

Jonah tried to flee from God's command to go the great, wicked city of Nineveh. Taking a ship in the opposite direction, he thought he escaped, but he did not get far before a storm overtook the ship. The Gentile crew was praying while Jonah slept. Casting lots determined Jonah confessed that he was the problem. Jonah had them throw him into the sea to calm the storm. Seeing the storm cease, the Gentile mariners worshiped the God of Israel. Meanwhile, the Lord had prepared a great fish to swallow Jonah. In chapter two we find that after three days trying to survive within the fish, Jonah finally came to his senses and surrendered to God's will. The fish vomited Jonah up probably somewhere on the coast of what is today Israel or Lebanon. That is where our passage for today begins.

¹ Then the word of the LORD came to Jonah the second time, saying, ² "Arise, go to Nineveh, that great city, and call out against it the message that I tell you." Jonah 3:1,2 This does not mean Jonah only heard from the Lord two times, but rather that the same command from God came to him again for the second time. The wording is very much like chapter one verses one and two. It is a do over. We are back where we started. Jonah took a sin detour. When we disobey God, we often take our own sin detours. We miss the opportunity to lay up treasure in heaven (Matthew 6:19ⁱ). **We substitute an adventure with God for our comfortable normal in which we are in charge.**

"Arise!" Looking back through Scripture, we see it was the beginning of the command of God to Abraham to go and claim the promised land (Genesis 13:17ⁱⁱ). It was the command to Joshua to cross the Jordan and take the promised land (Joshua 1:2ⁱⁱⁱ). Get up; start moving and see what I can do through you! Now Jonah has been awakened spiritually and sees things from heaven's perspective (1 Corinthians 4:18^{iv}). He sees the great mercy of God kept him alive in that fish God appointed. He sees that unlike some people, he has been given a second chance to get up and get things right by obeying God.

The text does not tell us about Jonah's state of mind, standing on the shore covered in fish puke. I know some translations soften the term to spit or spewed, but vomit is an accurate translation. Did he say to himself, "This is a great picture of what we are like to God when we are in sin!"? Was he so traumatized that it took him days to recover his composure? Would he have PTSD dreams the rest of his life? It seems like a reasonable conclusion, but the text does not tell us. I imagine he humbly preached the story many times during his life as a warning to those who would try to flee from God's call on their lives. I can picture him sitting with a group of children who wanted to hear the story from the man who experienced it and Jonah beginning with, "Do you want to know what it is like to run from God when He calls you?" It was probably his signature sermon illustration. **But there are a few more in the last chapters that he would also be known for.**

Second chances do not always come, but they are more likely to come when we are genuinely repentant. That does not mean nothing is lost. The mariners lost their trade goods, Jonah lost the first chance to deny himself and do God's will, and Nineveh experienced three more days of the suffering caused by their sins. More than likely, Jonah lost many good nights of sleep being wakened by dreams of giant fish.

Second chances are not deserved because we repent. They are the gracious gift of God who understands our weaknesses and wants us to spiritually mature (Psalm 103:14^v). He desires our eternal good over our temporary happiness. If that means taking us

through a good scare, He will do so for our eternal good (Romans 8:28^{vi}). It is usually in times of testing and hardship that we seek God with all our heart. Those times are when we pray most earnestly and learn the greatest lessons.

Jonah was getting re-called. We read in Scripture the same was true with Peter. At the last breakfast Jesus told Peter what He had told Him three years before, "Follow me!" (Matthew 4:19^{vii}; John 21:19^{viii}) John Mark abandoned the Apostle Paul in the middle of a mission trip. But near the end of Paul's ministry, he sent for him, saying that he was useful for his ministry (2 Timothy 4:11^{ix}).

But that is not always the case. Adam and Eve did not get a second chance to stay in the Garden of Eden (Genesis 3:24^x). Sin can often irreversibly change our circumstances. When Moses took credit for bringing water out of the rock, he did not get a second chance to enter the promised land (Numbers 20:12^{xi}). A prophet disobeyed the Lord and was killed by a lion (1 Kings 13:26^{xii}). Do not presume that God will give you a second chance. When we realize we have been given a second chance, we should respond with humble gratitude and be more eager than ever to do as He has directed us. That is what we see in this chapter after Jonah's change of heart.

Jonah was to proclaim the message God will give him. Several times in Scripture we read of prophets being asked to prophesy something and they respond by saying that they can only speak what God speaks to them (Numbers 32:25^{xiii}; Jeremiah 1:7^{xiv}; 2 Chronicles 18:13^{xv}). Jesus declared that He not only spoke just what the Father told Him, but even how He was commanded to say it (John 12:49,50^{xvi}). While we may not be called to be a prophet, Jesus' example is one we are all to follow. His invitation to Peter is the same as it is to us: "Follow Me!" That implies being like Him. Yes, it is a tall order, even impossible, but we are to grow ever more like Him until the day we go home and the work is finished (Galatians 4:19^{xvii}; 1 John 3:2^{xviii}). One of those ways is controlling our tongues and speaking what He commands us to speak and do so in the way He would have us say it as well. Control of our tongue is one of the most difficult aspects of our transformation according to James (James 3:2^{xix}).

Jonah did not yet know just what the message was. He knew it was to cry out against it of the evil that had come up before the Lord (1:2^{xx}). But he still does not know exactly what he is to say. He must step out in faith and not worry about it, knowing God will speak it to him at the right time. The same is true for us. We might contemplate what it should be, or what Scriptures apply to the situation, but we should rely on what is given to us at the moment. It is God's message, not the message we come up with.

This brings to mind the call to Abraham. God called him to leave his people and family and go to a land that God would show him (Genesis 12:1^{xxi}). God did not say where that land was, but just gave him a general direction. Abraham did not need to know. Faith pleases God (Hebrews 11:6^{xxii}). Abraham went by faith. That is what we are to do.

In preparing a sermon, I ask for God to inspire me with His message. When I finish the first draft, I go through it and ask God to show me what was of me so I can edit it out. Then I ask Him to add anything He wants. Finally, when I deliver it, I ask again, that as I am speaking to add or delete what He wills. Some pastors do not prepare ahead and say they are relying on the Holy Spirit. But that can be laziness if they are preaching on a passage of Scripture. We are told to study like a workman to rightly interpret the Word of truth (2 Timothy 2:15^{xxiii}). Others just read other pastors' sermons and

paraphrase them. It may be good material, it may add to what needs to be shared, but if it is not God's emphasis for that congregation at that particular time, it will not have the full effect that it could have had the pastor spent time with the Lord to hear what He would say. But please do not get the idea this is only for preaching. It is for our daily lives. God wants to direct us if we will just take the time to ask and listen for the answer. We daily operate by faith in what the Word has declared, but we should also be sensitive to anything the Lord may direct us to do as we go through our days.

³ *So Jonah arose and went to Nineveh, according to the word of the LORD. Now Nineveh was an exceedingly great city, three days' journey in breadth.* Jonah 3:3 Jonah made that month long journey in obedience to the call of God. The Hebrew reads, "an exceeding great city to God." I do not think that means God was impressed by it, but that he cared about the multitude that lived within it and the suffering they were enduring because of sin (4:11^{xxiv}). We have hints like this throughout the Old Testament that God loves all of mankind.

"Three days journey in breadth" in Hebrew is simply "three days walk." It certainly took more than three days to get there. ESV implies it would take three days to walk from one side to the other. It is more likely that it means that it would take Jonah three days of walking to deliver his message so that the message would go throughout the city. Historians believe the city circumference was 55 to 60 miles including the greater metropolitan areas. Verse 11^{xxv} of the next chapter tells us the population was 120,000. Archeologists tell us that the walled circumference of the city proper was about eight miles. The hundred-foot-high walls with a top wide enough for three chariots to run side by side would have been quite imposing.

⁴ *Jonah began to go into the city, going a day's journey. And he called out, "Yet forty days, and Nineveh shall be overthrown!"* Jonah 3:4 Jonah took one whole day's walk into the city and began to cry out his message the Lord gave him. "Yet forty days, and Nineveh shall be overthrown!" The forty-day warning implied that was all the time they had to repent (Jeremiah 18:7,8^{xxvi}). The fact that there is a time period given implies there is only that much time to repent. The LXX renders this "three days." If that was the case it would add to the urgency of the message.

Jonah probably spoke in Aramaic, the language of the people. There may have been more to the message, but that was the essence of it. The word overthrown was the same word that described what God did to Sodom and Gomorrah (Genesis 19:25^{xxvii}).

We do not know if Jonah spoke of the experience in the great fish. It may have reinforced his message if he did. But in either case, it was the Holy Spirit that brought conviction that he was speaking for God (1 Thessalonians 2:13^{xxviii}).

⁵ *And the people of Nineveh believed God. They called for a fast and put on sackcloth, from the greatest of them to the least of them.* Jonah 3:5 The conviction of the Holy Spirit helped them to believe God. When we hear the Word of God and receive the truth of it, we are believing God. Actions follow.

They called for a fast and put on sackcloth, throughout every status in the culture, the elites to the slaves. Sackcloth was a coarse dark cloth made with goat or camel hair. It symbolized sorrow or repentance. Here are these brutal people of whom Jonah had no hope for them showing genuine remorse and fully believing God. But they responded much better than Israel did to many of their prophets. They responded more readily than Jonah did to the call to go to Nineveh.

It reminds me of Jesus' condemnation of his ministry triangle. Matthew 11:20-21 *20 Then he began to denounce the cities where most of his mighty works had been done, because they did not repent. 21 "Woe to you, Chorazin! Woe to you, Bethsaida! For if the mighty works done in you had been done in Tyre and Sidon, they would have repented long ago in sackcloth and ashes.* When we look closely at Jesus' teaching, we can see His concern for the world. During His first year of ministry, He went to Samaria. During the last year to the Decapolis. He healed the child of the woman of Sidon and the Centurion's servant. He taught there were many sheep that were not of this sheepfold, meaning non-Jews (John 10:16^{xxix}).

Jesus' ministry was mostly to the Jews up until the last year of His ministry. He knew the religious pride and false teaching had hardened many Jewish hearts. He could foresee faith in Him being spread throughout the world, or as He said in Acts 1:8, *"to the uttermost parts of the earth."* He knew that in areas without a strong religious indoctrination His message of repentance and forgiveness would find hearts longing for the message and accept it as the very Word of God. Jonah's experience was a forerunner of what was to come. But it was also a condemnation of Israel. Jesus used the Ninevites' repentance to remind the Jews of their need for it. Luke 11:32 *32 The men of Nineveh will rise up at the judgment with this generation and condemn it, for they repented at the preaching of Jonah, and behold, something greater than Jonah is here.*

Jesus also preached, *"Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand."* Matthew 3:2 The coming of the kingdom is a time of judgment. The prophets warned Israel that their desire for the Day of the Lord was ignorant of their own need for repentance (Amos 5:18^{xxx}). This is why we read of Paul telling the Corinthians to examine their hearts to see if they are in the faith (2 Corinthians 13:5^{xxxi}). We ask for Jesus' return, but if we have not placed our faith in Him and what He did for us it will be what Amos warned Israel, *"darkness and not light."*

I remember a quote I had heard about the coming judgment of God on America attributed to Billy Graham. After some research I found out it originated with his wife Ruth. Billy Graham *had just finished a chapter vividly describing the sinful conditions in America, and gave it to Ruth to read. She was very much sobered by the writing and returned the document to the study where he was writing and laid it on his desk, saying, "Billy, if God doesn't come soon and bring judgment upon the United States, He's going to have to apologize to Sodom and Gomorrah!"* (Relayed by James Kennedy).

I wonder if the words that God would put in the mouth of a modern-day Jonah would be like those He gave to Jonah of old. How many days does the United States have? Would a modern-day Jonah give us a time frame, or would he say we are already being destroyed from within? America is the number one exporter of pornography, the greatest consumers of illicit drugs and sex trafficking, politicians' greed and corruption is evident. Many of our big cities are in total moral decay. Some are like a war zone as gangs fight over turf. Our churches are splitting over acceptance of the Word of God. Crimes go unpunished, and the truth is hard to find. I do not mean to frighten you, but we do need to be honest about the degeneration of the nation and stand up against it, walk the walk, and plead with God for revival.

God always holds us accountable for what we know. That is always a factor in His justice. Jesus emphasizes this in Luke 12. *41 Peter said, "Lord, are you telling this parable for us or for all?" 42 And the Lord said, "Who then is the faithful and wise*

manager, whom his master will set over his household, to give them their portion of food at the proper time? ⁴³ Blessed is that servant whom his master will find so doing when he comes. ⁴⁴ Truly, I say to you, he will set him over all his possessions. ⁴⁵ But if that servant says to himself, 'My master is delayed in coming,' and begins to beat the male and female servants, and to eat and drink and get drunk, ⁴⁶ the master of that servant will come on a day when he does not expect him and at an hour he does not know, and will cut him in pieces and put him with the unfaithful. ⁴⁷ And that servant who knew his master's will but did not get ready or act according to his will, will receive a severe beating. ⁴⁸ But the one who did not know, and did what deserved a beating, will receive a light beating. Everyone to whom much was given, of him much will be required, and from him to whom they entrusted much, they will demand the more. Luke 12:41-48

The Ninevites only knew that their barbaric behavior had come to the attention of God and was about to be judged if they did not repent. The Uratu and their allies had conquered within 100 miles of the north of Nineveh, which may have added to the urgency of the message. The rest of the chapter tells us how seriously they did repent. That is the subject of next week's message. What would it look like if the Holy Spirit brought conviction to our nation? What if everything stopped for a month as people were on their knees weeping for the hardness of their hearts and over how far the nation has fallen. We have nations threatening to destroy us like they did. We should be pouring out our hearts to God and acting according to God's will to see that the nation realizes where we are headed without Jesus.

The effect of the Day of the Lord on our own lives will depend on our relationship with Jesus. The judgment on nations depends on each nation's relationship with God. May God have mercy on us. May we become brighter lights in a nation that seems to be slipping into darkness. May we always be ready to give an answer to the hope that lies in us with gentleness and respect (1 Peter 3:15^{xxxiii}).

Some people are of the opinion that we have fallen too far, that we have already squandered our second chance. But when I read of revivals of the past, that seemed to be the same mood in their day. Only God knows the answer. But for you and me personally, I believe that as long as we have breath, we can always turn to the Lord with all our hearts and ask for Him to revive us again. May our heart cry for our nation and ourselves be the words of the psalmist. ⁶ *Will you not revive us again, that your people may rejoice in you?* Psalm 85:6

Questions:

- 1 Review the key events to this point in Jonah.
- 2 Where did we see verse 1 and 2 before? Implication?
- 3 What is the faith aspect of the command?
- 4 Give examples of second chances and not getting them.
- 5 How far away was Nineveh? Describe Nineveh.
- 6 What words did God give Jonah to speak?
- 7 How does it imply repentance?
- 8 What was Nineveh's response?
- 9 What do you think of Ruth Graham's statement?
- 10 What can we do about our nation's condition?

ⁱ **Matthew 6:19-20 (ESV)**

¹⁹ “Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal, ²⁰ but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys and where thieves do not break in and steal.

ⁱⁱ **Genesis 13:17 (ESV)**

¹⁷ Arise, walk through the length and the breadth of the land, for I will give it to you.”

ⁱⁱⁱ **Joshua 1:2 (ESV)**

² “Moses my servant is dead. Now therefore arise, go over this Jordan, you and all this people, into the land that I am giving to them, to the people of Israel.

^{iv} **2 Corinthians 4:18 (ESV)**

¹⁸ as we look not to the things that are seen but to the things that are unseen. For the things that are seen are transient, but the things that are unseen are eternal.

^v **Psalms 103:14 (ESV)**

¹⁴ For he knows our frame; he remembers that we are dust.

^{vi} **Romans 8:28 (ESV)**

²⁸ And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose.

^{vii} **Matthew 4:19 (ESV)**

¹⁹ And he said to them, “Follow me, and I will make you fishers of men.”

^{viii} **John 21:19 (ESV)**

¹⁹ (This he said to show by what kind of death he was to glorify God.) And after saying this he said to him, “Follow me.”

^{ix} **2 Timothy 4:11 (ESV)**

¹¹ Luke alone is with me. Get Mark and bring him with you, for he is very useful to me for ministry.

^x **Genesis 3:24 (ESV)**

²⁴ He drove out the man, and at the east of the garden of Eden he placed the cherubim and a flaming sword that turned every way to guard the way to the tree of life.

^{xi} **Numbers 20:12 (ESV)**

¹² And the LORD said to Moses and Aaron, “Because you did not believe in me, to uphold me as holy in the eyes of the people of Israel, therefore you shall not bring this assembly into the land that I have given them.”

^{xii} **1 Kings 13:26 (ESV)**

²⁶ And when the prophet who had brought him back from the way heard of it, he said, “It is the man of God who disobeyed the word of the LORD; therefore the LORD has given him to the lion, which has torn him and killed him, according to the word that the LORD spoke to him.”

^{xiii} **Numbers 32:25 (ESV)**

²⁵ And the people of Gad and the people of Reuben said to Moses, “Your servants will do as my lord commands.

^{xiv} **Jeremiah 1:7 (ESV)**

⁷ But the LORD said to me, “Do not say, ‘I am only a youth’; for to all to whom I send you, you shall go, and whatever I command you, you shall speak.

^{xv} **2 Chronicles 18:13 (ESV)**

¹³ But Micaiah said, “As the LORD lives, what my God says, that I will speak.”

^{xvi} **John 12:49-50 (ESV)**

⁴⁹ For I have not spoken on my own authority, but the Father who sent me has himself given me a commandment— what to say and what to speak. ⁵⁰ And I know that his commandment is eternal life. What I say, therefore, I say as the Father has told me.”

^{xvii} **Galatians 4:19 (ESV)**

¹⁹ my little children, for whom I am again in the anguish of childbirth until Christ is formed in you!

^{xviii} **1 John 3:2 (ESV)**

² Beloved, we are God’s children now, and what we will be has not yet appeared; but we know that when he appears we shall be like him, because we shall see him as he is.

^{xix} **James 3:2 (ESV)**

² For we all stumble in many ways. And if anyone does not stumble in what he says, he is a perfect man, able also to bridle his whole body.

^{xx} **Jonah 1:2 (ESV)**

² “Arise, go to Nineveh, that great city, and call out against it, for their evil has come up before me.”

^{xxi} **Genesis 12:1 (ESV)**

¹ Now the LORD said to Abram, “Go from your country and your kindred and your father’s house to the land that I will show you.

^{xxii} **Hebrews 11:6 (ESV)**

⁶ And without faith it is impossible to please him, for whoever would draw near to God must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who seek him.

^{xxiii} **2 Timothy 2:15 (ESV)**

¹⁵ Do your best to present yourself to God as one approved, a worker who has no need to be ashamed, rightly handling the word of truth.

^{xxiv} **Jonah 4:11 (ESV)**

¹¹ And should not I pity Nineveh, that great city, in which there are more than 120,000 persons who do not know their right hand from their left, and also much cattle?”

^{xxv} **Jonah 4:11 (ESV)**

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^{xxvi} **Jeremiah 18:7-8 (ESV)**

⁷ If at any time I declare concerning a nation or a kingdom, that I will pluck up and break down and destroy it, ⁸ and if that nation, concerning which I have spoken, turns from its evil, I will relent of the disaster that I intended to do to it.

^{xxvii} **Genesis 19:25 (ESV)**

²⁵ And he overthrew those cities, and all the valley, and all the inhabitants of the cities, and what grew on the ground.

^{xxviii} **1 Thessalonians 2:13 (ESV)**

¹³ And we also thank God constantly for this, that when you received the word of God, which you heard from us, you accepted it not as the word of men but as what it really is, the word of God, which is at work in you believers.

^{xxix} **John 10:16 (ESV)**

¹⁶ And I have other sheep that are not of this fold. I must bring them also, and they will listen to my voice. So there will be one flock, one shepherd.

^{xxx} **Amos 5:18 (ESV)**

¹⁸ Woe to you who desire the day of the LORD! Why would you have the day of the LORD? It is darkness, and not light,

^{xxxi} **2 Corinthians 13:5 (ESV)**

⁵ Examine yourselves, to see whether you are in the faith. Test yourselves. Or do you not realize this about yourselves, that Jesus Christ is in you?—unless indeed you fail to meet the test!

^{xxxii} **1 Peter 3:15 (ESV)**

¹⁵ but in your hearts honor Christ the Lord as holy, always being prepared to make a defense to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you; yet do it with gentleness and respect,