

JONAH 3: 1-10

**A SECOND
TIME**

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Scripture Passage

Jonah 3: 1-10

The word of the Lord came to Jonah a second time, saying, "Get up, go to Nineveh, that great city, and proclaim to it the message that I tell you." So Jonah set out and went to Nineveh, according to the word of the Lord. Now Nineveh was an exceedingly large city, a three days' walk across. Jonah began to go into the city, going a day's walk. And he cried out, "Forty days more, and Nineveh shall be overthrown!" And the people of Nineveh believed God; they proclaimed a fast, and everyone, great and small, put on sackcloth.

When the news reached the king of Nineveh, he rose from his throne, removed his robe, covered himself with sackcloth, and sat in ashes. Then he had a proclamation made in Nineveh: "By the decree of the king and his nobles: No human being or animal, no herd or flock, shall taste anything. They shall not feed, nor shall they drink water. Human beings and animals shall be covered with sackcloth, and they shall cry mightily to God. All shall turn from their evil ways and

from the violence that is in their hands. Who knows? God may relent and change his mind; he may turn from his fierce anger, so that we do not perish.”

When God saw what they did, how they turned from their evil ways, God changed his mind about the calamity that he had said he would bring upon them; and he did not do it.

Sermon

Open Your Ears and Listen

***The word of the Lord came to Jonah a second time...
(Jonah 3:1)***

A second time... How encouraging this is! There is always "a second time." Without this, our life will be pretty hopeless. We all make mistakes and because of these mistakes, we have regrets. Frank Sinatra also sang that he had his own regrets in his song, "My way."

Regrets, I've had a few
But then again, too few to mention

He is lucky that he has too few to mention. But most of us have too many to mention. As we look back our lives, we have many regrets. We have regrets about what we said. We have regrets about what we did. We have regrets about the decisions we made. We made many wrong turns in life. We let our unnecessary emotions ruin our relationships. Thinking about it makes us feel sad.

Our Own Will

You met Jonah today in the Scripture. He was a strong man. More like a stubborn man. Instead of following God's will, he acted on his own will. Instead of seeking God's way, he wanted to live in his own way. That's why he ran away from God.

Don't we live like that sometimes? Instead of being aware of God, we follow our own instinct and our own sense of judgment when we make decisions. We don't pause to think about God's will. We want to control our life and our own destiny. As we reflected last week, isn't it why we cannot hear God? We are not even trying to listen to God. We are not listening to what is going on in our lives. We are not listening to what is in our heart.

Learning From Our Mistakes

Today we see that God called Jonah a second time. A second time. That is quite encouraging, because he didn't listen. God did not give up on him. God came to him a second time and spoke again with exactly the same words. When you go back to Chapter 1, it is exactly the same words. God always gives us *a new opportunity*, opens up *a new situation*, and gives us *a new start*.

Since we have this “second time”, our past mistakes can become our teacher. We learn what to do and what not to do. Based on our past mistakes, we can make a better judgment for the second time. Our past is not a ghost that haunts us and pulls us down. It cannot stop us from going forward.

Our mistakes and wrongdoings in the past *cannot define* who we are, what our life is. They cannot mold our future. Our future is not determined by our past mistakes. People say we reap what we sow. But not always.

Didn't St. Paul say this about the resurrection? ***"So it is with the resurrection of the dead. What is sown is perishable, what is raised is imperishable. It is sown in dishonour, it is raised in glory. It is sown in weakness, it is raised in power. It is sown a physical body, it is raised a spiritual body. (1 Corinthians 15:42-44)"***

We do not always reap what we sow. Even though we might have sown what is dishonorable and weak, it will not put up a wall that blocks our future. God's second chance will break down that wall and let us start again.

We should never forget that. If you did something that you regret today, then believe that there is a second time tomorrow. Then you will learn from your mistakes. You will learn about yourselves, about your life, and about God.

Becoming Open is a Journey

When we live with that kind of understanding, we will not fear our mistakes. Today's mistakes simply become a teacher for tomorrow. Today's mistakes become a platform to build our better future. When we believe that there is a second time, our life will become bigger. "Open wide" is beautiful but is not a static concept. "Open wide" is a process. It is a journey. It is a journey of becoming a bigger person. That is what the kingdom of God is like. This is what Jesus said: ***'The kingdom of heaven is like a mustard seed that someone took and sowed in his field; it is the smallest of all the seeds, but when it has grown it is the greatest of shrubs and becomes a tree, so that the birds of the air come and make nests in its branches.'*** (Matthew 13:31, 32).

Today's suffering will become tomorrow's strength.
Today's tears will become tomorrow's joy.

That's what the Psalmist sang;

***May those who sow in tears
reap with shouts of joy.***

***Those who go out weeping,
bearing the seed for sowing,***

shall come home with shouts of joy,

carrying their sheaves. (Psalm 126, 5, 6).

We cannot open our heart on our own with our own strength. For our heart to be open, it has to be ripped apart. Otherwise, it doesn't open. We don't have the strength to open our heart, it has to be ripped apart. Our suffering and tears will rip our heart apart. But when God heals it, our heart will become open.

Unimaginable Experiences

When the word of God came to Jonah, a second time, he was able to do wonderful things. What happened to the city of Nineveh was a greater miracle than Jonah being saved by the big fish. The Scripture said, 'Nineveh was an exceedingly large city, a three days' walk across'. But it took only one day for Jonah to preach the Gospel and to bring about change to the city. He didn't have an internet. He didn't have a twitter. But somehow the words got around. People started repenting. And this

wave of repentance went up even to the king. And the king rose from his throne, removed his robe, covered himself with sackcloth, and sat in ashes. Everyone repented, crying out to God for salvation.

That was a big miracle. Jonah did what no prophet could ever do before. He was the most fruitful prophet. That is what happens when you live out the second chance to the fullest. You will experience what you never imagined before. Jonah did what he could not even imagine. What he did was larger than life.

Running Away from God

It was not because Jonah was necessarily a greater prophet than other prophets. When God called Isaiah, immediately he said simply, here I am, send me. But Jonah didn't do that. He ran away. Why did he run away?

Nineveh was the capital city of Assyria. Assyria was the country who invaded Israel and destroyed it. He didn't want them to repent and be saved. He knew God very well so he knew that if they repented, God would save them. He didn't want them to be saved. He didn't want to be the messenger of their salvation. That's why he

ran away. But can we run away from God?

The Psalmist said,

Where can I go from your spirit?

Or where can I flee from your presence?

If I ascend to heaven, you are there;

if I make my bed in Sheol, you are there.

If I take the wings of the morning

and settle at the farthest limits of the sea,

even there your hand shall lead me,

and your right hand shall hold me fast.

(Psalm 139:7-10).

We cannot run away from God. Even when we feel God's absence, God is there.

Rock Bottom

Where did Jonah end up as he tried to run away from God? Sometimes, that's what happens to us. Where did he end up? The bottom of the ocean. We can see that in Chapter 2 of Jonah:

The waters closed in over me;

the deep surrounded me;

weeds were wrapped around my head. (Jonah 2:5)

He was at the bottom of the ocean. He hit the rock

bottom of his life literally. He lost everything and he even felt that he was abandoned by God.

***Then I said, "I am driven away
from your sight;
how shall I look again
upon your holy temple?" (Jonah 2:4).***

But ironically, right there at the bottom of the ocean, at rock bottom, he met God.

***As my life was ebbing away,
I remembered the Lord;
and my prayer came to you,
into your holy temple. (Jonah 2:7).***

We don't always meet God in this beautiful sanctuary or temple. Sometimes we meet God when we hit rock bottom. The prodigal son met God at the lowest point of his life. We don't meet God when things go well; we meet God when life is hard. We don't meet God when we feel confident; we meet God when we have lost all our confidence and hope. We don't meet God when we are welcomed and loved by people; we meet God when we feel rejected and abandoned.

A Second Chance

This was what Jonah said at the bottom of the ocean.

Most people would complain, but this is what he said:

***But I with the voice of thanksgiving
will sacrifice to you;***

what I have vowed I will pay.

Deliverance belongs to the Lord!' (Jonah 2:9).

He renewed his vow. Jonah didn't complain to God. Jonah renewed his vow at rock bottom.

That was when God sent a big fish and saved him. And he called him a second time. He went down into the deep darkness and the death was right in front of his eyes. But there he was renewed. He became a new person.

That is what we need. When we hit rock bottom of our life, when we don't feel God's presence, that is when we need to cry out to God. God will renew us and what we experience after that will be quite unimaginable.

Ultimately, We Say Yes

At first, Jonah said no to God, but ultimately he said yes to God. Jesus gave us this parable: ***"What do you think? A man had two sons; he went to the first and said, "Son, go and work in the vineyard today." He answered, "I will not"; but later he changed his mind***

and went. The father went to the second and said the same; and he answered, "I go, sir"; but he did not go. Which of the two did the will of his father?' They said, 'The first.' Jesus said to them, 'Truly I tell you, the tax-collectors and the prostitutes are going into the kingdom of God ahead of you. (Matthew 21:28-31).

God did not leave Jonah alone when he ran away. He was with him all along. When he was ready, he called him again. So he said no at first, but yes later. That should be our life. Maybe we say no at first, in our youth, but ultimately, later, we say yes.

We are weak. We can be easily broken. We don't see a big picture of life. Sometimes we plan for tomorrow, not knowing there may not be tomorrow.

But God never gives up on us. God calls us again and again. God wants us to live a new life. And with this second chance, we can always do better. And we sometimes experience what we cannot imagine. May your second life be a blessed life. And this second time, is an eternal second time. God gives us a second time not just once, but eternally.