

March 15, 2009 by Steve Brandon



# Nineveh Receives Mercy

## Jonah 3

1. **Jonah Repents (verse 1-4).**
2. **Nineveh Repents (verses 5-9).**
3. **God Relents (verse 10).**

In the history of the church, there have been many revivals that have taken place. For good reason, the most famous revival took place in the early church during Pentecost, the Jewish festival. Shortly after the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, Peter preached a sermon to the Jews who had gathered in Jerusalem for Pentecost. The Spirit of God anointed his message, so that 3,000 people repented of their sins and were baptized and brought into the church. Within a few more days, the church numbered about 5,000! That was a great revival!

During the days of Jonathan Edwards, there was a great revival, known as "The Great Awakening." Jonathan Edwards had been preaching in Northampton, Massachusetts with little effect. But, then, in 1734, through the simple preaching of the word of God, people were being transformed. In conservative churches, people were being touched with emotional outbursts and radical changes in their lives. People were awakened to their sin and their need for Christ. Many, who were lukewarm to religion previously, were transformed into those on fire for Jesus Christ. For the next three years, the moving of God's Spirit swept throughout Massachusetts and into Connecticut. George Whitefield was reaping the fruit of this revival as many were converted through his preaching as well.

In 1858, there was a revival in New York. Jeremiah Lanphier began a prayer meeting in Lower Manhattan on Wednesday, September 23, 1857. On that day, six men gathered for a noon-time prayer meeting. The next week, there were twenty people who attended. The following week, there were forty. Soon, the meetings, which had been held weekly became daily events. By February of 1858, three separate rooms were needed to accommodate all of the people praying at noon. By mid-March, the prayer meeting was moved to Burton's theatre in Manhattan and included more than 3,000 people. By April, "scores of building -- including printers' shops, fire stations, and police stations-- were open for the same purpose, necessitating a weekly bulletin with information on the locations of these simultaneous gatherings." <sup>[1]</sup> Many people were being converted at these prayer meetings.

A modern day revival took place in the 1990's when college students stood up before their fellow collegians and confessed their sins to one another. This revival began on Wednesday, January 22, 1995, at Coggin Avenue Baptist Church in Brownwood Texas, where two college students stood up and confessed their own sins before the congregation. The following Sunday, a similar occurrence took place at Howard Payne University, where these students attended, only this time, after a time of confession, other students streamed down the aisles to confess their sins as well. The revival spread to many other college campuses over the next month or two with dozens and dozens of campuses who were being touched by the power of God as students confessed their sins to one another. Notable among these colleges was the revival that took place at Wheaton college.

Sunday evening, March 19, 1995, students met together in Pierce Chapel at 7:30 pm, which was attended by about 900 people. The meeting lasted until 6am the following day, when the custodial staff requested the remaining 400 people to leave, so that the building could be cleaned. They filled five large garbage bags with alcohol, tobacco, drugs, pornography, and secular music, as people confessed and turned away from their sins. Subsequent meetings were held at College Church, where nearly 2,000 people gathered to confess their sins to one another. <sup>[2]</sup>

I had an opportunity to taste a bit of this revival when two-hundred students from Wheaton College came to Northern Illinois University. They held a service on campus on N. I. U. , where the students from Wheaton explained what they had experienced in Wheaton. Given the opportunity, many of the students from then came forward to confess their sins and seek forgiveness. I would guess that the attendance at this event was close to 200 students. It was a powerful experience.

Now, how can you explain all of these things? How can you explain what took place at Pentecost or during the days of the First Great Awakening? How can you explain what happened through the Manhattan prayer meetings or the revivals on college campuses? How can you explain it? You can't. It's only the working of God's sovereign Spirit to convict these people of sin, righteousness and the judgment to come (John 16:8), so that they confess their sins and turn to Christ, where their only hope is found.

The examples that I have given you this morning are but a few examples of the incredible working of God in this world. Would we have the time, we could look at many more examples of crowd of people being convicted of their sins coming to the Lord, seeking forgiveness. These things have taken place, not only in our country, but also in many other countries in the world. But, none of the instances of revival have even come close to what took place in Nineveh, seven hundred and fifty years before the birth of Christ. In the revival in Nineveh, more than 100,000 people turn from their sin, and God forgave them.

Jonah 3:1-10

Now the word of the LORD came to Jonah the second time, saying, "Arise, go to Nineveh the great city and proclaim to it the proclamation which I am going to tell you."

So Jonah arose and went to Nineveh according to the word of the LORD. Now Nineveh was an exceedingly great city, a three days' walk. Then Jonah began to go through the city one day's walk; and he cried out and said, "Yet forty days and Nineveh will be overthrown."

Then the people of Nineveh believed in God; and they called a fast and put on sackcloth from the greatest to the least of them. When the word reached the king of Nineveh, he arose from his throne, laid aside his robe from him, covered himself with sackcloth and sat on the ashes. He issued a proclamation and it said, "In Nineveh by the decree of the king and his nobles: Do not let man, beast, herd, or flock taste a thing. Do not let them eat or drink water. But both man and beast must be covered with sackcloth; and let men call on God earnestly that each may turn from his wicked way and from the violence which is in his hands. Who knows, God may turn and relent and withdraw His burning anger so that we will not perish."

When God saw their deeds, that they turned from their wicked way, then God relented concerning the calamity which He had declared He would bring upon them. And He did not do it.

This text nicely breaks down into three sections, based upon the three subjects of the text. Verses 1-4 talk about Jonah. Verses 5-9 talk about Nineveh. Verse 10 talks about God. And so, my outline this morning has three points. Let's start with the first one, ...

## 1. Jonah Repents (verse 1-4).

In the first four verses, we read of the account of Jonah repenting of his sin. In chapters 1 and 2, we see Jonah refusing the call of God upon his life. But now, in chapter 3, we see Jonah submitting himself to the LORD's instructions. If you compare verses 1 and 2 with the first two verses in the book, you will find very little difference. I place them side by side for your comparison.

Jonah 1:1-2  
The word of the LORD came to Jonah  
the son of Amittai  
saying, "Arise, go to Nineveh the great city and  
cry against it, for their wickedness has come up before  
Me."

Jonah 3:1-2  
Now the word of the LORD came to Jonah  
the second time,  
saying, "Arise, go to Nineveh the great city  
and proclaim to it the proclamation which I am going to  
tell you."

The wording between these two accounts is practically identical. In both instances, this utterance is described as "the word of the LORD." That is, it was God's word to Jonah--a divine summons. In both cases, God calls Jonah to "arise." That is, "get up, get on your feet, get ready to go." Then, God calls Jonah to "go to Nineveh." That is, "travel to Nineveh, move yourself from here to there." In both calls, God identifies Nineveh as "the great city." That is, "the large, influential city." This is followed by a summons to speak out against the city. "proclaim to it." That is, "cry against it, preach to it."

The only differences that you see between these two calls are very subtle. In chapter 1, Jonah is identified as "the son of Amittai," which is left out of chapter 3, but that's understandable, since by this time, we already know who Jonah is. Instead, we see the word coming "the second time." Furthermore, in chapter 1, the sin of Nineveh is mentioned as the reason why this proclamation needs to be given, but nothing of the sort is mentioned in chapter 3. Finally, in chapter 1, there is no mention of God giving Jonah the message to preach, which he says that he will do in chapter 3.

But, apart from those small differences, everything else is exactly the same. However, beginning in verse 3 (of each of these chapters), the differences between these two calls is as different as night and day. Consider the differences, ...

Jonah 1:3  
But Jonah rose up to flee to Tarshish.

Jonah 3:1-2  
So Jonah arose and went to Nineveh according to the word of the LORD.

In chapter 1, we find Jonah fleeing away from Nineveh to the remotest part of the known world, southern Spain. In chapter 3, we find Jonah following the LORD's command and traveling to Nineveh, where he brings God's message to them. I have identified this as Jonah's repentance. Rather than disobeying the LORD and running from Him, Jonah is now running toward the LORD in obedience to Him. This is repentance. It is a turning from sin and a turning to God. Whereas at one point, Jonah was being disobedient to the LORD, he is now walking in obedience to the LORD.

This is what God calls all of us to do! He calls us to forsake our sin. He calls us to follow Him. "If anyone wishes to come after me, he must deny himself, and take up his cross and follow me. For whoever wishes to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for My sake and the gospel's will save it. For what does it profit a man to gain the whole world and forfeit his soul? For what will a man give in exchange for his soul?" (Mark 8:34-37). This is a call to repentance. This is what Jesus calls us to.

What was Jonah's sin? He refused God's call to preach to others. I think about how applicable this sin is to us. I know of nothing more difficult than being faithful with sharing the gospel with unbelievers that are around me. It's a constant challenge to be bold with the gospel to my neighbors. How easy it is to remain silent, when a few words are needed! Perhaps the Lord right now might even be convicting your heart in people that He is calling you to talk to, but you have headed to Tarshish instead. Perhaps your Nineveh is at your work, perhaps in your extended family, or perhaps in your own home. Oh, may God give us the grace to boldly speak for Him. [\[3\]](#)

Now, the good news is this. You probably have a second opportunity. Over the next few weeks (or months), you will encounter your Nineveh.

Will you be like Jonah in chapter 1? Or, will be like Jonah in chapter 3? God gave Jonah a second opportunity to obey by coming to him "a second time." The first time, Jonah blew it and headed off to Tarshish. But, God pursued him, by bringing the storm upon the sea, by directing the lots toward him, by throwing him overboard, by appointing the great fish to swallow Jonah, by bringing Jonah safely to dry land. And now, Jonah has a second opportunity to obey the LORD. And he obeyed the second time.

What changed? Why did Jonah obey the second time? I think that the answer to this question is key. If we want to be successful where once we have failed, we ought to spend some time thinking about what changed. Did God change? No. Did God's call change? No. Jonah was still called to go to Nineveh. Jonah was still called to cry out against them. Did the people of Nineveh change? No. They were still the enemies of Israel. They were still engaged in wicked behavior.

So what changed? Jonah changed. In chapter 1, Jonah experienced the pursuing hand of God. Try as you might, you cannot run from God. In chapter 2, Jonah experienced the merciful hand of God. He was drowning in the sea, and God saved him out of his distress. Such things will change you as well. When you experience the pursuing, disciplining hand of God, you will change. When you experience the merciful hand of God, you will change.

Most likely, God will still give you another opportunity for obedience. I say this, because the Bible is flooded with those who received a second opportunity. **Moses** received a second chance. He tried to take matters into his own hands and killed an Egyptian who was persecuting a Hebrew worker. But, 40 years later, God gave him another opportunity to lead the people of Israel out of slavery the right way. **David** received a second chance. He blew it with Bathsheba and was punished for it, even losing his kingdom to Absalom, his son. Yet, God gave him another opportunity, as he was restored to the throne. **Peter** received a second chance. He denied Christ three times one night. Peter even did this when he swore that he wouldn't. Yet, Jesus restored him and gave him another opportunity. **John Mark** received a second chance. On the first missionary journey, he deserted Paul and Barnabas (Acts 13). But, given a second opportunity, he proved himself to be faithful, so that in the end, Paul would say, "He is useful to me for service" (2 Tim. 4:11).

So, make the most of your second opportunity. (1) Discern the discipline of God, and learn the pain of disobedience. (2) Rejoice in the mercy of God, and love sharing it with others. In verse 3, we see Jonah in his obedience. He "arose and went to Nineveh according to the word of the LORD." How good it is when we obey the LORD.

Verse 3 continues with a description of Nineveh, "Nineveh was an exceedingly great city, a three days' walk." This was the third time in the book of Jonah that God describes Nineveh in this way. In 1:2, we read, "Nineveh the great city." In 3:2, we read, "Nineveh the great city." We will see this description again in 4:11, "Nineveh the great city."

Here in verse 3, it's not "the great city." It is the "exceedingly great city" (verse 3). The NIV says, "a very important city." Literally, it is the "great city to God." In every way, Nineveh was a great city. Nineveh was great in population. There were more than 120,000 persons" in the city (according to 4:11). Nineveh was great in wickedness (as we have seen elsewhere). Finally, Nineveh was great in size. This is what the writer is getting at here, because the next phrase describes how big it was. Nineveh was "a three days' walk."

Nineveh was a gigantic, well-fortified city for Bible times. During the days of Jonah, the capital of Israel, the city of Samaria, had about 30,000 people in it. Nestled among the hills, it was tight and crowded. But, the cities of the Mesopotamia plain, where Nineveh was, had little to prevent it from expanding. Archeologists have discovered two walls in Nineveh. The first was a huge inner wall. It was 50 feet wide and 100 feet tall. It's circumference was 8 miles around. There was a second wall that enclosed fields and smaller towns. According to an ancient historian, the length of this wall was 60 miles around. It would take three days to walk around the entire outer-wall, such was the size of Nineveh.

In verse 4, we see Jonah beginning his ministry in Nineveh. "Then Jonah began to go through the city one day's walk; and he cried out and said, 'Yet forty days and Nineveh will be overthrown.'" This describes the first day of Jonah's ministry. He went into the city, found appropriate places to preach, stood among the people, and delivered his sermon, "Yet forty days and Nineveh will be overthrown." This phrase is a mere five words in the Hebrew.

We don't know if these five words was all he said. I sort of doubt it, as there are often times in the Bible where only a brief summary of messages are given. One notable example of this takes place in chapter 1. In verse 9, Jonah told them merely that he was a Hebrew. But, in verse 10, the sailors question him about something that wasn't recorded in the Biblical text (but was explained later). Regardless of whether or not this was all that Jonah said, we know that it's accurate. Jonah's message to Nineveh was that there is destruction on the way.

According to verse 2, God was going to give Jonah the message to proclaim to Nineveh. We don't really know if this is the message that God had given to Jonah. It may have been only half of the message, for there is no hope here given of deliverance, which is almost always characteristic of God's message. When Isaiah came preaching, his message was the same. Calling Israel by names, such as Sodom and Gomorrah (Is. 1:10), he said, "Come now, and let us reason together," says the LORD, 'though your sins are as scarlet, they will be as white as snow; though they are red like crimson, they will be like wool. If you consent and obey, you will eat the best of the land. But if you refuse and rebel, you will be devoured by the sword.' Truly, the mouth of the LORD has spoken" (Is. 1:18-20).

When Jeremiah was preaching, his message was the same. "'Return faithless Israel,' declares the LORD; 'I will not look upon you in anger. For I am gracious,' declares the LORD; 'I will not be angry forever'" (Jer. 3:12). Jeremiah's call was one of repentance for forgiveness. What was true of the Old Testament prophets was also true of the New Testament as well. When John the Baptist preached destruction upon Israel, "The axe is already laid at the root of the trees; therefore every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire" (Matthew 3:10). Earlier, John had said, "bear fruit in keeping with repentance." The implication is clear: there's hope if you repent.

When Jesus came, he preached repentance, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand" (Matt. 4:17). Only when Israel refused to repent did Jesus say, "the kingdom of God will be taken away from you and given to a people, producing the fruit of it" (Matt. 21:43). The implication is clear: there's hope if you repent. But, Jonah's message contained none of this. I think that Jonah only preached half of the message that

God gave him to preach. He preached the judgment, but not the hope.

In some ways, this casts doubt upon Jonah's repentance. It shows his continued hard heartedness toward Nineveh, the wicked city (which we will look at more extensively next week). However, if you look hard enough, you will find a bit of mercy in Jonah's message. First of all, mere fact that God sent Jonah was a display of God's mercy. God didn't need to warn the Ninevites of the coming destruction. Furthermore, when Jonah said, "Yet forty days," a period of God's mercy was displayed as well. Also if God had desired to destroy the city, He didn't need to wait forty days. But, the waiting period was a tiny window of hope for Nineveh. And they banked on this hope, which we see in my second point, ...

## **2. Nineveh Repents (verses 5-9).**

In verses 5-9 we see Nineveh clinging to whatever little hope they might find with the message brought to them by the strange prophet from Israel. In verse 5, we see the response of the people. "Then the people of Nineveh believed in God; and they called a fast and put on sackcloth from the greatest to the least of them."

It's important to see here how the people viewed Jonah's message. They saw his message as coming from the mouth of God. It wasn't Jonah that they believed. It was God that they believed. This isn't a subtle point. This is the main point. When Jonah spoke, it was as if God had come to earth to speak to Nineveh.

This is the dynamic of those who genuinely repent. They hear a person speaking, but they discern that something far more dynamic is going on. In reality, they hear the voice of God and respond to His message, not the message of the prophet. We need to be Bible people. I remember one time talking with some one about Christ and the Bible. Long before I was ever a pastor. He was checking things out, being interested in Christianity. We had many discussions. He asked me tons of questions, I always sought to answer from the Bible. At one point, he was angry with me, because I wouldn't tell him what I thought. It was always what the Bible says. The reason I answered him this way was because of the need for him to hear from God.

This is why, in my preaching, I attempt to stick so closely with the Bible. God will use me to the extent that I stay faithful to His word. Because, what God has written, He has promised to use to accomplish His purposes. Isaiah 55:11, "My word .. which goes forth from My mouth; It will not return to Me empty, without accomplishing what I desire, and without succeeding in the matter for which I sent it." But, if we go beyond the Scripture and preach our own opinions, we have no authority from God. God hasn't promised to bless that sort of word. Pity the people who are following the words of a preacher. But, rejoice in the power of the people who are following the words of God.

Those in Nineveh believed that God had spoken to them. And they repented. They called a fast. They also put on sackcloth. These are outward signs of repentance, mentioned often in the Bible. The idea of both of them is that they are an outward expression of your inward sorrow for your sin. The fast would bring the Ninevites to a place of dependence upon God as their stomachs would have hunger pangs. The sackcloth would bring the Ninevites into close association with the poor, the prisoners and the slaves--the needy people. The Ninevites knew that they were sinners. The Ninevites knew that they needed repentance. Jonah's words were all that they needed to hear. And there was this spontaneous outcry among the people, "Let us fast! Let us seek God!"

Word spread rapidly. In verse 6 we read of how "the word reached the king of Nineveh." Jonah didn't go to him directly. But, Jonah's word spread like wildfire and captured the attention of the king, whose name was probably Ashur-dan III (772-755), if we are right about the dates of Jonah.

The king believed God. Like the people, he too, humbled himself before the LORD. "He arose from his throne, laid aside his robe from him, covered himself with sackcloth, sat on the ashes" (verse 7). All of this brought the king, into solidarity with his subjects. The act of rising from the throne and laying aside his robe was a symbolic gesture to renounce his power and authority in light of the One who has all power and authority. This was an act of great humility on behalf of the king. He brought himself to be low with the people. The act of donning the sackcloth and sitting in the ashes was a great act of humility on his part. Again, these things are signs of repentance. Repentance is always associated with signs of humility.

And then, he used his royal power to enact a decree, commanding the entire city to repent, "In Nineveh by the decree of the king and his nobles: Do not let man, beast, herd, or flock taste a thing. Do not let them eat or drink water. But both man and beast must be covered with sackcloth; and let men call on God earnestly that each may turn from his wicked way and from the violence which is in his hands" (verses 7-8).

This reminds me of the call that president Bush made two days after the terrorist attack on our nation, which brought down several buildings in New York and killed thousands of people. President Bush declared, ...

Civilized people around the world denounce the evildoers who devised and executed these terrible attacks. Justice demands that those who helped or harbored the terrorists be punished -- and punished severely. The enormity of their evil demands it. We will use all the resources of the United States and our cooperating friends and allies to pursue those responsible for this evil, until justice is done.

We mourn with those who have suffered great and disastrous loss. All our hearts have been seared by the sudden and sense-less taking of innocent lives. We pray for healing and for the strength to serve and encourage one another in hope and faith.

Scripture says: "Blessed are those who mourn for they shall be comforted." I call on every American family and the family of America to observe a National Day of Prayer and Remembrance, honoring the memory of the thousands of victims of these brutal attacks and comforting those who lost loved ones. We will persevere through this national tragedy and

personal loss. In time, we will find healing and recovery; and, in the face of all this evil, we remain strong and united, 'one Nation under God.'

Now, therefore, I, George W. Bush, President of the United States of America, by virtue of the authority vested in me by the Constitution and laws of the United States, do hereby proclaim Friday, September 14, 2001, as a National Day of Prayer and Remembrance for the Victims of the Terrorist Attacks on September 11, 2001. I ask that the people of the United States and places of worship mark this National Day of Prayer and Remembrance with noontime memorial services, the ringing of bells at that hour, and evening candlelight remembrance vigils. I encourage employers to permit their workers time off during the lunch hour to attend the noontime services to pray for our land. I invite the people of the world who share our grief to join us in these solemn observances.

Do you remember where you were that day? I remember watching the national service at noon that day. I was in the walls of a church that evening, praying for our nation. Likewise, should you have asked anyone from Nineveh, "Do you remember where you were on that day?" I'm sure that they all could tell you where they were, and how they responded to the edict of the king. They could have told you how they went hungry that night. They could have told you how they visited their livestock and placed the burlap sacks upon their backs. They could have told you how they didn't feed their livestock their usual allotment of grain. They could have told you how they didn't water their animals that night. They could have told you of the prayer meeting they attended. They could have told you of the sin that they confessed and repented of.

The people of Nineveh were summoned to "call on God earnestly" which they did. We too, as a nation did this as well. Nineveh was also called to "turn from their wicked way" which they did. Though they had been men of violence, they turned from it. Sadly, we, as a nation, have not done this.

Jonah was one day into his ministry to Nineveh, and already his message had captured the heart of the entire city. The people believed and the king believed. The entire city was called to fasting and humiliation and repentance.

What amazes me, is that they had no promise that the LORD would repeal His sentence upon them. The reasoning of the king goes like this, "Who knows, God may turn and relent and withdraw His burning anger so that we will not perish" (verse 9). In other words, "We have no promise from God. He has said that he will destroy us in forty days. And we believe it. We have been a wicked and violent people. We deserve to be destroyed for our sin. And yet, we can't merely sit back and remain idle while our city is at stake. Let's at least make an effort to thwart our coming doom. Let's at least humble ourselves before the LORD and just see if He is merciful to us. It may just be that God will turn and relent and withdraw His burning anger so that we will not perish."

That's true repentance. There is a repentance, which is sorrowful for being caught. There is also a repentance which is sorrowful of the consequences. Both of these repentances are suspect. But, when there's no carrot in front of the Ninevites, promising safety if they perform some sort of deeds, you can trust its genuineness. With Nineveh, there was no assurance from God that all would be well if they did x, y, and z. Instead, their only hope was the mercy of God. And God was merciful to them. We see this in my third and final point this morning, ...

### **3. God Relents (verse 10).**

We read in verse 10, "When God saw their deeds, that they turned from their wicked way, then God relented concerning the calamity which He had declared He would bring upon them. And He did not do it." The old King James translates this, "and God *repented* of the evil that he had said that he would do unto them."

It would have been a nice outline ...

1. Jonah Repents (verses 1-4).
2. Nineveh Repents (verses 5-9).
3. God Repents (verse 10).

However, the problem with ascribing "repentance" here with the act of God is that it doesn't quite represent what God did. When we hear the word, "repentance," we think of turning away from evil and turning to good, which is entirely appropriate understanding of this word. But, God wasn't turning away from evil in the sense that we turn away from evil. Had God destroyed Nineveh, he would not have sinned in any way. His actions would have been perfectly just. A wicked nation deserves punishment from the hand of the Almighty. But, in light of their actions, God showed forth His compassion and mercy upon Nineveh. In fact, that's how the NIV translates this verse, "[God] had compassion and did not bring upon them the destruction he had threatened."

"Compassion" captures the idea well here. God had seen their deeds and had a pity upon the people of Nineveh, and withdrew His sentence of condemnation. God saw their deeds. God tested their deeds. God saw "that they turned from their wicked way." And God didn't bring upon them the destruction that He had promised.

The theological question that often comes to mind at this point is whether or not God changed His mind regarding Nineveh. The Scripture speaks of how "God is not a man, that He should lie, nor a son of man, that He should repent; has He said, and will He not do it? Or has he spoken, and will he not make it good?" (Num. 23:19). Another passage of Scripture says it this way, "The Glory of Israel will not lie or change His mind" (1 Sam. 15:29). So, what's up with this here in Jonah 3:10? Did God change His mind? I say, "No." Rather, I believe that God's message to Nineveh was a conditional message. Though Jonah only presented half of the story, the truth of the matter is that God's judgments upon man are often conditional. And, so are some of His blessings as well.

We catch a summary of the heart of God in the following passage.

Jeremiah 18:7-10

At one moment I might speak concerning a nation or concerning a kingdom to uproot, to pull down, or to destroy it; if that nation against which I have spoken turns from its evil, I will relent concerning the calamity I planned to bring on it. Or at another moment I might speak concerning a nation or concerning a kingdom to build up or to plant it; if it does evil in My sight by not obeying My voice, then I will think better of the good with which I had promised to bless it."

These words are most applicable to Nineveh. God had pronounced judgment upon them. But, as they turned from evil, God relented of His judgment, because that's the way that God is. God is a merciful God. And in Nineveh, we see mercy. The people of Nineveh were sinners in the worst way. They deserved to be destroyed. But, God, in His mercy, "relented from the calamity which He had declared He would bring upon them. And He did not do it" (verse 10).

Would the truth be known, this is why any of us are saved from our sin. The sentence of the Bible is death upon us for our sin. "The wages of sin is death" (Romans 6:23). The only way that we ever escape this judgment is the mercy of God. "The free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord" (Romans 6:23). Salvation comes to us through Christ as a gift. We don't earn it in any way. He freely gives it to any who believe. And this is the great promise of the gospel that we proclaim. God has promised to give eternal life to all who believe in Jesus. To all who would forsake all and follow Him, He will give eternal life.

How different we stand compared with the people of Nineveh. **They received a half-message from a half-hearted prophet with no promises at all from a God who they barely know, and yet, they still repented the first time they heard the message.**

Think about Jonah. Jonah's message gave only half the story. He merely declared that destruction was coming upon Nineveh. He gave them no reason to repent. He gave them no divine promises. With everything that we know about Jonah, I don't believe that Jonah was too earnest in seeking to persuade the people to repent. According to chapter 4, verse 2, this was the last thing that Jonah wanted to see from Nineveh. I don't believe that he was a very bold preacher.

Furthermore, I don't think that he followed a very good strategy in how to reach the city of Nineveh in forty days. He had no programs. He had no bands to attract attention. He didn't go to the king. In fact, if anything, Jonah's methods were anti-revival. He didn't want a revival to break out. But, revival, in fact, did break out, ... and such are the ways of God. His Spirit blows where it will.

Throughout the book of Nineveh, we have seen various miracles taking place. The storm upon the sea was ordained by the sovereign hand of God. The lots were directed by the LORD. The calming of the sea and the rescue of Jonah in the stomach of a big fish. But, none of the miracles were larger than the faith of Nineveh.

If Nineveh believed a half-message from a half-hearted preacher with no promises at all from God, they barely know, the first time they heard the message. Then what excuse do you have for not believing? Do you believe in Jesus? Do you believe that Jesus has taken away your sins upon the cross?

I want to close my message this morning in Matthew 12. Let's pick it up in verse 38-41, ...

Matthew 12:38-41

Then some of the scribes and Pharisees said to Him, "Teacher, we want to see a sign from You." But He answered and said to them, "An evil and adulterous generation craves for a sign; and yet no sign will be given to it but the sign of Jonah the prophet; for just as Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of the sea monster, so will the Son of Man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth. The men of Nineveh will stand up with this generation at the judgment, and will condemn it because they repented at the preaching of Jonah; and behold, something greater than Jonah is here.

The people of Nineveh were walking in darkness. they knew little to nothing about God. They had no Sunday school, no church, no Scripture, no teachers, no godly examples before them. What about you? Have you had these things? Have you repented?

The people of Nineveh heard the message once! They repented the first time they heard. What about You? How many times have you heard? Have you heard in Sunday school? Have you heard it in church services? Have you read it in the Scriptures? Have you heard it taught by teachers on the radio? Have you listened to CD's or DVD's that explain the gospel? Have you real life examples to follow? Have you read it in books?

The people of Nineveh heard a half-message. Jonah only proclaimed judgment to them. He gave no indication of mercy. Furthermore, the best that the people of Nineveh had was only a partial revelation of God, with no knowledge of Jesus. They had no guarantee and no promises. What about you? The message that you have heard is one of mercy. You have the full revelation, in which you have seen the place of Jesus in the saving plan of God. You have a guarantee of forgiveness if you repent.

Have you taken advantage of your opportunity? If not, then, "the men of Nineveh will stand up .... at the judgment, and will condemn [you] because they repented at the preaching of Jonah; and behold, something grater than Jonah is here" (Matt. 12:41).

Jesus Christ is greater than Jonah. In Him is all wisdom (Col. 2:3). Jonah lacked great wisdom in that he disobeyed the LORD. Jesus is the fulfillment of Scripture (John 5:39). Jonah was merely one portion of the full revelation. Jesus has healing power (Matthew 8-9). Jonah needed a God to come and save him. Jesus could calm the storm (Matt. 8:23-47). Jonah needed God to calm the storm (Jonah 1:15). Jesus offered Himself as full atonement (1 John 2:2). Jonah had no atonement to offer. Jesus was raised from the dead (Luke 24). Jonah wasn't. Jesus has promised His return (Matt. 24-25). Jonah is merely an Old Testament saint, awaiting the return of the LORD as well.

Jesus is better! Have you taken advantage of your privilege and believed in Jesus?

This sermon was delivered to Rock Valley Bible Church on March 15, 2009 by Steve Brandon.  
For more information see [www.rvbc.cc](http://www.rvbc.cc).

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[1] Iain Murray, *Revival and Revivalism*, p. 343.

[2] A good reference for these revivals can be found at [http://www.grmi.org/Richard\\_Riss/history/college.html](http://www.grmi.org/Richard_Riss/history/college.html).

[3] If you are wanting to enlarge your heart for evangelism and missions, here are a few books that might help you in that direction.

- *Tell the Truth*, by Will Metzger. This is a great book which helps to articulate and explain the gospel and give you some practical helps to share it.
- *The Master Plan of Evangelism*, by Robert Coleman. This is a classic book that looks at the strategy of Jesus to impact the world.
- *Let the Nations be Glad*, by John Piper. This excellent book shows how the supremacy of God ought to drive us to missions.