

Jonah 3 v 1-3

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Date: 09 June 2013

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[0 : 00] Let's turn again to the book of Jonah and chapter 3. Then the word of the Lord came to Jonah the second time, saying, So Jonah arose and went to Nineveh according to the word of the Lord.

How different to chapter 1 when we saw Jonah, when the exact same message came to him, we find Jonah legging it as fast as he could, way in the other direction.

We have been following the journey of this reluctant prophet, and we have seen that his life has been incredibly eventful.

Jonah has been through the most terrifying roller coaster possible in just a matter of a few days. Remember the fearful storm that he was in, where the sailors all believed it was the end, and in the end Jonah got thrown overboard.

Remember how the Lord had appointed this great fish to swallow Jonah, and he spent three days and three nights in the belly of that great fish.

[1 : 35] I don't think any of us could begin to imagine the trauma, what it would be like, the stench, the blackness, the slime.

What a prison to be in for three days and three nights. I would imagine it would be suffocating in the extreme. I think it's a sort of, you would put it into, if you're going to try and categorize nightmares, I think you would have that right up at the very top of a three-day and three-night imprisonment in the belly of this great fish.

We saw that Jonah initially was in despair, but that despair began to change. Remember when he turned, even in the belly of the fish, and he turned towards God, well in his heart, towards God's holy temple, and we saw there the significance of that.

That in his heart, in his mind, he was turning to the place where the mercy seat was, where God's grace and forgiveness could be experienced and known.

And then Jonah, remember last time we were looking at that, where he began to turn from his despair into hope. Nothing had changed.

[2 : 57] His circumstances hadn't changed. But he began to praise God in the belly of the great fish. Quite a remarkable, I believe it is one of the great displays of faith, where in the darkness and in the suffocation of that prison, he begins to praise God.

And we saw last time how when at that time, at verse 10, and the Lord spoke to the fish and had vomited Jonah out upon the dry land.

So here's Jonah now, different man. In many ways, a different man, the same man, but a different man. And the last three days in Jonah's life haven't been like anything else.

Can you imagine meeting Jonah? He says, what's doing, Jonah? Poo! You want to hear what's been happening to me? You wouldn't believe him. You would say to yourself, come on. But that's exactly what had happened to him.

He had been in God's college for three days and three nights. And he learned more in the three days and three nights. And I'm sure many people would learn in three years. But this time, Jonah is ready to obey the voice of the Lord, because we read there that the word of the Lord came to Jonah a second time.

- [4 : 18] And that's what I find so really wonderful about the Lord's dealings. It's like, it's as if the past has been wiped away. It's exactly the same word that has come to Jonah.
- The word of the Lord came to Jonah the second time with exactly the same commission. And it's there you see the amazing forgiveness and mercy and the condescension of God.
- It's like he's saying to Jonah, right? The past is past Jonah. Jonah, you were disobedient. You learned lessons. But we're going to move on, Jonah.
- You're going to obey me this time. And we're going to, we're in this together. And I think it's an area in life that we often have problems with is a whole area of forgiveness.
- Sometimes we cannot grasp God's forgiveness. And the reason we cannot grasp God's forgiveness is because sometimes we're not very good at forgiving ourselves.
- [5 : 26] You, if we're absolutely brutally honest with our own life, you've got to ask yourself, are you able to forgive? Are you somebody who is able to forgive?
- Really forgive? Not the kind of forgiving where you forgive a wee bit. Or you say you forgive, but it still rankles away and it still riles and you know deep down that you haven't really forgiven.
- And I think that's why we find it hard to understand God's forgiveness. Because God says their sins and their iniquities, I will remember no more.
- It's like he's washed the slate clean. And when we read that word where God remembers, it really speaks about God taking action against.
- Where God is remembering in order to take action and God is saying, I won't. I will not take action. Because of course God has taken action against Jesus Christ.
- [6 : 35] And while we sometimes find it hard to forgive others, we also find it hard to forgive ourselves. Maybe some of you in here are plagued by that.
- There are many aspects of your life you've been able to, as it were, forgive yourself. But there might be certain things and you say, it's still bothering you.
- And you're saying, you know, I cannot really believe that God could forgive me that. But yes, my friend, God does. And that's one of the things we've got to learn, is that as God has forgiven, we have to learn to forgive ourselves.
- Now, when it says, of course, that God forgives, we've always got to remember that it is possible because of the nature of some sins, that they will leave their own legacy, they will leave their own mark upon a person, even although the sin is forgiven.
- For instance, maybe somebody who was a drug addict might be delivered from that, set free, come to embrace Jesus. But yet there might be periods in that person's life where there might be periods of anxiety and depression and various things which have been left because of that.
- [7 : 55] I remember years ago, a man, he was one of the loveliest Christians. He wasn't a Christian for very long. But most of his life, he had a chronic drink problem.
- He was always a nice man, but he had this chronic drink problem. And I'm sure he spent as many of his nights in fields and ditches as he ever did in a bed. And then he was amazingly converted.
- And one of the things, I don't remember his mother, but people used to sympathize with his mother because of the state this fellow was so often in.
- And she would say, oh, he'll come one day. She believed that he would come to the Lord. She never saw it. But he was amazingly converted.
- And in his short life, there was the most incredible love and compassion and tenderness that was manifest in his life.

- [9 : 00] He had the most lived-in face you ever saw. But his health was completely broken. God had forgiven him all his sin. But his body had been so battered over the years that he didn't live all that long afterwards.
- So that's what I mean that although God will forgive us our sin, and there are times where God actually will restore the years that the locusts have eaten.
- Some people, it's quite miraculous a way almost that God works with them. But some people, as we maybe said before, walk with a limp of yesterday's sin in the way that it has actually affected their body.
- But this is one of the great lessons that we learn from looking at the life of Jonah is God's great forgiveness. And so the word of the Lord came to Jonah the second time.
- And you see, God's purposes are not going to be thwarted. God had a message to be delivered to Nineveh. Jonah, you're my man. Jonah says, no, I'm not.
- [10 : 08] God says, you are. God says, no, I'm not. And you see how the Lord will, he is still going to use the same man, and he is still going to give the same message. And so we find that Jonah goes to Nineveh.
- And we read there that it is termed, that great city. Arise, go to Nineveh, that great city. Now, of course, we mentioned before something of the Assyrians.
- And this city was great in its structure, great in its size. It was great in wealth. It was great in power. It was great in evil.
- It was great in idolatry. It was great in cruelty. We mentioned this before. The Assyrians were known for their cruelty. Historians, again, if you read through ancient history, sometimes when they would capture a city, they would behead thousands and stack the skulls up at the entrance of the city as a warning.
- They had a campaign of always destroying children, babies and children. And one of their favorite ploys was to impale loads of people and leave them to die in the hot sun.
- [11 : 26] They were known for their cruelty. And it was part of what, that Jonah had this difficulty in going to these people with a message like this because he knew God was a gracious God.
- And Jonah couldn't bear the thought of God being merciful to people like this. But anyway, Jonah goes with the message. And that's a great thing. Jonah goes with a message of judgment.
- And Jonah is faithful to the message that God gave him. And again, that is essential. If ever we are preaching at all, we have to be faithful to the word of God.
- We are never ever to alter the word to suit what our opinion might be or what we think. Because, you know, this is one of the great dangers that faces the church is where people have their opinions and their thoughts.
- And they're not, they don't agree with this and they don't agree with that. And they'll try and find a bit of scripture, take it out of context and play with the word to make it what it isn't really.
- [12 : 39] Well, God will not be mocked. And one day God will, he may allow that to go for years and years, but God will one day judge that. We are not at liberty and not at freedom to make God's word other than what it is.
- And that is the whole point of preaching is to be absolutely faithful to the truth. Sometimes the truth will hurt. Sometimes it will hurt me and it will hurt you.
- But it is the truth. And that is what has to be proclaimed. And so Jonah went with the truth. And it really is quite an amazing thing.

Because Jonah goes into this city. And he is proclaiming very simply that yet 40 days and Nineveh shall be overthrown.

You know, I can't think of many greater acts or displays of courage by any person.

[13 : 44] I think if you were trying to find a more modern, it would be almost like going at the time of the Second World War into the headquarters of the Gestapo and saying to them, I have a message from the Lord, I have a message from the Lord in 40 days.

And you would say to yourself, it is like a suicide mission. That is really, from a human point of view, what Jonah was on. Humanly speaking, his chances of getting out of Nineveh alive are nil.

And I am sure he was saying to himself, will I be beheaded? Will I be impaled? Will they skin me alive? Which they were notorious for doing. There were all kinds of horrendous possibilities.

But the great thing about Jonah is he is faithful. He goes forward with this message. And the great thing is that when God sends somebody on a mission, God will give that person the enabling.

As somebody so rightly said, the will of God will never take you where the grace of God can't keep you and the power of God can't use you.

[14 : 57] It's a great, great expression that. The will of God will never lead you where the grace of God cannot keep you and the power of God cannot use you.

So we read that Jonah rose and went to Nineveh according to the word of the Lord. And there was a three-day journey. And we believe in that. That was simply that he went round and about in the city, backwards, forwards, and maybe to the outlying parts.

And he proclaimed. And I believe that he proclaimed not just, I know that he goes with the word of the Lord. But I don't think that all he said was, in the Hebrew it's just, I think, five words, yet forty days and Nineveh shall be overthrown.

That's not all he would have said. Because the Ninevites, remember, are an idolatrous, the Assyrians are an idolatrous nation.

They couldn't turn to the living and true God unless they heard about the living and true God. It's one thing to say that they're going to be overthrown.

[16 : 03] But it's another thing to know who to turn to and how to turn. So it's very obvious that Jonah was preaching far more than we have here.

And the great thing is he went everywhere. It wasn't a matter of just running in and running out. He went into that city. He went all round about in that city.

And that message was for all. It was for those, and we see the king heard it. He would have gone from ever from the palace courtyard down into the gutter.

There wouldn't be a part that he missed out. And, you know, that's the way it is, or that's the way it should be with the gospel. Remember how Jesus, in the story of the Great Supper, he says, Go out into the highways and into the hedges, and call in the poor and the maimed and the halt and the blind, those who are at the far end of their, those who are down in their luck, those who are miserable.

And, my friends, we have a huge responsibility to share the gospel of Jesus Christ with other people. You know what the Bible tells us when we are converted, that we are ambassadors for Christ.

[17 : 22] If you tonight are a believer, you're an ambassador for Christ. In other words, you are somebody who represents Christ in this world by the way you live and by what you say.

And one of the things that we always have to do is to share the gospel with others. And that's what I think was one of the great things that we still have to a certain extent in this island is our ability to talk to other people and to interact with other people, whether it's at school or at work or wherever.

It's vital. It's important. And God gives us these opportunities. Not that we are to be almost assaulting people with the gospel and ramming the gospel down people's throat, but, you know, opportunities will be given to you.

I remember when I was converted, every colleague that I worked with at one stage or another asked me and said to me, what exactly happened?

And, you know, that is, in other words, they have just said, we want to hear your testimony. Maybe that's, they didn't say, I'd like to hear your testimony.

[18 : 39] But they said, what happened? Every single one of them at one stage or another. And I had the opportunity of sharing with each one what the Lord Jesus did in my heart.

So, you see, the Lord gives us these opportunities. And that's one of the wonderful things. And we should be praying for these opportunities so that people will hear.

So, Jonah began to go into the city, going, and he called out, yet 40 days, and Nineveh shall be overthrown. And, of course, 40 days, a very biblical number.

It rained 40 days and 40 nights at the time of the flood. Israel were 40 days and 40 years, I should say, wandering in the wilderness. The spies were searching out the land 40 days and 40 nights.

You find that Jesus, in fact, remember the temptation, he was fasting, he was in the wilderness of 40 days and 40 nights. There's a lot of these 40 days, 40 nights, like Goliath taunting Israel and so on.

[19 : 54] But here's Jonah, and he gives us this message. And I would love to have heard the message. But the amazing thing is that Jonah, I don't, these are things I don't know, maybe people who have a greater understanding of medicine and science and such like would be able to explain.

But as Jonah went around the city, one of the things that people in the city would have done, they were bound to ask him, excuse, well, they probably didn't say excuse me. They said, who are you?

Where have you come from? And I'm sure that Jonah gave his testimony on many occasions to different people as he passed by. And I tend to think, I don't know, but I reckon if you spent three days in the belly of a whale, this great fish, I'm sure, whether it's acids or whatnot, that there would have been some marking.

I might be completely wrong, I don't know, but that there would be, maybe his skin had been deeply affected. There might have been a look about him because when he told this amazing story, that he himself was almost a walking message of God's grace and God's forgiveness, of what God can do.

And I think that the people of Nineveh laid hold upon this fact. They obviously laid hold upon the truth of what Jonah taught, but they laid hold upon the truth of his own life, of what had happened to him.

[21 : 35] And so we find that there's this incredible fast right throughout the city, from the king all the way down. And it's the most amazing display of repentance, where they took off their clothes, put on sackcloth, and they called out mightily, or that is urgently, to God.

And so there was this amazing thing took place. And we find here that it tells us that God relented of the disaster that he had said he would do to them, and he did it not.

Now the amazing thing, or the wonderful thing here is, that God doesn't change his mind as such. But God is always true to himself.

He's consistent with himself. And the Lord said in Scripture, he made it very clear in Scripture, that if people, even foreigners, even people in other nations, where he declared that his judgment would come upon them, if they turned from their evil ways, and turned to him, that he would turn from the judgment that he planned to bring upon them.

And that's exactly what happened here in Nineveh. That's what it means when it says that God relented of the disaster. And one of the most encouraging things about this chapter in Jonah is the confidence that it gives us to be faithful to speaking for the Lord.

[23 : 23] Because, you know, you think about it. Here is, we've said it already, Jonah goes into absolute hostile territory. Maybe you say to yourself, you know, there are people I could never, ever speak to about the Lord.

And as things stand, that might be true. I know that we have to be careful. We have to be sensitive. We have to take the occasions as God gives them to us and presents them to us.

My friend, never give up. Never, ever put anyone outside in your mind the amazing grace of God.

Because sometimes we do that. We might be guilty of passing people on the street and say, oh, well, there's no point ever saying anything to him.

He'd just laugh at me. There's no point. I know his life. Oh, you think you do. I know his background. There is no point.

[24 : 27] My friend, the history of the church is full of people who have been saved from hopelessness and despair and brokenness and emptiness and also from pride and from affluence and from every situation and every circumstance.

Never think yourself wiser than God and never think that anybody is beyond God's grace. But maybe you're saying to yourself, but I'm not eloquent.

If I was an orator, if I was eloquent, if I had the ability to speak, then it would be different. Well, I don't know what kind of guy Noah was. Noah, Jonah was.

I don't know. But we've got to remember the city that he was in. We've got to remember this is the most violent people in the whole world.

These are people who would boil him alive. It took more than eloquence. It took more than oratory. It took more than persuasion. Supposing it was the most persuasive person in the whole world, wouldn't have made any difference to that city.

[25 : 43] The difference was that Jonah went looking to the Lord, believing the message the Lord had given to him, trusting the Lord, being faithful to the Lord, and leaving the result to the Lord.

And that's exactly how we've always got to remember. It's not by might, it's not by power, but it's by my spirit, saith the Lord. And I find this the most encouraging part, or one of the most encouraging parts of Scripture, that here in the most, in the last place in the whole world, that you would expect what you would say one of the mightiest revivals ever.

If we can use the word revival in a place where there was no, first of all, turning to the Lord, but where there's this mighty outworking of God's Spirit, breaking up people, and calling to the Lord.

May I say to anybody in here tonight who doesn't know the Lord, you might be saying to Yeshua, well, I don't know, is there hope for me?

Well, with all due respect, the one thing I would say is, no matter what you have done in life, you have never done the likes of what the people of Nineveh did.

[27 : 04] These people were the worst that you could ever meet in this world. And yet, they found mercy, they found grace from God.

What an encouragement. Surely, that should encourage each and every one of you. Because as Jesus himself said of Jonah, a greater than Jonah is here.

His name is Jesus. Will you cry to him and ask him to forgive you? Let us pray. O Lord, our God, we pray to be merciful to us.

We pray that we may hear and understand and believe the word. Lord, may we not close our ears to the truth. May we not be here thinking about what we're going to do.

We've already set our hearts and minds upon other things, but that we may close in with Jesus first and foremost. O Lord, help us to put the Lord first in everything in life.

[28 : 09] Grant us grace for all that we do. Take us to our home safely. May thy blessing be upon the fellowship tonight. And forgive us our sin in Jesus' name. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.