

The Greatest Miracle of All

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Preacher: BK Smith

[0 : 00] Please be seated and as you are doing so, reach for your Bible, Jonah chapter 3. Jonah chapter 3. I've got a question for you all.

How many of you believe in miracles? Does anyone here believe in miracles? All right. A lot of hands up. That's a good thing. Let me ask you another one.

Have any of you experienced a miracle? We've got a few more hands. Perhaps if you haven't, maybe you don't know about it or maybe you know someone who has.

I understand when I say the word miracle, it has many different meanings to many different people. When I say miracle, if you are into sports, you watch sports, you're thinking Olympics 1980, the miracle on ice.

In case you weren't born then, there was a bunch of college hockey players from the U.S. beat the mighty Russian team. If you even date yourself even back to 1972, all Canadians know the great 1972 Canada Cup series where Canada won this great meeting.

[1 : 22] But sports, athletes, those type of things, we all think things are miracles. Whether it be goals, whether it be touchdowns, home runs, anything.

Or maybe have you heard of extreme miracles? How many of you are familiar with the name Vesna Volovich?

Sorry, someone's looking for someone and I'm going to point them third row in the front. Welcome some of our family friends here, everyone. Hey, guys.

So, do you guys know the name Vesna Volovich? In case you don't know who Vesna Volovich, Vesna Volovich was a Yugoslavian airline attendant, stewardess, on a flight from Denmark to what is now known as modern-day Serbia.

On that plane, a bomb went off in the luggage compartment. The plane was at 33,000 feet in the sky. That's high.

[2 : 34] She survived. How does one survive 33,000 feet? Many people would say it was a miracle. Scientists would say that the reason she survived is when the bomb went off, the food car trapped her in the fuselage.

So, when the bomb exploded, everyone else got sucked out of the airplane, but she was trapped inside. It turned out she had very low blood pressure. And as you know, people who fly aren't supposed to have low blood pressure, but she said she cheated the medical test.

And what happened is, because she had low blood pressure, as the plane was coming down, she passed out. And what that did is, when the plane landed, if she had been awake, her heart would have exploded.

But because she had the low blood pressure and was passed out, she survived. After several months in the hospital, she walked out with partial paralysis.

Some would call that a miracle, would you not? Some mothers here might say, the miracle of childbirth, right? Others have experienced cure, whether it be from cancer or other life-threatening diseases, and they would admit readily that they are recipients of God's wonderful grace.

[3 : 56] Let me tell you about another miracle. You guys heard about the man who got swallowed by the whale? Remember? Got swallowed by the whale three days later.

They actually found him off the coast of South America. His name was James Bartley back in 1892. A whaler fell into the ocean.

Sperm whale gobbled him up. And the whalers finally got their whale, opened him up, and found him in the second of four stomachs of the whale. They cut open the stomach, and he was all bleached white from the stomach acids.

Unconscious, but alive. When we think about the book of Jonah, that is the miracle we think about, right?

We think about this man who was swallowed by a whale that God had appointed, actually the text says, a great fish to swallow him.

[4 : 58] We assume it was a sperm whale. Why? Because of all the whales that exist, a sperm whale is the only one with a throat large enough for a man to fit into. So we speculate that that is the only way he could have survived.

You see, what's interesting is that man sometimes tries to dumb down the miraculous. We try to make it more believable. That somehow, this whale of a story is just that.

Maybe not true. I say hogwash. We're not supposed to have logical explanations for the miraculous. You see, the miraculous is just that, a supernatural event.

Merriam-Webster's dictionary defines the miracle as extraordinary event manifesting divine intervention in human affairs.

That means it's unexplainable because God injects himself into man's life. The fact of the matter is, the book of Jonah has actually nine miracles listed.

[6 : 14] We've actually, over the last two, three sermons, examined five of them. Verse 1, chapter 1, verse 4 says, the Lord hurled a great wind at the boat.

Verse 1, 7, God interjected himself, and the lot came to Jonah. Verse 1, 15 says, the sea ceased raging when Jonah was thrown off the ship.

Verse 1, 17, the miracle I just talked about, the Lord appointed a great fish to swallow up Jonah. In chapter 2 and 10 says, the Lord spoke to the fish, and it vomited Jonah upon dry land.

In each of those situations and circumstances, we see the clear hand of God acting. This morning, I want to look at the sixth miracle that we find in the book of Jonah.

It is a miracle that I consider to be one of the greatest miracles of all time, and it is a miracle that people undergo every day.

[7 : 29] The miracle is found in Jonah 3, chapter 3, verse 10. It simply reads, The miracle that I speak of is that man finds mercy at the foot of God.

Is that man finds mercy at the foot of God. That man has the ability, the freedom to repent, and find forgiveness, and be given a new heart before the God who knows everything, who is supreme over all, and who will eventually judge everything.

That God, in his wisdom, can take a stone heart, a heart that beats for self, and transplant it with a heart that beats for God.

For me, to this day, this is the greatest miracle that I have ever seen. So this morning, I want to observe not only how this miracle happened to one of Israel's greatest enemies, but more importantly, how this miracle can happen today, possibly even to you this very morning.

So in all things, when we come to a biblical passage, we examine the context. We know that Jonah, chapter 1, was given a command by God to give this message to the people of Nineveh.

[9 : 06] He refused. He ran. God called him back. And here we find him sitting on a beach of the Mediterranean, probably stayed at some nice resort for a couple of weeks, and then God finally came to him with another command.

Verse 1, 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.

Here we find, and I want you to pay attention, Jonah is perfectly reconciled before God. He ran away. We read in chapter 2, his prayer in the belly of the great beast, reflecting on what he had done and was seeking God's forgiveness.

And God has forgiven him. And here he stands, perfectly reconciled and perfectly able to work for God. Verse 3, So Jonah arose and went to Nineveh according to the word of the Lord.

There is no argument this time. There is no trying to find another ship to Tarshish. Jonah simply yields to the calling on his life that God has given him.

[10 : 18] The trip to Nineveh would take over a month's time. You would travel in a caravan, either by donkey or camel.

So it would be an extended period of his life. And I've told you earlier before, this is the first time God has called one of his prophets from his country to go to a foreign country and prophesy against it.

Verse 3, Now Nineveh was an exceedingly great city. Three days journey. It's a journey in breath. Now I commented this on an earlier sermon, but this was a massively important city to the Assyrian Empire.

This city has actually been around since Genesis 10. It was a cultural capital, an economic capital. And here we see it as the seat of governmental power.

It was a massive city that had over 600,000 people in it. For us today, we can fit 6,000 people on the island of Vancouver, right?

[11 : 25] We can just jam them all in. But don't forget, back in those days, there wasn't 20, 30-story buildings. You maybe had 1, 2, 3 at the most. So it would be spread out through all the land.

And it had walls that encompassed the city that they said that three to four chariots could ride side by side amongst the walls. And it included between 150 to 200 towers.

This was a massive and an imposing city. And Jonah is called to go into it to give a message.

If you have an NIV Bible, you're probably noticing that I read a different verse 3 than you did.

There's actually a difference in the translation here.

Verse 3, I read from the ESV. But verse 3 in the NIV says, Jonah obeyed the word of the Lord and went to Nineveh. Now Nineveh was a very important city.

[12 : 34] A visit required three days. I had earlier talked about that because of the breadth of the city, they used that it would take three days to walk around the walls.

Now some people take a different approach. And the scholarly speculation is if Jonah was to reach this city, he had to make a special appointment with the governing authorities.

And by doing so, they said that a government visit took three days. The first day was the official welcoming. The second day would be the official duties that would take place.

And the third day would be the get out of town, thanks for all that you've done kind of day, right? But of course, with all the pomp and circumstance that official government people do at the time.

Now, I find that to be a completely unconvincing argument. One, nowhere in the text does it say that Jonah was an official representation of anyone but God.

[13 : 38] He didn't have that kind of clout. He had no official government position. He was simply a prophet from the northern tribe of Israel.

I believe he does exactly what the text says. Verse 4, Jonah began to go into the city going a day's journey and he called out, yet 40 days in Nineveh shall be overthrown.

I believe he just went in one of the main gates, walked days into probably the center of the city, probably where they were doing trade or business and just started preaching.

Jonah's message was very clear. In 40 days, God is going to be bring judgment upon the city. I want you to pay special attention to the last word in verse 4.

We read it as overthrown. When we read it in English, that can be kind of tame. It's almost like a political takeover.

[14 : 52] The conservatives are going to overthrow the liberals in the next election. Or maybe the green. Who knows? Right? It's just a polite way of going about that there will come change.

That's not, in fact, what the word means. The word that is used here is used, the same word that was used in Genesis for the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah.

An earlier example of God's response to wickedness. What it means is God's judgment is coming and it could mean annihilation.

So, the words that Jonah is sharing are not speculative, but he even gives a time frame in 40 days. Now, this is where the miracle begins. This morning, I want to show for you three ways that this miracle comes about.

[15 : 55] And as I said before, it's the same miracle that happens every day when someone knew and understands the truth of Jesus Christ and is ultimately born again.

So, here is Jonah delivering truth to them. Truth about them and truth about God. So, the first point is the miracle of salvation always happens with the word of God.

The miracle of salvation always happens with the word of God. If you are a believer in Jesus Christ and count yourself as one who is born again, there was someone, somewhere, could have been at church, a friend, a Bible study, you could have been watching TV, or you could have simply been reading your Bible, but you had to read something or experience some type of truth that engaged you.

It just doesn't happen because of who you were born to, because someone did a religious ritual over you, or you were baptized, or who your parents are, or what nationality you are.

Those don't bring about salvation. It starts when you are presented with the truth of God's word.

John 1.1 introduces us to Jesus Christ, and it calls him the word.

[17:22] John 1.14 would say, and the word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only son from the father, full of grace and truth.

So the beginning of salvation has to happen when you are confronted with truth. Somehow, somewhere, someone presented truth to you.

You don't get it from observing nature. You get it from what is known as special revelation, and that is from God.

And that message is, there is a God. God is coming back. To judge the living of the dead, and we will all have to give an account of our lives.

Paul tells us in the book of Romans that quite clearly, that we all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God. A lot of people miss that statement, the glory of God.

[18:29] That ties into the book of Genesis when God first created Adam and Eve, and they were to walk in his glory. That's what we were created for.

We were created, men and women, to reflect God's glory here on earth. But we rejected this call. We wanted to go our own way.

So we accepted our own way. We went rebellious, and we broke that fellowship that existed with God. And not only that, we incurred God's righteous wrath against us.

The Bible tells us quite clearly that we are now separated and are waited for the return of the God who will judge. And just like the Nineveh, Ninevites who heard Jonah's call out on that day in history, so we must hear someone call out to us as well.

That's where salvation begins. The second miracle of salvations happens when we believe God.

Take a look at verse 5.

[19:42] And the people of Nineveh believed God. Now, I want you to pay close attentions here. It doesn't say that they believed in God.

Okay? It says they believed God. And there's an important distinction here that needs to be made. Also, the word God that he's using here is the word Elohim in the Jewish, the Hebrew language. Elohim as compared to Yahweh. Remember, when Jonah interacted with Yahweh, that was God's Israelite covenant God. There was a relationship. But Elohim means God's supreme creator, ruler of all.

Right? Yahweh is Elohim. But when Elohim is presented before the Ninevites, this is the God of all gods. And the God of all gods is going to judge you in 40 days because of the wickedness that you have done.

That word believe. There are plenty of people who believe in God, but don't believe in everything that God says.

[20:58] Many people fashion themselves believers in God, yet choose to live the way they want to live.

This is not what is going on here. When it says they believe God, they believe what Jonah says, that A, there's a God. That God sits on high.

He is the supreme God. That God is coming to judge me and I will give an account for my life. They believe that. That's how God has been presented.

They accept the fact that they are a cruel and wicked people. They understand that their rebellion has come to God's attention. And they also understand that God as the supreme God, the creator of the heavens and the earth, has every right to judge and punish these people.

They believe this message. I'll be honest. I meet all types of people who argue with God. They try to negotiate what is acceptable and what is good in their life.

[22:11] They try to make their own rules that somehow they may know better than God. We know that God lives, but I believe God is a loving God, kind of a grandfather who winks at my sin.

And at the end of the day, everything will be okay. My friends, that is a perversion of the biblical truth that exists in God's word. There's nothing in scripture that would allocate that at all.

The Bible tells us, and as we learned through the book of Revelation recently, Jesus Christ is coming again. There's no doubt about it. See, these Ninevites, they know it's true.

They know they've been wicked and violent people. They have made war and acted cruelly towards other nations. They also understand that there is a God, and now they have to give an account to God in 40 days.

And now that God has presented this truth to them, they believe and they act accordingly. So we see that the miracle of salvation happens when we hear the truth.

[23 : 20] The second miracle of salvation happens when we believe God. And this leads me to my third point this morning. Everything hinges on how we respond to God and his truth.

Everything hinges on how we respond to God and his truth. This is an incredible passage that we read. What happens next? Let's look at the end of chapter 5, or verse 5, chapter 3.

Sorry, I was skipping into an unknown chapter of the book of Jonah. All right. They called for a fast and put on sackcloth from the greatest of them to the least of them.

Verse 6. What Jonah is describing to us is the complete mark of a humble king.

note, he does not want to sit on his throne. Can you imagine you're a king sitting on the throne and someone comes to tell you about the God of all gods who sits above all who sits, and we learned about this, right, in Revelation, the great throne room of God.

[24 : 44] You do not sit on your puny throne before the greatest throne in the world. You get up. that robe that you wear that denotes your sovereignty.

Back in those times, the longer the robe declared, the longer your sovereignty, the more land, the more power you had. Can you imagine showing up to God wearing that?

You take it off. You take it off. There's no way you show up with God. This is my puny sovereignty. When we read this, we almost think it's too easy, right?

He shows up one day, people start repenting all over the place, gets word to the king, and the king repents, and all is good.

Well, what's interesting here, like so many of you who've come to know the Lord Jesus Christ in a real way, God had to humble you first, right?

[25 : 50] historians believe that at this time in Assyrians' history was actually a complete disaster going on.

They believe that the king's name was Assyrdan III, and he was seen to have absolutely no control over his kingdom's plight at all.

they were plagued with earthquakes, famines, none of their wars were working out. The historians tell us that there was times of riots, and there was also in 736, I think it was 736 or 763, get my numbers mixed up, but there was a complete solar eclipse.

And as you know, during that time without signs, just seeing something like that, in the middle of a really horrible rule, you start to think, maybe I have displeased God.

Remember chapter 1? The ship, the storm, things weren't going well, the mariners had to start thinking, only a storm like this can be caused by God.

[27 : 12] Let's all pray to our different gods and just hopefully we'll get the right God to save us.

That's how life was like back then. But here's this man who shows up and preaches the God of all gods, the supreme gods, is coming to judge.

For many of us, we have many different broken stories. My story began with my parents getting divorced when I was young and it caused a chaos in our home which led me to a Bible-believing church where I heard the gospel, became a Christian.

I know many men who've been saved in prison, those who've had their businesses fail, others experience the breakdown of relationships, whether it be marriage, the loss of a child, many great things come to us and we start to realize that maybe we're not as in control as we thought we were.

I believe that is the king's mindset. He's looking for something just like those who are on that ship. They're looking for something.

So what does this king do? He gets off the throne, takes off his robe, puts on a sackcloth and covers himself with ashes.

[28 : 46] I am just going to be as humble as I can be because I have no control on this life. Can anybody relate to that?

that we have no control. However, we see this act of true humility.

Verse 7. And he issued a proclamation and published throughout Nineveh 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. You see, the king is advocating for a symbol that reflects his inward reality. I am broken. We are broken as a people. And to demonstrate our brokenness, we are going to put on the sackcloth and we are going to fast.

[30 : 02] You see, the thing is, people who are truly repentant, that's what they do. The core of our beings, we want to demonstrate, Lord, what can I do?

I understand I'm a sinner. I understand I'm broken. I understand that I have no control over anything that is going on. sometimes we offer real apologies to the people that we've hurt. Sometimes we beg. We try anything to mend those relationships because we are sensitive to what we have done.

My friends, that is the most glorious place to be. That means God is calling you to something. You see, however, the mark of true repentance occurs here at the end of verse 8.

Notice it says, let everyone turn from his evil way and from the violence that is in his hands. This is what is called repentance.

[31 : 13] Repentance is an act of not just turning to God, but it's turning away from my sin, my life, destruction that I had.

It is turning away from the sin that grieves God. It turns away from the way I've been living that has been causing destruction and ruin to my family.

You see, this king gets it. And notice in verse 9, when he does those things, he's not doing them simply as acts like he's got a checklist.

Verse 9 says, he just simply asks, who knows God may turn and relent and turn from his fierce anger so that, I'm going to read that again, who knows God may turn and relent and turn from his fierce anger so that we may not perish.

He is not presumptuous upon God's grace. Have you been? Have you lived a life, committed sin, engaged in rebellious behavior that you knew God is not satisfied with, but you presume that God will forgive you?

[32 : 31] If you do, there's something messed up in your thinking because that is never what is portrayed in the Bible. Our sin is to bring us to a point of shame, a point of humility, and we don't presume upon God.

God. See, the king here isn't even presumptuous enough to assume he's even doing the right actions. He doesn't know fasting is going to work.

He doesn't know that putting sack cloths, but he's simply doing the best that he can to show that I am broken and my people are broken. As I said, brokenness is a virtue for standing before God, isn't it?

Brokenness is what brings us to this cross. Brokenness makes us understand that we need the cross. We need to be fixed. We need God to do a work in us.

It's like the song, it says, nothing to the cross I bring, it's simply to the cross I cling. I'll tell you what's really interesting about this story.

[33 : 47] Jesus Christ refers to this story in Luke chapter 9 and also in the book of Matthew. I said Luke chapter 11, not 9, it's 11 29. Context, Jesus is preaching before the Pharisees, the religious rulers of the day.

They do not want to humble themselves. They want to bring their lofty clothes, you know, that works, that baggage that they have, and they want to present it to Jesus, and they want to hear Jesus say, hey, I'm proud of you guys.

You guys nailed it. They want, and then they're bothered because Jesus Christ is hanging out with tax collectors and prostitutes, and those who are totally broken in society, and it's bothering them. So what they do is they challenge Jesus, show us a sign. All right? And we all know that Jesus was doing miracles left and right. There was no one who was not made perfectly, physically well in his presence, whether it be leopards, paralytics, people with withered hands, people who couldn't walk, see, hear.

Jesus cured them all. They'd seen it all, but they still demanded a sign. So Jesus rebukes them, and this is what's written in Luke 11, 29. He says, when the crowds were increasing, he began to say, this generation is an evil generation.

[35 : 08] It seeks for a sign, but no sign will be given to it except the sign of Jonah. For as Jonah became a sign to the people of Nineveh, so will the Son of Man to this generation.

Verse 32, the men of Nineveh will rise up at the judgment with this generation and condemn it. For they repented at the preaching of Jonah, and behold, something greater than Jonah is here. Amen? It is. It's Jesus Christ. It's simple faith. God offers simple faith.

He honors it. God. It's a faith that believes in God. It isn't a faith that asks for more signs or more miracles or anything else. It is a belief that just believes.

Belief that is characterized with humility. It is a belief that means, would you get over yourself? You do not know better than God.

[36 : 20] God. You see, when we are presented with the word of God, when we believe, when we repent, this is the type of miracle we can expect.

Verse 10, when God saw what they did, they turned from their evil way. God relented of the disaster that he had said he would do to them, and he did not do it.

one author commenting on this passage says, this passage speaks of the incredible mercy of God's heart, of his incredible love.

Here, one finds irrefutable evidence that God wishes not for the destruction of the sinner, but for the redemption and reconciliation of all creation.

Amen? Amen? God wants to restore that glory that we once had. He wants to walk in fellowship with us to continue to reflect him to this lost, broken world.

[37 : 33] Friends, let me ask you this. Are you humble before God? Are you broken before God?

And the God that I mean is the God of the universe. The God who sits on the great high throne, who has created all that is within it. The God who is the source of all good things in your earthly life.

And the God who has every single right to make a demand on your life. God the gospel teaches us quite clearly that without repentance, no one will see the father.

You see, it's not enough to love God. It's also about hating your sin, hating your rebellion, hating your foolishness.

One preacher I was listening to made this comment on the subject of repentance. And he says, Christians are the repenting. We're not perfect, right? You should be nodding.

[38 : 51] Yeah, we're not perfect, guys. Being a Christian doesn't make us perfect, doesn't make us right. Our sole authority is in the truth of Jesus Christ, the word of God.

Amen? That's it. By his mercy do I go. Go. Go. Go. Go. Go. Go. Go. Go. Go. Go. Go. Go. Go. Go. Go. Go. We are to be a repenting people.

The biblical message is clear. Repentance is the road to forgiveness. Are you wanting to be forgiven? Do you want peace with God?

Are you looking for a new relationship with God? Perhaps even a renewed relationship with God. I'm going to leave you with the words of the Apostle Paul.

This is from Acts 17.22. And maybe you're going to find yourself in the audience that Paul was speaking to. This was in Athens.

[39 : 57] He says,

My friends, if you want to be married to God, you need to divorce yourself from this world and this sin.

This truth is real.

Repentance leads to a miracle. A miracle that you can experience today. A miracle we call the new birth in Jesus Christ.

Where you finally come to a place, believe in God, humble yourself before him, and cling to the cross. Let's pray.

[42 : 51] Dear Lord, great heavenly Father, what an incredible chapter this is. Father, I pray that more people would believe you, Lord.

I pray this for our nation, our city, our families. That we would quit arguing with God. We live in such a blessed time.

And in this blessedness, it has been used to sow confusion about who you are, who we are. We're told repeatedly over and over, we are good, we are good, we are good.

And we compare ourselves to other people and we pat ourselves on the back and think really good thoughts about us. But ultimately, we know that we sit on this puny throne in our hearts.

And we wear a tattered robe, yet we act as if it's made of fine gold. But you sit upon the greatest throne room that ever existed.

[44 : 04] Where the angels shout day and night, holy, holy, holy is the Lord God Almighty. And from that throne room, you give us mercy and justice as we know your Son, Jesus.

If there's anyone here today that does not know you, I pray that they would call upon the name of Jesus Christ and be saved. That they would be willing to repent of their past life and turn to God. To be broken is a good and wonderful thing. All too often, God has to break us to build us up again in Him. So, Father, we thank you for the great mercy that you grant us.

The exceeding kindness that you show us. That you have sent Jonah into our lives. Greater than Jonah, but Jesus. We have the record and His word.

And He commissions prophets and preachers and evangelists to go out into the world and declare this gospel truth. For somewhere, somehow, we heard it and we responded.

[45 : 26] So, God, most Heavenly Father, we thank you for the mercy and we ask for mercy. Praise Jesus. Amen.

Amen.