

Responsive Servants: Taking the Message of God to Heart

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[0 : 00] I thank God that He is the God of second chances. You know, when we mess up and we blow it, He doesn't discard us and He doesn't destroy us.

He gives us second chances. God is a God of mercy. God is a God of grace. And God is a God of forgiveness.

Now, these qualities are not readily available in today's world. These qualities come from God. And as God's people, we understand that He is the God of the second chance.

On New Year's Day, 1929, Georgia Tech played the University of California in the Rose Bowl. In that game, a man named Roy Rigels recovered a fumble for California.

But somehow, he got disoriented and he ended up running 65 yards in the wrong direction.

[1 : 06] And it wasn't until one of his teammates, Benny Long, outdistanced him and downed him right before he scored a touchdown for Georgia Tech.

And when California then attempted to punt, Tech blocked the kick and they scored a safety, which was the ultimate victory for them, the ultimate margin of victory.

Well, that strange play came in the first half. And everyone wondered, who was watching the game, asked the same question. What will Coach Nibs Price say and do to Roy Rigels in the second half? Well, during the halftime, the teams went their separate ways into the locker rooms. And they sat down on the benches and on the floor, all but Rigels.

In the corner of the room, he put his blanket around his shoulders and he sobbed like a baby. Now, if you've ever played any kind of sports during halftime, you know that's usually when the coach comes out.

[2 : 22] And especially if something goes wrong, he usually lets the team know why it went wrong and what they need to do to change things. But that day, Coach Price was quiet.

But, you know, no doubt he was trying to decide what to do with Rigels. Then the timekeeper came in and told him there was three minutes before the second half.

And so Coach Price tells the team, everyone that played in the first half is going to play in the second half.

So the players got up and started to file out to the field. All but Rigels. Coach Price said, Roy, I said, let's get out to the field.

He said, Roy, you didn't hear me? The same team that played the first half is going to play the second half. Then Roy looked up through tears of a strong man and a proud football player.

[3 : 30] He said, Coach, I can't do it to save my life. He says, I've let the University of California down. I've let you down. And he says, I've ruined myself.

He said, I couldn't face that crowd in the stadium to save my life. Then Coach Price reached out, put a hand on Rigels' shoulder.

And he said, Roy, get up and go on back. The game is only half over. Rigels got up, went back, and all those players on Tech will tell you they never saw a man play like the second half like Roy. Rigels played that second half. Now, by the way, he did get a nickname, and it stayed with him. It was Wrong Ray Rigels. But he got a second chance.

Now, Jonah's repentance in Jonah chapter 3 allowed Jonah to have a second chance. God gave Jonah a second chance to do his will.

[4 : 40] Jonah repented of his disobedience. He got spit out of the whale on the dry land. And Jonah went on to accomplish what God had called him to accomplish.

And God forgave him, even though he was disobedient. David Jeremiah said, when we recognize what we've done, are remorseful over it, have repented, and have had time to reflect on the whole process, then God is ready to reassign us.

So there was a change of attitude, ambition, and action when Jonah truly repented of his disobedience.

Jonah repented, and it was seen in his following the Lord's command. Jonah had a change of direction. Instead of going the opposite direction, like Larry mentioned a little earlier, Jonah changed his direction and moved in the direction that God called him to.

Jonah became a responsive servant. Jonah then responded to the call of God upon his life.

[5 : 58] And here is the thing. A true servant of God is always going to respond to God's call. A true servant of God is always going to respond to God's call.

In this study, as we are looking, and especially in today's message, I want to challenge us as God's people to arise and to go and proclaim the gospel of God, the message of God, to a lost and a broken world around us.

My question is, have you heard the call of God on your life? We were told this morning that God has a plan. What's God's plan? God's plan is that all should come to repentance.

God's plan is, and it was carried out by the Lord Jesus Christ, came to the earth, born of a virgin, lived a sinless, holy life, went to the cross, died in our place for our sin, and rose again the third day and set out, sending his disciples out into the world to proclaim the message, the gospel.

God says, all who call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved. God said that he wills that all should come to repentance. So God has a plan.

[7 : 18] His plan is for his followers, his body, the church, to continue what Jesus began and where Jesus left off when he rose again and he ended up descending into heaven.

He has left us here to carry out the plan and carry out the mission. And as Jonah, have we repented if there is any disobedience in our life, any area in our life where we're saying, you know, God, I don't think I want to do that.

God, I don't think I'm prepared to do that. God, I don't think I can do that. God says, if I call you and I commission you, I will empower you to accomplish the mission just like he did for Jonah.

Maybe this morning you may be saying or thinking to yourself, well, I'm glad God is the God of the second chance. So this text this morning, as we are going to look at it, Jonah chapter 3, the first four verses of chapter number 3, shows us the marks of a responsive servant.

First, a responsive servant will accept the mission of God. If you consider yourself this morning to be a responsive servant, as a responsive servant, you are going to accept the mission, the calling of God upon your life.

[8 : 44] And as we see in Jonah chapter 3, the first three verses, now the word of the Lord came to Jonah the second time. Remember, he's the God of the second chance.

It came to Jonah the second time saying, arise, get up, go to Nineveh, that great city, and preach to it the message that I tell you. So Jonah arose and went to Nineveh according to the word of the Lord.

Now Nineveh was an exceedingly great city, a three-day journey in extent. You know, God had worked on his servant to get him to the point where he could hear from God.

The commentator and the preacher Warren Wearsby wrote this. He said, remember, God is more concerned about his workers than he is about their work.

Let me repeat that. God is more concerned about his workers than he is about their work. He goes on to say, for if the workers are what they ought to be, the work will be what it ought to be.

[9 : 48] If we're doing, if we are who God called us to be, and we're doing what God's called us to do, God's plan is going to be carried out because it will be carried out through us.

And it was only when Jonah cried out in repentance of his disobedience, God heard, God spoke to the, God forgave him, God spoke to the fish. He said, go to dry land, spit the prophet out, and Jonah was able to hit the ground running.

God now recommissions Jonah. He says the second time, get up, go to Nineveh, and tell them what I tell you to tell them.

You know, Jonah may have started out singing, I did it my way, but Jonah ends up saying, okay, Lord, I'll do it your way.

Are we that way? Are we willing to say, not my will, God, you know, I know what I think. I know what I think is right. I know what I see ought to be done.

[10:52] But Lord, what do you want done? What do you want us to do? What do you want me to do? See, Jonah accepted this recommissioning, and Jonah heard when to go.

Jonah heard where to go. And Jonah heard what to do as well. Did Jonah's assignment change? No, it didn't change. Same assignment, but God spoke to him the second time, recommissioned him.

God told Jonah where to preach, and God told Jonah what to preach. He told him where to go, and he told him what to say.

Now, God's commission had not changed, and God's commission to his church hasn't changed in 2,000 years. God still says, go and share the gospel.

Matthew 28, 18 through 20, and Jesus came and spoke to them, his disciples. He says, all authority has been given to me in heaven and on earth.

[11:58] Go therefore, or as you are going, the tense of the verb is saying, make disciples of all nations, and then baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.

So he's saying, as we go, as the body of Christ, he says, our number one responsibility as the church is to share the gospel.

Number one responsibility. If we're not sharing the gospel, we're not doing God's will. We can do all the social work that we want to do, and as long as we're not sharing the gospel, we're worthless as far as God's concerned.

Now, we're worth a lot because we're his. But as his servants, I heard a very, very dismal statistic this week.

It said that only about 1% of the churches in America are actively, actively engaged in evangelism.

[13:11] You look at the average church's calendar. What's scheduled? Socials?

Dinners? Game time? Where is it scheduled that we're going to go out into our community, we're going to share the gospel, we're going to touch our community?

Yes, some of that is we're going to reach our community by doing things physically, by serving them, by helping them, by serving them. But as we do, we share the love and we share the gospel.

Are we really the body of Christ on the mission of doing the will of God?

He says, go therefore, or as you're going, as you go to work, as you go to school, as you go play ball, as you go to the gym, as you go shopping.

[14:13] He says, make disciples, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Holy Spirit, and then teaching them. See, it doesn't stop there. It doesn't stop when someone comes to know the Lord. He says, teaching them to observe all things that I've commanded you, and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age.

And again, Jesus said to his followers in Acts chapter 1, verse 8, he says, but you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you shall be my, what?

Witnesses to me in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria and the end of the earth. God's commission to the church, to us, is to go to the lost with the good news of Jesus Christ.

That's our mission. That was Jonah's mission. Go. I want, I want these people to repent and I want to be their God. See, God's commission to Jonah was to go to Nineveh and to preach.

Now, that word preach here means to call, to call out or to recite. He says, I want you to recite to them what I tell you.

[15:30] I want you to call out to them and I want you to give them the message that I give you. So we are to go out and preach to call out and to make a connection with those who don't know Jesus and share the gospel with them.

You know, notice, in this passage, Nineveh didn't come to Jonah. How did it work? Jonah went to Nineveh.

Gone are the days when you put up a building, put a steeple on top and the people show up. Because there was a time when, at least in America, it was culturally expected to be in church on Sunday morning.

But those days are gone. And in some ways, I think that's good. You say, well, pastor, what makes you say that? Well, because historically, the American church has been full of cultural Christians.

And now, you know those who were left? I believe those who were followers of Jesus. You see, there were a lot of cultural Christians that filled up churches in the 60s and the 70s who went to

church because it was the thing to do but didn't have a personal relationship with Jesus Christ and weren't on mission for Him.

[17 : 05] And today, it may seem like, well, why aren't they coming? Well, the thing is, cultural Christianity in America is an anomaly.

It wasn't that way in the first century. It wasn't that way in the second century because Jesus said, if you want people to know me, you've got to do what?

You've got to go. If people, if you expect people to hear about Jesus, to hear about God, it's to go. So, it wasn't that way in the first century.

And in order for people to come to know the Lord Jesus, we are to tell others. We are to share our faith with others and disciple them, teach them what Jesus taught.

Taught His apostles, who then, Jesus taught His disciples, and then we are continue with that. So, the great biblical principle that we see here is, God has not called the lost to come to us.

[18 : 12] He never has. He's called us to go to the lost. He's called us to go to a broken and a dying world. So, upon hearing from God, the second time, Jonah gets up and he removes the seaweed from his head and then he goes on to Nineveh and he preaches the gospel.

In verse 2, God said, I want you to preach the message that I tell you. You know, the mission of Jonah was not to preach his feelings, wasn't to preach his opinions, his own wisdom, but he was commissioned to preach the Word of God, the message of God.

This message means a proclamation. Jonah was commissioned to proclaim to Nineveh the message that God had presented to Jonah.

And so, the great biblical truth is God speaks to his servants so that his servants can speak for him. God said, go tell you what I told you.

Go tell them what I tell you. Go share with them what I've done for you. So, in verse 3, so Jonah arose, Jonah got up, he went to Nineveh according to the Word of the Lord.

[19 : 28] Now, Nineveh was an exceedingly great city, a three-day journey in extent. So, Jonah not only heard the Word of God, but this time he heeded the Word of God, he did what the Lord commanded, and God was pleased with his obedience.

So, after much wandering, after his waywardness, after his willful disobedience, Jonah finally accepted the mission of God, and he ends up going to Nineveh.

Now, the question is, have we accepted the mission of God in our life? This morning, we heard God has a plan. And we recited this morning, what did we recite this morning? God has a plan for me.

God has a plan for me. God has a plan for you, and that is to make a kingdom impact by the love that we show, by the gospel that we share, and the grace that we bestow upon others, and the grace that we show others.

So, in verse 3, Jonah arose, he got up, he goes to Nineveh. And when we accept the mission of God, and when we accept the plan of God, when we accept the call of God, we're going to get up, and we're going to go as well.

[20 : 51] And we'll never accept the mission of God, and be a part of the work of God until we hear and we heed, and we simply do the word of God. Now, God's word says Nineveh was what kind of city?

It was a great city. There was a lot of people. Commentators kind of are all over the map on the size of Nineveh. Some will say 120,000.

Some say even up into the millions. We're not really sure how many people, but it was, how long did it take to, they didn't have, they didn't have their Kia's and their, their Ford's and their Chevrolet's and their Dodge's during those days.

What did they have? They had their feet. And so, how big of a city was it? It took three days to walk to one, from one end of the city to the other. That was a pretty, that was a pretty good size city.

I remember when I was in Japan and one of the things, the places that, where we stayed, the larger city, it was about the size of Birmingham, about 350,000. Where we were set and then I would go out and speak to the churches in the different areas.

[22 : 00] I was able to go from one end of the city to the other in just a matter of a few minutes. And of course, I had a bicycle. But, it took Jonah three days to go across.

So, the thing is, Jonah was speaking to multitudes. Jonah was sharing the gospel with multitudes. How many times do you think he said, repent?

How many times do you think he said, you've got 40 days until God wipes you off the face of the earth unless you repent? I'm sure he said it over and over and over again. As he's walking, as he's going, Jonah is sharing the message that God told him to share.

So, in verses one through three, we notice a responsive servant who will accept the mission of God and go. In verse four, we see that a responsive servant will announce the message of God.

We have God's call in our life. We'll respond and we'll go. And as we go, if we are truly responsive servants, we're going to tell others.

[23 : 07] We are going to announce the message of God to a lost and a broken world. Verse number four, and Jonah began to enter the city on the first day's walk. Then he cried out and said, Yet forty days and Nineveh shall be overthrown.

Jonah didn't waste any time when he got to Nineveh. He started preaching the message. He started proclaiming the message God said to proclaim. What message do we have to proclaim to the world today?

God loves you. You know, there are far too many people that start out their gospel proclamation with, you guys are a bunch of sinners.

People don't respond to that. What are people thinking about today? Does God even love me?

Thing is, most everyone knows that they could do better.

Most everyone knows that they've got problems, that their lives are a mess, and they wish it was better. God loves the world so much that he gave his only begotten son.

[24 : 15] See, how did Jesus go to the crowds? How did Jesus, when Jesus was preaching, what did he preach? He preached freedom. He preached, come to me and I will give you rest.

Come to me and I will take care of your sin. He said, come to me. And that's the message we have to proclaim today. Now, Jonah's message was a message of destruction that if they chose not to repent, that God would destroy them.

But in this age of grace, Jesus chose a different tack. He went to the world and he said, I love you. You need to come to me. I'm going to die on the cross for you.

I'm going to take care of those sins. We don't have time to waste. Think about it. Nineveh was given how long? Forty days.

You're a good listener. They were given forty days. Do we know today how much time this world has before Jesus Christ returns? No, we don't.

[25 : 21] We're hearing in the book of the Revelation in Sunday school that there is coming a day. We heard in Thessalonians this morning that there's going to come a day when the dead in Christ are going to rise first.

The trump of God is going to sound. The dead in Christ will rise first. Then we which are alive and remain will be caught up together with them in the air. And so shall we ever be with the Lord.

And that's going to start up a chain of events. But we don't know when that day is going to be. So we may have an hour. We may have two. We may have 200 years.

We don't know. Nineveh had 40 days. They knew their time frame. You see, we don't. We don't have time to waste. People are dying in their sins and Jesus could return at any time.

We need to be busy proclaiming the message of God. And it was glorious. Was it two Wednesday nights ago someone here trusted Christ as their Savior?

[26 : 22] He was about to walk out the door but then I asked a question. See, we can ask questions of people. Do you know if everything's right between you and God?

It's a simple question. You know, my question to him was, how's your journey with God? I mean, it was not a negative question.

It was a how's your journey with God? He said, well, you know, I'm trying to be good. Well, and that set the stage for the next question, the next question, the next question.

Sharing the gospel is not difficult. It's not, we don't have to be a theological giant, if you will, to share the gospel.

And I've shared this with people who've just trusted the Lord. I said, do you understand what Jesus did for you? Yes. Do you understand what you've just done? Yes. Do you understand that the Bible says all who call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved?

[27 : 27] Yes. Do you understand that God has got you in his hand and no one will ever be able to pluck you out of his hand? And he says you are saved, not shall be saved.

Yes. I said you know enough to go and share the gospel with someone else. Because all we need to know is what God did for us in order for us to share what God wants to do for someone else. The thing is, Nineveh wasn't expecting Jonah. You know, the local chamber of commerce didn't schedule a three-day preaching in the Nineveh Civic Center by Jonah the prophet. They didn't set up sales tables and sell CDs and MP3s of Jonah's latest messages. They didn't sell t-shirts with Jonah getting spit out by the whale and say, come, come hear this great prophet. You know, they didn't sell tickets and they didn't promote it on radio or TV. Jonah went out. He spread the message that God was telling him to say and they repented and they repented.

[28 : 35] When Jonah showed up in Nineveh, listen to this, God showed up in Nineveh. When you show up in your neighborhood and you're willing or in your family's life, when you show up ready to proclaim what God said, God shows up.

God's Holy Spirit does the work. See, it's not our ultimate responsibility to save people. That's God's job. So Jonah showed up, God showed up. When the word of God was preached, the Spirit of God convicted the sinners who were there of their sin, of righteousness, and judgment. That's the Holy Spirit's job and that's what the Holy Spirit did. God always honors the proclaiming of his word. This is what God's promised. He said, my word will not go out void. It won't go out without accomplishing its purpose that I've set for it to accomplish. And God gave Nineveh 40 days to repent. God, aren't you glad God gives people time to repent? God gave you time. God gave me time. And God is giving time for all those who we know who will come to him. He's giving them time to repent.

[29 : 57] But God's not willing that any should perish. All should come to repentance. And here's another great biblical truth. If the church of God will not accept the mission of God and begin to announce the message of God to this lost and broken world, how will people be able to respond to the word of God?

Faith comes by hearing. And hearing by the word of God. See, that's where we share the gospel. We share what God said. Jesus, we're all sinners. Christ died on the cross to take care of our sin. Jesus Christ rose the third day to prove that our sin was taken care of. So what kind of message are we given to give to the world? The gospel. People still must be born again. Just like Nicodemus on that evening when Jesus said, you must be born again. People still need to be born again today. There's no other way. It's not by joining a church. It's not by being part of a religion. It's not by being part of a movement. It's only by coming to the Lord Jesus Christ, trusting Christ as our Savior, and being born again, given a brand new life, being indwelt by God's Holy Spirit.

[31 : 22] God's word and God's requirements haven't changed in 2,000 years. The question this morning is, will you accept the mission of God upon your life?

Will you accept God's commission? Will you be willing to be part of the plan he has for you and announce the message of God?

My question is, will we be a responsive servant? Let's pray. Father, this morning as we've come to you, I thank you that you have chosen to allow us to be part of your plan. The privilege that you have given us to partner with you and to go out into a lost and a dying world and proclaim the message that you love this world so much that you gave your unique son to die on the cross in our place. Father, I pray this morning as we go out from this place that we would not only be willing, but we would be prepared and we would be bold to share our faith because the most important thing that we can do in this world is to share the message that you've given us.

[32 : 59] That we would come to know Jesus, that the world around us would come to know Jesus as their Savior and could spend an eternity with you in your heaven.

Father, we thank you. We praise you for all that you've done.