

# Jonah 3

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Date: 16 November 2016

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[ 0 : 00 ] Now we left the end of chapter 2 in Jonah with the great fish or whale, whichever it was, vomiting Jonah up onto a beach, onto the dry land.

And then of course he is now, presumably after having had some sustenance there to eat and drink and dry off and rest and so on, he is then sent again by the Lord on this same commission.

Now this is not the Lord being heartless, this is rather the Lord giving him a second chance. It is the Lord giving him another opportunity, just as we might say how when Simon Peter had denied Jesus, Jesus at the end of John's account of the Gospel gives him an opportunity to affirm three times that he loves him, just as he had denied him three times before, before the cock crew.

So the Lord gives Jonah another opportunity to do the right thing. The word of the Lord came unto Jonah the second time saying, Arise, go unto Nineveh, that great city, and preach unto it the preaching that I bid thee.

So Jonah arose and went unto Nineveh according to the word of the Lord. So now he is doing what the Lord commands. Now he is in God's will, and there is all the difference in the world.

[ 1 : 21 ] It's not unlike, if you think of that parable that Jesus told about the two sons whose father sent them to go and work today in the vineyard. Matthew 21, we read at verse 28, a certain man of two sons, he came to the first and said, Son, go work today in my vineyard.

And he answered and said, I will not. But afterward he repented and went. And he came to the second and said, Likewise. And he answered and said, I don't, sir. And went not.

Whether of them twain did the will of his father, they sent him to him the first. So here we have this example Jesus tells of those who are, on the one hand, supposedly quite willing, yeah, we'll do whatever God says, but they don't do it.

And on the other hand, you've got those who say, oh, we're not going to obey what God says, but they end up doing it. And this is Jonah here. He has been determined not to obey the word of God, not to obey the command of God.

But now he has effectively passed through a living death. He has been entombed in the belly of the whale. And he has been spat out after three days onto dry land.

[ 2 : 29 ] He has been given his life back. He's been given a second chance and there's nothing like a brush with death or even an extended one like this as Jonah's hand for making people recognize the value of life.

And how it is needful to get that life to the full, which will only be, of course, when we are acting in the will of God. So when Jesus told that particular parable about the two sons, he said that the publicans and the harlots go into the kingdom of God before you.

For John came unto you in the way of righteousness and you believed him not. But the publicans and the harlots believed him. And he, when he had seen it, repented not afterward that you might believe him.

Now these are the very people, the publicans and the harlots or even the ordinary common people who were uninstructed in the way of the law. About whom the scribes and Pharisees said in John 7, 49, This people who knoweth not the law are cursed.

In other words, the unlearned, those who weren't saturated in the Old Testament scriptures like the scribes and the Pharisees were, Oh, they were under a curse. And yet these are the ones who are ready to receive blessing when it is offered to them.

[ 3 : 46 ] Jonah is given to us as, we are told, assigned both to the Ninevites and also, on separate occasions, assigned to the Israelites. He is a highly significant prophet to that extent.

It's not just this little wee short book with this dramatic story in it about the man swallowed by the whale. But rather it's that which is used by our Lord to speak both to the pagans in Nineveh and

also later on, centuries later, to the Israelites.

Jesus himself says in Luke 11, at verse 30, he says, For as Jonas was assigned unto the Ninevites, so shall also the Son of Man be to this generation.

Of no sign be given to it, but the sign of Jonas the prophet. For as Jonas was assigned to the Ninevites, so shall also the Son of Man be to this generation. So Jesus says in the first instance, Jonah is meant to be assigned to the Ninevites.

Now you might think, okay, well he's coming and he's preaching to them. And we read how he goes, day's journey into Ninevite. He proclaims, yet forty days and Ninevite shall be destroyed. But that's a message.

[ 4 : 55 ] That's being a mouthpiece. How is it being a sign? Well, we would have to understand, although scripture doesn't explicitly spell it out, we would have to understand, from what we are told elsewhere, that part of the Ninevites listening, part of their receiving of Jonah's message, is that as they became susceptible to his message, they asked him of his story, who he was, where he'd come from.

Now, you might think, ah, he doesn't say that at all. But remember, that's what people do. If somebody turns up at the church and we don't know them, then somebody outside, hopefully, will engage them in conversation, say how nice it is to see them, ask them where they're from. Ask them if they're visiting, ask them if they've got relatives here, ask them if they're on holiday, where they're from, what's their own congregation, or what's their family, and so on. And this is what people do. So the Ninevites, when Jonah begins to give his message, will say, well, who are you? Where are you from? And so on. This is what the shipmen do, that the sailors do in chapter one. Because when they have their storm, and when Jonah, clearly that Jonah is the one for whom the storm is responsible, then they say to him, you know, who are you?

What is your occupation? Where did you come from? What is your country? And of what people are thou? So they ask. Of course the Ninevites are going to ask. He says, 40 days, and Ninevites are going to be destroyed.

[ 6 : 21 ] They say, well, yeah, who are you? And where have you come from? And, you know, why have you got this message for us? He's going to be telling them all these things. And part of his message is going to be the testimony that he himself is assigned to them as a living example of both judgment and mercy.

Now, most of us, if we have a testimony, they would be able to say, well, I'm an example of God's mercy. Because God delivered me from the sin in which I was dwelling, and so on. We couldn't actually say, look at me, I'm an example of judgment.

Because the Lord has struck me down for what I've done. He may have struck us temporarily or chastised us in the past, but we couldn't really say, well, look at me now, I'm an example of judgment.

Jonah is an example, a living example of both judgment and mercy. Because the Lord's judgment fell on him, he was effectively consigned and tombed in a living death in the burial of the whale. He was swallowed up by this living death for three days and three nights, and then he gets his life back. Judgment. Death as his punishment for sin.

[ 7 : 35 ] An example of judgment. He is also an example of mercy. That the Lord, having caused him to pass through this living death, then gives him a second chance.

And he is therefore uniquely positioned to give his message that personalised, pithy relevance. Because he isn't just saying, well, this is what God said, you know, I don't think about it, but this is what God told me to say here.

He's a living example of what God says. That not only is there judgment for sin, but there can be mercy. Otherwise, you know, if you think about it, otherwise, if somebody says, yet 40 days, then it was going to be destroyed.

If there's no hope, no silver lining, no strand or thread of hope or expectation or something to grasp at there, it's not exactly a message that is going to bring about repentance, is it?

If people don't think, well, maybe the Lord might have mercy on us, maybe he might have pity, we think we're all going to just get zapped and there's no hope regardless, everybody's going to say, well, you might as well just eat, drink and be merry because you're going to die.

[ 8 : 44 ] You're going to get zapped in it in a little while anyway. 40 days, we'll all be dead and destroyed. So we might as well just indulge ourselves as much as we can because if there's no hope, if repentance doesn't bring about anything, if judgment isn't tempered with mercy, what hope

do we have?

So there must have been in that message. We weren't told all of it. But there must have been in there, in the person, in the testimony, in the witness of Jonah, something that indicates that this God of judgment is also a God of mercy.

And it's not in what the Lord literally gives him to preach. Therefore, it can only be in the person of himself who is this living witness, living testimony to both the judgment and the mercy of God.

And this gives him this personalized relevance without which, humanly speaking, there's perhaps not much in the way of results, not much in the way of incentive for the Ninevites to repent, seek to repent.

He couldn't have been such an effective sign to the Ninevites. And Jesus says that he is a sign to the Ninevites. Not just a preacher to the Ninevites, but a sign to the Ninevites.

[ 9 : 58 ] He couldn't have been such an effective sign had they not inquired after his story. And because they would have a mind to take it seriously, so Jonah's restoration gave hope of God's patience with men of other ones.

There was no hope of salvation. There's no incentive for repentance. So likewise, if we could just extrapolate that forward into New Testament times, Christ's resurrection, having passed through death, not a living death now, but an actual death, and being three days and three nights in the tomb, his resurrection, that stamp of approval of God on his sacrifice on the cross, this assures us, this resurrection assures us that God is fully reconciled to penitent sinners by Christ's death.

Just as Jonah's coming back, as it were, from the dead, gives proof that God is ready to be reconciled to Old Testament sinners, even if they be pagans.

He is ready to be reconciled to them. Witness Jonah. God had mercy on him, even though he was blatantly disobedient. And he knew what he was meant to do, but he chose to disobey.

The Ninevites, you could argue, hadn't really known any better until they were told that they have the example of Jonah, of God's mercy, if there is repentance.

[ 11 : 28 ] So likewise, we have the example of Christ's resurrection to testify to God's being fully reconciled to penitent sinners by Christ's death.

Because if Christ's death was not acceptable to God as an atonement, as a payment for the sins of the penitent in this world of those who turned to the Lord through Christ, then he wouldn't have raised them up again from the dead.

That's the stamped receipt, if you like, that proves payment has been made. It is God's testimony of acceptance for the price that Jesus has paid on behalf of sinners.

So just as Jonah is assigned to the Ninevites, so Christ is ultimately a token assigned to us. Yes, there is life after death.

Yes, there is the possibility of forgiveness and restoration. God is propitiated, made favorable to sinners that they will turn and repent because of what Christ has done.

[ 12 : 35 ] So he is stated to be by Jesus assigned to the Ninevites, but he is also stated to be a sign to Israel. Now we made reference to these passages in previous weeks.

In Matthew chapter 12 verse 38 on to 41, it certainly describes the Pharisees and saying, Master, we can see a sign from me. And he answered and said unto them, evil and adulterous generations seek it out their sign.

There shall no sign be given to it but the sign of the prophet Jonas. For as Jonas was three days and three nights in the whale's belly, so shall the Son of Man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth.

The men of Nineveh shall rise in judgment with this generation and shall condemn it because they repented at the preaching of Jonas and behold, a greater than Jonas is here.

Therefore, he is a sign to that generation, he is a sign to that generation of Israelites. Likewise, chapter 16 of Matthew verse 4, a wicked and adulterous generation seek it out for a sign.

[ 13 : 38 ] There shall no sign be given unto it but the sign of the prophet Jonah. So in other words, they're getting the sign of Jonah. They're getting the sign of the prophet Jonah and it is proof to them in their generation of Israelites that he is meant to be one who testifies to them.

Nineveh repented and turned from evil and they had initially been complete pagans. We're back again to the parable, remember? The parable of the two sons in the vineyard.

One says, no, I'm not going to work in that vineyard. But then afterwards he repents and he goes and he does it. And then you've got the other one who says, yeah, yeah, I'll go and work in the

vineyard. And this is like Israel professing to obey God.

Say, yes, of course we serve the Lord Jehovah. Yes, we go to his temple, we make sacrifices, we read his scriptures, we do everything that he says, we obey his commands. I go, sir.

But then went, not. They didn't receive his Messiah. They didn't receive his son. They didn't actually do the work that the Lord required of them. They said they did. They said they would.

[14:43] Israel professing to obey God but not actually doing so ended up being doomed. And here's the bittersweet irony here. If you think of northern Israel and the kingdom of Samaria, the breakaway from the kingdom of Judah in the south because they wouldn't listen to the Lord's prophets like Elijah and Jonah and the others, they ended up being exiled to the very Nineveh which had itself repented.

Earlier, Nineveh had turned from God's judgment and repented. Israel, northern Israel, was steeped in its idolatry, the golden calves, at Dan and Bethel. They wouldn't repent.

So they got exiled to the Nineveh that had repented. There's such perfect balance and irony and justice in God's mercy here.

They ended up being doomed to exile in the very Nineveh which had repented at the preaching of God's judgment. So this is verses 1, 2, 3 there.

Now Nineveh was an exceeding great city of three days' journey. So it would take three days to go across. I'm not going to give all the measurements and so on here but suffice to say that from such ruins as have been excavated and the scale of them and so on it has been testified in the past by pagan writers by ancient Greeks and Romans and so on of the kind of expanse that ancient Nineveh was.

[16:19] It probably, we think they've identified four different sort of bases of the city the oldest of which is probably Nimrod which would be the ancient sort of founding of it and then it spread over what would probably have been four nearby cities to each other and then it became one huge big sort of greater Nineveh which would take three days to walk across.

Now you think oh come on you're stretching things a bit am I? You know if you think of any modern city whether it's London that takes in places like Putney or Stepney or Lambeth or Penge and other places that at one time would have been completely separate from the city of London that was just the walled in square mile all these would have been villages out of my think of Glasgow like Brother Glen and Partick and maybe all these places that would have been separate from Glasgow itself and now could have swallowed up within it and you could repeat the same story for like Aberdeen or Dundee or Inverness nowadays where Culloden at one stage would have been miles outside the city and now it's just part of the city expanding housing so all these cities they swallow up areas round about them and the ancient cities they were no different at one stage would have been different cities you know probably ancient Nineveh and Nimrod and Coniic or whatever the ancient name where these places were they all expanded and became one huge big greater Nineveh so three days to walk across Nineveh so when he's just over a day into it not quite half way he begins to enter the city of his journey and cried and said yet forty days and Nineveh shall be overthrown now when it says an exceeding great city the Hebrew mind said could not conceive of greatness outside of God so anything that was described as great was only great with regard to God so for example when it says an exceeding great city it means literally an great to God a city that is great to God a great before God in the same way if you look at Psalm 36 at verse 6 thy righteousness is like the great mountains now that's what we've got it in English the great mountains but what it is literally in the Hebrew is the mountains of God when you want to express greatness you can only do it by means of

God the mountains of God are the great mountains likewise again in Psalm 80 at verse 10 we read the hills were covered with the shadow the boughs that of were like the goodly cedars and that is literally the cedars of God they are great they are good what is great and good well God is great and good so cedars of God is the goodly cedars mountains of God is the great mountains a city that is itself a great city exceeding great city is a city that is great to God or great before God because in the Hebrew thought you couldn't delineate greatness you couldn't identify greatness apart from God yet 40 days now the implication here is as we know 40 days is usually taken in scriptures a time of testing some would say a time of humiliation or pressure you know think of

Moses and Elijah and Jesus when they're under their particular times of testing they're fasting 40 days Moses 40 days up the mountain Elijah 40 days in the journey to Mount Jesus 40 days in the wilderness being tempted of Satan not eating so fasting 40 days 40 years for example is the

amount of time that is spent in the wilderness it's also I haven't realised until I read it somebody pointed out one of the commentators today it's also roughly the time from the beginning of Jesus earthly ministry to the fall of Jerusalem the overthrow of Jerusalem by the Romans now that happened long after Jesus of course had been crucified and risen and ascended into heaven but if you think about it you know it says in Luke's account of the gospel that Jesus began his ministry he began to be about 30 years of age now we know the counting is not precise we know that now we know Jesus was probably born around the year that we now call it 6 BC so it's not exact and yet because people thought that he had been born in what we would call the year dot so we would say that when

[ 21 : 05 ] Jesus was about 30 years old that would be 30 AD after he begins his public ministry 40 years maybe but the time of Jesus brief earthly ministry the act of the apostles and the spread of the gospel and then the hardening of the Jewish nation the rebellion against the Romans fought by 70 AD Jerusalem is completely destroyed and overgrown by the Romans the war begins in 66 AD and 70 AD Jerusalem is destroyed for the final time you could say in that sense so you get this 40 year period between the beginning of Jesus' ministry and the destruction of Jerusalem so 40 days 40 years and so on it's always a significant period the sense with Nineveh is that they have had all this time in which there might have been repentance that God has waited long and yet the cup of wrath is almost full as though a great big ceremonial cup was being filled one drop at a time you know you could think of a tax that is dripping plop plop into it and little by little the level would have filled up to ages and ages to get up there but it's almost now at the rim and the last few drops as they plop in are going to finally make it over spill remember what the

Lord says to Abraham I think it's in Genesis 15 it says you're not getting the land yet not going to give you an inheritance yet because the iniquity of the Amorites is not yet full there is a judgment planned on Canaan on the pagans that are inhabiting it and all their sin and all that he but the judgment the iniquity of the Amorites is not yet full and so likewise the judgment on Nineveh it was just a few drops away from the cup overflowing as it were so by the time you get down to the last 40 days the clock has almost ticked away completely there's almost nothing left but there is this last gasp almost deathbed period of grace that's 40 days and yet Nineveh shall be destroyed and it's thought by some commentators to be the fact that you know because God has waited so long and because the judgment is now certain that he doesn't say but if you repent it will be okay and if you turn it will be alright as far as

God tells Jonah to give the message he doesn't say yeah but if you turn it's okay he just says you've had it it's coming to be destroyed but they must have seen in Jonah this example that there is yet grace yet opportunity yet mercy with this God of absolute righteousness so the people of Nineveh believed God and proclaimed the fast and put on sackcloth and the greatest of them even unto the least of them for word came unto the king of Nineveh and he arose from his throne he laid his robe from off him and covered him with sackcloth and sat in ashes this is the instruction then that he gives to everybody that they should do likewise not even the beasts are to be allowed to eat or drink you know the beasts too you know does that seem a little bit harsh after all they're not especially guilty of anything well if you think about just as the fall affects all of creation you know remember how when the

Lord says to Adam now it's going to bring forth thorns and thistles and all manner weeds and difficulty and the sweat of your brow you're going to have to till the soil and work for your own food because now the land is cursed now the earth is under a curse the whole of creation is affected by the fall and so sin infects all of creation from man and his dominion all the way down to the lowest microscopic cells of life you might think well that's a little harsh isn't it well it may be harsh philosophically but it is reality isn't it I mean if one person decides to do something to pursue a particular area lots of other people are going to be sucked into that vortex you know wars get started because of either the pride or the megalomania or the ambition of usually one man maybe a group of people together but one person is usually ultimately responsible for that final push that brings nations into war and when those nations come into war thousands if not millions can end up perishing well that's not very fair is it

I mean these people weren't part of the original argument no but they all get sucked in so it's not likewise with creation or the animal kingdom they're not the ones that sinned in the garden of Eden no they're not the ones that keep perpetuating sin but they all get sucked in by it as lesser levels of creation you know half the epidemics that sweep the world I think of the age epidemic in Africa and

in other places and so on an awful lot of the victims of that fear for the illness are what we would call innocent victims you know children who are born with it or children who are innocent wives who are infected by promiscuous husbands and so on they they haven't done anything and yet they end up being dragged down with it there are the guilty and there are the completely innocent now the beasts of the field and the creatures might say well they're innocent here but because yes they are part and parcel of what sucks down sin into the vortex they also will share in the deliverance you know if the lord's wrath is averted then the cattle of the stall and the beasts of the field they'll live they'll get water and fruit again and the good times will come back for them because men and women repent it you know the lord is mindful and we read that in chapter 4 verse 11 the final verse should not I spare men about that great city when there are more than six score thousand persons that cannot discern between their right hand and their left and also much cattle the lord is concerned for the creatures but because they share in the lives of men so likewise they must share in this symbolic token of repentance so they won't eat they won't drink they won't have anything they'll be this fast they'll be this morning in Nineveh and the king says you know let man and beast be covered with sacral and turn every one from his evil way from the violence of it that is in their hands is everybody just as guilty here you know is it really for you to say they're all violent and all evil and all unawaking as well if you think of it it says everybody turn from their evil ways you know everyone is guilty of something before God we may not be as guilty as those whose sins are more public we may not be guilty of the same things as those who end up in the glare of publicity in the spotlight or those whose particular weakness or particular failing or particular addiction is something different from us now you turn the spotlight on any one of our lives you turn our little hearts inside out in our minds and our thoughts everyone is guilty of something before God and we know it everyone is guilty in some whether it's secrets whether it's public whether it's known to us whether it's unknown to the rest of the world everyone is guilty before God

[ 28 : 46 ] Jesus said if you're even angry with your brother you've murdered him in your heart Jesus said if you're going to look on someone with adultery in your heart you're guilty of it because that's what you've lost it after that's what you wanted to do you just didn't have opportunity to do it it doesn't make you more virtuous it's because you're more constrained so likewise we're all guilty everybody is guilty of something before the Lord and we're not scrabbling about you said oh well you have to dig no you don't you and I we know what we're guilty of before the Lord we know our sins we know that if our lives were set before the searing searchlights of heaven then we would be curling up with shame at what would be exposed when the Lord whose eyes there's a flame of fire looks into our hearts and pierces to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit he sees everything that is there he cannot stand righteous before him without being washed in his blood first therefore everyone has need of repentance everyone in

Nineveh everyone in Scotland everyone in Scotland everyone across the world has need of repentance and we know that just as Nineveh stands to be destroyed in 40 days time so Peter tells us the world itself will all be gathered up like a stroller the elements will melt with fervent heat this world is unborrowed time we can't stay in it even if we wanted to all we can do is make preparation for what comes next who can tell if God will turn and repent and turn away from his fierce anger that we perish not they have little shafts of light little threads of hope what are they for them the thread of hope is the fact look at Jonah he was judged he was effectively condemned to a living death he was three days and nights in the belly of the whale God judged him and smote him for his disobedience but look he is alive and well and talking to us on behalf of this great God there must be a sliver of hope with God's mercy even in the midst of

God's severity Romans tells us in Romans 11 verse 22 behold therefore the goodness and severity of God these two are not in contradistinction they are rather part of the two sides of the same coin the goodness and severity of God and them which fell severity but toward thee goodness if thou continue in his goodness otherwise thou also shalt be cut off God saw the works you might say well sure it's not the works God saw in their faith yeah they wouldn't have repented in turn if they hadn't first believed because that's what we read verse 5 there the people of Nineveh believe God there is faith that then gets put into practice just like the book of James said when we looked at that you know faith without works it's there it's all right saying well yeah we actually believe God but we're not going to do anything about it we're not going to change we're not going to turn from our evil way yeah we believe everything you say Jonah but you know this is my life this is how I want to live it and I'm going to carry on they believed

God and because they believed God they turned from their evil way and they repented God saw their works and they put that repentance into practice that they turned from their evil way and God repented of the evil that he had said that he would do unto them and he did it not you might think well does that make God changeable God has changed his mind then because he said he was going to condemn them but then he didn't no God condemns sin God is absolute in his vengeance and judgment against sin but when sin is turned from and repented of then God would become unjust were he to condemn those who have genuinely turned away from their sin who are putting it behind them who are turning to him why would he want to destroy that which is coming to him in penitence that which is seeking them God cannot treat the penitent and the sorrowful in the same way as he does the impenitent and rebellious nobody does least of all

God there has to be a distinction otherwise God himself would be unjust and he cannot be unjust he cannot deny himself whether it's repentance and faith there will be mercy and this is what God says this is what God does God saw their works that they turned from their evil way God repented of the evil that he had said that he would do unto them and he did it not it's like you know a long shark was about to send a boy round to break your fingers or your legs because you hadn't paid him the debt that was due let's say you were in ten thousand pounds and then somebody said well hang on a minute wait a minute here's nine and a half thousand it's not the full amount but here's nine grand just now you know just don't break his legs yet is he going to say no no I'm sending him in for the last 500 he is now seeing evidence okay here's some payment here's a substantial amount of payment here's a turning things have changed

[ 34 : 25 ] I don't need to go and make an example of this person anymore I won't look stupid if I don't meet out this punishment I won't look soft so he's going to change because payment has been made now there is no payment that can be made for our sins other than man of Christ when we turn in repentance we're not saying look at me Lord how good I am look at me how humble I am look at me how penitent I am but rather we are pleading Lord look at Christ look at your son and see the price that has been paid there that's what I'm claiming that's what I'm asking that my sin be washed in the blood of Christ because I repent of my sin in his name I'm asking you to look to his righteousness to his sacrifice to the payment that he made on behalf of all who trust and believe in it and I'm trusting in him and I'm believing in him and I'm turning and repenting of my sin God saw their works and they turned from their evil way and God repented of the evil that he had said that he would do unto them and he did it not behold the goodness and severity of God this is the law and this is the gospel that he spread and he and all the the