

## The God of the Second Chance Jonah 3: 1 - 10

### Introduction

Thomas A. Edison, the famous American inventor, was working on a crazy contraption called a “light bulb” and it took a team of a dozen men 24 straight hours to build the very first one. The story goes that when they had finished the light bulb, Edison gave it to a young helper who nervously carried it up the stairs. Step by step he cautiously climbed the stairs, obviously frightened of dropping such a priceless piece of work. You’ve probably guessed what happened next; the poor young fellow dropped the bulb at the top of the stairs. It took the team twenty-four hours to make another bulb. Finally, Edison was ready to have his bulb carried up the stairs again. He surprisingly gave it to the same young boy who dropped the first one. That’s trust.

God shows the same trust in Jonah. God is giving this racist, rebellious, reluctant death wishing Prophet a second chance to obey Him and bring His word to Nineveh. This morning’s though could be titled “Our great and merciful God is the God of the second chance”.

### I. Our God is a Merciful God. (3:1-4)

The first four verses of chapter three show God as a merciful God. The definition of mercy is “compassion or forgiveness shown towards someone whom it is within one’s power to punish or harm.” God’s mercy is seen in his compassion and forgiveness towards both Jonah and the Ninevites.

Firstly, these verse shows Gods mercy to Jonah as he once again commissions Jonah to bring His word to the Ninevites. Verses 1 & 2 in chapter 3 echo Gods first commission to Jonah in chapter 1 “*Then the word of the Lord came to Jonah a second time: “Go to the great city of Nineveh and proclaim to it the message I give you.”*” In the Hebrew text three imperatives convey the Lord’s command to Jonah: arise, go, preach. Here Jonah is back at the start, doesn’t this echo the Israelites experiences trying to cross the Jordan river into Canaan? An initial refusal to obey, a time of suffering and then being brought back to that same decision again for a second chance. God as He did with the Israelites and brought Jonah back to the point where

He chose to disobey His command to, *“Go to the great city of Nineveh and proclaim to it the message I give you.”* God’s mercy is seen in how He deals with His saints and their disobedience. God could have rightly dispensed with Jonah’s services. After all, Jonah hadn’t metaphorically accidentally dropped the light bulb he had smashed the bulb deliberately, jumped up and down on it, picked up the pieces and thrown them in God’s face and then taken to his heels and fled. Jonah deserved punishment; Jonah probably deserved to have his death wish granted, he certainly didn’t deserve to be given a second chance. It is outrageous that God would choose to give this rebel another chance, but He did. God deals with Jonah in His mercy not as Jonah deserves.

Verses 3 & 4 show God’s mercy to the Ninevites. Nineveh is an important city having a population of around 120,000 souls and is generally regarded as the greatest city in the world at the time of Jonah. It was the capital of the Assyrian Empire, a major trading city and the royal seat of the Assyrian King. However, Nineveh’s true importance is not derived from these geopolitical factors, its true importance comes from the fact that God had chosen to save Nineveh. Nineveh is important because it is important to God. We have already looked at how unlikely the Ninevites were as recipients of God’s mercy, so we do not need to labour the point here, suffice to say, “You do not need to be perfect to be saved”. If there ever was a city that deserved God’s judgement it was Nineveh. God’s message may sound hard, it certainly sounds like a message of impending punishment, “Forty more days and Nineveh will be overturned.”. However, God’s messenger, Jonah certainly understood it as a call to repent and an offer of salvation. God’s dealt with the Ninevites not as they deserve but from His mercy.

God deals with the saint and the sinners both in the same way He doesn’t deals with them as they deserve, He deals with them out of His great mercy.

So, what does this mean for you and me as saints, those who profess Jesus as Lord and Saviour?

Well it has two practical applications and a warning:

Firstly, because God deals with us out of His mercy whatever our past failures and sins God can and will continue to use us. The prophet Jeremiah wrote in Lamentations 3: 22 – 23 *“The steadfast love of the Lord never ceases; His mercies are new every morning; great is your faithfulness.”* as Jerusalem was destroyed. Jerusalem has the centre of God’s promises to Israel of the Temple of the very identity of the Israelite people. The promises of God appeared to have passed and all seemed lost, God’s judgement came and it looked irrevocable. But, even at this low point Jeremiah knew that God had not finished with His chosen people. Jeremiah knew that God’s restoration was yet to come, he knew that God’s mercies are new every morning. This was true for Jonah, this is true for any saint that has fallen, God’s mercies are new every morning. Our great God is the God of the second chance. Yesterday’s sin and failings do not disqualify from God’s tomorrow.

The second application is, because God chooses to deal with saint and sinner in the same manner, out of His mercy this has to be how we deal with those around us. If we saints serve a merciful God how can we be anything but merciful ourselves. If we choose not to show mercy, then we place ourselves above God. Jonah had no mercy, that is compassion and forgiveness, for the Ninevites and look what that brought Him and those around him. If we fail to show God’s mercy we need to prepare ourselves to experience God’s judgement.

The warning is don’t presume on God’s mercy. Yes, God is the God of the second and third and fourth chance, but the saint’s disobedience and sin have real consequences. Sometimes those consequences persist long after God has shown His mercies. I can think of vicar I knew in Penzance that had an affair with a parishioner. The affair destroyed his marriage and his ministry. For years he wandered through life unable to fulfil God’s call until God restored ministry, God’s gave him a second chance. But his ministry was never the same and many people refused to attend services he took or even allow him to visit their homes. The consequences of his sin will stain his ministry for the rest of his life. I thank God He is the God of a second chance but please don’t understand that it means God gives us a free pass, a get out jail card if you will from the consequences of our disobedience.

Verse ten clearly shows that if the Ninevites had rejected God call to repent Nineveh would suffer the same fate as Sodom and Gomorrah. When we reject God's mercies, we may experience God's judgement.

## II. **Our God is a Great God. 3:5-9**

Verse five to nine show the greatness of God. Now, easy as it is to be hard on Jonah, but he did understand the greatness of God far better than many of us do today.

Firstly Jonah, understood God's great desire to save. Jonah understood that God was sending him to Nineveh to show His mercy and save the Ninevites from their sins. Jonah's problem wasn't grasping that God's great desire to save people; Jonah's problem was that in his opinion God was simply saving the wrong people. Jonah really understood God's great heart's desire to save the lost.

Secondly Jonah understood the great power of God. Let's take a minute to think what God was asking Jonah to do but lets us use a contemporary example. Imagine if you will that God told you to go to Mosul in Iraq and call the people to repent, that's a pretty big ask. Now imagine it is a few years ago when Mosul was then controlled by ISIS and they were at the height of their savagery and depravity. What would your first reaction be, fear for your personal safety or a sinking feeling that it was a futile waste of time as there is no way that those ISIS fighters in Mosul would or could possibly respond to God's call to repentance. You would probably be tempted not to obey because deep down you just couldn't believe that God is great enough to save Mosul and look after you. A quick point of interest, the ruins of ancient Nineveh lie on the outskirts of Mosul. Jonah however didn't question that God's is great enough to save the savage and depraved Ninevites and protect him, he knew God was mighty to save. In fact, he was so certain about the greatness of God he took off in the other direction. Just don't ask Jonah thought he could play hide and seek with this great God and win.

Jonah was a racist, rebellious, uncaring, self-centred and petulant prophet but for all his failing he understood the greatness of God. Jonah understood that with God nothing is impossible even saving the Ninevites and keeping him safe.

Last week I said God choosing a fish as the means of saving Jonah may have some significance. Well the Ninevites worshipped Dagon as their chief deity. The worship of this pagan god dates back the third millennium BC. According to ancient mythology, Dagon was the father of Baal. Dagon was the fish god (dag in Hebrew means "fish"), and he was represented as a half-man, half-fish creature. So, when Jonah told of his miraculous rescue by a huge fish the pagan Ninevites would have got really interested. God provided Jonah with a gold-plated introduction to the Ninevites. God is truly a great God.

Over the last two weeks I have asked if you are going to be Jonah or Joshua meaning will you be like Jonah and disobey God or will you be like Joshua and obey God. Well this week I am asking are you going to be more like Jonah? That is are you going to like Jonah and grasp hold of greatness of God? Are you going to be like Jonah and understand that God is a God of great compassion who wants to save those around us perishing in their sin? Are you going to be like Jonah and understand our God is great and mighty and powerful to save even the most unlikely of people? Are you going to, like Jonah, experience God as the God of the second chance?

I have a challenge for you. Imagine that person you think is most unlikely person you know to be saved. The apply John 3:16 to that person. You could say something like this, "For God so loved "person's name" that He sent His Son so that if "person's name" believes in Him "person's name" will not perish". Then ask yourself two questions do I believe God can save them and ask God what part in seeing this person saved do you have?

The famous evangelist Charles Finney said, "It is the great business on earth of every Christian to save souls. Now if you are thus neglecting the main business of life, what are you living for?"