

**WHEN LIFE SEEMS TO SWALLOW YOU WHOLE** - Thoughts on God's Will from the Book of Jonah - Part 4  
 Sunday, July 26<sup>th</sup> - 6:30 p.m.  
 Pastor Don Horban, Cedarview Community Church, Newmarket, ON

**Jonah 3:1-10** - "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."

1) **GOD IS QUICK TO GIVE JONAH ANOTHER CHANCE**

I said last Sunday there is mercy even in God's chastening. His is a ***strong*** grace. Not a ***sentimental*** grace. God doesn't cast Jonah aside to get somebody else. This truth fits with the doctrine of chastening. There is a simple beauty in those gracious words - **Jonah 3:1** - "The word of the Lord came to Jonah a second time."

We all need to think the ways of God through in our complicated circumstances. God was ***calling*** Jonah, not ***ruining*** Jonah. He was preparing Him, molding his character, sharpening his commitment. God never had it in His heart to ruin Jonah or cast him aside in his failure.

2) **EVEN AFTER YOU'VE BEEN DELIVERED FROM THE BELLY OF A FISH, GOD'S WILL IS STILL WAITING TO BE CARRIED OUT** -

**Jonah 3:1-4**- "The word of the Lord came to Jonah a second time: [2] "Get up! Go to the great city of Nineveh and preach the message that I tell you." [3] Jonah got up and went to Nineveh according to the LORD's command. Now Nineveh was an extremely great city, a three-day walk. [4] Jonah set out on the first day of his walk in the city and proclaimed, "In forty days Nineveh will be demolished!"

Here we learn God's plan all along. His plan wasn't to obliterate Jonah. It was to change Jonah's calculating, stubborn heart. Jonah discovered God's plans hadn't changed. God still required his obedience. There was still a job to be done. **Very clearly, you can't avoid the command of God.** You can run from it, but it will follow wherever you go. God did answer Jonah's prayer for **deliverance**. He did not change His mind about Jonah's **assignment**.

### 3) NOTICE THE IMPORTANCE OF ONE PERSON'S LIFE IN GOD'S PLAN

A whole city was won by Jonah's simple obedience. The lesson is very direct. God was right in His call of Jonah. There was potential in God's call. There always is. Jonah to be awakened to this. There is a high wisdom to God's call. We are always **able** to do God's will if we are **willing** to do it. God would not have commanded Jonah to go all alone to Nineveh unless He was prepared to reward Jonah's efforts.

You may feel inadequate for the job God is calling you to. In your own strength, you probably are. The important truth to remember is that **God is never uninformed or unaware of all the facts in any of His call and will for our lives.**

Look at 1 Thessalonians 5:24 - **"He who calls you is faithful; he will surely do it."** God always knows what He's doing with our lives. He can always be trusted. Don't let your initial reflex fears or questions keep you from looking to God in faith. His will is always the best thing for you and everybody else.

### 4) THE STEPS TOWARD RENEWAL

Here we have recorded the way lives are made right with God. Whether you've been swallowed by a fish or not, these steps have never changed. They are always fruit producing, though rarely easy:

- a) **First, people must hear what God is saying about their lives.** This is the less obvious lesson concerning the **Ninevites**. Jonah had to give the message of sin and repentance exactly as God had commanded. And the people of Nineveh had to hear it.

The thing is, our culture finds it hard to embrace this kind of religion. We have been programmed to see this kind of Biblical message as intolerant and judgmental. All of this makes it harder and harder for the church to be God's gospel light in this world.

Just to be clear, there is no Scriptural hope for personal salvation or renewal without hearing the message of the Bible. It's the message Jonah ran from. We must not make the same mistake.

Everything starts with having hearing ears.

- b) **Second, to their credit, the people of Nineveh believed the message God gave Jonah.** They received it with seriousness and faith. Our text specifically says "**the Ninevites believed God.**" I take that to mean they knew they weren't just listening to **Jonah**. They sensed the voice of God Himself.
- c) **Third, there was a genuine sorrow for sin.** There was no passing the buck, no excuse making. They had a keen sense of their guilt and shame.
- d) **Fourth, they called out to God.** It's one thing to feel guilty. It's another thing to take your guilt to God in earnest prayer. Unlike the first pleas of the shipmates of Jonah, they didn't call on their false gods. This indicates the depth of the seriousness of their response to Jonah's message. I'm sure, if they were religious at all, their first inclination would have been to other god's rather than the God of Jonah.

The lesson here is unless you go to the God of the Bible you will have confession without cleansing. This may feel *therapeutic* but it will never being **peace with God**.

- e) **Fifth, the people were willing to forsake their sins and did so immediately.** The genuineness of this repentance is seen in the way they forsook their sins **before** God promised to spare them.

## 5) THE RESULTS OF REPENTANCE

Blessing always follows repentance. God doesn't apply spiritual life to rebellious hearts. We must first respond to convicting grace by confessing our sins. Then God will bless and honor our contrite hearts.

The order is spelled out in passages like 2 Chronicles 7:14 - "**If my people who are called by my name humble themselves, and pray and seek my face and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven and will forgive their sin and heal their land.**"