

Jonah 3

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- [0 : 00] Well, I just wanted to give my own word of grateful thanks, Paul, for your presence in our midst. Paul was the first person I met in 2006, the year after our first group of Holy Trinity folks went to Nairobi in Haruma.
- And as he mentioned, Haruma and Mathari and Kibera form three large units of incredibly dense populations.
- Haruma, 350 to 400,000 people. Mathari, 500 to 600, as he mentioned. Kibera, over a million. Mathari itself, where he hopes to plant the church, as I recall, had two toilets.
- 600,000 people. And an open sewer system. And when he mentions the need for a sound system, it is because in the slums of Nairobi, there is a competition for sound on Sunday.
- And you are literally meeting behind corrugated steel, this thick, next to drums beating and chants giving and religions sprawling across the communities.
- [1 : 23] What a place. We praise God for you. It's great to have you here. I went about seven years, I guess, in and out of Nairobi.
- I was drained. But am convinced that it's a manifestation of our own gospel work here at Holy Trinity.
- To reach the nations and not to go to the highest, the wealthiest, the mightiest, but to assist in the planting of the church in a place like where Paul lives.
- For six years, I went in and out training 32 pastors who are working there every day. I remember doing a preaching workshop.
- About 150 people in a room half this size with one light bulb in the middle of the room. And they would sit from nine in the morning until the sun went down in the evening over the din of a compressor that enabled the sound to go forward.
- [2 : 33] So it is a joy to have you here. We are privileged to know you. The mercy of God. You came in today into church under Pastor Jackson's call to worship signaling the mercy of God.
- And there are so many different mercies today. Tender mercies, severe mercies. Pastor Jay himself, I think, and Shirley, 46 years of marriage today.
- Mercy mercies. Only those who are married 46 years know the mercies that attended.
- Is that not true, Shirley? Shirley? Esther Joy, born this week into our own church family from the Weinbergers.
- Mercies. Mercies. An important memorial service this Friday for another infant born into our family. Mercies.
- [3 : 51] Homes given. Friends entertained. Mercies. Relationships ruptured. Need for mercies.
- Mercies. Mercies. Mercies. Mercies. We need the mercy of God. And we walk as a local family calling out to be under the banner of His mercy.
- Mercies. Mercies. Even in our text today, it opens with a merciful word to a rebellious prophet.

It closes with a merciful way to a repentant people. Certainly the content of Jonah 3 is going to show us the obedience of a prophet.

Chapter 3, 1 to 4. But underneath that obedience is the mercy of God. certainly our text in five through the remaining verses is going to show us not the obedience of a prophet but the repentance of a people and even that we will see the mercy of God and I pray that there will be lessons that will change our lives even as you hear this word take a look I encourage you to look at your Bible Jonah chapter 3 if you don't have one there's still some available on the back table grab one the text opens with words that indicate that God is a God of mercy and we know that because he's a God of second chances take a look at verses 1 and 2 then the word of the Lord came to Jonah the second time saying arise go to Nineveh that great city and call out against it the message that I tell you the construction of those opening verses mirror the linguistic construction of the opening of the book wherein we saw chapter 1 verse 1 the word of the Lord came to Jonah the son of Amittai saying arise go to Nineveh that great city and call out against it when the word came to Jonah for the first time he rebelled he fled he desired to live away from the presence of God at that time he was determined not to live for God's pleasure but for whatever would give him pleasure instead we saw in chapter 1 that the prophet exists for the pleasure of God but he rebelled which brought us to chapter 2 where we learned that the prophet exists not only for the pleasure of God but he exists at the pleasure of God and God was merciful thrown over sea into the sea and we learned that

[7 : 27] God drew near there's a connection to this idea of living at the pleasure of God in the military there are those who hold posts today who are said to serve at the pleasure of the president which in a sense means you retain your post as long as the president keeps calling upon you and the day that he doesn't call upon you well your work is complete the word of the Lord came to Jonah the second time there's something here for everyone who has run from God which is another way of saying there's something here for everyone God is gracious he is kind he's merciful he doesn't want you to think that you merely exist at his pleasure although you do but he's better than that he's good then the word of the Lord came to Jonah the second time he is strong enough to save the prophet Jonah and he's slow enough to push Jonah aside he calls upon him he's still serving for his pleasure at his pleasure in mercy and so it is for many of us for anyone here who is on the run from God there will come a time when you will be taught severe mercy like Jonah that you do not only exist for his pleasure but at his pleasure but then you will learn that with God there is so much more he's merciful who here today needs God to come for a second time he came for Peter after those threefold denials the Lord Jesus is keen in the resurrection proclamation not only to appear to him but to send news concerning him and a desire and a recommission for him and maybe that is where you find yourself today and need simply in this sermon to cry out upon those little phrases the second time and say oh Lord may it be so for me today and this time after being severely disciplined by God

Jonah appears to be ready to obey take a look at verses 3 and 4 so Jonah arose and went to Nineveh according to the word of the Lord now Nineveh was an exceedingly great city three days journey in breath Jonah began to go into the city going a day's journey and he called out yet forty days and Nineveh shall be overthrown there are some encouraging marks of soul development here first the idea that and Jonah arose we saw him arise in chapter 1 but rather than going 600 miles north and east he fled on the waters to a pulling tide in the furthest opposite direction but here he arose and went to Nineveh he got his visa his passport stamped he crossed his territorial lines and he walked into a foreign country on a short term missions trip the prophet obeys he even delivers the word that God had against it

Nineveh is called here an exceedingly great city the description at this moment concerns its size archaeologists of the 19th century have let us know that the inner wall of Nineveh was some 12 kilometers around but beyond that you can learn about the character of Nineveh by looking at Nineveh's history just as you can learn about the characteristics of Chicago by knowing its history Chicago of course is not only built on segregation which it is historically but it also is known for its concrete will to make something of herself Chicago is a city that rebuilds itself you might say we have a preoccupation with finding a place of personal ascendancy what about

Nineveh's history what do we know of her Nineveh appears for the first time in Genesis 10 not in the book of Jonah or Nahum Nimrod was the founder Nimrod described in Genesis 10 as a hunter which really translated would mean a man of war and violence and blood and he's also translated in terms of one who was doing his work before the Lord not that he was in concert with the Lord but all he did the Lord was seeing it Nineveh is a city in the Bible that was built by a rebellious individual who continually conquered territory and founded cities by violence Jacques Ellul the 20th century sociologist speaks of Nineveh in this very way

Nahum would later call Nineveh a city of blood one which was full of lies full of violence quote no end to her plunder and so into this city Jonah came and through this city Jonah walked and to this city Jonah preached and the summary of his message in verse four is trenchant if nothing but terse there it is the summation of his preaching ministry on his short term missions trip yet forty days in Nineveh shall be overthrown three observations about Jonah's obedience first the clarity and severity of that message is unchallenged I mean it is so clear and so severe it reads to me like a sandwich board that's more rightly affixed to a street preacher down on some corner of Michigan

[14 : 54] Avenue it's that clean isn't it yet forty days and Nineveh shall be overthrown clearly this is a truncated and abbreviated word the writer has not seen fit to give us anything close to his manuscripts and unfortunately it presents an incomplete God it presents a one dimensional God at that taken on its own the modern reader is left a bit dissatisfied the second observation Jonah's message does stand in contrast to the word many faith communities bring to cities today to be told that there will be a future negative consequence for today's acts of disobedience well those are words even the church avoids at all costs whether it be toward the city or to the citizenry and yet this is the word of the

Lord to be graciously warned in the assembly of the righteous as a member of the citizenry that our present acts of disobedience will be met with a future act of divine judgment the truth of the matter then is that God does have a word for Nineveh for Chicago and for us we have all transgressed God's ways and we will all be held accountable for our walk and we will be especially accountable for the things we know and more graciously treated concerning the things we do not know there is no hope for

Nineveh without this message just as there is no hope for us the reformation of my own soul and the reformation of your soul and the reformation of our city requires the repentance of her citizenry we all need a clear understanding that our actions in private are taking place before the eyes of God who is ever public and he will hold us like the Ninevites to account and only that message is strong enough to make us sit up take notice and mend our ways how often have you seen a child who's quite aware that they will not receive the discipline of their parent go on their merry way of disobedience but when a word is put forth in love concerning consequences for action there is hope for restoration the church has abandoned this message and therefore our cities and our citizenry and our church are in such desperate straits in the past even secular nation builders would not have relinquished the notion of a future judgment

I was fascinated a bit ago by reading the Jefferson Bible that was a wonderful version of it that was given to me you know the Jefferson Bible he took the gospels Thomas Jefferson founder of our country and with scissors very carefully meticulously excised parts that did not meet his modern mind whether it be the miraculous or the resurrection or other things and so he compiled what became in a sense the moral substance of the word of Christ and he would read it devotedly in the evenings interestingly Jefferson leaves in the future judgment why well I'm sure that Jefferson he had his anthropology squared away he knew that the populace and there would be no way of holding his citizenry toward any ways of morality or justice if not being held by some future impending accountability and so the day of wrath is left in while the resurrection is taken out even by secular nation builders one final observation on

Jonah's obedience here if we were to cheat I don't know if you've ever read Jonah before so you've got to come back to see chapter 4 but for those who have been all the way through if you lean forward into chapter 4 and then draw your mind back you're aware that Jonah's obedience here is somewhat partial the sense you get by reading this summary is that Nineveh is only under God's condemnation and that point of judgment is true but it presents an impoverished and incomplete view God is not only going to discipline the rebellious God is good to the ungodly when they turn from their wicked ways in other words of the love of God we are told nothing by

[21 : 09] Jonah his obedience here is real but you begin to wonder if his heart is still soiled you begin to wonder if he just went about his day according to duty like he's all tied up as a preacher there's nothing lavish or beautiful in his words he actually is an unfortunate minister an unhappy man an unsatisfied preacher and the subtle silences here in our own text are known in full force in the coming chapter C.S.

Lewis said a perfect man would never act from a sense of duty he'd always want the right thing more than the wrong one duty is only a substitute for love like a crutch which is only a substitute for a leg that seems to be a more apt depiction of Jonah let me put it this way Jonah is in compliance but he's not in communion with God there's hard work that needs to be done he's like the Christian who's experienced salvation yet who goes on in life with deep dissatisfaction with God I want to stop on this for a moment for you and for me who follow the Lord Jesus Christ God wants more than merely your our external actions he wants our internal affections there are some signs here then that would help you how do you know if you're living merely in compliance with God rather than in communion with God well as we're going to look at the life of

Jonah his interior world is going to emerge he's a man who's irritable he's a man of quick anger he's a man who soldiers on in rightness he's a man who isolates himself he's a man who's saved by God but upset with God he's a man whose relationships with God affect his interactions with every other person he's a one-dimensional man he's a severe man he's an easily offended man he's a man who reads the worst in the words and ways of everyone around him he's a man who intentionally remains on the outside of things he's a man that's not in communion with others in short he's a mess what a miserable state to be in compliance with God to in the business world to get through

FINRA but to have no communion or joy this is an odd but often embodied contradiction to be a Christian caught in the fog not quite sure how you got there unable to collect yourself in a way that would allow you to emerge what do we need what did Jonah need he needed to be recaptured by the complete picture of God he needed to be shaken by the wounds of a friend he needed to be humbled he needed to be willing to enter into a season of humility he needed to encounter the living word who would love him nonetheless he needed someone to ask

God to have pity on him to do for him what he could not do for himself if you are caught today in compliance and nothing more then hear the words of Augustine for those who would learn of God's ways humility is the first thing humility is the second thing and humility is the third or EM bounds humility flourishes in the soil of a true and deep sense of our sinfulness and our nothingness nowhere does humility grow so rankly and so rapidly and shine so brilliantly as when it feels all guilty confesses all sin and trusts all grace humility is born by looking at God and his holiness and then looking at self and man's unholiness or the words of

[26 : 58] Jonathan Edwards there was nothing that I so earnestly longed for as humility brokenness of heart and poverty of spirit my heart panted after this to lie low before God as in the dust that I might be nothing and that God might be all that I might become as a little child chapter 3 verses 1 to 4 the obedience of a prophet but on a deeper level the mercy of God he is a God of second chances six to the end more quickly given the American sense of time Paul by the way when I was in Africa

I think I was in the service once I think for maybe two hours before I got up to preach it's the longest I ever had to wait to preach before and everyone seemed quite fine with it I wanted to have a five minute sermon to let them all go home but they weren't ready for that either were they a prophet obeys but then look a people repent verse 5 that seems to be a summary statement of which then verses 6 through 9 go back and unfold there are many aspects here that indicate that the people's repentance is superior to Jonah's obedience in every way there's an immediate attachment to the word there's a mourning it is universal it is public there's a turning there's a hope let me put it this way this is a model for us for your own soul for our city for our church this is the model of a contrite heart to whom

God will look look how it begins at the top verse six the word of the Lord reached the king of Nineveh and he arose from his throne removed his robe covered himself with sackcloth and sat in ashes one one can almost have a vision of a father if you're speaking in terms of what a father would do on behalf of his family in our own congregation a father leading the family by a public externally visible indicator of humble mourning that's what sackcloth and ashes is not only a father but a pastor on behalf of a church a mayor on behalf of a city a president on behalf of a country here a king to cover himself with sackcloth to sit in ashes and then verse seven to issue a proclamation publish it through the land hear the words 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 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 the external signs of your mourning of your own sin are not necessary in the sense of a necessary indication that you're truly repentant but let me tell you something there's often very little repentance internally that goes on unattended by external action this is why in the churches of old at times there were kneelers this is why when my grandma was converted at the

LA tabernacle under Amy Semple McPherson there were front altars this is why in the Pentecostal tradition it is not altogether unusual for one in a public assembly to find their way to the front and to lay on the ground this is why in times of revival there were actual tears shed in public this is why there are verbal words that would indicate I am turning I am departing from one way of life and committing today to walk into another this is a model I think as a Christian for what it is to come to the foot of the cross to publicly indicate that I am undone and committed to turning from my evil way and repentant for the violence that is in my hands and here's a prayer verse nine who knows

God may turn and relent and turn from his fierce anger so that we may not perish it's enlightening to see how modern day Jewish readers take this text for here we come to their understanding of the usefulness of this book in the Hebrew canon Judaism reads the entire book of Jonah annually at one sitting during the afternoon service on Yom Kippur the day of atonement before the reading of Jonah in the editor's introductory notes for the Jewish tradition the rabbis have written the following the book of Jonah is particularly appropriate for

[33 : 57] Yom Kippur because the story of Jonah teaches that sincere repentance can reverse even the harshest heavenly decree and the reading of Jonah is particularly appropriate for Yom Kippur because the repentance of Nineveh's inhabitants is to serve as an example to us to repent of our sins that's the words within the Jewish tradition to view the Ninevites the pagan as the model for the religious that the insider is instructed by the action of the outsider and this is very consistent with the way Jesus takes the book of Jonah in Luke chapter 11 he will raise the city of Nineveh and say that it will come forward in judgment upon those who don't hear his word because they were rejecting his word as the outsiders were receiving it rather than following the model of those who desperately needed

God and were willing to ask for it and walk out through the doors in their stubborn rebellion and their persistent isolation Nineveh's repentance was sincere the Ninevites serve as an example for what sometimes our own heart seems unwilling to do and those who would reject the words of Jesus and live under his word well even the Ninevites then will one day stand up in judgment their repentance is superior to Jonah's obedience their repentance is a model for our own hearts and so I ask you are you living outside the word of Christ if so here is the way back humility a calling out to

God a turning from evil and I wouldn't say who knows God may turn and relent I would say we do know because he has given us the satisfaction of his own son verse 10 when God saw what they did and how they turned from their evil way God relented of the disaster he said he would do to them and he did not do it the word relent twice used in describing God's response for some it's confusing does it mean that God changed his mind does it mean that he reacts to events in contrast to control them does it mean that human actions somehow catch him by surprise and now he's got to change course midstream is open theism actually the doctrine of the scriptures is it an accurate way of speaking about

God well the term there for relent is identical to the one used in psalm 90 13 where like our passage God is the subject and the context is his own anger and it's translated pity it's consistent with the very Hebrew term here for relenting that is often translated comfort God comforted God had pity on them it isn't as if God changed in his character or was inconsistent in his heart he is just and merciful and he is exercising in verse 10 an aspect of his character freely willingly voluntarily and that is good news for the prophet and people alike it's good news for you it's good news for me because truth be told our heart is not fixed we are fickle we are changeable we are less complete than

God in an exercise of mercy we are divided and yet this chapter has indicated two things the book ends God is a God of mercy he's a God of second chances for all of you who have been following him and yet resist his ways even in compliance he's got more mercy for you to bring you to full communion and God is a God of pity for those who have lost their way and were even unaware that they were under the cross is where justice and mercy meet where anger is averted where salvation is won where you are called upon to turn and ask for mercy don't leave today without being in full communion with

[39 : 30] God don't leave today without looking your own heart squarely in the eye and finding covering covering of Christ don't leave today until you live with him joyfully willingly obediently graciously may today be the day of salvation our heavenly father we've been here for a bit today and it's been good for this is a day unlike any other day of the week we give ourselves to so many things for six help us on this

Lord's day to give ourselves to one thing to peer into your presence to lift our gaze into the heavens to open your word and take it to heart we commend the cross work in our lives to you in Jesus name amen■