

**GOING WITH GOD: JONAH'S RECOMMISSION**  
**Jonah 3:1-10**  
**February 11, 2007 – Grace Covenant Baptist Church**

B. H. Carroll, founder of Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, described this chapter in Jonah as “the biggest case of conversion in the Old Testament on a foreign field.”<sup>1</sup> R. C. Sproul proclaimed of these events “record of the most successful evangelistic campaign ever waged.”<sup>2</sup>

**I. Jonah's Recall (3:1-2)**

Jonah had endured much at the hand of God. He had disobeyed God's initial commission and attempted to run from God. However, as Jonah quickly learned, there is nowhere one can hide from God, not even in the bowels of a ship going to the middle of nowhere. God ordained the ship that carried Jonah and the crew that rebuked Jonah and throws him overboard. Jonah is left for dead. But then God ordained a new transport to deliver Jonah from death and judgment in the great fish. And as we saw last week, Jonah finally cried out to God in thanksgiving, proclaiming, “Salvation is from the LORD” (2:9). Then God commands the fish, and the fish spits Jonah up onto the dry land. It is interesting to note that the fish obeyed God's voice when Jonah did not.

Having experienced God's divine discipline, Jonah is once again approached by God. The same voice that approached him earlier, the same voice that spoke to the fish, now speaks to Jonah. What would Jonah do this time?

**1. God's forgiveness (v. 1)**

“**Now the word of the LORD came to Jonah the second time.**” As we have seen, Jonah had been through much for his disobedience. When God came to him the first time, Jonah, even though he was a prophet, was not spiritually prepared to go to Nineveh. So God broke him, crushed him, shattered his pride and prepared his heart. When God comes this second time to Jonah, Jonah is a different man. He is ready to listen and obey.

“**Now the word of the LORD came to Jonah the second time.**” These should be words of great encouragement to us. The Lord had patiently dealt with Jonah, and He now comes to him “**the second time.**” Hear we have evidence of God's forgiveness. O. Palmer Robertson catches the glory in God approaching Jonah again,

How wonderful! God says, Let's go at it again. The wording of this new commission to Jonah is virtually identical with the wording of his original charge. Let's start from the first, says the Lord. Let's forget about the past, and act as though it never happened.<sup>3</sup>

Aren't we glad that God is a God of second chances! How often have we spurned the word of God only to find Him patiently and graciously dealing with us to fulfill His purpose in our lives? And when we repent of our sin, just as Jonah did in chapter 2, then God forgives us. And His forgiveness is full. God forgets our sin. When we come to Him through Christ Jesus our

---

<sup>1</sup> B. H. Carroll, *An Interpretation of the English Bible*, Founders Press, v. 2, *The Prophets of the Assyrian Period*, 33.

<sup>2</sup> R. C. Sproul, *Jonah and Malachi*, CD recording, Feb. 2007, *Tabletalk*.

<sup>3</sup> O. Palmer Robertson, *Jonah: A Study in Compassion*, 42.

Lord and ask forgiveness, He looks at us just as though we never sinned. He holds no grudges against those who humbly come to Him, forsaking their sin and faithfully and obediently follow Him.

God did not condemn Jonah. Discipline him, yes. Get his attention, yes. But he did not hold a grudge against Jonah. Imagine Jonah's delight when he hears from God a second time. Perhaps he thought that he would never hear from God again. Perhaps he thought that is what he deserved. But God's ways are not man's ways. God was preparing Jonah all along for his mission to Nineveh.

Mark Dever agrees with the truth that God is a God of second chances who offers full forgiveness for those who truly repent from their sin and obey God's call. But he is wise to offer this word of wisdom,

This does not mean that we can *presume* upon his grace and mercy in any particular situation. Jonah didn't flee from God knowing that God was going to do remarkable things; but Jonah may not have been terribly surprised either when God did deliver him. He knew that God was merciful and compassionate.<sup>4</sup>

Do you know that tonight? Do you believe that God, who is merciful and compassionate, is ready and willing to forgive all who repent of their sin? May I remind you that doing nothing is not an option. Doing nothing is to disobey just as Jonah's running from Him. Your sin might have stifled your ministry just as it stifled Jonah's. Dear friend, repent of your sin. Spare yourself God's rod of divine discipline. Confess your sin, and He is faithful and just to forgive you your sin, and cleanse you of all unrighteousness! God does not mark iniquities!

## 2. God's instruction (v. 2)

Jonah confessed and was now ready to do God's work. God's instruction, "**Arise, go to Nineveh the great city and proclaim to it the proclamation which I am going to tell you.**" This recommission was virtually word for word the same as God's original commission to Jonah, with one notable exception. God changes the preposition. His original command to Jonah was for him to cry "against" Nineveh. Now he tells him to proclaim "to" Nineveh. Why this little change in prepositions? Palmer Robertson gives great insight here,

It is not that God has changed his mind. Jonah must still begin with the same message of judgment, denouncing their sin. But Jonah's own experience in and out of the belly of the great fish speaks about the possibility of forgiveness, restoration and blessing after divine condemnation. Jonah now is capable of conveying no other message whether he wished to or not. No matter what he says, his life-experience shouts to his hearers, 'Look at me! Forgiveness and restoration are possible even for those who disobey and run away from God.' Instead of preaching exclusively against the city, Jonah's very presence was a message of hope *to* the city.<sup>5</sup>

We that have received forgiveness from God through Jesus Christ are also messages of hope wherever we go. Our commission as believers is the same as that of Jonah, "Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations" (Matt. 28:19), literally, "As you are going." Our lives are to reflect the forgiveness and mercy of God. Our lives, like Jonah's, shout out, "Look at me!" Jonah was now ready to proclaim the message of the Lord in word and in life. Are you ready?

---

<sup>4</sup> Mark Dever, *The Message of the Old Testament: Promises Made*, 778.

<sup>5</sup> Robertson, 43-4.

## II. Jonah's Obedience (3:3-4)

**“So Jonah arose and went to Nineveh according to the word of the LORD.”** You almost wonder if this is the same Jonah from chapter 1. But as we have seen, it is not the same Jonah. He was a different man. He had been changed by God's grace. Phil Newton draws attention to two aspects of Jonah's obedience.

### 1. Jonah's attentiveness

There is a new level of attentiveness in our lives when we know that God has forgiven us. The first time the word of the Lord came to Jonah, he ran. Now, he readily obeys and goes to Nineveh. There were no schemes to get away this time. No ships to Tarshish. He is fully aware that he has the same responsibility. He had changed, but Nineveh was still as wicked as it was when this story began. He knew that he could possibly be put to death for his message. At the very least he perhaps expected great persecution from these pagans. But for Jonah that was better than receiving God's discipline. But then again, that is the purpose of God's discipline. Newton remarks,

When the child of God has been humbled by the disciplining hand of the Lord, he is brought to a new capacity of hearing the Word of God. Previously, there had been plenty of competition for his hearing. All of the noises of the world, personal desires, selfish ambitions, fear of obedience clutter the pathway to submissively hearing the word of the Lord. Have we not all had those times in which we have been so consumed with ourselves and our desires that we really have not paid much attention to what the Scriptures are saying? But when the Lord has afflicted us with merciful discipline we find ourselves tuning out the other noises that have been competing for our attention. We learn to hear what God says through his Word and to bend our hearts in glad obedience to him. The Psalmist agreed, “It is good for me that I was afflicted, that I may learn Thy statutes” (Psa. 119:71).

So for three days Jonah makes his way across Nineveh in obedience to the Lord.

### 2. Jonah's message

Jonah's message would not seem to be very popular with the masses, **“Yet forty days and Nineveh will be overthrown.”** This was certainly not a message you would entitle, “How to Win Friends and Influence People.” But that was not Jonah's purpose. Jonah was simply to be the willing vessel that would obediently deliver the message that God had given him to proclaim. Nothing more, nothing less. And now, he was a willing vessel. Sinclair Ferguson highlights this truth along with God's actions in bringing Jonah to this point the point of willingness,

Jonah was not really fitted to be the evangelist of the Ninevites. He had no comprehension of their condition, nor had he any true sympathy for them.... It is clear, however mysterious it may seem, that God used even the result of Jonah's disobedience to equip him for service.<sup>6</sup>

It is through this process of breaking and humbling, through God's divine discipline, that his servants are made ready and willing vessels to carry His gospel to the world.

---

<sup>6</sup> Sinclair Ferguson, *Man Overboard*, 69.

### III. Jonah's Success (3:5-10)

Jonah's success is seen in the responses to his message.

#### 1. Nineveh's response (v. 5)

**"Then the people of Nineveh believed in God."** Jonah's message, **"Yet forty days and Nineveh will be overthrown."** And their response, they **"believed in God."** I would suggest that Jonah was probably stunned by their response. How could these who had given no thought whatsoever to God believe in God from this simple message of judgment? How could these, who were known haters of God respond so easily?

But that is the power of God in the gospel! Notice that the people believed in God, not Jonah. We too often seem surprised when one we would least expect comes to Christ. Sometimes that keeps us from even carrying them the message. But who are we to determine whether or not a person is prepared to receive the gospel? Palmer Robertson asks,

But why should you be surprised when people come to faith in Christ? Don't you realize that the prouder, the more sinful people are, the more miserable they are? Did God not give his only Son to save sinners? Isn't the Holy Spirit real, causing men to be born again? From the greatest to the least the people of Nineveh believed in God. The down-and-outers alike responded to the message. The gospel is no respecter of persons. It has the power to save the hippies and the yuppies. It speaks equally to the power-brokers of politics as well as the dealers in drugs.<sup>7</sup>

Their repentance is demonstrated by their actions, **"they called a fast and put on sackcloth from the greatest to the least of them."** Fasting and sackcloth were external evidences of repentance. In other words, they proved their belief in God was real and that their repentance was genuine by their actions.

#### 2. The king's response (vv. 6-9)

**Then the word reached the king of Nineveh, he arose from his throne, laid aside his robe from him, covered himself with sackcloth and sat on the ashes.**<sup>7</sup> He issued a proclamation and it said, **"In Nineveh by the decree of the king and his nobles: Do not let man, beast, herd, or flock taste a thing. Do not let them eat or drink water."**<sup>8</sup> **But both man and beast must be covered with sackcloth; and let men call on God earnestly that each may turn from his wicked way and from the violence which is in his hands.**<sup>9</sup> **Who knows, God may turn and relent and withdraw His burning anger so that we will not perish."**

God sends his evangelist into a city that is totally given to paganism from top to bottom, from the highest officials down to the hoi polloi. They're all involved in paganism. They have never heard of this evangelist that comes in and he just starts proclaiming and the words that he proclaims pierce their hearts and they respond in profound repentance... Talk about a revival. Talk about a visitation from almighty God to a pagan nation—here it is. I mean, that's extraordinary. Who would expect if we went to some pagan culture and walked down the street and start proclaiming the Word of God to see everybody respond the way they respond to Jonah there in Nineveh.<sup>8</sup>

---

<sup>7</sup> Robertson, 48-9.

<sup>8</sup> Sproul, *Jonah and Malachi*.

This is both a moral and a spiritual miracle (Carroll, 33).

### 3. God's response (v. 10)

**“When God saw their deeds, that they turned from their wicked way, then God relented concerning the calamity which He had declared He would bring upon them. And He did not do it.”**

#### Relented:

**Psalm 106:44-45** – <sup>44</sup> Nevertheless He looked upon their distress when He heard their cry; <sup>45</sup> and He remembered His covenant for their sake, and *relented* according to the greatness of His lovingkindness.

**Joel 2:13** – Now return to the LORD your God, For He is gracious and compassionate, Slow to anger, abounding in lovingkindness and *relenting* of evil.

**Jeremiah 18:7-8** – <sup>7</sup> At one moment I might speak concerning a nation or concerning a kingdom to uproot, to pull down, or to destroy *it*; <sup>8</sup> if that nation against which I have spoken turns from its evil, I will *relent* concerning the calamity I planned to bring on it.

**Jeremiah 42:10** – If you will indeed stay in this land, then I will build you up and not tear you down, and I will plant you and not uproot you; for I will *relent* concerning the calamity that I have inflicted on you.

#### Changed His mind:

**Exodus 32:14** – So the LORD *changed His mind* about the harm which He said He would do to His people.

**Jeremiah 26:13** – Now therefore amend your ways and your deeds and obey the voice of the LORD your God; and the LORD will *change His mind* about the misfortune which He has pronounced against you.

**Amos 7:3, 6** – <sup>3</sup> The LORD *changed His mind* about this. "It shall not be," said the LORD.

<sup>6</sup> The LORD *changed His mind* about this. "This too shall not be," said the Lord GOD.

#### Repent, sorrow or regret:

**Genesis 6:6** – The LORD was *sorry* that He had made man on the earth, and He was grieved in His heart.

**1 Samuel 15:35** – Samuel did not see Saul again until the day of his death; for Samuel grieved over Saul. And the LORD *regretted* that He had made Saul king over Israel.

**Jeremiah 26:3** – Perhaps they will listen and everyone will turn from his evil way, that I may *repent* of the calamity which I am planning to do to them because of the evil of their deeds.

Surely this indicates, says the open theist, that God planned one thing (namely, judgment) based on the sin and wickedness of Nineveh, but then when he learned that they had repented, God himself “repented” and changes his mind about what he had planned to do. How could God thus change his mind, asks the open theist, if he had

already known exactly what the Ninevites would do? Does this change of mind not indicate that God does not know the entire future?<sup>9</sup>

Clearly, the motif that God changes his mind is not an incidental one in Scripture. It runs throughout the entire biblical narrative and is even exalted as one of his praiseworthy *attributes*. It is very difficult to see how passages such as these can be fairly interpreted if we *assume that the future is exhaustively settled and known by God as such*.<sup>10</sup>

In reply to this objection, it may be stated that these are merely anthropopathic expressions, intended simply to impress upon men his great anger at sin, and his warm approval of the repentance of those who had sinned against him. The change of conduct, in men, not in God, had changed the relation between them and God. Sin had made them liable to his just displeasure. Repentance had brought them within the possibilities of his mercy. *Had he not treated them differently then there would have been change in him*. His very unchangeableness makes it necessary that he shall treat differently those who are innocent and those who are guilty, those who harden themselves against him and those who turn toward him for mercy, with repentant hearts.<sup>11</sup>

**Hosea 11:8** – How can I give you up, O Ephraim? How can I surrender you, O Israel? How can I make you like Admah? How can I treat you like Zeboiim? *My heart is turned over within Me*, all My compassions are kindled.

## Conclusion

1. How merciful is your God?
2. Are you fulfilling your commission?

---

<sup>9</sup> Bruce A. Ware, *Their God Is Too Small*, 17.

<sup>10</sup> Gregory A. Boyd, *God of the Possible*, 85 [italics mine].

<sup>11</sup> James P. Boyce, *Abstract of Systematic Theology*, 76 [italics mine].