

[3 : 44] So first and foremost, I'd like to apologize for my behavior Saturday night. It was inappropriate. I feel bad for the University of Southern California. I feel bad for Max and Kius, Pat Hayden.

I feel bad for our players and I feel bad for my own kids that the way I acted was irresponsible and something that I obviously don't condone.

Those were the words in the public apology of Steve Sarkazian back when he was the head coach of the University of Southern California. Steve was actually invited to speak at an event. It was kind of like the kickoff event for the season. There was about 2,500 people there in attendance. They were made up of fans and players and his coaching staff and important and key university donors. And when he took the platform, Steve's words were slurred. He was screaming, he was cussing and shouting out profanities.

Steve wasn't angry. He was out of his mind drunk. In fact, by his own admission that night, he was an embarrassment to the university, to the athletic program and to his own family. And while that wasn't Steve's first time to show up to an event drunk, it would be his last. Because regardless of his apology, Steve was fired the very next day. Now in our society of cancel culture, it appeared as though Steve had coached his last game at a major college university program. In fact, one sports writer called him, quote, untouchable. No school would dare hire him with all of his baggage. All except for one man.

A man named Nick Saban. Yes, that Nick Saban, the coach of Alabama for 17 years, the coach that won six national championships at Alabama, the man who is recognized as one of the greatest coaches at any level to ever coach football. Saban did what no one else would do. He touched the untouchable.

[6 : 14] And he hired Steve Sarkeesian as his offensive coordinator. Now this was not the first time that Saban had ever hired a coach with damaged goods. In fact, it was actually something that Saban did throughout his entire tenure at Alabama. For example, back in 2009, he hired a man by the name of Mike Groh as an assistant. Groh had been fired from Virginia for his lack of success. And he was fired by his own father. You know you're bad when your own father fires you, right? And yet Saban took him in. And after some time at Alabama, Groh would go on to be named the national recruiter of the year and become an NFL assistant. And then there was Mike Loxley. When Mike Loxley was at New Mexico, his record was two and 26. I could coach that well, all right? Two and 26. And he had a physical altercation with an assistant, was accused of sexual harassment and age discrimination. Yet Saban hired him as an analyst, later promoted him to be a coordinator, and together they won the 2018 championship. He would go on to become a head coach again at the University of Maryland. And then there's Lane Kiffin. In Lane's early years, he bounced around everywhere. He was the offensive coordinator at USC for a short time.

Then he went to the Raiders where he was fired after 20 games. Then he goes to the University of Tennessee where he's the head coach there for not even hardly a year and leaves in a sea of controversy.

Goes back to USC as the head coach where after a 21 point loss to Arizona State, he's pulled from the team bus and told to find his own ride home because he had just been fired.

At 39 years of age, Lane was seen as cocky, arrogant, and way in over his skis. But what other people saw as a disaster, Saban saw as an opportunity. And Kiffin was hired as the offensive coordinator at Alabama. And after some time in rehabilitating his career, Kiffin would go on to become the head coach of the Ole Miss Rebels. And oh, by the way, Sarkeesian, he's now the head football coach at the University of Texas. These are just a few examples. I could give you more.

They are just a few examples of the coaches that Nick Saban hired when nobody else would hire. Everybody else saw them as untouchable, yet Saban brought them in. One sports writer said this, quote, Nick Saban's coaching rehab is so real, those who make it to graduation see their careers remade, close quote. And Saban was not only this way with coaches, he was also this way with his players.

[9 : 21] You know, there's always a lot of criticism out there. When somebody does something wrong, everybody wants to know, how are you going to punish the guy? All right, but there's not enough for 19 and 20 year old kids, people out there saying, why don't you give them another chance?

I feel strong about this now, really strong. All right, about all the criticism out there of every guy that's 19 years old that makes a mistake and you all kill him.

And then some people won't stand up for him. So my question to you is, where do you want him to be? You want to condemn him?

To a life sentence? Second chances. Mulligans. Do-overs. Fresh starts. Another try, another shot, another opportunity.

And if everybody in this room was honest tonight, you would acknowledge that at one point, you have needed one. Can I get an amen? Anybody here needed a second chance?

[10:34] Like you needed that second chance after you were fired from your job. You needed that mulligan after that awful tee shot. You needed the do-over after failing the exam.

You needed another chance, or you needed a fresh start after saying something hurtful to someone that you loved. Or you needed another chance after you blew the opportunity. Everybody in this room tonight has needed a second chance.

And third, and fourth, and fifth, and sixth. Every one of us here tonight has needed that opportunity to have a second chance in life.

And I am thankful tonight that we serve a God who gives them. Amen? And that is exactly, that is exactly what we see in Jonah chapter 3.

Let's be honest. By the end of Jonah chapter 2, Jonah has blown every opportunity he's had about as bad as anyone could. He is a prophet of God for Pete's sake.

[11:39] And what has he done thus far? He has rejected God's call. He has run from God's presence. He's put other people in danger by his actions. He refuses to pray when he's asked to.

He's needed multiple interventions from God to the level of bringing storms in his life. And the last time we left Jonah, he's walking down a shoreline covered in fish vomit.

Man, you are one pathetic loser. And Jonah is. At this point in the story, he is a total loser.

This is not just the guy that missed the final shot. This is the guy that keeps giving the ball to the other team for the very purpose of throwing the game. With his resume, there is no church in America that's hiring him.

You will not find his name in America's up-and-coming prophets. He is, to use a word, untouchable. He's untouchable.

[12:42] But God has a way of restoring what everyone else has left for dead. Verse 1. Then the word of the Lord came to Jonah, everybody say it, the second time.

We see here the unwavering grace of God. That is that God comes to Jonah a second time. The God who was not obligated to give Jonah an opportunity the first time offers Jonah the same job a second time.

Now, if you're tempted for just a moment to think, well, this must be about Jonah. Jonah must be so talented, so gifted, that God just simply cannot do this mission without him.

Well, if you would be tempted to think that, let me remind you what the Apostle Paul says in Acts chapter 17. Let's be very, very clear here tonight.

Can we be clear on one thing? God does not need Jonah. Jonah needs God. God does not need Jonah. So why the second chance?

[14:12] Well, if it doesn't have anything to do with Jonah, then it must only have something to do with God. Namely, listen, faith family, this is just the kind of God that God is.

Amen? Amen? This is revealing to us something about the very character and nature of God. He is everything Jonah knew God to be.

God's character that Jonah so struggled with is revealed here. In fact, notice what Jonah says in chapter 4, verse 2. Remember, this is the whole reason why he was running in the first place.

It says, I prayed to the Lord and said, O Lord, is this not what I said when I was yet in my country? This is why I ran. This is why I went to Tarshish. I went because I knew you are a, say it, gracious God.

And you're merciful. And you're slow to anger. And you're abounding in steadfast love and relenting from disaster. Listen, what Jonah did not want for the Ninevites, namely grace, he's now experienced for himself.

[15:21] And dear friend, if you walk away from the book of Jonah without having a deeper understanding of the grace and mercy of God, you are more asleep than Jonah was.

Because God's grace is everywhere. God's grace is in a storm when he so loves his runaway that he brings an intervention into his life. God is in the fish when he appoints the great fish to swallow Jonah up and teach him once again the salvation belongs to the Lord.

And now here it is in chapter 3 where God comes to Jonah with a second chance. Now let's just stop for a moment right there where you are. Stop and think about where you would be tonight if God only gave you one chance.

If God had a zero tolerance policy, one strike and you're out, would anybody be here? I don't think so. Where would Abraham have been after he lied?

Or Moses after the murder? Or David after the adultery? Or Peter after the denial? In other words, if you read your Bible very much, here's what you discover pretty quickly.

[16:34] And that is that the Bible is not filled with stories of great people who accomplish great things by their amazing talent. Oh no, what the Bible is full of is a revelation of a great God who uses really weak and messed up people to accomplish mighty things for His glory and by His grace.

Many years ago in Britain there was this conference where all these different religious leaders came together and they were trying to discuss what made the different religions and belief systems different from the others.

And they came to Christianity and they said, what makes Christianity unique? What makes Christianity different than every other belief system? And they tossed around different answers. Some said, what's the incarnation? Because clearly no other belief system has God taking on flesh and becoming a human. And they said, yeah, that's definitely unique. Others said, well, it's clearly the resurrection.

I mean, no other belief system has God not only becoming a man, but dying and rising again. And they said, yeah, absolutely. That's totally unique. And then in walked a man, you've heard of his name, named C.S. Lewis.

[17:52] And they asked C.S. Lewis, what do you think? What is Christianity's unique contribution to all the world religions? And Lewis said, without even hesitating, that's easy, grace.

Grace. Grace. And everyone in the room agreed that the notion of God's love coming to us freely and not based on our merit whatsoever goes against every single human instinct.

And it does. You see, faith family, Buddha will offer you a path. Hindu gods will offer you karma.

Islam will offer you a system of good works.

Only Jesus Christ offers you a second chance. Notice here, not only that we see God's unwavering mercy and coming to Jonah a second time, but notice also in verse one, that the word of the Lord came to say it, Jonah, the second time.

Jonah. In other words, here's what I'm trying to get you to see in the text, is that the word of God doesn't just come a second time. It comes a second time to Jonah.

[19:12] Of all people, they get a second chance. Jonah gets a second chance. I mean, if this is a baseball game, this is the time in the game where you call in the relief pitcher, right? Bring in the lefty.

We need a new prophet. We need someone else who can do the job. I mean, someone should revoke Jonah's prophetic license at this stage. And you know this. Come on.

Just be honest tonight. If you brought the story of Jonah into an everyday kind of story, you know good and well that's exactly how you would respond. So imagine that somebody is interviewing to work at a daycare, right?

They want to work with kids. They want to work in this daycare environment. And they're going through the interview process. And they, as you typically would be, they get asked several questions. First, tell me about your background.

My background? I've been running from the police for about five years. Oh, okay. All right. Well, thank you for being honest. Let's skip the background section.

[20:11] What about your work ethic? Oh, my work ethic. Oh, man, let me tell you, I love to sleep in. I mean, I'm such a sleeper. Like, I arrive late most of the time.

I don't know that I'm ever on time for work. In fact, I was on this cruise one time, and I was sleeping through a storm. In fact, my friends nicknamed me the sleeper. Okay, well, let's skip the background check and let's skip the work ethic.

Tell me about kids. How do you feel about kids? Kids. Oh, I hate them. I mean, they are vipers in diapers. I mean, if I'm really honest with you, like, my idea of a good time is like smacking a kid right

upside his chubby face and watching him cry.

Now, I'm being sarcastic because that's my spiritual gift. But I'm asking you, be honest. If you were interviewing that person for a daycare position, would you hire them?

Of course you wouldn't. They don't have the background. They clearly don't have the work ethic.

And they don't like kids. That's Jonah. Not even exaggerating, that's Jonah.

[21 : 23] Jonah is running from the authority of God. He sleeps on the job. He's late for the mission. And the very people God has called him to serve, he can't stand.

I don't know about you, but I wouldn't hire Jonah. But God does. God does.

God's not finished with Jonah. And I think if we're really honest and we really let that sink in, it teaches us a couple of things.

And first of all, it's this. Is that God loves the messenger as much as he loves the mission. What I mean by that? Listen, and I think this is so profound and helpful for us to think about.

If this were only about Nineveh, if it were only about reaching Nineveh, God would be picking another prophet. Are you tracking with me?

[22 : 25] Like it's relief pitcher time. It's somebody else. But this isn't just about the mission for God. It's also about the messenger. The fact that Jonah is still in the game means that God loves Jonah as much as he loves Nineveh.

And do you know what that should say to you, faith family? It should say to you tonight that you are not a means to an end in the kingdom of God. You're not a meaningless pawn in God's redemptive game of chess.

When he tells you to serve and give and witness, you need to stop thinking that he just wants something from you, but he actually wants something for you.

That he cares about you. That's why you're here. And he could use somebody else because he doesn't need you.

But he comes to Jonah's a second time. And not only that, but secondly, it means that God can give you a future regardless of your failures.

[23 : 32] God can give you a future regardless of your failures. And I hope you're hearing me that tonight. Listen, we've talked about this a lot at Faith Family. Many years ago, we did a series called From the Ashes.

And I used to talk about how everybody at Faith Family smells of smoke. Okay? Not because we smoke cigars after church. That would be a great idea. But that's not why you smell smoke.

It's because we've been through the ashes of life. We all know what it's like to be Jonah. And so whatever it is, whatever that thing is in your life that you're just like, nope, God is done with me.

I'm just here to tell you tonight, he's not. He's not done with you. Your past doesn't have to define you. And the reason why is because, notice this on the screen, in Jesus, failure is an event.

It is not an identity. Failure may be an event, but it is not your identity. Listen to what Paul says of his own life in 1 Timothy 1, verse 12.

[24 : 33] Paul says, Notice this. Now take off your little, this is the Apostle Paul, and he wrote, no, no, no, no.

Paul's about to tell you who he is. God appointed me to service, though formerly I was a blasphemer, a persecutor, an opponent of Christianity.

But I received mercy because I acted ignorantly in unbelief, and the grace of our Lord overflowed for me with the faith and love that are in Christ Jesus.

Oh, this is a trustworthy and deserving statement at full of acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners of whom I'm the foremost.

But you know what happened? Here's what happened. I received mercy for this reason that in me as the foremost, Christ Jesus might display, oh my, his perfect patience.

[25 : 41] Oh, his patience is perfect to put up with you and to put up with Paul, to put up with me, to put up with Jonah. He says, as an example to those who are to believe in him for eternal life.

And then he just ends by saying what we should all say. Oh, my, to the king of the ages, immortal, invisible, the only God, be honor and glory forever and ever.

For a man who loves like this. To take me with my resume and appoint me to service.

Listen, this is what I've come to appreciate about Nick Saban and what he did as a coach. You may not like Alabama football. I don't blame you. Jesus doesn't like Alabama football.

That is theologically accurate. In my theology. But as a Christian, you should at least respect a program that stands for redemption instead of condemnation.

[26 : 52] And here's what I just want to scream. I just want to scream that it's sad when a college football program looks more like the kingdom of God than the church of Jesus Christ.

That's a problem. Notice this here on the screen, Faith Family. A Christian culture is not a cancel culture. It is a cross culture.

And if you're not down with that, you're probably not going to like it here. Because this is all about what we are. It's coming to the Jonah's and just saying, listen, God's not done with you.

God's not done with you. He has an unwavering grace towards you. And he uses Jonah's. And listen, this is the total opposite of how the world works.

The world wants people moving in the right direction. God wants to use Jonah's who've been running in the wrong direction. The world wants to give the ball to the best player for the final shot. God's going to give the ball to the guy who's airballed every shot he's ever shot for the final shot.

[27 : 58] And it's crazy. It's the upside down nature of the kingdom of God. Amen. That the last get to be first.

And the first end up being last. It's the kingdom of God. And why does God do it this way? Think about it. Listen, when the best player makes the winning shot, everybody praises the player.

But when the bench player gets put in in the final seconds of the game because of the coach and makes that final shot, everybody praises the coach.

Meaning the reason why God does it this way is so that he gets all the glory, not Jonah. Oh, no, no, no, no. When this story is complete, that is the story of Jonah, or any story in this room for that matter, when this story is finished, the glory will not be, Jonah was really educated.

Boy, Jonah had an amazing speaking ability. Oh, my, look at that man's conversion record. He must be the next Billy Graham. Actually, Billy Graham came chronologically later. But whatever. All glory in this story will go to God.

[29 : 11] And not only is it because God gets all the glory, but it's also so that Jonah will learn humility. I want to show you, there's always little nuances in the text, and we're committed to exegetical preaching here.

So I want to show you the shift that's taking place from chapter 1 to chapter 3, because God is coming to Jonah, what? A second time.

But notice a little difference this time than the first time. Look back at chapter 1, verse 2. God comes to Jonah, and he says, That was the first time Jonah got the job offer.

But notice how it said in chapter 3, verse 2. Very similar. Arise, go to Nineveh, that great city, and call out against it. And here's the difference.

The message that I tell you. Why the shift? Why the difference? The difference is this. Jonah has to learn the mission is not about him.

[30 : 19] It is about God, and what God has called Jonah to do. That's why the shift, and you're going to go tell them the message I give you. You're going to do what I tell you to do.

Why? Because this isn't about you. It's not about what you think about Ninevites. It's not what you think about me. It's you being humbly obedient to whatever I call you to do.

All God wants from Jonah, and all God wants from us, is humble obedience. Humble obedience that recognizes this is not about me. This is entirely about the name and glory of God.

So what is it in your life that you think disqualifies you from serving God? You say, well, I've totally lost. Well, but God wasn't asking you to win. He's going to take care of the victories, not you.

You say, but pastor, I've failed. Tell me one person in the Bible outside of Jesus that didn't. They're miserable failures, and yet God used them.

[31 : 23] Here's what I want to land on us tonight, and it's this. Your failures are not bigger than his forgiveness. Amen? That's a great place for an amen. You should be jumping up, shouting hallelujah, jumping a few chairs, but that's okay.

Your failures are not bigger than his forgiveness. Where sin abounds, grace abounds all the more. So we see his unwavering grace a second time.

We see that it comes to undeserving prophets. It doesn't just come a second time. It comes to Jonah's a second time. And thirdly, verse 2. Arise and go to Nineveh.

So now we've focused on the second time, and then we've focused on Jonah. Now let's think about Nineveh. Here we have this. It's crazy. The unwavering mercy of God comes to an undeserving

prophet of God to do an unrealistic mission for God.

I love it! I mean, this is just what God does. I'm going to let my mercy, which is undeserved, come to people that are a total mess to do something they couldn't possibly do.

[32 : 34] Jonah is called to go to Nineveh. And even the text talks about how Nineveh is this great city, and it's great in many ways.

First of all, I mean, in this time in the ancient Near East, this would have been a mega, mega city.

We're talking probably about 120,000 people or so.

Now, to have a city that's 100,000 more in this time is a very, very large city. It was a political power. In fact, I've told you that Nineveh is actually the capital of Assyria, which is one of the mightiest nations at this point in time.

It is full of all kinds of wickedness and rebellion. And these were an extremely violent people. I've already fleshed out for you earlier in this series that one of the reasons why Jonah doesn't want to go is because of what Assyria did to the nation of Israel in being brutal towards them when they made them captives.

This is a big city with big problems with a lot of people that have done a lot of serious things. And if I'm Jonah, I'm probably thinking, I'm just one prophet.

[33 : 50] I can't do this. This is bigger than me. Have you ever felt that way about what God has called you to do?

How can I lead this church? How can I raise these children? How can I reach people for Jesus? The task is too big.

And here's my answer. Yes, it is. Because you're on mission with God. Of course it's too big for you. The day you feel the task that God has given you is easily accomplished in your strength is the day you're not serving God. But when you're on mission with God, it's going to feel impossible because it's God's mission.

But take comfort in this, faith family. Notice it on the screen. There is no mission that is greater than the God who called you to it. Amen? There is no mission that's greater than the God who called you to it.

[34 : 52] Again, this phrase, the great city, it literally reads, a city great to God. That is, in all of its wickedness, and we'll talk a little bit more about this next week when we see what happens in Nineveh.

But in all of its wickedness, God loves the Ninevites, and He knows that through this city can come amazing things. That there's something about reaching the city of Nineveh that will have a ripple effect around the world.

And man, this really helps us think about our own calling right here in the Minneapolis-St. Paul area. I did some research and preparation for this sermon in terms of just our area.

And there's roughly 3.7 million people in the metro area. Of this area, there's 3,300 churches. Of those 3,300 churches, about 761,000 people attend church.

Now, that's a lot of math for this Tennessee boy to do. I've got to get out my toes. But if my math is correct, that's about 3 million people who are unchurched. Right here where we live.

[36 : 04] In this metro area. That is, God has given us a mission that's impossible for us to do. Except for the power of God.

Except for the power of God. The city may be too big. Our church may be too small. But if God can reach Nineveh with a single prophet, God can reach the Twin Cities through this little faith family church.

I believe that. And if you don't believe that, wake up, Jonah. Jonah. Because it's right here in black and white.

He used one man, as we'll see next week, to bring repentance to an entire city. I don't know what it is that you have on you right now that you just feel like, there is no way I can do this.

Would you just rest in the fact that God used Jonah and God wants to use you? To raise kids. To lead a church. To reach people for Jesus.

[37 : 11] And you are totally undeserving to be a part of this mission. But that's exactly the kind of people God loves to use. That's the story of Jonah.

Now, notice Jonah's response. Does he take advantage of this second opportunity? Look at verse 3. So Jonah arose and went to Nineveh according to the word of the Lord.

And Nineveh was an exceedingly great city. Three days journey in breadth. So the crowd goes wild. Everybody, big applause for Jonah. Right? Jonah finally gets it.

He finally steps up and does what he's supposed to do and responds. You know, most of us are like Jonah. That is, we tend to take the long way. Right? Here's Jonah's path as he finally gets to Nineveh.

Is he has to go the wrong way for quite a while. Until finally, God gets his attention. Gets him on the right track. And he responds in obedience.

[38 : 11] And goes to Nineveh. And does as God had called him to do. Don't most of us tend to go the long way? Anybody want to testify tonight? Like, there's just been a few times in your life you've gone the long way on your own.

But the ultimate response, the final answer is, here am I, Lord. Send me. Here am I, Lord. Use me. I know I'm not deserving.

I know I don't have a lot of talent. I know my resume's a total mess. But use me. However you want to use me for your glory and by your grace. One of my favorite Christian artists growing up.

Anybody big Rich Mullen fans? Rich Mullen's? All loved Rich Mullen's. He's passed for many years now. But he had a song and in it the lyrics go like this.

The Lord is sure speaking to you to set aside your pride and your anger too. To say the time is short just means the time is now. Every tongue will confess and every knee is going to bow.

[39 : 11] All right, okay, uh-huh, amen. You can argue with your maker. But you know you just can't win. Jonah, you can't run from God.

God is going to use his man. He's going to use his prophet to do his mission to demonstrate his glory. And so what is it tonight, Christian, that God is calling you to do that you have put off, that you have said no to?

And tonight you just need to, like Jonah, surrender and say, I'm going. I'm doing it. Here am I. Send me. These three verses in Jonah 3, 1-3 are all about a sovereign God who has a sovereign plan of bringing salvation to the world.

And like Saban at Alabama, God often does this in ways and with people that nobody else would dare use.

But if we're honest, that's exactly how God brought the ultimate gift of salvation to the world in the first place. It wasn't through someone born in a palace.

[40 : 26] It was someone born in a manger. It wasn't with a famous entourage. It was with a corrupt IRS agent and a trader and a bunch of common fishermen.

A man that never wore a royal crown but a crown of thorns. And that Son of God, that man was given a mission and he was obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross.

Why? So that the word of the Lord would come to you a second time. Believe on the Lord Jesus and you will be saved.

That's the best news in the world for failures like you and me. And all God's people said, Amen. Let's pray.

Lord, thank you for your word to us tonight. Thank you for once again just revealing your unwavering grace. Not just to Jonah but to us.

[41 : 41] Lord, your word has come to us. Your grace has come to us a second time and a third time. We don't even have numbers to count how many times.

You have just continued to come to us with your grace. And we thank you for that. We give you the glory for that. We know that this is not about our talent.

This is not about our resume. It's not about how gifted we are. It's just about how gracious you are. And so I pray whatever it is tonight, whether it's a calling, a responsibility, that we would just say, Lord, use me.

Just use me however you want to use me. Pray that we would surrender like Jonah and that we would go and do what you've called us to do.

And then when we mess up along the way and when we take the wrong path or make the wrong decision or just completely turn on you, that Lord, you would once again by your grace, just come and give us that other opportunity to be restored and renewed.

[42 : 51] And maybe there's someone here tonight that just walked in here and they've been running from you. Maybe it's not even obvious to those around them, but just in their heart, they're running the opposite direction.

I pray that this very moment they would surrender to you, that they would stop their running and be redeemed. Lord, help us now as we enter to a time of communion and reflection on the cross of Jesus and how it is the cross that unwaveringly brings us your grace time and time again. Pray it in Jesus' name. And God's people said, Amen.

