English translations leave out. It actually reads *“Nineveh was an exceedingly great city **to God...**”*

Now fast forward to the last verse of Jonah. **Read 4:11**

There were 120,000 people who didn’t know right from left. I would assume that’s small children. That would mean that there could have been several hundred thousand all together.

No wonder it was a great city to God. It was full of people and God loves people. Even bad people.

So God sends His prophet with a message.

I. *God Is A God Of Second Chances*

II. *God Is The God Of Salvation*

Read vs 5

Isn't that awesome? The people believed God.

You say, "Yea, like I can buy into that. Here they are, warrior bad guys. This is the capital of one of the most violent nations that's ever existed on the planet. Avowed enemies of Israel and a Jewish guy shows up in town carrying a sign that says 'Repent, The End Is Near' and they all believe him. That's harder to swallow than the whale story."

I have to believe that Jonah was more shocked than we are. How could this happen?

Well, as we read history we discover that there was a convergence of events that I believe prepared the way for Jonah.

1. Within a five year period (765 & 769 BC) there were two major plagues that had ripped through this part of the world killing thousands.
2. In 768 BC there was a complete solar eclipse that the superstitious Assyrians would have interpreted as a bad omen.
3. About 100 miles north of Nineveh two warrior tribes had come together and formed an alliance against Assyria. They were beginning to slowly move south.

So you have 2 plagues, a solar eclipse, enemies to the north and then to top it off here comes this guy who's been in the belly of a fish for three days.

His skin is bleached white and probably raw and oozing from the stomach acid. His hair probably looked like the bride of Frankenstein. He smells very unusual.

And here he comes walking into town yelling "Repent, the end is near," and people say, "You know what, we believe him!"

For some reason they took Jonah seriously.

Here's a powerful lesson for us. God has commanded us to share His truth with the people in our sphere of life. Whether it's talking to them about Christ or inviting them to church or an event God wants us to be part of His evangelism team.

How do we usually respond? There's something in us that says, "Na! They're not interested in what I have to say. Look at them. They've got it all together. They're so cool. So intimidating. They won't want to hear anything about God."

That's what flashes through our brain when so often God's at work behind the scenes preparing peoples hearts.

Our tendency is to say:

"Since they don't look interested, they must not be interested."

"Since they don't look like they need anything, they must not need anything."

"Since they look so happy and together, they must be so happy and together."

"Since they don't seem interested in religion, they must not be interested in religion."

And we've got it all figured out. We don't even need to try. We already know they're not interested.

Often times God is working behind the scenes in ways we never dreamed of to prepare the hearts and minds of a person He's put in our path.

That's what He did with Jonah, just on a much bigger scale.

God uses one worn, haggard, bleached, formerly unreliable man. A guy He had to put through the ringer just to get him to do what He asked.

I bet Jonah wouldn't have been your first choice!

Turn to I Corinthians 1 pg 1013 Read vs 26-31

you know what God does? He delights in bringing us into situations that are way beyond us. That are way over our head. And He does it so that He'd get the worship and honor instead of us.

It doesn't say Jonah 3:5 So the people of Nineveh believed Jonah, does it? It says they believed God.

This is all about God. Everything's all about God. God is all in all. We're just little specks of dust floating on a little ball of dust in a galaxy that's one of an innumerable number of galaxies in an immense universe, that we can't seem to get to the edge of cause every time we go out further there's more we didn't know was there.

God is big folks. He's huge. He's a whole lot bigger and more powerful than most of us give Him credit for.

And as Jonah 2:9 says, "Salvation is of the LORD."

And just so He can drive home the point of who's the real consequential one in this story, Jonah's not mentioned again in the rest of chapter 3.

Turn back to Jonah

The people of Nineveh believed God. And here's what they believed: God would wipe them out, but... But He went to the trouble of sending a prophet. A strange looking guy, but a prophet none the less.

And not only that but God was giving them over a month to respond. In other words, God was willing to show them mercy.

John 3:17 says: *"For God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through Him might be saved."*

The Bible says, *"As I live, says the Lord GOD, I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked."*
Ezekiel 33:11

I Timothy 2:3-4 *"For this is good and acceptable in the sight of God our Savior, who desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth."*

Our God is a saving God.

Well, the message went out and look what happened. **Read vs. 6-8**

Even the king was humbled by the words of a weak little Jewish prophet.

He told everybody to put on sackcloth, which is just what it sounds like. Rough burlap, like

you'd make sacks out of.

And he sat in ashes. Ashes were worthless and useless so to sit in them was a sign you realized your own unworthiness.

People of ancient cultures knew about one another's gods. These people had heard the stories about God destroying Pharaoh and his army back in the exodus.

In fact in Exodus 9:16 God says to Pharaoh, *"But indeed for this purpose I have raised you up, that I may show My power in you, and that My name may be declared in all the earth."*

They had heard the God of the Hebrews had made the walls Jericho collapse and how He destroyed Sodom and Gomorrah.

And now though the preparing work of God in their lives everybody was ready to believe.

They were afraid. So they say, verse 9... **Read 9**

That's faith. It wasn't a mature faith. It wasn't a strong faith. It wasn't a faith that had much knowledge of God.

But it was faith.

Their god's were only vengeful and harsh and demanding. They had to be bought off because they were always angry.

Now they throw themselves at the mercy of a God who would give them warning.

That's all that God really asks of anyone. A recognition of our own sinfulness and a realization that the only way we can be saved from His wrath is through His mercy.

They had a weak, untaught faith. But it's not the strength of our faith that saves, it's the object of our faith.

They had faith in the living God.

- I. *God Is A God Of Second Chances*
- II. *God Is The God Of Salvation*
- III. *God Is A God Of Mercy*

Read vs 10

The book of Jonah is filled with what the theologians call “anthropomorphisms.” From: *anthropos* meaning “man” and *morphe* meaning “shape” or “form.”

Anthropomorphisms are descriptions of God’s actions that are written in human terms.

Obviously you and I can’t think in infinite terms. God is way more complex and unique than we can process. So the Bible uses accommodating language to describe God.

A good example is chapter 1, verse 2 where God says “the wickedness of Assyria is come up before me.”

If you’re not careful you could read that and get the impression that God was busy doing “God things” and finally their wickedness got so extreme that it finally caught God’s attention.

Of course God knew all about the wickedness of the Assyrians long before there were any Assyrians. Stuff doesn’t pop into God’s mind or thoughts. This is all language meant to accommodate the infinite God to finite people.

Again, here in chapter 3 and verse 120, we find this language of accommodation. God doesn’t have to see somebody’s actions to know if they have faith or not.

We do, because we can’t see people’s hearts but God doesn’t. Not only that but God doesn’t change His mind. The theological term for that is immutability.

He doesn’t say to the angels, “Let’s try this plan for the world for 6 months and then we’ll evaluate to see if we need to tweak it any!”

We don’t get up in the morning and say to God, “How are you doing?”

He’s always the same. He doesn’t change.

What’s happening in verse 10 is this. God promised to judge a wicked, violent, Nineveh. The Nineveh He spared was repentant and changed.

God didn’t change. The people of Nineveh changed.

And that’s the beautiful message of true, biblical Christianity.

The religions of the world try to appease God. They try to change God from being an angry God to being loving God.

The God of the Bible doesn't change. He doesn't need to be reconciled to us. We need to be reconciled to Him.

God is fully willing and able to save from judgment and hell. He's already made the way. He's already paid the price at the cross.

Now His message is be reconciled to God. Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and you shall be saved. Neither is there salvation in any other, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved.

The people of Nineveh had to say, "Who can tell if God will spare us?"

They hoped so, but they couldn't be absolutely sure. Their faith was limited.

We don't have to say that. We don't have to wonder. I John 5:13 *"These things I have written to you who believe in the name of the Son of God, that you may **know** that you have eternal life."*

Not think, hope, wish, or guess. We can know we have eternal life.

You know, I did a Google News article search for the phrases "died suddenly" and "died unexpectedly." I got 4850 hits for articles from the past 30 days. And those are just the ones that made the news.

How about you today? God's a God of second chances. Maybe you've heard about Him repeatedly but you've always tried to push Him aside. How about today?

Do you have 40 days? I don't know. I don't know if you have 40 hours or even 40 minutes left.

But I know this. When runners stop running, God hears. He's a God of second chances, a God of salvation, a God of mercy.

He's shown incalculable, immeasurable, boundless, and extravagant mercy to me. He's forgiven me because of Jesus Christ and made me His child.

And He'll do the same for you.

I don't want to be melodramatic this morning, just honest with Biblical truth. God is the God of second chances, until you die. Then the chances are over. Then it's too late.

The Bible says, *"It is appointed for men to die once, but after this the judgment..."* Hebrews 9:27

See it's not too late for you today because you're here.

Today, the best you know how, would you bow your heart before the living God and trust Him for forgiveness of your sin?