



“The Gospel and Faith”  
Jonah 3:1-5

**Idea:** God desires for sinners to be forgiven and transformed, but they must first believe in Jesus and what He purchased for them.

**Intro:** Where were you when the world stopped turning? This question is the title and opening line in Alan Jackson’s famous country song he wrote to commemorate and remember the feelings that he and all Americans felt on the morning of 9/11. Like many of us, Alan Jackson watched that terrible morning unfold on the television screen. Yesterday, we, as a nation, honored the 2,977 Americans who got up and went to work on what they thought would be another normal Tuesday morning. Unfortunately, four jetliners were hijacked by Al-Qaeda terrorists who had declared jihad against the United States, and they turned them into instruments of mass murder. Those jetliners were intentionally flown into the twin towers of the World Trade Center in New York City, into the Pentagon in Washington D.C., and one that was most likely intended for the White House. Thankfully, the fourth jetliner was commandeered by very brave Americans who were able to keep the plane from crashing into its target. In any event, all of the people on all of those planes died. And in the cases of the three that did hit buildings, particularly the Twin Towers of the World Trade Center in New York City, it caused massive death. Americans will forever live with those images that we saw live.

That dark day twenty years ago reminded us that evil is a reality, which we must never forget exists in our world. Dr. Albert Mohler, discussed this on Friday in his daily podcast called “The Briefing.” He said, “...in the years preceding September 11, 2001, Americans had begun to buy into the idea of a universal peace, of an age of global reason in which peace would prevail because reasonable people operating on the basis of instrumental reason would be able to work out conflicts in such a way that war could be avoided.” He shared how the background for this belief was built upon the teaching of the Enlightenment philosophers of the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries. The German philosopher Immanuel Kant was in many ways the leading voice of the Enlightenment. His book entitled, *Perpetual Peace: A Philosophical Sketch* placed confidence in human nature and human reason, which they saw could and would bring an end to any kind of armed conflict or violence when it came to the relations between states. This reality could be achieved so long as the states had a basically little “R” republican structure of government, and so long as they were at least inclined toward democracy. They argued that this kind of perpetual peace was possible so long as they were modern nation states and were ruled by or governed by people who would operate in the age of reason.

This belief and philosophical aspiration seemed to be proving right prior to 9/11. After all, the world had witnessed the ending of the Cold War, the breakup of the former Soviet Union, and the destruction of the Berlin

Wall that unified Germany under a democratic and unified government. It is interesting that while many recognized and rejoiced over these achievements, they glossed over the events of the 20<sup>th</sup> century that made it the bloodiest century in human history. The truth is that while it may have seemed humanity was evolving into something better and more peaceful, the reality was humanity still possessed the same propensities for evil as before.

We dare not forget what the Bible says about people. All people “*are under sin*” (Rom 3:9). None is righteous. No one seeks God. They are deceitful, hateful, murderous, and war against God and one another (Rom 3:10-118). This evil condition is the experience of every heart that has not been redeemed by the cross of Christ. It is the condition of every person in rebellion against God. The prophet Jonah was fully aware of the evil in the world. He possessed a keen understanding of the evil the Ninevites had inflicted upon his people. Therefore, when God called him to go and preach against their sin, he decided to reject the order because they might hear, repent, and be forgiven. Jonah wanted them to experience wrath rather than grace, so he fled.

He went down to Joppa, chartered a ship, and stepped down into it to flee to Tarshish from the presence of the Lord. As the ship sails away, God hurls a great storm after it. He is going to get the attention of his wayward prophet. While the storm is raging outside, Jonah is asleep inside the cabin below the deck. The sailors are scared to death as the ship threatens to rip apart, but God’s man is numb to the whole affair. When he is awakened by the captain, the storm is not surprising to him. He knows it was sent by God and the result of his choices. He also knows how to quiet it down. The solution he offered was his own life. If the sailors would throw him over board, the storm would cease. He would rather die than preach to his enemies. After attempting their own action plan, the sailors followed Jonah’s instruction and cast him into the sea. Immediately, the sea ceased its raging.

Jonah can only tread water for so long. Eventually, he begins to sink into the deep. His desire for death rather than obedience to the call is quickly replaced with despair. In his affliction he calls out to God in repentance and faith, and God appoints a fish to swallow him. As we looked at Jonah’s repentance last Sunday, we were reminded that the Lord specializes in the impossible and improbable. His mercy can and will reach down to the very depths of despair to raise up those who will repent of sin. It may feel like you are a million miles away from the Lord and dead to the things of God, but you are only one prayer away. The Lord desires to step in, rescue, and raise you to life again. Jonah was raised up and put back in service. Today, we see through Jonah’s message of judgment to the people of Nineveh that God desires for sinners to be forgiven and transformed, but they must first believe in Jesus and what He purchased for them.

Read Jonah 3:1-5.

**Inquiry:** The word of the Lord came to Jonah a second time. His experience was unique. There are no other stories in the Bible or in history of people being swallowed by a fish in order for them to repent of sin and come back to God. However, the principles behind the uniqueness of this story are seen in all of our lives. More than likely, many of us are only here today and in the service of the Lord because the word of the Lord came a second time.

God graciously reemploys the prophet. He again commands him to go to Nineveh and call out against it. The revival birthed in Jonah’s heart will result in a mighty spiritual awakening taking place in Nineveh. God will use his experience to bring about this desired outcome. According to Sinclair Ferguson, “God intends to bring life out of death.”

The city of Nineveh “*was an exceedingly great city.*” It is described this way four different times in the book. Archeologists affirm the Bible’s assessment of the city. It was great in history, having been founded by Noah’s great-grandson Nimrod (Gen 10:8-10). It was also great in size. The city stretched for eight miles, and including its suburbs had a circumference of sixty miles. The metroplex could have had a population of 600,000 people. It was great in splendor and influence as one of the leading cities of the powerful Assyrian

Empire. Nineveh was also great in sin. The people were known for their violence. They showed no mercy toward their enemies by often impaling them alive on sharp poles to die a slow death in the desert sun. They beheaded thousands and piled their skulls in heaps and even skinned people alive. They also would often kill babies and children who were not wanted.

This is the people to which Jonah was commissioned to go and preach, and he did just that. It would normally take a person three days to navigate through the entire city. Jonah begins his assignment. He spends his first day preaching a message of judgment. What we read in the text is in Hebrew a five-word sermon. We do not know if this was the extent of the message or a summarization. Somehow, in an unrecorded parenthesis, footnote, or logical reasoning processes, the Ninevites also heard the words: "And it is going to be at the hand of God. He is the One who sent me here and who is going to destroy you." Jonah preaches judgment from the God of Israel to the pagan idolaters of Nineveh, and they believed God. From the greatest to the least, they turned to God in faith. Why? Did they see something in Jonah? Was he discolored from the fish's belly? Had they heard about Jonah's experience before he even arrived? We can only speculate. What we do know is that God used Jonah's experience to reinforce His Word, and the people believed it.

This is the work of the gospel. God desires to see sinners forgiven of their sins and transformed. He wants them to turn from evil things and live righteously for His glory. He wants sinners to recognize their brokenness and how sin has separated them far from God, and He wants them to by faith turn to Him through Jesus Christ. This is the gospel...that Jesus died, was buried, and was raised to life again so that sinners can be forgiven and redeemed from sin.

The transformation that took place among the evil people of Nineveh is nothing short of amazing. I want us to look at this miracle today and next Sunday through the lens of the gospel. Today, let's look at it from the perspective of the gospel and faith. Then next Sunday, we will look at it from the perspective of the gospel and repentance. Both are needed in salvation. As we think about the gospel and faith, we discover that...

## **1. The God of the Bible is on mission, seeking to save sinners.**

Read Jonah 3:2.

The day Jonah arrived in Nineveh, the citizens of the city going about their normal routines. They were wicked and living in rebellion against the God who created them, yet they probably gave very little thought to how they were living. Little did they know that their day would end much different than it began. They would hear words from a foreigner that would turn their world upside down. They would go to bed that night on tear-stained and prayer-saturated pillows because God got hold of their hearts.

The preaching against sin and the subsequent repentance and faith reveal to us that our God is on mission. He absolutely desires to seek and save sinners, and we know this to be true. Jesus, Himself, described His mission as not one focused on religiously righteous people. He is not satisfied to just be in relationship with an isolated few. Instead, He came to seek and save the lost (Luke 19:10). His eyes are on the peoples of the world (John 3:16). The apostle Paul explains God's heart for all people in Romans.

Read Romans 10:11-16.

Paul makes it abundantly clear that the God of the Bible is not exclusively the God and Redeemer of the people of Israel. He is seeking out everyone, whether Jew or Greek. And He seeks them out by sending believers to tell them the gospel. He sends believers to sinners so they will hear the truth about themselves and about God. God is on mission doing what we would consider the improbable and impossible.

As we think about the gospel and faith, we discover that...

## 2. The God of the Bible justly judges sin.

Read Jonah 3:4.

Jonah's message does not seem to have been a detailed apologetic proving the existence of Israel's God over and above the idols of Nineveh. Instead, it is rather simplistic, explaining only the judgment of God on sin. Why do we so often want to leave out judgment in our preaching of the gospel? I remember several years ago watching a famous TV preacher on Larry King Live. Larry asked this preacher if the lifestyle of homosexuals was sinful and punished by God. He would not venture anywhere near the Bible's description of that lifestyle. He would not call it sinful.

Conversely, the Bible never shrinks back from calling sinful things sin. In fact, it clearly expresses the just judgment of Holy God against sin.

*For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who by their unrighteousness suppress the truth. – Rom 1:18*

*<sup>9</sup>Or do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived: neither the sexually immoral, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor men who practice homosexuality, <sup>10</sup>nor thieves, nor the greedy, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor swindlers will inherit the kingdom of God. <sup>11</sup>And such were some of you. But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God. – 1 Cor 6:9-11*

As we have said throughout this study of Jonah, God never glosses over sin. He rightly points it out and judges it. The Ninevites were never going to get away with their rebellion and wickedness. God saw their sin and the condemnation it placed over their lives. He judged them. In the same way, God sees our sin and its condemnation, and He judges it. Thankfully, He has also made a way to be forgiven of sin. Did you catch what Paul coupled with God's judgment of sin in 1 Corinthians 6? In verse 11, he said, *“And such were some of you. But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God.”*

Like the Ninevites, we need to recognize God's judgment on our sin and believe what He says about it. As we think about the gospel and faith, we discover that...

## 3. The God of the Bible redeems sinners who by faith believe His Word.

Read Jonah 3:5.

The Ninevites believed God about their sinful condition. They did not dismiss it. They owned it. Surely, Jonah expressed to them something that gave them hope that the Lord would forgive and redeem, so they expressed that hope in repentance. They believed in God's grace and longsuffering and by faith turned to Him.

It may seem that sinners are beyond the grace of God, but that is never the case. No one can sin themselves beyond His reach. I hope you see in the story of Jonah's preaching in Nineveh that the God of the Bible stands ready to forgive and restore sinful people. Again, He specializes in the impossible and improbable. God's mercy can and will reach down to the very depths of despair to raise up those who turn to Him in faith. It may feel like you are a million miles away from the Lord. The reality is, you are. In fact, you are dead to the things of God, but you are only one prayer away.

*<sup>9</sup>because, if you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. <sup>10</sup>For with the heart one believes and is justified, and with the mouth one confesses and is saved. – Rom 10:9-10*

The God of the Bible will redeem your life if you will believe what He says about your sin and by faith believe on Him for the forgiveness of that sin. We are justified, made right before God, not by our good works. We have none. We are made right by Christ's good work on our behalf on the cross. Have you trusted in it?

As a Christian, are you sharing this message with others? How often do you preach it to family, friends, coworkers, and classmates? Are you committed to taking this message to the nations? Will we like Jonah go to people who are far from God and tell them the Good News?

**Conclusion:** Where were you when the world stopped turning? I vividly remember the events of 9/11. On that day, I buried my grandmother and watched the unleashing of evil upon our country. It reminds me of two things: the presence of evil and the consequences of it. Thankfully, God has overcome the evil and made a way for forgiveness.

God is in the business of raising broken people out of the despair of sin. He does that in salvation. Today, if you have never surrendered your life to Jesus and trusted Him as your Lord and Savior, what is keeping you from doing that? Like the Ninevites, turn from your sin and place your faith in Jesus. He will change your life.

God also sends His children on mission with this message of salvation. Are you sharing it? Who do you need to share it with today?

What is keeping you from rising and coming to Jesus?

Good news: God loves you. He created you and desires to know you.

Bad news: You are a sinner in rebellion against your Creator.

Best news: God has done everything necessary to justly deal with your sin and bring forgiveness and restoration to your life. Today, He calls you to turn from your sin and self and turn to Him as Savior and Lord. Have you received forgiveness in Christ?