



“The Gospel and Repentance”
Jonah 3:6-10

Idea: God desires for sinners to be forgiven and transformed, but they must first believe the gospel and turn from their sin.

Intro: We have a wonderful Savior! His name is Jesus, and the very fact that Scripture refers to Him as a Savior means there is something from which to be saved. There is a danger threatening us, and the Bible reveals the danger to be the judgment of God upon our sin and rebellion. You see, humanity has made war on God, and He will justly deal the wickedness of each and every person. Thankfully, God is patient and merciful. He would rather see sinners turn from their wickedness and experience forgiveness than face the fiery judgment they deserve. The apostle Peter explains the patience and mercy of God to believers who were facing tremendous persecution for their faith (2 Peter). They wondered about the justice of God and why their persecutors seemed to be thriving. He reminded them of the coming judgment, while also reminding them of God’s heart for sinners.

⁸But do not overlook this one fact, beloved, that with the Lord one day is as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day. ⁹The Lord is not slow to fulfill his promise as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, not wishing that any should perish, but that all should reach repentance. ¹⁰But the day of the Lord will come like a thief, and then the heavens will pass away with a roar, and the heavenly bodies will be burned up and dissolved, and the earth and the works that are done on it will be exposed. – 2 Peter 3:8-10

Judgment is coming! This message is what Jonah was sent to deliver to the people in Nineveh (Jonah 1:2), and it would have been a message he would have happily delivered. The prophet possessed a keen understanding of the evil the Ninevites had inflicted upon his people, but he also had an acute perspective of God’s mercy. 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. We have seen in Jonah's repentance how 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 the gospel and turn from their sin.

Read Jonah 3:6-10.

Inquiry: The word that reached the king was the warning of judgment. The Ninevites were in spiritual danger, and Jonah was fully aware of what it was like to experience the judgment of God. Jonah obeyed the second call to go to Nineveh (3:1) because he had learned that obedience is always the best option. At the same time, I believe Jonah's heart, at least for the moment, had softened toward the Ninevites. The preaching of judgment came from a place of love rather than hate. Is this not what we see in the preaching of the gospel? Sinclair Ferguson has said it well, "To warn men of the judgment to come is the only course that biblically instructed love can take." It is the reason we would shout out a warning or reach out and grab a person who is too close to the edge of a cliff. It is the only loving thing to do. This is how Jonah felt. He felt an obligation to warn the residents of Nineveh and do everything he could to rescue them from the disaster that was coming. When it comes to the preaching of the gospel in our own lives, we too must feel the same obligation. Ferguson again makes a strong point. He says, "It is unlikely others will be convinced of their danger if we are not convinced of it."

Do you believe that "*the wages of sin is death?*" Do you believe that sinners will rightly experience a devil's hell for all eternity? Are you convinced this judgment is just and the future of all people who reject God's gracious gift of salvation through Jesus Christ? The Ninevites believed it. From the greatest to the least, they heard and heeded Jonah's simple warning (3:5). The transformation that took place is nothing short of amazing. Eric Redmond offers an incredible perspective on it. He says:

"The great king of this great city who sits on a great throne and who is wearing robes of royalty one-minute looks like an insignificant nobody who is mourning and sitting in ashes another minute. The Lord's message has made this great statesman, who is part of an empire that is ruling the world, understand that even he must humble himself before God."

The king turns from his evil and cries out to God. He also commands every person in the kingdom along with their animals to cover themselves with sackcloth, fast, turn from their evil, and cry out to God for mercy. He and the people were so moved by the preaching of judgment that they by faith believed it and turned from the sin. They turned toward God. We then read in verse 10 the beauty of the gospel. The Lord relented of His judgment and forgave their sin.

Last week we began looking at this miracle through the lens of the gospel. We examined the element of faith in the work of the gospel. Today, let's look at it from the perspective of the gospel and repentance. Both are needed in salvation. Sinners must turn to God in faith, but they also must turn from their sin. This turning is what we refer to as repentance. It is a change in direction. Repentance involves...

1. An awareness of sin.

Read Jonah 3:6, 8.

The day Jonah arrived in Nineveh, the king and citizens of the city were 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 king in all his glory realized that he was undone. He saw his sin for what it was...an abomination before Almighty God. The Holy Spirit of God had illuminated the king's heart and mind through Jonah's preaching. Before this day, the king had never considered his sin and subsequent rebellion against the God of Heaven. The thought of judgment and eternal damnation was not on his radar. He was enjoying the benefits of his sin. Then, in a moment everything changed. His eyes were opened to his evil ways. He was appalled and devastated over his sin. He fully knew the wrath of God he deserved.

Awareness of sin is what the gospel brings to us. On the day of Pentecost when the Holy Spirit descended and Peter preached the gospel, the people present in that moment became aware of their sin.

Read Acts 2:37-38.

Their hearts were arrested. They became aware of the sin that separated them from God. In that moment of revelation, they asked Peter and the disciples what they needed to do. They needed to turn from their sin and turn to Jesus Christ. The gospel demands that we be aware of our sin. You cannot be saved if you do not first know you are lost. You cannot repent of sin if you cannot see it.

2. Contrition over the sin.

Read Jonah 3:6.

Contrition is the state of feeling remorseful and penitent. It is a strong emotional response of regret, shame, and despair over sin.

Read Luke 18:10-13.

The tax collector felt the weight of his sin before Holy God. He was broken over his sinful life. The same thing took place in those present at Pentecost. *"They were cut to the heart"* (Acts 2:37). Those present in Jerusalem were overwhelmed by their sinfulness. You cannot repent of sin if you do not feel the sting of the separation it has caused between you and God.

3. Agreement about sin.

Read Jonah 3:8-9.

The king and the Ninevites believed God about their sinful condition. They did not dismiss it. They owned it. They called it what it was...evil. They did not make excuses. They did not try to blame others. They agreed with God about their sin.

"I am a sinner. I am an idolater. I am an adulterer. I am an alcoholic. I am a thief. I am running from God. I live for money and pleasure. I am religious but not godly. I am consumed with evil. I place my hope in myself." These are the things we must own up to and agree with God about. Repentance by definition is the turning from our sin and turning to God. This is exactly what the king and the people did in Jonah 3.

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. As we have said the past few weeks, the Lord 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 and repentance. 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.

And Peter said to them, "Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins, and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit." – Acts 2:38

The God of the Bible will redeem your life if you will believe what He says about your sin, by faith believe on Him for the forgiveness of that sin, and in faith turn from your sin.

Conclusion: The gospel is an incredible message! It is a message that says no matter who you are or what you have done, you can be forgiven and transformed. 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.

Perhaps, you are a Christian who is walking at a guilty distance. In a lot of ways, your life resembles Jonah's life when he was on the run. That is a dangerous and miserable way to live, and you know it very well. What is keeping you from coming home? What is keeping you from turning from whatever sin you are holding onto and receiving Christ's forgiveness and restoration?

God also sends His children on mission with this message of salvation. As a Christian, are you sharing this message with others? How often do you preach it to family, friends, coworkers, neighbors, 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?

What is the Lord calling you to do today?

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?