

“Nineveh, Meet Jonah”

Jonah 3

08/28/22

### Introduction

Tim. Pastor. **Jonah 3. Pray.**

**There are two people in life who will always have our unreserved yes.**

**The first is your authority.**

**Dad = authority.** I remember growing up - you didn't mess with my dad. If Dave Olson said something that was law. I remember when I was in middle school, my brothers and I went with some of their friends over to Augusta, GA - it was about 30 minutes from my hometown to go to the mall. That's what you did as teenagers in Aiken, you went to the Augusta mall because there was a pacsun and a hot topic. It was great.

And we're driving home, and one of my brothers friends was distracted, didn't stop in time, ended up rear-ending my brothers car. So we call my dad on the way home - here's what happened. We all get back, everyone parks - about to head inside. And my dad comes out and as stern and direct as you can say it, not shouting, just direct - "If your last name isn't Olson, it's time for you to leave."

I have never seen 16 year old guys move that fast in my life. Dad was authority. You listened to what he had to say.

Two people in life that have your unreserved yes - the first is your authority.

**The second is your love.**

**College boys and love.** You would see this happen all of the time in college, when guys started dating somebody. It's like for 3 years they lived in sweatpants and stained hoodies, then all of a sudden they're wearing sweaters and chinos. And you're like - "Bro, what happened to you." "Well, she likes it when I wear..." Got it. Got it.

***There are two people in life who will always have your yes - Your authority and your love.***

**Up until this point in the story God has been reminding Jonah of both - That He's the authority and that He loves Jonah deeply and Jonah is to love Him.**

God had given Jonah a command to go to Nineveh - and Jonah thought he could rebel against God's authority. He thought he could run from the presence of God - He had forgotten God's authority - that the God he worshiped controlled the wind and the waves. That the God He worshiped was going to get His attention and His obedience through His severe mercies.

Jonah had lost his love. His heart stopped beating with the heartbeat of God. He doesn't want what God wants. He doesn't want the Ninevites to repent. He doesn't want to preach the message God gives him. So God, out of deep love for Jonah sends some sailors, a storm, and a fish to save Jonah from himself+rebellion.

**Which is the big theme of the book → *Jonah is consistently rebellious, and God is consistently gracious.***

Now, while that is the big theme of this story and the life of Jonah - God's continual pursuit of the heart of Jonah - what we'll see today in chapter 3 is going to show us that God chasing Jonah isn't just about Jonah.

While God is certainly chasing after Jonah, He's also chasing after Nineveh. God is merciful and gracious time and time and time again to Jonah, but that grace isn't to stop with him.

God wants Jonah's yes - because He wants the very grace and mercy He has shown Jonah to be shown through Jonah to others. And that's true for us as well.

And that's the theme of chapter 3.

God has been showing Jonah - I am your authority. You are called to love me. And so because I'm your authority and your love would you give me your "yes" in obedience to the call to preach to Nineveh.

Walkthrough → Apply

### Walkthrough Jonah 3

**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."**

**This is a 1-for-1 repetition of ch 1, v1 - it's a marked "do-over" opportunity.**

A sign of God's faithfulness to Jonah. Jonah, I'm not giving up on this. I've put a call on your life - I've commanded you to do something - go to Nineveh, preach my words. I know you rebelled the first time, trying to run from my presence, but I'm not going to let this go.

Even though Jonah is rebellious, hard-hearted, on the run, God won't give up on him.

Which is just worth pausing and celebrating for a moment that the same is true for us, amen? That God does not give up on us when we're rebellious, hard-hearted, on the run - though we are faithless, He remains faithful.

And God doesn't give up on our obedience. God's going to keep pushing keep pushing keep pushing until He gets Jonah's yes.

**3 So Jonah arose and went to Nineveh, according to the word of the Lord.**

Same call as chapter 1, completely different response. Jonah actually goes to Nineveh!

However...it's best to read this in light of what Garrison said last week about chapter 2 and I'll argue next week from chapter 4 - **less like whole-hearted obedience, and more like a grumpy obligation** - But he does go.

While God hasn't fully gotten Jonah's heart yet, he has gotten Jonah's act of obedience.

**Now Nineveh was an exceedingly great city, three days' journey in breadth. 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!"**

Alright, pause here. This is the **worst sermon in the history of sermons**. All of the build up of suspense in this story - fleeing, ship, storm, fish → all leads up to "Yet forty days, and Nineveh shall be overthrown!"

**It's 8 words in English, 5 in the original Hebrew.**

Can you imagine if I got up here one Sunday, stood behind this pulpit and said – “God's angry with you. Soon you'll be destroyed.” And then I just sat down. You're not coming back next Sunday. Guaranteed way to shrink a church, not make radically changed followers of Jesus, right?

But that's what Jonah does - walks into the city - You're about to be destroyed! Alright, see you later! No 3 point alliteration, no funny anecdotes or stories - 8 words.

But look at what happens...

**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. 6 The word reached the king of Nineveh, and he arose from his throne, removed his robe, covered himself with sackcloth, and sat in ashes.**

The great king of this wicked, violent, evil nation - repents. He humbles himself before God and repents.

- They put on **sackcloth** - it was this ancient repentance symbol of renouncing the things of the world.
- They sit in **ashes** - a symbol of their sorrow for sin and wickedness.

**7 And he issued a proclamation and published through Nineveh, “By the decree of the king and his nobles: Let neither man nor beast, herd nor flock, taste anything. Let them not feed or drink water, 8 but let man and beast be covered with sackcloth, and let them call out mightily to God. Let everyone turn from his evil way and from the violence that is in his hands. 9 Who knows? God may turn and relent and turn from his fierce anger, so that we may not perish.”**

But not only does the king repent, he leads the entire city to repent. The text says - from the greatest of them to the least of them - from the king to the servants and everyone in between - they all repent.

**Notice the irony between what's happening in Nineveh and what's been happening with Jonah:**

- Where Jonah repents falsely with much pride and bravado, the Ninevites repent fully and completely - throwing themselves on the mercy of God.
- Where Jonah remains hard hearted through a storm and a near death experience, the Ninevites repent quickly after 8 words from a foreign prophet.
- Where the pagan sailors worship God despite the actions and words of Jonah, the pagan Ninevites worship God because of the actions and words of their king.

**10 When God saw what they did, how they turned from their evil way, God relented of the disaster that he had said he would do to them, and he did not do it.**

Summarize chapter 3 like this → **Jonah gave the Ninevites a half-hearted sermon, God gave the Ninevites full-hearted forgiveness.**

### Two Questions

That's chapter 3. There's a really strange ending to come, but let's stop here for tonight and apply this into our lives. What can we learn and see from chapter 3 as it pertains to us here and now 3,000 some odd years later.

I think what we should wrestle with from this part of Jonah's story is 2 questions...

**Two questions to ask in light of this passage:**

**1. Do you believe the mercy of God is great enough to save sinners?**

You can't read the book of Jonah without seeing this continual message → God's heart is to save those who are far from Him.

**We see this in the life of Jonah - God's continual pursuit of a man on the run.**

**But we also see this in Nineveh.**

Nineveh, as the Scriptures have told us a couple of times now, is a powerful city. It wasn't just a prominent place, it was a status symbol. In the 8th century BC, when this story takes place - it was the capital city of the greatest empire in the world - the Assyrian empire. And Nineveh in particular was built as a monument to this empire's greatness.

**But the city was exceedingly wicked and evil...**

**One historian - "Nineveh was the cruelest, vilest, most powerful, most idolatrous empire in the world."**

- It was a city full of sexual immorality + prostitution, corruption, idolatry.
- The Ninevites were known for their violence and cruelty.
  - We talked in week 1 about how they would make piles of enemies' heads and stack them outside of cities they conquered as warning signs to other nations.
  - They would also make a public mockery of their enemies through regular public executions and burning at the stake. Just as violent and cruel as you can imagine.
  - Nahum (another OT prophet) calls it "the city of blood."
- But not only were they sexual immoral, corrupt, and violent, they were also arrogant and boastful about just how evil and great they were.
  - Ninevite king **Asharshidan - "I am powerful. I am all powerful. I'm a hero. I'm gigantic. I'm colossal. I am honored. I am magnified. I'm without equal. I'm the chosen one."**

**Arrogant, boastful, proud, violent, immoral, idolatrous, corrupt...and yet not outside the reach of the mercy of God.**

Such that when they repent, He relents. He does not destroy them. He has mercy. He forgives.

Chopping heads off, "We're the greatest", arrogant enemies of God's chosen people - the Israelites - and when they repent, He pardons.

**No one is past the saving grace of God.**

This is the very heartbeat of God - to save broken people from their sin and themselves, and bring them into relationship with Him. That is the entire message of the Scriptures and of history → God bringing people back to Himself through their repentance and His mercy.

That's the drum the Bible beats - The grace of God. The grace of God. The grace of God. Put on display for us in Jonah 3.

**So it's worth us pausing and asking ourselves:**

**Do you believe the mercy of God is great enough to save sinners?**

**Non-Christians:**

If you're here, and you're not a follower of Jesus - you're just checking things out, or maybe someone invited you, or you're asking questions and wrestling with what it means to be a Christian - I'm so glad you're here.

*If that's you, I need you to hear one thing from me tonight, and that's this:*

**The grace of God is great enough to save you.**

I don't know the ins and outs of your story. I don't know the intricacies of who you've been or what you've done. What your hands have touched, what your eyes have seen.

I know all of us in the room have done things we're not proud of. If you think you've walked into a room full of upright, first class, moral people who gather together because of how good we are - you've got this Christianity thing all wrong. You've walked into a room full of jacked up, messed up, broken, stumbling, failing - desperately in need of the grace of God people.

And we've got stories, and we've got wounds, and we've got hurts, and we've got sin - and I'm not saying from like 5 years ago, I'm saying from like this morning or this afternoon. And yet we're here and we're worshiping and gathering because we just can't get over the fact that God would save and forgive and rescue and call his children - jacked up people like us.

**You've walked into a room of folks who have found one hope and one hope only for our lives - the grace and love of God for sinners.**

And so I don't know what you've done or what's been done to you, I don't know how broken or outside of the reach of God you think you are, I don't know what labels you wear as badges of shame and disgrace...

**Here's what I do know - We worship a God who delights in rescuing messed up people for His glory - that's His heart.**

So much so that 2,000 years ago He would send His own Son to earth, to live as the only person in history who was not messed up and broken and full of sin, and yet Jesus became sin and took our sin on a cross - so that all who repent (turn) from their sins and trust in Him with their whole heart would be forgiven, washed clean, made new, and brought home into the family of God.

You're not too far gone. Would you turn today? Would you like the Ninevites - acknowledge before the Lord "I am a sinner, in need of a Savior. Would you forgive me for my sins and bring me into your family?"

Don't delay. Today is the day of salvation. There's an urgency for the Ninevites to repent. There's an urgency for you to repent. Turn to the Lord.

**Romans 10:9 - If you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved.**

Will you repent and believe? I say this every week because it's true every week - I'll be down front after the gathering. Would you come down, and we can talk about what it means to surrender your whole life to Jesus.

**Christians:**

If you're here, and you are a follower of Jesus - it is worth asking yourself the same question - **Do you believe the mercy of God is great enough to save sinners?**

Who is the person you've written off? Who is the person you've decided for God - is either not worth saving or ever going to be saved - so you kind of just gave up?

The Lord our God wants to save...

I didn't mention this as we were working through the passage, but God had been preparing Nineveh to receive Jonah's message. In the years leading up to Jonah's arrival, Nineveh had experienced a series of plagues and a solar eclipse. Ok cool, what does that mean? Well in that time in the pagan culture of Nineveh - plagues and a solar eclipse were both signs that the gods were angry with the people. Then Jonah shows up and what does he say - "God is angry with you!"

God had already been working LONG before Jonah showed up on the scene, priming their hearts to receive his message. You never know what is going on behind the scenes or underneath the surface of your coworkers heart, your neighbors heart, your family members heart, your friends heart.

**Do you believe the mercy of God is great enough to save sinners?**

Who have you written off as being "beyond" the saving work of Christ Jesus?

But then you have to ask the 2nd question...

**2. Are you willing to be used by God in His salvation plan?**

God in this entire story is after Jonah's heart. That's the big theme - Jonah running, God chasing. Jonah's rebellion, God's grace. That was the whole argument of week 1, right? He picks Jonah for a reason - He wants to save Jonah from himself and his sin - his bitterness, anger, pride, prejudice, etc.

***But, what I'm so struck by in chapter 3, is that the story doesn't end after the fish.***

It doesn't just end with God getting Jonah's attention. We don't get to the beginning of chapter 3 and God saying - alright Jonah, you sort of-ish learned your lesson - you're willing to go to Nineveh, I see that so all good, you can go home now.

**No! What does God do? He doubles down! Do I have your attention now Jonah? Yes? Good. Go to Nineveh!**

The consistent theme of the Scriptures is not that God simply wants to save people. He does - yes and amen. Our God is a missional, pursuing God. But it never ends there!!

**The theme of the Scriptures is that God pursues us and then calls us to join Him in the pursuit of others.**

**2 Corinthians 5:18 - 18 All this is from God, who through Christ reconciled us to himself and gave us the ministry of reconciliation.**

In other words: **God saves us to send us.**

God saves you, rescues you - calls you out of darkness into his marvelous light. Forgives your sin, washes you clean, makes you whole. To use the languages of that 2 Corinthians 5 passage - He reconciles you to Himself...

THEN he gives you the message of reconciliation.

Or what I hope is a helpful analogy - when it comes to the grace of God, you're a hose, not a bucket. God's grace is meant to go through you, not just stop with you.

We have a mission. We have a calling. **If you are a Christian in the room - you are a missionary - a sent one of God.**

You have marching orders from God to take the gospel to the world. Some of us are called to go far (foreign missions, church planting), but all of us are called to go - to our neighbors, coworkers, friends, family.

**Let me say it even stronger** → There is no category in the Scriptures for a Christian who receives the gospel of Jesus Christ and then never shares their faith with anyone else. There is no category in the NT of a church who is not actively working and praying for people in their city to come to Jesus.

Pastor JD Greear puts it so poignantly when he says - **"Without the mission [of God], a church is not a church. It's just a group of disobedient Christians hanging out."**

If you are a Christian, you're either living your life on mission or disobeying God. If you are saved, then you are sent.

**And what I love about the story of Jonah is that it takes away all of our excuses for why we don't step into this.**

- **The excuse of competency** - I don't feel like I'm able to articulate or adequately share my faith. What if someone asks a question I don't know? What if I can't respond to the pushback or can't present the gospel clearly - I just fumble over my words? Jonah preached 8 words. There's no well articulated testimony, ornate reciting of Bible passages or apologetic defenses for the existence of God. No funny but also tear jerking personal anecdotes and stories. He just says - "hey guys, God is God. So repent." It's not about what you say - it's about the God who empowers our words. God uses us, despite us. God is the One who saves by His Spirit. He is the one who tells us in Isaiah 55:11 - His Word will not return empty or void but will accomplish the purpose for which He sends it.
- **The excuse of sin and shame** - We can believe the lie that we can't be used by God because of our sin struggles, or our past. We're not holy enough or good enough to be used by God. Let's repeat the first 2 chapters. Jonah on the run fleeing the presence of God. God doesn't give up on Jonah. No Jonah - I want you to preach. Sometimes it's through our brokenness that God actually wants to do a great gospel work. Sometimes it's in our pain that God gives us the platform to reach people for Christ.
- **The excuse of rejection** - Yeah but Tim I'm nervous and scared of how they'll respond. What if it's too soon. What if they reject me? Well first, the Ninevites beheaded their enemies so there's that. But also - the Bible says all who live a godly life will suffer, will be persecuted. The invitation of Jesus is to take up our cross and die to ourselves, and sometimes that means dying to the need for the approval and acceptance of others.
- **The excuse of laziness or apathy** - Yeah but I really just don't want to be around those people or spend time with them or engage with them. The ninevites were Jonah's fiercest and most hated enemies. He had many reasons to despise them, not want what's good for them, not want to see them turn to God.

And really, if I can take it even one layer down below that → **The excuses we give for not sharing the gospel, reveal the idols of our hearts.**

So we say...and it reveals we love and need...

- Competency → Control
- Sin + Shame → Power
- Rejection → Approval
- Laziness + Apathy → Comfort

**So what it boils down as you think about this question - "Are you willing to be used by God in His salvation plan?" is this → God is sending you, does He have your "yes"? And if He doesn't have your "yes", then is He truly your God?**

**Because there are two people in life who will always have our unreserved yes - your authority and your love.**

And if God is your God, then He'll be both.

**So if God doesn't have your "yes" in joining Him in the mission He's working in the world - declaring the kingdom of God, bringing people to Himself, chasing others down with the good news of His love and mercy - could it be that you don't see him as your authority or as your love?**

**Could it be that the problem is actually at its core not that you feel incompetent, that you're afraid, that you're ashamed, or that you're apathetic - but that you've simply replaced God with a different authority and a different love?**

And God is calling you back to Himself - to see His rule and reign over your life, to see His great love for you and mercy for you - that you would repent and join Him in His mission in our city and in our world.

Because just like God wanted to use Jonah to bring His grace to the Ninevites, there are many He wants to use us to bring grace to as well.

### **Gospel Conclusion**

What stood in the way of Nineveh's forgiveness? Their sin wasn't the obstacle. It was Jonah. Jonah's rebellion against God wasn't just hurting him, it was also getting in the way of this city seeing God. His love of himself, him thinking he's his own authority - that is a barrier to the good news of God going into the world.

**So on the one hand the invitation for us tonight is → Don't be like Jonah.**

Be willing to be used by God. Know that His mercy is far reaching. Know that our God wants to save! Be willing to say "yes" and join Him in the work of reconciliation He is doing all over the world.

But the other invitation, in your excuse making, in your idolatry, in your fear or apathy or worry or doubt, in your disobedience towards being sent by God because He's not your authority or your love is not simply – "stop being like Jonah!" but - **"start looking at Jesus!"**

If you want to live with God as your authority and your deepest love - it's not just "don't be like this guy" but look at your Savior! You want to fall more in love with Jesus? Spend time looking at Jesus!



**John Piper - "If you want to ignite a passion for the nations, start by igniting a passion for God."**

**The true and better Jonah.**

**The one who puts the authority of God over you and the love of God for you on full display.**

The one who did not make excuses. Who did not love the approval of others, or his comfort, or his own plan - but submitted Himself to the will of the Father.

Like Jonah, we were on the run.

Like the Ninevites, we were full of evil and wickedness.

And yet Jesus came for us, His enemies, died the death we deserved on the cross, bore our sins on Himself - took our punishment in our place - so that we by faith and faith alone could be washed clean, made new, and made right with God.

Look at the cross! The hope of the world! Jesus, who in an incredible act of mercy and grace purchases our salvation at great cost to Himself, and then calls us to follow Him in His plan to save the world.

### Conclusion

Before we take communion - 5 minutes →

**Where are the Ninevehs God is sending you to?**

**Communion.**

**Pray.**