

### JONAH #3 – THE ALLOWANCES OF GOD FOR A LIFE

This morning, we will continue in our study on the book of Jonah. The book of Jonah is a very short but compelling book. It's about God's interaction with a man, specifically, related to God's calling on his life, for a single mission. In our first study we looked at a calling on a life, the calling of God on Jonah's life and how he rejected God's call, not because he was afraid but because he simply did not care about the lost. He had a callous disregard for the lost. We talked about 'the spirit of Jonah' and I challenged you to consider this question. Do you have God's heart for the lost?

Last time we explored the hand of God in our lives, his interventions in our lives. Even though Jonah had run from God, God still intervened in his life and rescued him. We learn that you really can't run from God. God's grace comes to us in ways we would never expect, that sometimes the belly of a fish is our salvation.

This morning, we will be looking at God's allowances for a life. What does God do in the name of grace and mercy? We will learn that God is a God of second chances, the allowances he makes in the face of our disobedience. **1“Then the word of the Lord came to Jonah a second time. Go to the great city of Nineveh and proclaim to it the message I give you. Jonah 3:1.**

Here is where we are up to so far in the book of Jonah. God called Jonah to go to the great city of Nineveh to give them an opportunity to turn from their ways and turn to God. How did Jonah respond to God's call on his life? He ran from his call and from God. Now, you could understand Jonah running from fear. The city of Nineveh would intimidate anybody. However, Jonah fled for another reason. He fled because he did not want the mercy of God to break out. He did not want God to pour his grace on others. This is spirit of Jonah. It was nothing more than a callous indifference to the lost. Jonah did not want to do what it would take to reach out to them.

Then God sent a great storm, and he rescued Jonah from drowning. He received the mercy of God inside the belly of a great fish. While there, Jonah changed and began to be open to God's plan. Now, this morning in chapter three, we find the call of God coming again. If we just stop right there, we have three enormous insights into God. We need to take note of these before we go any further in this chapter.

Firstly, calls from God do not go away. They are always there waiting to be fulfilled. God's purposes will be fulfilled. However, the missed opportunities that God presents us with will haunt us forever. If we flee, like Jonah did, if you run away from a call from God on your life, God will not abandon you. However, you may not bear all the fruit that God has for you. Lives may be at stake. This shows how serious God's calls are.

Second, God is the God of the second chance. God gave the call to Jonah and Jonah fled. Then God gave it to him again. He gave him a chance to reconsider. He gave him an opportunity to change direction. Have you ever screwed up so royally that you really thought you could never do anything for God again? Is there something in your past? A choice, a mistake, a decision that you would give anything to try again. John

Ortberg says this about second chances. **"If you're going to receive help from the Lord of the second chance you will have to acknowledge the truth about your condition. John Ortberg, Love Beyond Reason.**

I know it's a hard question. It's an uncomfortable question but it's a question that could determine if you live the life God has called you to live. You can go back and when you do, you won't receive judgement from God. You'll receive mercy; however, you have got to turn you back on pride. You must care more about being right with God than being honoured in the eyes of others. Jonah did and it saved his life.

So, Jonah obeyed the word of the lord and went to Nineveh. On the first day, Jonah started into the city. <sup>3</sup> **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. Jonah 3:3.** How did Jonah get Nineveh's attention? I discovered through the week that there have been accounts of people partially swallowed by whales, but certainly not for three days and three nights, which still convinces me that a miracle of God happened here.

However, when they were released from the whale their skin had been completely bleached. Imagine if that was the case with Jonah. Imagine a guy looking like that walking into Nineveh preaching. Maybe Jonah even told them his story. It would have got their attention. We don't know for sure because the bible doesn't tell us but it's interesting to ponder these things.

We do know that Nineveh was a very important city. It was the capital of the Syrian empire. It was a large city, economically and militarily important. These things didn't impress God. He was interested in it because it was full of people who did not know him. They all mattered to God. You have never looked eyes on anyone who didn't matter to God. That's the way we need to view the world.

Here is another key lesson from Jonah for us this morning. The call of God on your life may be a difficult one. You may have to confront your worst fears, suffer hardship or endure great difficulty. <sup>4</sup>**Jonah began by going a day's journey into the city, proclaiming, "Forty more days and Nineveh will be overthrown."** Jonah 3:4. Sometimes talking truth is a tough job. It's always a difficult conversation.

<sup>5</sup>**The Ninevites believed God. A fast was proclaimed, and all of them, from the greatest to the least, put on sackcloth.** <sup>6</sup> **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.** <sup>7</sup> **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.** <sup>8</sup> **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.** <sup>9</sup> **Who knows? God may yet relent and with compassion turn from his fierce anger so that we will not perish."** Jonah 3: 5-9.

That's amazing! They repented. It was immediate. Jonah's answering of his call, his humility, his willingness to endure great hardship and speak the truth and it had widespread impact. They repented and boy did they repent. Did you notice? Scripture says they believed!

Jonah preached that in forty days Nineveh shall be overthrown. This was what he enthusiastically wanted and preached. He enjoyed preaching wrath. He did it with glee, not tears because he couldn't wait for God's hammer to fall on them. How disappointed Jonah must have been when God responded with mercy. Verse ten says, When God examined their deeds and how they forsook their evil way, he renounced the destruction he had said he would bring on the city. It was not just intellectual panic that made them repent. The word in the Hebrew here has to do with sincere trust.

First, they turned back to God. Secondly, they fasted. Now that's not the main use of fasting in the bible. Its primary use is as a spiritual discipline. You go without food to turn away from the preoccupation with the flesh to heighten your spiritual sensitivities. Here they fasted as a way of repenting. They turned to God hoping that God might turn to them.

Thirdly they put on sackcloth. That's a phrase you may have heard before. Sackcloth was this thick coarse cloth, usually made of goat's skin. You would wear it instead of normal clothes. It was often coupled with ashes, which you would put on your face. It symbolised your expression of grief over something.

Fourthly they prayed. They called urgently on God. Finally, they turned from their evil ways. This was a big repentance. The repentance of the Ninevites should give us all a real dose of enthusiasm when it comes to thinking about our family, friends and neighbours who may be far away from God.

There was another reason why they turned so quickly. Their turning didn't depend on Jonah. It was the Holy Spirit. Don't get me wrong, they could have resisted. God does not overpower us, but it wasn't the strength of Jonah that was doing the convincing! The power of Jonah's words was not the issue. It was the power of God.

So, what was God's response? <sup>10</sup> **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. Jonah 3:10.** I love that verse. It's one of the most enlightening verses in all of Scripture.

I want to suggest three important truths to end on. Number One, God is a responsive God. A God able to be moved by you. Emotionally moved by you. Moved to mercy. Do you realise that God's heart is filled with tenderness and delight at the mere thought of you.

Secondly, we can come to God for mercy. It's available to us. God is that kind of God, not just towards ancient cities or biblical characters but towards You! Here and now,

this Sunday right now. God is deeply sensitive to those who cry out for mercy. Even when they deserve judgement.

Out of all the things the Ninevites did, the only thing that is mentioned in this verse that moved God was that they turned from their evil ways. It's the only thing mentioned. That's the nature of true repentance. It's the primary action in chapter three, the Ninevites repentance and God's compassion. The enduring truth of this chapter, that you can take away today is that compassion is a primary attribute of God.

God filled the world with beauty and mystery. With waterfalls and sunsets. Glaciers and the tropics. With Lemon Meringue pie and Feijoas. God said, "I don't just love you this much". God gave us a mind, the ability to know right from wrong, to choose to follow him.

God gives us people. Teachers, friends and heroes, people to share community and intimacy and fun with. Then God gave his son, Jesus Christ. Jesus was God's ultimate attempt to show us how much he loves us. He let his son pay the debt that we couldn't. God's unswerving commitment to justice and his longing to forgive meet at the cross. With the sacrifice of Jesus, God says, "Now you will understand how much I love you".

Redeeming is what God is into. He is the finder of directionally challenged sheep. The searcher of missing coins. The embracer of foolish prodigal sons. His favourite department is the lost and found. His love and his grace have no limits. His power has no boundaries. He offers all this to you this morning.

Maybe you haven't received God's love for you this morning. You have never accepted Jesus as your lord and saviour and this morning you long for the kind of God I have been talking about. Long for him to be in your life. Well, you simply need to acknowledge that you have been separated from God. Ask for God's forgiveness and invite Christ to be Lord of your life.