

Repent/Relent

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- [0 : 00] A midlife crisis. A fabulous failure. Fear of where you're headed.! Fear of where you're headed. A longing for change.
- Whether you're at home right now or you're in the room with me here,! I know that at least once in your life already, you have felt the urge to turn your life around.
- Change your plans, your school, your jobs, your friendship group. You break the lease. You end a relationship. You upend your routines.
- You lock yourself out of your apps on your phone. Or you sell a guitar. Sometimes you can. Sometimes you must.
- Or you can't and you wish you could. Turn your life around. Have you ever said out loud, I have to turn my life around?
- [1 : 10] At our best, we try and live a life that leads down the path that suits our needs, our joys, our comforts, even suits our loved ones. But the message of the Bible is that God needs to turn your life around so that you may truly live.
- Can God really do that? Can God turn your life around? And would it really matter if you did? My name is Nick.
- I'm a discipleship pastor here at St. Paul's. I'm really glad you're here. And I'm really glad that today we're in Jonah chapter 3. At the end of chapter 2, we land with Jonah on the beach.
- Spat out of a fish. Stinking of stomach. Squinting in the sun. Somehow still alive. God has relented from destroying him and saved him.
- So what should God have done next? Is he going to scold Jonah like an angry parent? Is he going to give him a new set of stricter rules to live by?
- [2 : 24] Or is he going to put a pressure on him with a threat? That, ah, this is your last chance. No. Instead, Michelle just read that God renews his partnership with his prophet.
- Jonah got a clean slate as if he'd never run away at all. The book of Jonah could start chapter 3, verse 1. Jonah was tumbled in the water, taste tested by a fish, turned back to God and all by grace.
- God really can turn a life around in dramatic fashion. In chapter 3, God reset his expectations of Jonah.
- He still had to go to Nineveh and, like God says at the beginning of Jonah, preach against it for their wickedness. But this time, Jonah obeyed.
- What would Nineveh do in response to God's message? Would they ignore Jonah or would they turn to God and repent? Repent.
- [3 : 38] To turn from living life your old way and to turn toward God is called repentance. Jonah 3 is going to show you Nineveh's response as an example of our need for repentance, the nature of repentance, and the hope of repentance.
- All people need to God. And if you turn to him, he will turn your life around. There is assurance available. Assurance for the repentant.

Because God is gracious and merciful to all people. Now, there was a great need for repentance where Jonah was sent.

I shared three weeks ago when we started the book of Jonah that Nineveh was known for its brutality. Even their allies were allies because they feared them.

According to historians, there was even more going on here in Nineveh at the time. More going on than usual. There had been an ominous solar eclipse.

[4 : 54] There had been earthquakes. There had been political uprisings. And there was conflict everywhere between those under the thumb of royal rule and those wanting to break that thumb.

Nineveh couldn't stay a superpower unless that changed. It was as if God had prepared the ground ready for Jonah's message to take root.

Jonah walked for a whole day, as we've read. Whole day into this vast city. Still hadn't got to the middle of it.

And he would have seen everywhere a desperate need for change. So as Jonah spoke, it only took five words in his language.

Eight words in English. Eight words to convince people that they needed to turn their life around. Jonah proclaimed in verse 4, The Ninevites believed God.

[6 : 09] News of coming destruction led to belief in the God who had sent that message. There's no mention here of Jonah's preaching style.

His hairdo. His teaching technique. His charisma. Maybe how he smelt. Or anything else that can make his message more listenable.

Or more relatable. Or more fearfully obeyable. Instead, there's simply a heart response.

A heart response to the word of God that led to belief. Nineveh's belief was not like belief light. It was weighty.

It's the same Hebrew word for believed used when Israel saw the Red Sea crash down and drown Pharaoh's army. Then Israel believed.

[7 : 08] Same word. In God. On the evidence of God's deliverance. But this time, just God's few words bring belief.

That word moved from the street into homes. From the lowly to the rich. From the peasant to the palace and all the way to the king.

The king had riches. He had his reputation. And the protection of his army. But those same eight words broke his trust in his kingdom's strength.

And he, too, believed. Nineveh had armies that annihilated entire peoples.

Like whole cities off the face of the earth. They could have easily imagined how something like that would happen to them if there was a greater army out there. But here they fear something greater.

[8 : 16] They fear a God. Look at verse 8. Let everyone call urgently on God. Let them give up their evil ways and their violence.

When the king believed, he believed because he saw they, the whole nation and him, had a moral debt to God for their evil and their violence.

And that debt had brought upon them a spiritual consequence. That of judgment. God's word hit bullseye in their heart.

Did any of you hear Michelle read that passage this morning? Or have you ever read Jonah before and heard about Nineveh's belief? And think, what Jonah said, those eight words, why does that?

How is that enough? How is that enough? Surely Jonah then went on a preaching tour and was on TV on the morning show and got to speak in the universities to all the intellectuals.

[9 : 26] No, just five words in Hebrew. How is that enough? How isn't it like Pharaoh, when Moses spoke to him, talked about God's coming judgment upon Egypt, unless they let God's people go?

Pharaoh said no, over and over and over and over again. The answer is that it takes the power of God for our need of repentance to seem reasonable, beyond logic and circumstance.

An early church leader called Paul talked about it like this. Opponents must be gently instructed in the hope that God will grant them repentance, leading them to a knowledge of the truth.

Notice that God initiates repentance before we know we need it. Through his word, God powerfully leads us to a gift.

A gift is seeing our need to return to him. Nineveh's believing king commanded that his people turn away from the Assyrian way of life, their evil ways and their violence is his summary of that.

[10 : 59] They are turning from their sin. Sin is anything done against God's will and order.

God revealed to Nineveh through his word to them that their evil hearts and violent hands were sinful. Nineveh surrendered because God revealed their sin against him and that their judgment day was a month away.

The nature of repentance is demonstrated here in what the king then led his people to do about their sin. First, he joined in with his people.

Verse 6, when Jonah's warning reached the king of Nineveh, he rose from his throne, took off his royal robes, covered himself with sackcloth and sat down in the dust.

The kings of Nineveh were often given these extra kingly titles. You think king might be the top but then there's king of the universe or king of the four corners of the world.

[12 : 21] But here, Nineveh's king stood down from his throne, removed all signs of his royalty and joined his nation mourning in the dust in awfully itchy sackcloth.

It's such a humanizing moment. Imagine seeing that throne room empty, all the fancy clothes thrown on the floor and then going outside and seeing all the people together in the street.

There was nobody in Nineveh more or less in need of repentance and no difference in the nature of their repentance.

All people must repent the same by turning to the grace and mercy of God. Once the king had joined his people in the dust, he said, by the decree of the kings and nobles, do not let animals, herds or flocks taste anything.

Do not let them eat or drink but let people and animals be covered in sackcloth. Let everyone call urgently on God. Let them give up their evil ways and their violence.

[13 : 43] The three things that they did, they're refusing food and water, they're mourning outwardly and their calling out to God reveal the nature of repentance.

Their fasting created inner hunger and thirst. They replaced their inner evil with inner pains, refusing to fuel that evil within.

Fasting shows their desire to turn away from their sinfulness. Their mourning in sackcloth and dust shows that they had surrendered their outward actions and comforts.

They chose to cause external pains to themselves, bowing down their violent hands. And this shows their desire to turn away from their sinful ways.

repentance. And then the king commanded prayer to direct their repentance. He commanded they pray urgently to God, that they call out to him with emotion and put into words what their fasting and mourning signified, their commitment to turn from their sin and to plead with God for mercy that he might relent.

[15 : 15] For, verse 9, who knows? God may yet relent and with compassion turn from his fierce anger so we will not perish.

Nineveh's need for repentance came from a new belief in God and in his right judgment of them through his word.

And the nature of their repentance was the same for all. It was a turning to God from their own way of life inwardly and outwardly expressed in prayer that was urgent, honest, exhaustive, pleading for mercy for their sin.

Those eight words from Jonah had no hope. But the king had found hope in them that God might relent.

But it's only a hope as strong as, who knows? But it was a hope in a merciful God. For here's how God received their repentance in verse 10.

[16 : 32] When God saw what they did and how they had turned from their evil ways, he relented and did not bring on them the destruction that he had threatened. God heard their cries, he saw them turn and he relented.

God reveals his nature here. He is merciful. Nothing Nineveh had done had paid for their sin. When Nineveh turned to God, God turned toward them.

The hope of repentance the king had found was in God's nature, not in the nature of his people's repentance. Let me explain that. None of the quality of their mourning, not the volume of their prayers, not how many days they'd fasted or what they'd fasted from, none of that gave the king hope.

He already had it. The hope that the king has is described as compassion. Compassion, hope in the compassion of a God, even if it was just who knows kind of hope, because the king discovered hope in God's compassion because he warned them.

The word came. Receiving the word in the first place, declared hope in the nature of the God who spoke this word, that he is merciful and compassionate.

[18 : 18] But God is also a just God. God can do anything, but being just, he will see justice done always.

So, how was justice done in Jonah 3? How was Nineveh's sin paid for?

If God is just, judgment must come. So how is it right and just for God to relent in verse 10? What took his anger away?

There is a mystery in God's mercy. Nineveh received it without justice for judgment.

Not seeing that justice done was Jonah's main problem. And without spoilers, I'm going to tell you, Jonah's response was what left God.

[19 : 27] Jonah was angry. Come next week to hear about what happens next. Jonah's problem with God should be our problem.

We should want, long for someone to show up who's going to reveal how God's judgment in verse 10 of chapter 3 is just.

You should be hoping for a person who can show you how to turn and repent of your sin and who can give you assurance that your sin is truly dealt with.

Without that person, you have a problem, I have a problem, and Jonah's got a legitimate problem. Otherwise, hope in God is at best.

Who knows? It's a mystery. Well, I have good news for you and for Jonah. Crafted into Jonah 3, in the way that it's structured for us, is a longing for this person.

[20 : 42] There's a clue that unlocks the mystery. This chapter is bookended with God's judgment and his verdict, God's word and his relenting.

Both are gracious. And we're meant to notice those two verses pull us into the center and look at what happens in the middle, which is the center verse in verse 6.

Jonah's first readers were meant to yearn for someone yet to come, a king who would also come down from his throne, but give assurance to his repentant people.

That person is the answer to the king of Nineveh's who knows. Philippians 2, 6 to 8, we hear that Jesus was in very nature God.

Jesus stepped down from his throne in heaven and took on the nature of the lowliest servant. He took off his robes and became a creature like us.

[22 : 14] He did not do this to join in with our repentance like Nineveh's king did, but to lead his people to belief in him.

Find assurance in himself. He is the king who picks people up from the dust, out of the dirt of their fears and failures and their longings to turn their lives around.

And he does not say, follow me and who knows, God might relent. No.

Jesus is the king who says, follow me and I will bear your judgment for you.

That is the kind of king I am. Listen to my words and believe in me. I will die your death that is promised and bear your sin and judgment so you may live.

[23 : 31] Jesus' death on the cross on behalf of those who repent and believe in God's word was the moment the wrath and fierce anger of God were poured out on the sinless king of sinners.

Their sin was once for all paid for at the cross. Nineveh's trust in God's nature and belief in God meant that 800 years later Jesus died bearing Nineveh's judgment.

God is just. God can forgive because Jesus drank down the cup of judgment even for the most lost and far off sinner.

Jesus suffered to declare assurance to the repentant and as he hung on our cross Jesus received his own extra kingly title which was far greater than the Nineveh kings of old.

A sign was nailed above Jesus' head written in all the common languages of the time the local language the old language of the empire and the new language of Rome for all people to read this is Jesus king of the Jews Jews was the name for the people of God but it's not just for Israel it's the name for anyone who follows him Jesus is the king who brings assurance to all sinners he is the king of God's people and the king of kings do you see your sin but have never turned to God you need to repent do it urgently wholeheartedly!

[25 : 51] truthfully crying out to God for mercy assured that because of your king Jesus there is forgiveness that God longs to offer to you God really can turn your life around do you follow Jesus but you haven't turned your whole life toward him part of you has turned away reflect is that you reflect on what that might be and then repent do it urgently wholeheartedly honestly crying out to God for mercy assured that because of your king Jesus you have forgiveness already and a relationship with God that is safe ask God to help turn your life around to your king all of it and find your sin already gone and rejoice

God can really turn every life around God turned Jonah's life around on a beach and sent him to Nineveh our prophet King Jesus offers to turn your life around and this is the king King Jesus message from the first church to today that we carry into the city of Chatswood that you carry into your workplace your school your home I have declared to both Jews and Greeks that they must turn to God in repentance and have faith in our Lord Jesus all people who know God or don't yet know him must turn and repent and have faith in our king Jesus Christ your king calls you to repent so turn pray and find him willing to lift you from the dust and join in with the mission of your king he will stand with you strengthening you with hands that still bear the scars from enduring your judgment for your sin and with all God's people globally who make his message their story take it with you into your city every day declare the words of your king that are words of life that there is hope hope with assurance that God can turn your life around and you see you in the way