

Keynotes from Pastor Tim's am Sermon on 6/06/2021

Series – Jonah, the runaway servant

Part 6 – “How to respond when God confronts us”

Text: Jonah 3 verses 1-10

Scripture references from the ESV

Jonah 3 Then the word of the LORD came to Jonah the second time, saying, ² “Arise, go to Nineveh, that great city, and call out against it the message that I tell you.” ³ So Jonah arose and went to Nineveh, according to the word of the LORD. Now Nineveh was an exceedingly great city, three days' journey in breadth. ⁴ Jonah began to go into the city, going a day's journey. And he called out, “Yet forty days, and Nineveh shall be overthrown!” ⁵ And the people of Nineveh believed God. They called for a fast and put on sackcloth, from the greatest of them to the least of them. 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. ⁷ 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, ⁸ 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. ⁹ Who knows? God may turn and relent and turn from his fierce anger, so that we may not perish.” 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.

Every day, we come face to face with God, though we may not always be aware of it because we don't see him with our physical eyes. We are confronted with him in creation – all of nature declares the existence of God and his power. We are confronted with God in sustaining us – everything we have from the oxygen that keeps us breathing to the friendships that bring us joy comes from God. As we read the Bible, we are especially confronted with God. It tells us who God is, who we are and how we are meant to relate to him.

In all these good gifts, God speaks to us. Just as it is rude to ignore a person who speaks to us, so it is rude to ignore God who is always speaking to us. In fact, it is not only rude but sinful.

How we should respond to this God who confronts us with his glory is a message that runs throughout the Bible.

When we are confronted by God, we need to respond with faith and repentance

- God confronts Jonah with his grace, and Jonah trusts God and repents of his sin.
- God confronts Nineveh with a message of judgement and Nineveh trusts God and repents of their sin

God responds to them as they trust and repent

Whether we consider ourselves to be a Christian or a pagan, the response to God must be the same.

- Christians need to trust God on a daily basis, confessing and repenting of sin
- Those who currently don't believe in God (pagans) need to come to God in faith and repentance and then live a life of daily trust and repentance

This chapter of Jonah shows us repentance from two angles.

1. The repentance of Jonah

In response to God's command to go to Nineveh, Jonah not only refused to go but went in the opposite direction, running from God's command and from God's presence. Sin is running from God, but Jonah discovered he couldn't run from God because God pursues sinners relentlessly. It is only after Jonah has been thrown overboard and swallowed by the great fish prepared by God to save him from drowning that Jonah at last begins to pray to God. Up till this point, Jonah had not spoken to God.

God shows his amazing grace to Jonah by firstly:

- hearing and answering his prayer (**Jonah 2:1-2** see p4)
- saving his life (**Jonah 2:10** see p4)

In his grace, God doesn't write his prophet off. Instead of decommissioning Jonah, he recommissions him. The command (**w1-2** above) gives him a second chance to fulfil his ministry, echoing the command in **Jonah 1:1-2**. (p4).

God did the same for the apostle Peter, after Peter denied that he knew Jesus because of the risk to his own life (**John 18:17,25-27** see p4). In his hour of greatest

testing, Peter failed as an apostle of Jesus Christ. Yet when he met the risen Lord, Jesus entrusted the care and teaching of his people to this failed apostle. (**John 21:15-17** see p4).

That is grace, but we must not assume that God will always act like that. It is not always appropriate for people to return to their original ministry if what they have done has undermined it.

We need to see that God is gracious and doesn't leave his people on the scrapheap when they have failed.

None of us deserve any ministry in God's kingdom. We have ministry opportunities only because of the grace of God to us, not because of our giftedness, natural ability or knowledge of ministry. **It is God who:**

- calls us to serve him
- equips us, gifts us and gives us the knowledge we need

How does Jonah respond to the grace of God? (**vv3-4** above)

The grace of God to Jonah has resulted in Jonah changing his mind. He obeys God.

Jonah has done a complete about turn. He heads to Nineveh to fulfil God's commission.

This is repentance – a change of mind that leads to a change in direction.

2. The repentance of Nineveh

The Ninevites are confronted by God with a message of judgement. Jonah is an ambassador for God to this great city, faithfully speaking the words that God has given him for the people (**v4** above).

The people believe God (**v5** above) and show this by fasting and wearing sackcloth, grieving and humbling themselves under God's hand. Even the king himself joins in, calling people to repent of their sin in the hope that God will be merciful (**vv6-9** above).

- This pagan nation had no regard for Israel's God, yet they heeded the message Jonah brings and turn from their sin, in the hope that Israel's God will turn from his intention to destroy them.

In one day, 120,000 people believed God and repented before him, banking everything on him being merciful.

Scripture helps us to see why they take Jonah seriously, and respond in faith and repentance

- **Matthew 12:39-40** see p4 - Jesus tells us that Jonah being swallowed by the fish acted as a sign to the people of Nineveh. That sign showed that God was with him and speaking through him.
- **Romans 10:17** see p4 – faith comes from hearing. That is what happened in Nineveh. The people heard God’s word, believed that it was true and then repented.

Their repentance was a response of faith.

Behind all this is the work of God’s Spirit. **Ephesians 2:8** tells us that faith is a gift from God. God sends Jonah with a message and then works through that message in the hearts of the Ninevites to bring them to repentance.

God’s response was to take notice of their repentance (**v10**) and he didn’t bring his intended judgement on them.

He spared this great city to live for another day.

What does this mean for us? When we are confronted by God, either by his grace or by his warnings,

we too are to respond with faith and repentance.

Here are two ways to work out faith and repentance.

a) **God is sovereignly ruling the nations** - God spared Nineveh to live for another day, but this was not only because of their repentance. God warned them and gave them time to repent, but he did not have to do this. He showed mercy by giving them time to change because he planned to use them as a rod of discipline for his own people, Israel. (**Isaiah 10:5-6** see p4). At the same time that God sent Jonah to Nineveh (Assyria’s capital city), he was also warning Israel that he would use Assyria to chasten them for their idolatry.

God needed to spare Nineveh because he had a purpose for them.

Proverbs 16:4 says 'The Lord has made everything for its purpose, even the wicked for the day of trouble.'

You may wonder what kind of God is this who governs the nations even using wicked nations for his purposes?

He is the God who created the universe and everything in it so he owns it and can use it as he chooses.

When we humble ourselves before him and trust him, this truth becomes a source of great comfort. Our world seems out of control at the moment, with all that is going on. Our lives, too, can seem out of control with things happening in our families that we have no control over, and sins that seem to constantly defeat us.

We are utterly helpless in the face of all of this.

Yet as we read the Bible, and put the pieces together, we find that our God is still in control.

Everything from great empires to the smallest atom, including our lives, is under God's sovereign power. He is providentially working through the chaos so that his purposes, including that of doing good to his people, will be fulfilled.

We need to trust that God is governing the chaos to bring honour to his name and for our eternal good.

b) God responds to repentant people with mercy – The repentance of the Ninevites fell short of being a saving repentance, but it was genuine as their actions showed. They acknowledged their sin of violence (**v8** above) and agreed that God is just in judging them for it. They grieved over the state they were in and stopped being violent. God's response (**v10** above) is to turn from the judgement he had threatened.

Here is a God who turns from his fierce anger when we stop running from him and run towards him trusting that Christ has paid the price for every sin

We need to respond to God with daily confession of sin and daily turn away from it. Whenever we are confronted by God over the sin in our lives, either because we fall to it and discover what is in our own hearts (like Jonah) or because God exposes it through his word (like the Ninevites), we need to confess and turn from it.

We cannot keep on sinning and think that God will endlessly keep on forgiving. He is patient with us and gives us time to change and seek his forgiveness, but if we refuse to repent despite his grace or his warnings then he must act justly and carry out his judgement.

- If we are believers, it might mean he brings storms into our lives, or brings us to the very lowest place we can go, in order to bring us to our senses and seek him.
- If we are not believers, then it will ultimately mean eternal separation from him.

We need to stop justifying ourselves before God and acknowledge our sin, agreeing that he is just in judging us for it.

We need to grieve over our sin and be determined to stop doing it.

Crucially we need to turn to Christ

The life of repentance is only possible because of Jesus. When we turn from our sin to Jesus, he puts his Spirit in us and enables us to have the assurance of forgiveness and the freedom to obey God.

As we respond to God in faith and repentance, we enter into a relationship with him.

It matters eternally that we respond to God when he confronts us. It matters eternally that we trust him and repent of our sin.

Jonah 2:1-2 Then Jonah prayed to the LORD his God from the belly of the fish,² saying, "I called out to the LORD, out of my distress, and he answered me; out of the belly of Sheol I cried, and you heard my voice.

Jonah 2:10 And the LORD spoke to the fish, and it vomited Jonah out upon the dry land

Jonah 1:1-2 Now the word of the LORD came to Jonah the son of Amittai, saying,² "Arise, go to Nineveh, that great city, and call out against it, for their evil^[a] has come up before me.

John 18:17,25-27 The servant girl at the door said to Peter, "You also are not one of this man's disciples, are you?" He said, "I am not."²⁵ Now Simon Peter was standing and warming himself. So they said to him, "You also are not one of his disciples, are you?" He denied it and said, "I am not."²⁶ One of the servants of the high priest, a relative of the man whose ear Peter had cut off, asked, "Did I not see you in the garden with him?"²⁷ Peter again denied it, and at once a rooster crowed.

John 21:15-17 ¹⁵ When they had finished breakfast, Jesus said to Simon Peter, "Simon, son of John, do you love me more than these?" He said to him, "Yes, Lord; you know that I love you." He said to him, "Feed my lambs." ¹⁶ He said to him a second time, "Simon, son of John, do you love me?" He said to him, "Yes, Lord; you know that I love you." He said to him, "Tend my sheep." ¹⁷ He said to him the third time, "Simon, son of John, do you love me?" Peter was grieved because he said to him the third time, "Do you love me?" and he said to him, "Lord, you know everything; you know that I love you." Jesus said to him, "Feed my sheep.

Matthew 12:39-40 But he answered them, "An evil and adulterous generation seeks for a sign, but no sign will be given to it except the sign of the prophet Jonah. ⁴⁰ For just as Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of the great fish, so will the Son of Man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth.

Romans 10:17 So faith comes from hearing, and hearing through the word of Christ.

Ephesians 2:8 For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God,

Isaiah 10:5-6 Woe to Assyria, the rod of my anger;
the staff in their hands is my fury!

⁶ Against a godless nation I send him,
and against the people of my wrath I command him,
to take spoil and seize plunder,
and to tread them down like the mire of the streets.