

# Jonah 3

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[0:00] Thanks be to God for his word. I'm going to make sure that I'm... bald men don't do great in the sun, so I'm going to stay right underneath this umbrella here.! Let's go to God in prayer as we consider this passage, Jonah chapter 3.

Our Lord in heaven, as you bring us to this most unusual passage, will you help us to see your heart for mercy and compassion for the nations? And will you confront our hearts and shape us and change us into the likeness of Christ for our good and for your glory?

We pray that in Christ's name. Amen. Now, if you were with us two weeks ago when we looked at Jonah chapter 1, this sounds very familiar, right? Verse 1 of chapter 3 sounds very familiar. They're almost identical.

The opening lines of chapter 1 and the opening lines of chapter 3 are nearly the same. It's almost as if we've hit the reset button.

I like how one commentator put it. If one has listened or read carefully, there can be no doubt that the story is, as it were, starting over.

[1:37] Once again, Jonah has heard the word of Yahweh. Jonah's back where it all started. His attempted flight had no effect. And that's what we saw. Chapter 1, Jonah ran away from the Lord, instructing him to go to Nineveh and call out to it.

In chapter 1, the Lord made that quite difficult for him and corrected his course. In chapter 2, Jonah cried out to the Lord, and the Lord has set him now back on that same course.

And so Jonah is right back where he started. What are we to learn from that? I think at least two things. The first of which is don't delay obedience.

Right? Don't bother yourself in disobeying God. You aren't doing yourself any favors, are you?

Right? What has disobedience, running from the obedience to which he was commanded, what has that bought for Jonah?

Well, certainly not an escape from duty. Right? No, disobedience has bought him loss. Right?

[2:53] He lost the ticket price he paid for a very long voyage. I imagine that was quite expensive. It brought him terror as he had to experience the terrible storm. It brought him to the point where he had to resign himself and say, Pick me up and cast me into the sea. Chapter 1, verse 12. It brought him the trauma of being cast into the sea, being swallowed by a monster, darkness like the grave, being vomited onto the seashore.

And here he stands again with identical commission, go to Nineveh. His disobedience hasn't absolved him of his duty. It's simply added to the cost. And the same is true of us.

When the Lord says to us, put sin to death. Friends, don't delay. Augustine of Hippo, in his spiritual autobiography, which he called his Confessions, recounted a prayer that he prayed as a young man.

He said, Lord, grant me chastity. Not yet. Is that your attitude? Sometimes it's mine. Right? And so he continued in sin and delayed the obedience that he knew he ought to pursue.

But delaying obedience didn't get him anything but pain. And at the end, after long hardships, he still needed to kill that sin.

[4:27] Just like Jonah, he was back to square one with nothing to show for it but a higher price tag. Parents, when your little one is on their way towards choosing disobedience, have you ever said, I've said this, have you ever said, you know, do you want to do this, what you're told

now?

Or do you want to spank and then do what you're told? Right? Right? Disobedience doesn't relieve us of our duty. It just adds to the cost. And similarly, on the flip side, right, not just the put off sin but the put on righteousness.

When the Lord says love one another, make disciples of all nations, not just those put off commands, but the put on Christ, the walk in obedience commands. Friends, don't delay in that either.

The cost here might be more subtle because sin ruins things. The cost is very easy to see. But there is a cost to delayed righteousness.

The cost, the pain of it, is often found in regret. Think back over the last few years of your life. What do you regret?

[5:41] I'm sure you don't say, I wish I had sinned a little bit more given the chance. If the opportunity arose. Now, perhaps you, and I hope that you regret, lament over the sin that you did.

But I wonder if also that the Holy Spirit doesn't convict you about the good you could have done. Right? Righteousness delayed.

Right? The opportunities to share the gospel you didn't take. Who might the Lord have saved through that? What might have been the effects? The encouragement you could have shared but didn't.

How might God have built his church through that? The truth you could have spoken. The charity you could have given. Don't delay obedience, friends.

If you've been truly born again, made new by the Spirit of God, he will prick your conscience of these things. And now, absolutely, there is forgiveness for disobedience.

[6:48] Right? In Christ, if we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness. But we will still sorrow over the opportunities for good we have squandered.

And so there is a cost to delaying obedience. There is a loss. Whether that cost comes in the form of Jonah's lost money and time and terror and reputation.

Or the pain and toil that our own disobedience costs us. Or the regret from our failure to obey. There is always a cost. So, friends, don't delay obedience.

That's the first thing I think we learn from verse 1 is God hits the reset button and brings Jonah back to square one. I think the second is that when we've failed, God still uses failures.

Right? Jonah does not deserve the opportunity to remain God's prophet. Yet, here the Lord is commissioning him again to serve him.

[7:51] If the Lord wants to use people in his mission, and he obviously does, he's been doing it since day one, you know, be fruitful, multiply, fill the earth.

He has to use imperfect people like you and like me and like Jonah. Because there's only been one perfect person. And he stands today in heaven, ruling and reigning.

And he will come again. But in the meantime, everyone else is a sinner and a failure in some way. And the Lord loves to use sinners and failures to demonstrate his strength and his power and his graciousness.

When we sin, when we disobey, when we fail, how does the Lord treat us? He doesn't reject us. Because he will not reject his own.

I love how one pastor put it. We have disobeyed him. We have run away from him. Some of us, like Jonah, have run very far indeed. Does God cut us off?

[9:01] Cast us off? Does he disown us? No. He disciplines us, it is true. But having done that and having brought us to the place of repentance, he returns the second time to recommission us to service.

Moreover, he comes a third, a fourth, a hundredth, a thousandth time if necessary, as often as it is. None of us would be where we are now in our Christian lives if God had not dealt that way with us. Oh, the greatness of the unmerited grace of God. We deserve nothing, yet we receive everything, even when we foolishly turn from it.

Why is that, friends? Why does God come back to us with grace when we have disobeyed? Why is it that he would recommission us and prompt us into mission yet again after failure?

Second Timothy 2. If we are faithless, he remains faithful, for he cannot deny himself.

[10:13] Those whom he has bought with his blood, he will carry through to the end. We are offered grace, not because of anything good in us, but because of God's great loving kindness.

We're offered grace because of God's goodness. And it's also God's goodness that provides our success in ministry, in mission. And make no mistake that everyone here is a minister of the gospel if you are in Christ.

Everyone here has a mission if you are in Christ. And we may feel inadequate to the task. Good. If you feel adequate to the task, something's wrong.

But Jonah shows us here that the results of the success of our mission is not to do with us, but to do with him.

And we see that in the very unusual evangelization of Nineveh, right? We said from day one here, as we looked at Jonah chapter one, that this is a missionary God.

[11:22] Really, this book is not about Nineveh. This book is about a great God and his very unusual prophet. And what we are seeing here is that God is still concerned for the nations.

Even when his prophet isn't, God is a missionary God. He is ascending God. He is ascending Jonah there again, right? And he has commissioned us as well to be a missionary people.

And so if you belong to Christ, you have a mission that is to share the gospel of Jesus Christ.

Because God's heart is to show mercy and to offer grace to all who would repent and believe.

From every tongue and tribe and nation. Even one like Nineveh. As we've remarked before, Nineveh was a profoundly wicked society.

As the capital of Assyria. Even to them, he would offer mercy. And he designs to communicate that through human messengers like you and like me.

[12:30] But Jonah's mission, the words that the Lord gave him to say are a little strange, aren't they? Right? Verse two, what was the message that the Lord would tell Jonah? Well, we see it play out in verse four.

Jonah began to go into the city, going a day's journey. He called out, yet 40 days in Nineveh shall be overthrown. Now that doesn't sound like a normal missionary activity, does it?

That's not the way we normally think about missions. Right? It's not God loves you and has a wonderful plan for your life. It's a popular evangelistic introduction.

Or it's not repent for the kingdom of heaven is at hand, how Christ began his ministry. It's not the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord, as Paul would put it in Romans 6.

It's not, as Peter said on the day of Pentecost, everyone who calls upon the name of the Lord shall be saved. And now, whether Jonah's sermon is really just one sentence long, as we see in verse four, or whether that's a summary of maybe a longer message, there aren't exactly quotation marks in the Hebrew.

[13:46] This doesn't look like a normal evangelistic appeal the way you and I would normally think of it. But consider the context. A prophet of Israel comes to Nineveh and tells them in the name of God that they will be overthrown.

And he gives them time. Why would he give them time? To cower and lament and just make it excruciating on the way to that destruction?

No, God isn't cruel. He's not petulant. He doesn't torture them with the prospect of judgment just to increase the pain of it. The 40 days is an offer.

An offer to turn and abate the wrath to come. And in fact, Jonah, we for sure know, we know that Jonah understood this to be an offer of grace.

Because next week in chapter four, he's going to say, I knew, Lord, that you were a gracious and merciful God, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love and relenting from disaster.

[14:59] So why lead like this? Isn't there a better way? Isn't there a more conciliatory way to do this? Than say, oh, your sin is so bad, therefore you will be overturned.

Well, Paul says in Romans chapter three that through the law comes a knowledge of sin. We are all sinners and we need to know that.

The gospel doesn't look like good news unless it's correcting bad news. Unless we stand justly condemned before a righteous God. Unless there's real consequences to the way we are and what we have done.

And the gospel doesn't look like good news. It looks like an odd story 2,000 years ago in the Middle East that doesn't have much relevance to us. It's only when we face the true significance of our sin. And the true weight of the Lord we have sinned against. And the impact of our sin. And the consequences for it.

[16:08] It is only when we are confronted with that. That the gospel truly looks gracious and glorious and wonderful. When we are confronted with the law, we recognize ourselves to be sinners.

And justly condemned with our failures. But our natural reaction is often defensive, right? Mine is, how about you?

Hey, don't judge me. I'm not that bad. Or at least I'm not as bad as that guy. That guy. Sorry, guy. Who are you to judge me?

We say, right? We recognize our guilt. But instead of reacting as we ought. We love to reject correction, don't we?

In all sorts of ways. But when God is at work, what happens? What happens in Nineveh? When God is at work. When we're confronted with our sin.

[17:15] When we instinctively react defensively. When he is at work in the inner man. He humbles us.

And we can repent. Thomas Watson, the great Puritan, put it best. Until sin be bitter.

Christ will not be sweet. So who are the results up to then? I've said, you know, we have this mission, right?

Just like Jonah. Like we have been commissioned. Jesus calls it. Or we have called Jesus commission to us. The great commission. Why don't we do it? Fear is probably one of the biggest reasons.

Fear that we don't know enough. Fear that we'll fail. We can make the mistake very easily, I think. Fear that we're going to look. Of thinking that Jonah was successful because, you know, there was a mighty response.

[18:30] In here in chapter three, right? The middle of chapter three is all this incredible response of repentance. This incredible response to his preaching. That would be a mistake.

Jonah's success is not found in that response. Let me explain what I mean by that. What is happening in Nineveh? Is this the work of a master evangelist?

No, hardly, right? What happens in Nineveh is a massive work of God, right? Jonah wasn't even happy to be there, right? We're going to find out again in chapter four.

He doesn't want Nineveh to turn. He would rather see them burn. And even through this prophet, right? He probably didn't come and preach really excited to them.

He didn't put on the best preaching performance of his career, right? Not to mention in verse four, his message is not destined to be a crowd pleaser, right?

[19:33] The reaction we see here is not from Jonah's genius or his talents. And friends, the results in our evangelism is not found in our genius and in our talents.

It's from God's power. The measure of a prophet's success is not in other people's reactions, but in his faithfulness to the task set before him.

Right? Consider the prophet Isaiah. Right? We all remember the famous line probably from Isaiah chapter six. I heard the voice of the Lord saying, whom shall I send and who will go for us?

And then Isaiah said, here am I, send me. Do you know what the very next line is? Right? Right? We kind of excerpt verse eight there from Isaiah six and we don't keep reading.

Here's the very next line in Isaiah six. And the Lord said, go and say to the people, keep on hearing, but do not understand.

[20:45] Keep on seeing, but do not perceive. Make the heart of this people dull and their ears heavy and blind their eyes. Lest they see with their eyes and hear with their ears and understand with their hearts and turn and be healed.

What is the Lord sending Isaiah to do? It's not going to be a massive work of success. And here's what Isaiah says. Then I said, how long, oh Lord? And he said, until cities lie in waste without inhabitant and houses without people in the land is a desolate waste.

Now, if Isaiah is not going to have what we would consider a roaring success in his mission, like Jonah did. But guess what? Was he unsuccessful?

Unsuccessful? Not in the Lord's eyes. He was no less faithful. Because the measure of success is in the faithfulness, not in the results.

Because I can't achieve the results. Right? I can't reach into your heart. Your heart today. And change anything. I can simply proclaim what is true about the Lord's word.

[21:56] He must do a work in you and in the world. So what is our call? It is not to create new birth in other people.

We can't do that. Our call is to offer the gospel and make disciples of those who repent and believe. The results of evangelism.

Friend, let this release you from fear. The results of evangelism are not on us. What is successful evangelism then?

Mark Dever in his book, *The Gospel and Personal Evangelism* said, One of the most common and dangerous mistakes in evangelism is to misinterpret the results of evangelism, the conversion of unbelievers, for evangelism itself.

Which is the simple telling of the gospel. Evangelism must not be confused with its fruit. The Christian call to evangelism is a call not simply to persuade people to make decisions, but rather to proclaim to them the good news of salvation in Christ.

[23:10] To call them to repentance and to give God the glory for regeneration and conversion. We don't fail in our evangelism. Hear this. We do not fail in our evangelism if we faithfully tell the gospel to someone who is not then converted.

We fail only if we don't faithfully tell the gospel at all. Evangelism itself isn't converting people. It's telling them that they need to be converted and telling them how they can be.

Friends, if new birth is a miracle, and we absolutely believe that it is, right? I can't do that to you. There is only one who can do it.

And it is the Lord, the giver of life. It is a work of God. And it is a miracle of God.

If I can convert you by my own cleverness, that's not Christian conversion. That's just sales and marketing, not new birth.

[24:21] But, friends, in evangelism, we get the high honor and privilege of being the means through which the Holy Spirit works.

That excites you. So when you share the gospel with someone, even if they're not interested, even if they reject it, even if they reject you, that's faithful evangelism.

And it is beautiful in our Lord's eyes. Well done, good and faithful servant. Thank you. Jonah shows us.

Friends, don't delay obedience. He shows us that Christ will not be sweet until sin is bitter. And he shows us that the results of the mission, the obedience to which we are called, that's on God.

So don't fear rejection. Don't fear failure. The only failure is to run for Tarshish. So the only thing now is we look forward to next week in chapter four is to see the response to this great show of repentance in Nineveh.

[25:44] How will the Lord react? How will Jonah react? And how will that change us? Friends, let's pray. Lord, I pray that you would help us to not add to the cost of obedience through our disobedience.

That we would look to Jonah and see one who... Well, Lord, see one we would not like to emulate. And Father, I pray that you would help us to trust you. That the results of our mission are truly yours. Lord, I pray that that would free us from fear.

And Lord, that it would excite us to be the agents, the means through which you powerfully work in this world. I pray that in the name of Jesus Christ, our King.

Amen. I hope that everyone was able to get one of these.

[27:06] If you don't have one, I think there are more on that table over there. Communion, just as far as, you know, we don't normally have the children with us. It is a remembrance meal where the Lord promises

salvation to his people.

And we believe here at Shoreline that the participants in communion ought to be those who are baptized believers who are walking in repentance.

And so that will guide all of our families in this celebration here. What we see in the book of Jonah is that the Lord is extending mercy to a wicked city that didn't deserve it.

Friends, that is a precursor to the cross, isn't it? Where he extended mercy to a wicked world, including me, including you, who didn't deserve it.

In the cross, our Lord secured that pardon, that mercy, by bearing the punishment that our sins deserve.

[28:20] I'm going to read the words of the Lord. I'm going to read the words of institution soon. He was overthrown as Nineveh was threatened, right? The author of life, sentenced to death.

He was overthrown in our place. Friends, that's the message of the gospel. And we have a Savior who offered himself in our place.

And if you've never, I don't know where every one of you stands today with the Lord. But if you have run to Christ for pardon, repented like Nineveh did, entrusted and trusted yourself to this God in faith, this celebration is a testimony to you.

And as we're about to see in 1 Corinthians, it is our proclamation of the gospel as well. So friends, if you've not come to the place where Jesus, you've repented and believed in him, and he is as your Lord and your Savior, don't receive these elements.

Instead, receive him. So let me read these words. The Lord Jesus, on the night when he was betrayed, took bread.

[29:36] When he had given thanks, he broke it and said, This is my body, which is for you.

Do this in remembrance of me. In the same way, also, he took the cup after supper, saying, This cup is the new covenant in my blood.

Do this as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me. For as often as you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes.

Let's remember him together. I thank you, Lord, that a group of unworthy sinners can come together and, as your word says, proclaim the Lord's death in our place so that we are not overthrown.

Lord, there's another part of that, the until he comes part. I pray, Father, that you would excite our hearts, that he is coming, so that we would not lose heart no matter what happens in our society and around the world, no matter what happens in our lives.

[31:24] Lord, as we proclaim the Lord's death and his coming, Lord, would you excite us to mission so that others may join in this joy. And, Father, may we entrust all the results to you, our great God and Father, in whose name we pray.

Amen.