

The Power of God's Word

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- [0 : 0 0] So, over the last few weeks, we've been working through the story of Jonah. Chapter 1, we heard that God commanded Jonah to go to the great city of Nineveh and call out against it.
- But Jonah, in a moment of defiance and possibly fear, leads to Tarshish, a city that was located somewhere in southern Spain, completely in the opposite direction of Nineveh.
- Instead of obeying God's command, Jonah chose to run. He boards a ship, thinking he can escape God's call, but God sends a mighty storm to intercept him.
- The sailors, realizing that Jonah is the cause of the storm, reluctantly throw him overboard in a miraculous act of both judgment and mercy. Jonah is swallowed by a great fish, where he spends three days and three nights in the depth of the sea.
- Then, in chapter 2, we witness Jonah's prayer from within the fish. In the belly of this creature, Jonah has no way out, no escape from God's presence.
- [1 : 1 1] In that moment of desperation, he turns back to God, acknowledging his power and mercy. Jonah repents for his disobedience, and in his prayer, he recognizes the profound truth that salvation comes from the Lord.
- After this, God speaks once again, not to Jonah this time, but to the fish, commanding it to release Jonah onto dry land, sparing his life and giving him a second chance. At this point, it's clear that Jonah isn't the one guiding the story.
- In fact, when we turn back to the very first verse of the very first chapter, we see that the book of Jonah doesn't even begin with Jonah. It's something far greater, the word of the Lord.
- It's not just any word, but the very word of him who spoke creation into existence, saying that there be light, and there was light. Him who spoke creation into existence.
- As John's gospel testifies, this is the same word that was with God in the beginning. Of course, the book of Jonah doesn't proceed like the gospel to speak of the word made flesh, being Jesus Christ, but it does reveal the power of God's word made manifest.
- [2 : 2 5] God's word comes with purpose, setting things in motion and bringing unexpected things to light. The creative words that shape the universe is the same word that governs history and shapes human lives.
- And just as it quite visibly reveals, can be revealed in the story of Jonah. This is a story originated, unfolded, and driven by God's word to his creatures.
- It begins with the word of the Lord, and in the end, the same word as the final word. In between, his word propels the events forward, commanding the fish to release Jonah, sending him to Nineveh with a message, and even, as we'll read next week in the fourth chapter, engaging in a conversation with the distraught prophet when Nineveh is spared.
- Jonah's flight itself is triggered by God's word, though in a negative way, indeed, the word often has this dual aspect. Jonah runs, not from danger, but from the very commission he was given by the same word.

Even the sailor's decision to throw him overboard is brought about by the revelation of the name of the Lord, the God who speaks these words. Without this word, there would be no story, no movement, no tension, no flight, and no rescue.

[3 : 53] The message of the story, the events themselves, are inconceivable without this word, and the particular God whose word it is. Then the words of the Lord came to Jonah a second time.

Here in the third chapter of Jonah, everything begins again, just as it did before. We hear the very same words from the beginning of the book, with only one addition, the reminder that this is the second time the Lord is persistent, not quick to abandon his purposes, and always willing to begin again.

But this time things are different. Jonah is not merely starting over. He has been given new life, delivered from the depths of Sheol, much like Israel delivered from exile out of Babylon.

The second half of the book tells the story of one who has been brought back from the dead. And because of this, Jonah's response to the words of the Lord will reflect that transformation.

When Jonah is given a second chance in chapter 3, something has changed. The same word is spoken, but Jonah's heart has been renewed through his experience in the belly of the fish.

[5 : 05] He no longer runs from God's command. Instead, he obeys and goes to Nineveh. This transformation reveals profound truth. When we encounter God's word, we too are given opportunities for a fresh start.

Jonah's change in attitude is a testimony to God's grace and patience. It shows us that no matter how far we stray, God's word remains a call to repentance and obedience.

Jonah's new response to that God's word doesn't just bring about external change, it transforms the hearts of those who hear it. Like Jonah, we are recipients of the same powerful living word of God.

The Bible is not just a historical text, it's a living revelation speaking into our lives with authority and power. God's word is the capacity to enter our hearts, challenge our sinful tendencies, guide us in the path of righteousness.

It calls us to repentance, just as it did for Nineveh. It convicts us of sin, but also offers hope, forgiveness, and restoration.

[6 : 15] In a world filled with uncertainty, the word of the Lord remains our anchor and guide, calling us to walk in the light of his truth. As we look through Jonah 3, we'll see the power of the words of God is evident in at least three key ways.

The first thing we notice, a rather obvious but important point, is that the message Jonah is entrusted with originates not from any human source, but directly from the creator of the universe.

This is significant because it places Jonah's task within the framework of God's sovereign rule over all creation. In Jonah 3, when the word of the Lord comes to Jonah, it's not a mere suggestion or a piece of advice or an opinion.

Instead, it's a divine declaration from the same God who spoke the world into existence. The message Jonah carries is powerful because it comes with the authority of the creator.

It should remind us that any message we receive from God today when we read scripture carries the same weight. It's coming from the one who holds all things in his hands.

[7 : 27] The message of salvation is not merely advice or philosophy, but a call from the one who has the power to create, sustain, and redeem all things.

What's striking about Jonah's message is that it doesn't rely on his skill or eloquence. Jonah's message was brief, just a simple proclamation, but God used it to move the hearts of an entire city.

In the same way, the power of the gospel doesn't depend on the messenger's abilities. St. Paul understood this when he said, my message and my preaching were not with wise and persuasive words, but with a demonstration of the Spirit's power.

As we read in 1 Corinthians, the effectiveness of God's words comes not from human effort, but from his Spirit. Again, in 1 Corinthians we read, God chose the foolish things of the world to shame the wise.

God chose the weak things of the world to shame the strong. Our skill, our wisdom, our eloquence, are not what makes God's message powerful. It's God's choice to use us that makes his word effective, and that truth should fill us with both confidence and humility.

[8 : 43] The gospel's power is in God's action. It's reassuring to know that the power of God's message doesn't rely on the skill of the messenger, but even more comforting is the fact that the message itself reminds us of some important aspects of God's character.

For one, God is unchanging. Despite Jonah's initial disobedience, the message doesn't change. God recommissions Jonah in chapter 3. It's the same message.

Go to the great city of Nineveh and proclaim to it the message I have given you. It reminds us that God's word is stable, reliable, and unwavering in its purposes.

His plans are not altered by human failure or resistance. Even when we falter, God remains steadfast, showing us that his will continues to move forward, unaffected by our shortcomings.

His changing nature of God brings comfort because it reminds us that we can trust in his word and his promise regardless of our own failings. As well as revealing God's unchanging nature, the message reveals two other elements of his character.

[9 : 51] One hand is his justice, also is his mercy. In warning Nineveh of impending judgment, God demonstrates his righteousness and his commitment to uphold justice.

As we see in Jonah's message, God's mercy is equally present. He gives the Ninevites a chance to repent and turn from their sin. The power of God's message lies in the fact that it reflects his heart with his righteous justice and his deep desire to save sinners.

This is not a message of condemnation, but an invitation to experience mercy and redemption. God is just, yet he extends grace to those who turn to him.

Ultimately, the power of the gospel lies not in our words or efforts, but in God's action. Just as he worked through Jonah's simple message to bring about the repentance of Nineveh, so too does God work through the gospel to bring mercy to sinners today.

Our role is simply to be faithful messengers trusting that the true power comes from God himself who is always at work to accomplish his purposes. Another message we see is that the message is simple, surprisingly brief.

[11 : 17] In fact, in Jonah 3, 4, we read his proclamation, 40 more days and Nineveh will be overthrown. It's most likely that he said more than this during his time in Nineveh, but I think the simplicity of the message recorded in the scripture seems intentional.

The brevity underscores the power of God's word. Even without detailed explanation or lengthy sermon, the message was clear enough to reach the hearts of the people. Jonah's simple proclamation led to a citywide repentance from the king to the common people, showing that it's not the complexity of the message, but the power behind it that brings change.

To provide some background in Nineveh, we know from the book of Kings that Jonah lived during the reign of King Jeroboam II, which places his life somewhere between 793 and 753 BC.

Nineveh was the capital of the Assyrian Empire, which is located near Mosul, modern-day Iraq. At the time, Assyria was surrounded by some of the most powerful nations on the earth at that time.

To the east, there was Elam, there was Phrygia and around Damascus to the west. To the south, there were the kingdoms of Israel and Judah, and to the north, Ararat, among many other kingdoms, smaller kingdoms.

[12 : 48] The result of this was that the empire became highly militarized, a society built in conquest, and to maintain control over the vast territories, the Assyrians were infamous for the brutality.

Using extreme acts of cruelty to strike fear into their enemies. These horrific displays served as a chilling warning to other cities, resist Assyria, and you will face terrifying consequences.

The Assyrians were by nature aggressive, hard-hearted, but somehow this hard-hearted city in a hard-hearted kingdom was moved by the words of one man.

The power of the message was not in its length, sophistication, but in its divine origin and authority. The message of the gospel, like the message of Jonah, is also simple yet powerful.

Repent and believe the good news as we hear in Mark's gospel. The gospel is rooted in the straightforward truth. Despite its simplicity, this message has the power to transform lives.

[13 : 53] Just as Jonah's simple warning that the people of Nineveh to repentance, and simplicity doesn't diminish its power. In fact, it emphasizes that God's work in salvation depends solely on the sovereign grace and the response of our own hearts.

The message of the gospel is simply this. God created the world and humanity out of love, intending for us to live in a perfect relationship with him.

Humanity sinned by disobeying God, which led to a separation from him and spiritual death. Despite our sins, God sent his son, Jesus Christ, into the world to save us.

Jesus lived a sinless life, died on the cross to take the punishment for our sins, and rose from the dead, conquering both sin and death. By repenting of our sins and placing our faith in Jesus Christ, we receive forgiveness and eternal life and are restored to relationship with God.

The gospel promises that all who trust in Jesus will experience eternal life with God in his kingdom, free from sin, suffering, and death, both physical and spiritual in our separation from God.

[15 : 14] Sometimes we feel like we need to have all the right words or deep theological insights or arguments to share the gospel effectively, but God's message can be simple and even a few words can make a big difference when they come from him.

So, another thing we learn about the message God sent Jonah is that it was for all. Jonah's message to the people of Nineveh was clear, accessible to everyone, regardless of how good or bad they were.

Even though the Ninevites were notorious for their wickedness and unfamiliar with the God of Israel, they were all given the opportunity to repent. We see that God's mercy extends to all people no matter how far they have strayed from what their past looks like.

God's call to repentance is not reserved for the righteous, but is offered for everyone, showing his desire to save all regardless of their sins.

In addition to passing over past sins, Jonah's message cuts across all levels of society, from the king in his palace to the lowest servant in the streets.

[16 : 24] Every person heard the call to repent, and every person responded. This is a demonstration of the inclusiveness of God's offer of grace, reaching all levels of society, regardless of social class or education or status.

Similarly, the Great Commission given by Christ calls us to bring the gospel to all nations and all people. The gospel, like Jonah's message, is intended for all people.

We read in St. Paul's letter to the Galatians, he declares that in Christ there is neither Jew nor Gentile, neither slave nor free, nor is there male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus.

Just as the Ninevites were given the opportunity to repent, so too is the gospel an invitation for everyone to turn to God and receive his grace. So as we reflect on Jonah's message to Nineveh and the remarkable transformation of an entire city, we're led to consider one of the most central themes in scripture, repentance.

The story of Nineveh is not simply a tale of a city avoiding destruction, it's a powerful illustration of what true repentance looks like, the impact it can have on both individuals and communities.

[17 : 48] Repentance is not just an emotional response or a fleeting feeling of guilt, it's a total change of direction, turning away from sin and turning towards God. The story of Nineveh gives us a vivid picture of the different aspects of repentance.

The Nineveh demonstrate their repentance is not passive but active. It involves hearing God's word, responding with action, being transformed from the inside out.

True repentance is about more than feeling sorry for past wrongs, it's about making a genuine shift in our behavior, our mindset, and our relationship with God. So as we explore the nature of repentance, we'll look at four key aspects of the marriage from Jonah 3.

Each of these elements reveals something important about how repentance can work in our lives. Conversely, true repentance begins with hearing and believing God's word.

Without hearing God's word, the people remain unaware of their sins and they need to turn back to him. Imagine a person walking towards danger without realizing it, unless someone warns them, they remain unaware of the peril ahead.

[19 : 09] In the same way, God's word serves as both a warning and a guide, opening our eyes to the reality of our sin, leading us towards repentance. In Jonah 3.4, Jonah's proclamation to Nineveh, although simple, lies in an urgent call to change.

The Ninevites could have ignored the message, but instead they listened. The act of hearing God's word is crucial because it initiates the message, but instead they listened.

Sorry, the Ninevites could have ignored the message, but instead they listened. The act of hearing God's word is crucial because it initiates an encounter with God's truth.

This encounter often acts as a mirror revealing areas of sin in our own lives that we have otherwise ignored. repentance is impossible without first hearing God's word.

This was true for Nineveh and is true for us today. We often, like the Ninevites, are unaware or ignoring the path we are on until God's word awakens us to reality.

[20 : 18] The phrase, the Ninevites believe God, shows that repentance also begins with faith. They didn't just hear the message and dismiss it. They believed in the truth of God's warning and trusted that he would respond if they repented.

St. Paul says in his letter to the church in Rome, faith comes from hearing and hearing from the word of the Lord. Without faith in what they have heard, the Ninevites would have continued in their way.

Faith is not just intellectual acknowledgement but a response of trust in God's character and his promises. The Ninevites did not ignore or resist Jonah's message.

Instead, they responded immediately with belief and action. Repentance requires more than just hearing God's words with our ears, it requires listening with our hearts, allowing his truth to enter deeply.

Today, we must approach God's word with openness and humility, ready to respond in repentance and God convicts us of sin. We must ask God for the grace to not harden our hearts but to allow his word to change us from the inside out.

[21 : 33] Ignoring God's word leads to spiritual blindness and ultimately judgment. True repentance leads to action.

true repentance is seen when God saw what they did, how they turned from their evil ways. God acknowledges repentance when it's accompanied by genuine life change, not merely words or rituals.

In Jonah 3, 5, we see the people of Nineveh proclaiming a fast from the greatest to the least of them. Fasting in this context is more than just abstaining from food.

It's a powerful symbol of repentance. By giving up their basic physical needs, the Ninevites were demonstrating their willingness to turn away from their former ways. Fasting represents a conscious decision to forsake the things that once consumed us, whether it be sinful habits, selfish desires, or the pursuit of personal gain.

It's an outward expression of an inward conviction, acknowledging that the paths we were on led us away from God. giving up food, they were declaring that their desire for God's mercy and favor was greater than their physical hunger.

[22 : 51] In addition to fasting, the people of Nineveh clothed themselves in sackcloth, and even the king himself sat in ashes as described in Jonah 3, 6. Sackcloth and ashes are ancient symbols of mourning and grief, humility.

Sackcloth was a coarse material, it was uncomfortable and symbolized the discomfort of the soul, a heart grieving over sin. Ashes associated with death symbolized decay and signified the awareness of one's own mortality and the unworthiness before a holy God.

By choosing to wear a sackcloth and covering themselves in ashes, the Ninevites were publicly humbling themselves, acknowledging their guilt and their dependence on God's mercy. It's a visible expression of the inward realization that they were nothing without him.

True repentance always comes with humility, realizing that we are in need of God's grace. The actions of the Ninevites remind us that repentance is not only about regret, but about surrendering our pride and coming before God with a humble heart.

well, the outwards actions of repentance like fasting and wearing sackcloth are important. Psalm 51 verses 16 and 17 remind us that God's desire, God desires more than just physical displays.

[24 : 21] King David writes in the Psalm, you do not delight in sacrifice or I would bring it. You do not take pleasure in burnt offerings. My sacrifice, O God, is a broken spirit, broken and a contrite heart.

You, God, will not despise. This passage speaks of the truth that outward rituals and actions mean nothing if they are not accompanied by a genuine change of heart.

People of Nineveh understood this. They did not just fast or wear sackcloth to avoid destruction, but they humbled their hearts before God. True repentance begins in the heart with an acknowledgement of sin and a deep desire to be reconciled with God.

Without that inner transformation, even the most dramatic physical actions are empty. God values sincerity over ritual and he is moved by a heart that is truly broken over sin and desires reconciliation with him.

This is the essence of genuine repentance, not just outward behavior, inward renewal. true repentance needs to change. Jonah's journey is not one of simple obedience, but one that includes a deep wrestling with God's mercy towards those he views as enemies.

[25 : 46] His internal conflict parallels the process of true repentance, which involves a shift in heart and perspective. Jonah, in his reluctance, struggles to see beyond his own biases and judgments, much like how we often fail to recognize our own failures when we judge others.

This blindness prevents us from truly understanding both God's will and the people around us. We read in the Gospel of Matthew, Jesus says, Why do you look at the speck of sawdust in your brother's eye and pay no attention to the plank in your own eye?

How can you say to your brother, let me take the speck out of your own eye, when all the time there is a plank in your own eye? You hypocrites, first take the plank out of your own eye and you will see clearly to remove the speck from your brother's eye.

Failing to recognize our own sin blinds us, not just to God's truth, but also to reality in others and in the world. By acknowledging and addressing our inner selves, we can see clearly and engage with truth and move towards love.

Repentance is about turning towards love and compassion. The people of Nineveh, by repenting, demonstrated a shift from evil and violence to humility and an openness to God's mercy.

[27 : 13] Without genuine repentance, we, like the people of Nineveh, for their change, live in a spiritual hell, separated from experiencing the love of God.

Finally, we see in Jonah 10, it's emphasized that God is not indifferent to the actions of those who seek him in repentance. He's attentive to the sincerity of our hearts and he responds to true, heartfelt repentance.

The people of Nineveh didn't just acknowledge their sins, they demonstrated repentance by changing their behavior. God looks beyond superficial actions and recognizes genuine transformation which was evident when the Ninevites turned from their evil ways.

True repentance isn't merely about feeling remorse, but involves a turning away from sin and a desire to live in alignment with God's will. The mercy God showed to Nineveh was not because they earned it, but because of his gracious character.

God's mercy, while freely given, does require genuine repentance from us. The people of Nineveh didn't just feel bad for their sins, they actively sought change through fasting and prayer and turning from their wickedness.

[28 : 37] While repentance is necessary, mercy is ultimately a gift of God's grace, not something we can merit through our own efforts. God gives mercy out of his abundant love and it's always undeserved.

God's decision to relent from bringing disaster upon Nineveh is a reflection of his nature. We'll read next week in Jonah 4.2, Jonah himself acknowledges that God is gracious and compassionate, slow to anger and abounding in love.

This is a powerful reminder that God's response to repentance is not mechanical but is deeply rooted in who he is, merciful and compassionate, patient.

His desire is not to punish but to restore and forgive when people turn back to him. This shows that God's mercy flows from his character of love and grace, rather from any external pressure or conditions.

The story of Jonah and Nineveh and its deliverance foreshadows the ultimate act of mercy shown to us through Jesus Christ.

[29 : 57] Just as the people of Nineveh were spared from the destruction they deserved, we too have been spared from the consequences of our sin through the sacrifice of Jesus.

He took upon himself the judgment we deserve, offering us forgiveness and reconciliation. This mercy should not be taken for granted but should move us towards gratitude and a transformed life.

In light of the mercy we've received, we're all called to live in obedience and humility, reflecting on how God's grace continues to shape our lives. Amen. So as we close, let us, we should take a moment to reflect on the mercy God has shown to us.

Have we truly repented of the areas where we've turned away from him? Are we living in the freedom that comes from knowing we are forgiven or do we take his mercy for granted?

I encourage you today, just as God spared Nineveh, he's waiting with open arms to receive us when we repent. His mercy is not limited by our failures but is made new every morning.

[31 : 15] So let us live lives marked by gratitude, humility and a deep awareness of the mercy we've received because through Jesus Christ we too have been spared.

Let us pray.