

# Jonah: Part 3

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[ 0 : 00 ] continuing to look at this story of Jonah, the runaway prophet and the merciful God. Here we find ourselves in Jonah chapter 3.

We'll read the whole chapter and then we'll think about it together. Jonah chapter 3, verse 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 obeyed the word of the Lord and went to Nineveh. Now Nineveh was a very important city.

A visit required three days. On the first day, Jonah started into the city. He proclaimed, 40 more days and Nineveh will be overturned.

The Ninevites believed God. They declared a fast and all of them from the greatest to the least put on sackcloth. When the news 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.

[ 1 : 07 ] Then he issued a proclamation in Nineveh. By the decree of the king and his nobles, do not let any man or beast, herd or flock, taste anything. Do not let them eat or drink, but let man and beast be covered with sackcloth.

Let everyone call urgently on God. Let them give up their evil ways and their violence. Who knows? God may yet relent and with compassion turn from his fierce anger so that we will not perish.

When God saw what they did and how they turned from their evil ways, he had compassion and did not bring upon them the destruction he had threatened.

Amen. Been at the garage a few times in the last couple of weeks, so we're going to begin thinking about cars.

I don't know what your car history is like, but ours was pretty much a series of clapped out old bangers. There's one that stands out in particular in my head, described affectionately by an American friend of ours as a shoebox on wheels, a really nice machine.

[ 2 : 20 ] Well, this shoebox on wheels developed some gearbox trouble when we lived up in Dingwall. So we took it to our local mechanic. We used him quite a lot.

He was a nice guy. We took him to the garage. He took a quick look, came back and I realized, he's fine. You'll be fine to run for weeks and months with that. Now, I don't know whether the mechanic was just particularly optimistic that day.

20 miles later, coming out of Inverness, our car gets stuck in third gear. Will not shift out of third gear. So we're hitting the, this is about five o'clock, we're hitting the roundabouts.

Third gear, we're coming up to traffic lights in third gear. It's like, please, we made it all the way back to Dingwall and we eventually had to stop on the high street and had to push our car to the local car park.

Now, when I heard the mechanic's message that morning, I was delighted because nobody wants to have to lose their car for a few days and face a mechanic's heavy bill.

[ 3 : 22 ] The message was nice. Problem was, as it turned out, it was neither true nor accurate. So when we reflect on that, which one would we prefer?

Think about those kind of situations in your own life. I guess all of us would probably choose to know that there is a serious problem needing dealt with so that you can avoid a potentially difficult, potentially even dangerous situation.

Now, this takes us right to the heart of our story today and to Jonah's message as he preaches to Nineveh in chapter three and verse four.

Look at his message. Very simple sermon. Very short sermon, so it seems you're not getting one of those. He proclaimed, 40 more days and Nineveh will be overturned.

So here is Jonah walking into enemy territory saying to them, you are about to face the judgment of God. That's a hard thing to do, isn't it?

[ 4 : 31 ] But what we'll see is that God's truth, God's hard truth does its work and a city is saved because Jonah brings the word of God to the people, a word that they may well not have wanted to hear.

So this morning, we're going to concentrate on Jonah's message and then the response that we find in that, from that message. Look with me though at verse one before we even get to Jonah delivering the message.

We see again hints of the dominant theme of the mercy of God coming through. The word of the Lord came to Jonah a second time.

So if you've not been here, in chapter one what we discover is Jonah being told by God, go to Nineveh. And what he does instead is he runs away. So he's a disobedient prophet who gets a second chance.

Now there's mercy, there's patience, there's grace and kindness from God there. And in verse two, he's given his mission once again.

[ 5 : 42 ] And it's almost the same as we find in chapter one, but there's a really important difference. So if you flick back over, let's see the difference. In chapter one in verse two, Jonah is told, go to the great city of Nineveh and preach against it.

Chapter three, verse two, go to the great city of Nineveh and proclaim to it. So there is a difference there. Chapter one, preach against it. Chapter three, proclaim to it.

So here's what I want us to see this morning. That Jonah's words, words of judgment, and Jonah's story, his story of receiving grace and mercy from the Lord God are a message of hope proclaimed to the city of Nineveh.

That Jonah can speak to them and say, yes, you are facing God's just judgment, but still there is hope of forgiveness and rescue and restoration. And I know this because this is my story, because this is my experience.

And so Jonah, as we found in the end of chapter one into chapter two, had been thrown into a storm of God's judgment, facing certain death, but was saved by God's grace as God sent the fish to swallow Jonah.

[ 7 : 02 ] Now Jonah, it is restored to relationship with God. Now he is in service of God and this is his message. This is the message of his life.

There is grace after judgment. There is a God who delights to show mercy. And in God's providence, God has been controlling this whole story.

The city of Nineveh are going to hear from a prophet of God who's just recently had this first-hand reminder of the grace and mercy of God.

And so we need to bear that in mind and we'll see it come out actually. But in verse three, we see Jonah this time doesn't go running. This time he obeys the word of the Lord and goes to Nineveh, travels right through it over the three days and he proclaims that message.

Takes him three days, whether that's because he has to meet the officials and there's all kinds of ceremony or whether it's just it's a fairly large city. But you get the idea of Jonah going through each part of the city, whether it's to the rich area or the poor area, whether it's the centers of business or education or government and the message is the same.

[ 8 : 18 ] The message is that because of your wickedness, the judgment of God is upon you. It's an easy message in a sense to read sort of divided as we are by time and history.

But imagine being Jonah. He knows what the people of Nineveh are like. He knows their wickedness. He's probably heard the stories, maybe seen it firsthand and now he has to go into enemy territory announcing this message to them.

That's not easy. Let's just stop for a moment. Let me encourage one another to be praying for the people that we know who preach and teach the Bible, to pray for Christians who are public figures, for those who seek to live consistently faced with a barrage of attacks.

We see it in our media how difficult it can be to live consistently for the Lord Jesus. There is that temptation to give people what they want, to bend to culture, perhaps to present a God who is love and love only, to miss the judgment of God that Jonah was called to speak of.

But if we are to be faithful to the Bible and to be faithful to the character of God and to actually present Jesus as good news, we need to bring these hard realities to people.

[ 9 : 54 ] To use some of the pictures that we find in the Bible, God is our king. Whether we accept that or whether we don't accept that as people makes no odds, God is the king who is over us and our rebellion against his rule and his law is like an act of treason against our king.

Or to use another picture from the Bible, God is our father. We read a couple of weeks ago the story of the prodigal son. That son who said, Father, I don't want anything to do with you.

I want your money, I want your stuff, but I don't want you, I want freedom away from you. When we treat God in that way, when we live in his world without any thought of God, the Bible says that's deserving of judgment.

The Bible often presents God as a judge and our sin, our failure to love God and to love others is presented as lawlessness.

forgiveness. And the sentence that we deserve is eternal death. Now, that's a hard message, but it's a necessary message.

[ 11 : 15 ] Imagine for a moment that we're sitting, and some of you have been here sitting in a surgeon's office. You've gone, there's been something bothering you, you've gone and you've had some tests and now you're waiting to hear the outcome.

Of course, the message that we would all want to hear at that moment is, the tests are all clear, you're fine. But if in reality you have an aggressive illness at work in your body, then that's not the message that you need.

The message you need is your condition is serious, but there is hope, there is a cure. And so we must always speak of the judgment of God, otherwise the cross of Jesus makes no sense.

Unless we understand that he is there in our place taking that judgment for us, there is no point in the Son of God going to the cross unless the judgment of God is real and sin is serious.

And what we see even in the story of Nineveh is that had Jonah refused to speak of the judgment of God, those people would not have changed and their city would certainly have been destroyed.

[ 12 : 35 ] They needed to hear of the judgment of God. But you know that's not all that Jonah brought to them. Look with me at verse number nine.

There's this wonderful hint at what Jonah has been speaking to them about. So this is a godless king known for leading the way in violence but yet he can reflect and say, who knows, God may yet relent and with compassion turn from his fierce anger so that we will not perish.

Now where does that idea come from? It certainly doesn't come from any of the pagan gods that were around in Nineveh at the time.

This king, this godless king has hope of finding compassion and mercy because of Jonah's life story, because of the message of Jonah, because of the experiences of Jonah.

He is the prophet who could reflect on the fact that he was deserving of God's judgment but instead he knew God relenting and showing mercy and compassion.

[ 13 : 55 ] Here is a prophet who could speak of both the justice of God and mercy beyond justice to Nineveh. And you know that's what we all need.

We all need someone sent by God to speak the hard truth to us of our wickedness and the judgment that we should receive but can also offer us the hope of rescue.

He can also offer us the hope of finding peace with God from this desperate situation that we find ourselves in. And isn't this the heart of our Christian testimony?

That our stories are not about ourselves. They're about the grace of God in rescuing us. That's the God that we share with others.

We have a story to share like Jonah of God's grace to us. And ultimately this prophet Jonah points us forward to Jesus the true prophet, the ultimate prophet.

[ 14 : 56 ] Because the gospel of Jesus Christ says that God's judgment against sin is real and God in his love sent Jesus to bear that sin and that judgment for us on our behalf.

So that we might know God's compassion. That God's mercy towards sinners is real and the cross shows us that. Because God didn't leave us in our helpless condition.

He sent Jesus to be our substitute, to be our rescuer. So that on the cross Jesus takes our sin on himself and he gifts us his perfect record of righteous obedience so we can be accepted by God so that God can delight over us with singing.

He becomes the abandoned son so that we by faith in him might be adopted children of God. And so Jesus, the true prophet, his life and his death and his resurrection speak a message of hope to us.

He is the one who has lived for us the life that we could never live. He has died for us the death that we deserve to die and he's risen again to guarantee new life to all who will trust in him.

[16:09] And that by faith in him we can know forgiveness and mercy and grace after judgment. And there is power in that story, in the gospel story.

We see it in Nineveh here because look at their response in verses five to nine. Having heard of the judgment of God, having seen in Jonah's life the mercy of God, how do they respond?

It's really helpful for us to reflect on their response because perhaps we find ourselves thinking, well if this is God's message to me, if this is God's message to the world, how should I respond to this? What am I supposed to do about this message of a God who is just and a God who shows mercy and a God who sent Jesus? Well let's look together at the city of Nineveh and see what we can learn from them.

first of all, in verse five, they are those who believed God. So Jonah came bringing a message from God and they believed it.

[17:22] What could they have done in that situation? What might people have expected them to do given their history of wickedness and cruelty?

Well they could have heard this message and they could simply have killed Jonah as a hostile enemy. They had a history of hatred towards the people of God, the people of Israel, so he could just have been another casualty of that hatred.

Or they could have laughed his message off as crazy talk. Who is this guy walking in here saying 40 days and the place is going to be destroyed?

That's nonsense. Or they could have heard the message and despaired at it but concluded there was no hope, so there was no point in them changing.

But the wonderful thing is they don't do any of those, rather they believed God. And you know, that's not down to them, that's entirely a God thing.

[18:26] God is opening their hearts and their consciences to respond positively to this message. For hundreds of years, the nation and the city, hostile to God and his people and his word, but now in God's grace, they respond with belief.

And that belief leads them to action. We read it in verses 5 to 8, there's all these signs of repentance. So as we continue in verse 5, they declare a fast, they put on sackcloth, we see the king taking off his robes, he's covered with sackcloth and he sits down in the dust.

All of these are signs of sorrow for their wickedness, a sense of humility before God and a desire to change. In verse 8, the king calls the whole society, even the animals, to a fast, to not eating, to show sorrow over their wickedness and sin.

We see them wearing sackcloth, those scratchy pieces of clothing as a sign of them humbling themselves before God. And then in verse 8, we see there is prayer, let everyone call urgently on God and there is a desire to change their ways, let them give up their evil ways and their violence. There's going to be a new direction for the life of this city because they have heard the message, they've been convicted by it, and there's a desire to repent and change.

[20:02] For God to change any one of us, it begins with that sense of conviction that all is not well between me and God.

That because of our sin, our walking away from God, our failure, even to match up to our own standards, never mind God's, there is a problem there.

And there needs to be that conviction that leads us to repentance. So instead of, I feel really bad about that, but there's nothing I can do about it, and we decide, I'm not going to walk my own way, I'm not going to walk just pleasing myself, I'm going to turn and I'm going to live for the glory of God. That I'm going to get rid of those other things that I've made more important than God, that He's going to be my first priority. And we see in the language of verse 9 that there is a sense of trust in God.

They don't presume on the mercy of God. God may yet relent and with compassion turn from His fierce anger so that we will not perish, but they certainly see that God is their only hope of salvation.

[21:14] Our city is going to be destroyed unless we turn to God, unless we place our hope in His mercy. And that all leads them to this point of trust, and then we see how God wonderfully responds to that.

So I wonder, as we consider the gospel, as we consider what God has done for us in Jesus, how are we responding to that message?

Is there a sense of conviction in our hearts about the ways that we have chosen to ignore God or walk away from God? Is there a desire in us to repent from that and to turn to God or to return to God?

Because a Christian life, Martin Luther said, should be one of daily repentance. Are we coming to Him in our need, trusting in Him as our only hope, as our only Savior?

Are we responding to the gospel in ways that would be similar to that of Nineveh? And then we see God's response.

[ 22 : 30 ] We see God's mercy. We see this incredible turnaround. When God saw what they did and how they turned from their evil ways, He had compassion and did not bring upon them the destruction He had threatened.

So remember, the book of Nahum tells us this, that this is a city that's famous for lying, for stealing, for killing. This is a city and nation with a history of hatred towards God and God's people.

But here is a city that is saved by God's incredible mercy because of the heart of God, because of God's desire to rescue people.

As Peter says it in his second letter, chapter 3, the Lord is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance.

It was a story of Paul, that here I was, a violent man persecuting the church, wanting rid of the church and God in His grace sent Jesus and His mercy changed me.

[ 23 : 43 ] So Nineveh's change of heart towards God results in this wonderful new verdict that once they turn towards Him as they are prompted to do that by God Himself, He shows them mercy and compassion.

And you know, it's stories like this, it's stories of God's grace that can encourage us towards prayerfulness. You know, if God can change Paul, He can change anyone. If God can change this city, He can change any city.

It's stories like this that can fuel our desire to pray and to keep praying for those missionaries that we know around the globe and gives us courage to witness instead of to despair and think, God will never use me or things will never change.

God's mercy is great. And this brings us back once again to Jesus, the true prophet and to the good news that Jesus brings.

Think about it. If Jonah's life encouraged the people of Nineveh that there is hope for them in the mercy of God, how much more should the life of Jesus encourage us to recognize that there is mercy for us?

[ 24 : 57 ] So the king of Nineveh wasn't sure would God relent and show compassion, but we can know with certainty that if we trust in Jesus that He will relent, that He will show us compassion because the justice that we deserve has been served on the Lord Jesus.

Jesus experienced the Father's fierce anger on our behalf so that we need not and we will not if our hope is in Him, that we can know salvation from Jesus, that we can know that we will not be destroyed because He gave up His body to be destroyed so that we could be welcomed and loved by our Father in Heaven, that we could know new life.

So just as Jonah is the prophet who speaks of justice and mercy, Jesus is the true prophet we look to, who speaks to us, the cross speaks to us absolutely of the justice of God, the seriousness of sin and the holiness of God, but it speaks to us also of mercy beyond judgment in His resurrection life. And so He is the one that we need to look to and trust in. His is the story that we need to share. He is the true prophet whose words we all need to respond to in faith and obedience.