

# Jonah 3

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Date: 18 May 2024

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[0:00] Please do turn back to Jonah 3, Jonah chapter 3 on page 775. We've seen so far that the book of Jonah is not really about a big fish.

! It's about God's mercy. In chapter 1, God has mercy on the sailors by sparing their lives. In chapter 2, God has mercy on Jonah by saving him from darkness and death.

And then the fish spits him back up onto dry land. And today, we begin with even more mercy. Look at verse 1. Then the word of the Lord came to Jonah the second time.

Jonah is living his second chance. Another life. God has not abandoned him in his sin. God has not let him run.

God did not see Jonah's first failure and give up on him. No, God persisted. Though Jonah was running, God's grace and his mercy would not stop following Jonah.

[1:13] And we see the fruit of that here. Jonah is standing in God's mercy on dry land. A new life. And God even continues to use Jonah.

Look what God says to him. Verse 2. Arise, go to Nineveh. That great city and call out against it the message that I tell you. God doesn't say, Jonah, you've sinned too much.

I can't use you anymore. He doesn't say, I can't. I'm done with you now. No, he says, arise. Go and preach and tell Nineveh about me.

I want to use you, Jonah. And it's the same message he was meant to preach before. Call out against their evil. He's sending Jonah on the same preaching mission to the big city of Nineveh. Now, Nineveh was the main hub of the Assyrian Empire. And the Assyrians were Israel's big enemies. They were a brutal nation. And so God is saying, Jonah, go into the heart of the enemy and preach.

[2:30] This is like an English preacher in 1940 being told, go to Berlin and preach against the Nazis. Call out against their evil and tell them about me.

And look how Jonah responds to this task. It's so refreshing. Verse 3. So Jonah arose and went to Nineveh according to the word of the Lord.

There's not, but Jonah went the other direction. No. So Jonah arose. God's discipline in Jonah's life has worked.

The storm and the death and the darkness that has all been in Jonah's life, it's all been for a reason. It's all brought Jonah to this wonderful point right now.

It's brought him to obedience. God has made him a new man. But now Jonah has a hard task. Jonah may be out of the darkness.

[3:34] But now he has to preach darkness against Nineveh. He has to call out against Nineveh. In chapter 1, God says, their evil has come up before me.

And it needs to be addressed. It needs to be called out against. God sees their evil. He smells their wickedness. And it cannot be ignored.

It needs to end. And so Jonah is going to Nineveh with a hard message. With a sobering and heavy message. And it's a message we all need to hear today too.

God has not changed. And so this message has not changed. It's a message that is for you just as much as for Nineveh. And we must hear this.

And so are we all listening? This is the message. God must overthrow evil. God must overthrow evil.

[4:39] So Jonah heads to Nineveh with his sermon notes in hand. And look how big Nineveh is. Verse 3. It's three days journey in breadth.

This is a huge task. This is like me asking you. Go preach to everyone from here in Ealing. All the way to Buckingham Palace. And you need to reach all the parts in your preaching. Ealing Broadway. Preach there. Then Acton. All the high streets and the parks there. Then Shepherd's Bush. Go to Notting Hill. Preach there. Kensington.

Don't forget all of Hyde Park as well. And then go to Buckingham Palace and preach there. Make sure everyone hears what God has to say. So you can imagine Jonah in this city.

Standing in the squares. Outside the shops. In the parks. On the benches. Preaching. And look what his message is. Verse 4. Jonah began to go into the city.

[5:43] Going a day's journey. And he called out. Yet 40 days and Nineveh shall be overthrown. This is God's message.

Yet 40 days and Nineveh shall be overthrown. Now Jonah likely said more than this when he was preaching. Because when the Ninevites respond.

They know that this is from God. Jonah likely spoke about who the Lord is. He likely spoke about their evil ways. But this is at the heart of the message.

This is the main point of his sermon. And it's a warning about where this city is heading. Yet 40 days and Nineveh shall be overthrown.

This city is about to be destroyed. Their evil has come up before God. And God is going to flip this entire city on its head.

[6:46] Completely wipe it out. It's like flipping your dinner table over. And completely destroying it. In fact this is the same language God uses against Sodom and Gomorrah.

When God overthrew those cities. He sent sulfur and fire from heaven. And incinerated them. Well that is what is happening in 40 days.

Nineveh is literally going to be obliterated. Jonah is coming with the message of God's judgment. It's like Nineveh is on the train tracks.

And the freight train of God's wrath. Is hurtling toward them. And Jonah is saying. Everyone listen. In 40 days it's going to hit.

The stench of their lives. Of their evil. Has come up to heaven. And God cannot stand it. He needs to wipe it out.

[7:50] And this is the main point of Jonah's sermon. And it's the main point of my sermon tonight. God must overthrow evil.

And we need to realise something important. About what God is about to do. We need to realise. This is fair.

God is not being hot headed. Or unreasonable here. This is fair. If we think God is overreacting here.

We have completely missed who God is. We have completely missed the wisdom. And the righteousness. And the justice of God. God is holy.

And God is always right. And when evil lies before the splendour of his holiness. It's not just like a little mistake in God's eyes.

[8:53] Sin is not just a blemish on a basically otherwise good world. No. Any evil in the eyes of the pure and holy God.

Is an utter abomination. And so God in his perfect justice. Looks down at Nineveh. And says that evil must be overthrown.

And just think what this city has been doing. It's been living in God's world. Before his eyes. Under his law.

Running from his presence. Committing evil against his holiness. Taking his good gifts in this world. And throwing it back in his face. Their lives are full of evil.

And God hates evil too much to let it slide. And so what must God do? What is fair? God must overthrow evil.

[9:56] But we must also see. This message Jonah is preaching. This is merciful. If Nineveh are on the train tracks.

And the freight train is coming. Nineveh have been completely unaware. They're on the train tracks. Playing and laughing. And not caring at all.

And God has sent Jonah to say. The train is coming. Get off the tracks. You might often hear people complain.

That when the church preaches judgment. They'll complain. Well that's not loving. They'll say. Don't talk about the judgment of God. Because it forgets about the love of God.

Well that's a bunch of nonsense. It is loving to tell people the train is coming. It is merciful on Nineveh to warn them. But would you rather the train just hit them?

[10:59] No. In God's mercy. He is warning sinners of the judgment to come. And God is still showing that same mercy to the world today.

Because God has sent his son into this world. Preaching the same message. Do you remember what the first words of Jesus' first sermon were?

Repent. For the kingdom of heaven is at hand. And so God warns us today. This world is on the train tracks.

And the freight train of God's wrath is hurtling towards us. God's justice hasn't changed. Evil is still an abomination in his eyes.

He cannot let the evil of this world slide. The sin in our lives cannot be ignored. Even today God must overthrow evil. And one day he will.

[12:09] A day is coming when God will overthrow this whole world. When this world will be turned on its head. And all evil and sin that has not been atoned for.

Will face the wrath of God. The freight train is coming. Now we don't know the timings. We haven't been given a time span like 40 days.

But it is coming. And Jesus says we won't expect it. It will be like a thief in the night suddenly. And so he says we need to be prepared.

Because right now the world is totally unaware. We're laughing and playing on the tracks. Living carefree lives. Not knowing that something is coming our way.

Judgment day is coming. One day Jesus will appear from heaven with his angels. And he will gather all the nations before him.

[13:12] And he will come to judge the living and the dead. All evil will be set before him. Every sinner. And we will all have to give an account of what we have done with our lives.

No one will slip under the radar on that day. And on that day all evil will be overthrown. It will be eternally punished.

This world is on the brink of something catastrophic. And so I need to be like Jonah for you today. I can't let anyone leave here tonight without knowing this.

Judgment day is hurtling towards us. And this world is on the tracks. We're on the tracks right now. Yet only a little while and this world will be overthrown.

Forget about asteroids. Forget about viruses. The judge is about to come from heaven. So let me ask you. Are you prepared?

[14:18] Do you know this day is coming? Are you prepared for this day? Well now you know.

And there's only one way to prepare for that day. And we see it in the lives of the Ninevites.

Judgment is coming. And what do they do? They repent.

And it's my second point today. Judgment is coming. Repent. Judgment is coming. Repent. How the Ninevites respond to Jonah's preaching, it's the model response.

We really need to learn from them. And what is the first thing they do? And the people of Nineveh believed God. They didn't ignore this message.

They didn't laugh at it. No, they heard it, listened, and believed. When God tells you judgment is coming, believe it. Take it seriously.

[15:18] And did you notice? It doesn't say they believed Jonah, does it? It says they believed God. They hear Jonah speaking, but they know this is really from God.

This is a message from God. And I hope that's what we're all doing right now. But their response is also so much more. Look what they do.

Verse 5. They called for a fast and put on sackcloth, from the greatest of them to the least of them. Now, sackcloth is like rough, itchy clothing.

So imagine an old sack of potatoes, you know, that ropey material. That's what it's like. And when people put on sackcloth and facet and satin ashes, that was an act of mourning.

It was grieving. People might do this after a family member has died. It's a sign of utter sorrow. And the whole city did it, from the greatest of them to the least.

[16:29] And this response seems to have come down from the king. Look at verse 6. The word reached the king of Nineveh, and he arose from his throne, removed his robe, covered himself with sackcloth, and sat in ashes.

The king himself hears Jonah's preaching, and it hits him hard. He believes it, and he starts to mourn, and he gets the whole city to do the same.

And he issued a proclamation, and published through Nineveh, by the decree of the king and his nobles, let neither man nor beast, herd nor flock, taste anything. Let them not feed or drink water, but let man and beast be covered with sackcloth, and let them call out mightily to God.

Let everyone turn from his evil way, and from the violence that is in his hands. Who knows? God may turn and relent, and turn from his fierce anger, so that we may not perish.

The whole city goes into mourning. When the queen died, this whole city, well, the whole nation went into mourning, didn't they? Well, this is even greater mourning than that.

[17:39] Even the animals are involved. But this isn't just generally feeling sad. This isn't just grief about dying in 40 days.

This isn't even just a general sense of guilt. No, this is God-centered mourning. Look who they call out to, verse 8. Let them call out mightily to God.

This grief is a godly grief. That's what the New Testament calls it, godly grief. This is a conviction of sin. This is a realization of who they are, and who God is.

They realize the evil they've been doing before God the whole time, their whole lives, and it's cut them to the core. This is a whole city confessing their sin, crying out to God, hating their sin, and turning from it.

Laying their whole lives before the judge. And look how they talk about their lives. Verse 8. Let everyone turn from his evil way and from the violence that is in his hands.

[18:54] Jonah preaches. They believe it. And then there's city-wide turning. They turn from their evil ways.

They turn their lives around. They were running from God. They stop. They turn. And they start running to God. And this turning is called repentance.

Repentance just means turning. And this is what Jesus came preaching. Repent. Turn. For the kingdom of heaven is at hand. Turn from your evil ways and turn to God.

And this is how you prepare for judgment day. This is what we all need to do. Judgment is coming. Repent.

Whoever you are, wherever you are, turn your life around and turn to God. And if you want to know what that means for you, just look at Nineveh's repentance.

[19:59] Look what they do. Their repentance was urgent, wasn't it? They heard of judgment and they acted immediately. They didn't wait to see if it would happen.

They didn't wait 39 days. They didn't say, oh, I'll do something when I'm a bit older. They didn't hang around. No, they believed and did something immediately.

And their repentance involved their whole life, didn't it? That's why the animals were involved too.

You can imagine them taking the food away from the sheep, putting sackcloth over the horses.

All their possessions, every aspect of their life was involved in this turning. Nothing in their life was untouched by the word of God. And also, notice how practical and specific this repentance was.

What did the king say? You know those evil ways we've been living, that violence, those harmful things, the murder, the anger, these specific things in our lives that they need to stop now and we need to change.

[21:08] And this is the repentance we need to do. If you are running from God tonight, if you are like Nineveh and you are happily going about your life and you never thought a day is coming when God will end this world, you've never realized you're on the train tracks, well, here's your wake-up call.

And here is how you need to respond. You need to repent. Something urgent needs to happen in your life.

You need to come to God and grieve before him. Confess your sin. Admit how you've been running from him. Grieve over what your life has been and lay it all before God.

And you can't delay this. The train is about to hit. God is calling you now. So don't just hear my words. Listen to God.

This is your warning. Please do not wait until you're older. Please don't wait until next week or tomorrow. No, no. Turn to God now.

[22:21] Repent. And this will involve your whole life. Not just your Sundays. Not just your appearance. Not just cleaning up your language. But every aspect of your whole life needs to turn to God.

Your heart. Your eyes. Your bedroom. Your work. Your thoughts.

Your calendar. Nothing in your life can go untouched. This is your chance. Judgment is coming.

Repent. And for us believers here today, this repentance must keep going on in our lives.

For the Christian, repentance is daily. It's constantly turning to God. We all know our hearts wander from God every day, don't they?

We feel that pull when we just can't be bothered with godliness. We can go days, maybe even weeks or months, really thinking about God.

[23:31] And without knowing it, our lives have slowly turned from God. We've wandered, and now we're lost. And so we need to repent every day.

You can think of our hearts like a car on a winding road. If we take our hands off the wheel, if we stop turning, what will happen?

We will drift off into the ditch, won't we? Our hearts drift into a car crash if we do nothing. But daily repentance, it's like nudging and turning the wheel to keep us on track.

And so let me ask you, brothers and sisters, do you repent every day? Do you confess your sin every day? Do you grieve over your sin?

It can be very easy to say, yeah, I know I'm a sinner, and we don't really mean it. We can confess our sin in church, but really, we're just reading out the words on the paper.

[24:42] But do you come before God? Are you honest with him? Do you admit specific sins, hate them, and grieve over them? Don't let your life drift off into the ditch.

Judgment is coming. Repent. Repent. But God does not say this just to make us grovel. He says this out of mercy on you.

Because God has mercy on everyone who repents. That's my final point today. God has mercy on everyone who repents. Look how God treats Nineveh in verse 10.

When God saw what they did, how they turned from their evil way, God relented of the disaster that he had said he would do to them. And he did not do it.

God had mercy on them. The judgment that was coming on them did not land on them. The train was diverted.

[25:49] And for everyone who repents, this is how God will treat you. Judgment will not land on you. God will not do it. Whatever you've done, whatever evil is in your past, when you repent and believe in God, judgment will never, ever fall on you.

Because when you turn to God, you will find judgment has already landed on someone else. You will find Jesus has taken it all for you.

The freight train of God's wrath has struck Christ once and for all. On the cross, the judgment of God has struck Jesus. And so for all who will repent, it will never strike you.

There's nothing left to fall on you. And this changes everything about your future. Judgment day is coming. But for those in Christ, that is not a day to fear.

Because when Christ appears from heaven, you will not see the one who will punish your sin. No, you will see the one who has paid for your sin.

[27:04] Jesus is your only hope on judgment day. And for everyone who turns to him, you can have the greatest comfort, the greatest assurance tonight. You can look at Jesus and know God will not do it.

He will not bring judgment on you. Jesus Christ is the greater Jonah. He's the one who not only warns of the judgment to come.

No, he's also the one who says to an evil world, come and find your refuge in me. God has not left us on the train tracks.

No, he has sent his son to rescue us. Jesus Christ is the greatest mercy this world could ever know. And he's there for anyone who will repent.

which means when we come to him daily with our sin, when we do that daily repentance, you will not find a God who is fed up with you.

[28:08] You will not find a God who's ready to punish you. No, you will find a God who is merciful to you. Whatever you've done, however bad, however far you've wandered, God wants you to turn to your Saviour and know his mercy.

And you will never find an end to it because his mercy is new every morning. Let me pray.