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Jonah: Arise & Go

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4

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Who Knows? God May...

SCRIPTURE

Jonah 3



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Jonah, chapter three is where we will be this morning. I'm not trying to rhyme. It's just coming naturally. Give me long enough and I'll fall out of it. Jonah, chapter three is what we're studying this morning, the fourth sermon in this brief teaching series through the book of Jonah this summer. We'll be here for one more week, and then we're off to a different topic in the month of July. Jonah, chapter three.

If you don't have a Bible with you or you need one for one reason or another, you should be able to find one in one of the chairs around you, and Jonah is in the Old Testament. That's the first part of the Bible. You're looking for chapter three. That's the large number, and we're going to study all 10 verses in this chapter. Those are the smaller numbers that you see mixed throughout the text. Jonah, chapter three, verses one through 10, and if we could, just one more time, if we could just pause and ask that God would speak to us with a word of prayer. We can never really underestimate the importance and the value of what God can do in moments like this. Let's just ask that God would be with us and God would speak to us, and we'll get into Jonah 3. Let's pray. Friend, in your own heart, in your own way, just ask that God would speak to you this morning.

Father in heaven, we need you, so we ask that you speak right now, ask that you'll heal, you'll restore, you'll give light, you'll give truth, you'll do what only you can do. Pray you'll do it in Jesus' name. Amen.

Jonah, chapter three goes like this, "Then the word of the Lord came to Jonah the second time saying, 'Arise. Go to Nineveh, that great city, and call out against it the message that I tell you.' 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. Jonah began to go into the city, going a day's journey, and he called out, 'Yet 40 days, and Nineveh shall be overthrown,' 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."

"The word reached the king of Nineveh, and he arose from his thrown, removed his robe, covered himself with sackcloth and sat in ashes, and he issued a proclamation and published throughout 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.'"

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

That's God's word for us today.

Over the last few weeks, we've been ramping up to this moment right here, so if you need a refresher or we're just coming into the moment, let me just share with you again what's been going on. Over the last couple of weeks, we've watched God work with this prophet, this man of God named Jonah. Jonah was an Israelite. He was part of the inside crowd. He was part of God's people, and a prophet is supposed to be a messenger. They receive words from God, and they respond in obedience and do what God says, and Jonah was told to go to this place called Nineveh, this massive city, modern Syria, and he was told to go to the city called Nineveh to preach the news of judgment there.

Jonah did just the opposite. In fact, Jonah, chapter one, is the chapter full of opposites. God says do this. He does this. God says do this. He does this. You see Jonah running away, away, away from God. He gets on a boat to try to get away from God, and God is running after Jonah, so the message here.

As God comes after Jonah, He comes after him through a storm. Jonah's in a boat. The boat's on the high waters, and God calls a storm to come upon the boat, and the sailors, these pagan guys, they don't worship the God of the Bible. They don't worship Jonah's God. They start losing it. They're like, "What in the world is going on? None of this happened until you go here. What is happening?"

They wake Jonah up. Jonah's asleep, not even concerned about the wellbeing of these guys. They start talking to Jonah, and Jonah starts with some of that real superficial religious talk all of us have given before. "Oh, yeah. I'm a Hebrew. I worship the God who made heaven and the seas, yeah, and this, and this," and the sailors are like, "Bro, what are you doing right now?"

Jonah says, "Just cast me overboard." The most selfish thing we've seen in the book yet, but it's Jonah's way of getting rid of his life, and still getting around God's call on his life to go to Nineveh to preach to those people.

What Jonah hoped would be the end of him turned into a new beginning, as he's thrown overboard and God appoints a great fish to swallow Jonah whole. Can you imagine being a fish and having a bitter prophet for breakfast? It's exactly what this whale had coming. A few days in the fish is the right amount of time to get Jonah to the end of himself, and one day, the fish, three days later, the fish spit Jonah up onto the beach, and God started speaking to him for a second time, and that's what we see here.

If we were to think about the story of Jonah and identify the characters, there's a few that we really easily identify and recognize, because we see them so much. We'd identify Jonah. Yeah, the rebellious, this bitter prophet. Yeah, we see him right there. We would identify the sailors, these pagans, these guys who didn't worship God. They didn't want anything to do with God, but it's actually a bit ironic. They're the ones that come to believe God first in this whole story. They're the ones that are obeying God most easily. We see the fish. He's a character in the story, and there's someone that we see in everything, and that's God.

If I could encourage you to see Him this morning, to see Him as a father, because Jonah has a Father who loves him so well, who is so careful with him, who is so patient with him, and Jonah, a rebellious errant child continuously trying to run away. I think we could look at God, the Father, right here, and we can learn much about who He is and how much He loves each of us. You see, all of us have a Father.

I have a father. Tommy Ray West, take a look at this guy. How good is this? From Troy, Alabama, right? Lives in Montgomery still, where I grew up. That's my mom, and these are their grandkids. I claim responsibilities for the one in the back right and the front left. That's my son, Shepherd. This is my daughter, Perry. This is my father. Every single one of us in here, whether we know him or not, we have a father. This is mine. A good man, maybe even a great man. Didn't do everything right. Certainly made some mistakes, but this is my father.

I know when I talk about God as father, there are different emotions registered across the room. Some of us, because we didn't have a great earthly father. Maybe you were abused. Maybe you were neglected. Maybe you were overlooked. Maybe for others, just because we know the pain and the grief of losing a father that we love very much. I think all of us here, the ones that had a good dad who was looking to the Lord or the ones that we wish we knew our dad at all, we can come to Jonah, chapter three, and we can watch a loving father patiently at work to love His children so well.

As we look in here, I want to show you three things about the character of God as father. The first thing I want to show you is something about the character of the Father. The second thing I'm going to show you is something about the power that the Father has, and the third thing I want to show you is what happens when the character and the power of the Father come together for good in our lives.

The first thing I want you to see is this, God is a good Father. We're talking about the character of the Father, and we call Him good because if we were all very honest with each other in our own sinful flesh, we don't expect God to do what God is doing. Jonah 3:1, "The word of the Lord came to Jonah a second time." But think about this. God had already come to Jonah, and Jonah had already refused to obey God. Yet, God comes again, because God's good, and God is a God of the second chance, and if He's gracious, the third chance, and the fourth chance, and on and on and on.

But we were really honest, we would admit to one another we don't expect God to work like this. We expect Him to choose the elite ones. We expect Him to choose the ones that are good, and are working hard, and they're striving after Him. But look at God and His goodness here, going to a child that's struggling to get it together and loving him, and being patient with him.

There are three specific ways we see that God is good here. The first is this, God is good to work through our failure and our sufferings. In every way, Jonah looks like a failed prophet. He disobeyed God's clear word once, and he's about to halfheartedly obey it a second time, but in so many ways, this man of God, this person who should have known better, he keeps struggling to get it right. He keeps struggling to serve God with a full heart, and our God is good, because He works through our failures and our sufferings. Jonah has already failed in obedience. He has already suffered in the belly of the whale because of it. Struggle didn't disqualify Jonah from being used by God, because God does His greatest works in Jonah's life and in our lives today through our failures and through our suffering.

Jonah's struggle, Jonah's struggle to get it right, his struggle to hear God, his struggle to obey, that didn't get him sidelined. God kept coming back to him. God kept inviting him in. Look at His goodness on display.

This is what some theologians call the Jonah principle, and least we think we're just plucking this thing out of air, Matthew, chapter 12, verses 38 to 42, it's actually where we get it from. The Jonah principle goes like this, God enjoys bringing life out of death. See, the Pharisees came to Jesus one day, and the Pharisees gave him a challenge. Religious teachers, people that want to manipulate God and get God in their debt through good works, they came to God, and they challenged him, "Do a great miracle," and Jesus says, "I'm not going to give you a miracle, but the sign of Jonah, who was down from three days, and then he was back."

What is Jesus saying here? Jesus is saying, "You will know who I am by my weakness and not by my strength." Think of the story of Jonah, weak, frail, struggling to get it together, struggling to obey, struggling to string a few sentences together that honor God, and Jesus looks back on that, and Jesus says, "This is how I'm going to work in the world. Through what looks like death, I'm going to bring life. Through what looks like weakness, and failure, and struggle, these are going to be the situations where I'm going to shine the brightest."

It's out of the death that Jesus' life was extended to us, not His actual life. It took Jesus dying. It took Jesus getting to the end of himself for us to get to enjoy the life that He has. This is the Jonah principle. God enjoys bringing life out of death. He's good to work through failure and through suffering.

Anyone feel like they're a failure this morning? Anybody just feeling some struggle and the weight of the world over the last week? Take heart. Your failure doesn't disqualify you from being used by God. In fact, the presence of failure, and suffering, and weakness, those are indicators that you're a prime candidate to be used by God, because He's good. He's good.

Here's the other way He's good. God is, also, good to have compassion on a global city. Jonah is about to go to the city of Nineveh. That's the capital of Assyria, which is modern day Iraq. Think about this. It's a great city, not great because it's good, but great in terms of size, and great in terms of dominance and the control that it had on the world. It's a wicked city. It's known for gross evils, the greatest city that the world had ever seen. It's great in terms of size.

It took about three days to walk through. It's great in terms of might, economically, militarily, and socially. It was a city that could not be brought down. It was a city that could not be destroyed. Oh, but God, He will bring this city to its knees, without firing a single shot. In fact, He's going to use the most unlikely of weapons. He's going to use a mere soul that's struggling to believe Him, that's struggling to love Him, that's struggling to get it together, that preaches this weird five worded sermon that overturns the whole city.

God is eager to save people who live in cities. Do you see God's seeing a lot of wickedness and a lot of evil going on in the greatest city that this world had ever known, and God is sending the word to it. Do we love cities like God loves cities? It's a good question that we have to encounter as we read the Bible as a whole, but especially the book of Jonah in Jonah, chapter three. City dwellers have always been more open to change, and always more open to the gospel. The first few hundred years after Jesus lived, He died on the cross for the forgiveness of sins, was buried in the ground, and He rose from the dead to vindicate everything that He says. The spirit was poured out on all flesh, just like it was promised in Joel, chapter two, and then, God started sending his followers to cities. He sent them to all the cities of the ancient world, because what happens in the cities spills out into everything else.

The ideas that are discussed here, the economies that are built here, the art that's created here, it spills out into everything else. Whatever gets a city by the throat, gets the world by the throat, and God is good to have compassion on cities.

It was actually not city people that were originally resistant to the gospel or resistant to the gospel today. It's actually many people from outside the city, the farmlands or the hill country, if you will. None of this is to disparage anyone that's from there. I have family there. I have plenty of family from there myself. But when you think about it, it's city people that are open to change, and innovative, and creative ideas. Not people in the country that are more set in their ways, resistant to outsiders and new ideas. It was true in Jesus' day. The same is true today. If we want to see our world change, we pray to God and we consider how God would use our lives in this great city of Raleigh, and in the other cities of the world. God is good to have compassion on a global city.

The last thing we see is that God is good to work through reluctant obedience, reluctant obedience. Think about this. Jonah doesn't want to go to Nineveh. The only reason he's in Nineveh is against his will, because he told the guys to throw him out of the boat. The fish swallowed him whole. The fish threw him up on the land that he was supposed to be, and here's Jonah reluctantly doing what God has called him to do, and he goes into Nineveh, and he preaches all right, and it's this weird, awkward, really depressing message. Can you imagine if this was your Sunday at 11:00. Wait for it. Yet 40 days, and Raleigh shall be overthrown. That's it, so no need to sing. That's it. We'll go home. How depressing would that be? This is the word that he brought. In this reluctant prophet, and in this reluctant share, God does incredible things, because He's good.

God loves taking the crooked arrows of our lives and making them fly straight at His target. You feeling reluctant to obey God today? Feeling reluctant to go and share, reluctant to go next door, reluctant to followup with that friend, reluctant to engage that co-worker again? Take heart from Jonah. You have a good Father, who is organizing all of this towards a good end, and He's at work in your life and in your situation.

Well, does this mean that we can just keep sinning, that grace can abound? Maybe I can just stay reluctant. Maybe I don't have to give my heart to this, and God can still work in all of this for good. No. Romans says, "Shall we start sinning, that grace can just keep piling up to us?" Absolutely by no means. May it never be, because Jonah had to suffer. Jonah had to pay for his disobedience towards God, and we will, too. But take heart from Jonah's story that God will use our obedience, our disobedience, and even our halfhearted obedience to accomplish great things in the world.

What does this mean for us? By way of application, let's allow our sufferings and our failures to draw us closer to the Father. We've seen time and time again, haven't we over the last couple of weeks, God's at work in the details of this story to bring people to Himself. His character is on display in our lives, whether we have eyes to see it or not. He can be in the storm. He can be in a moment. He can be in a situation to bring us into Himself, because he's a loving Father trying to work everything together for good for those who love him and that are called according to His purpose.

Think about this. Suffering and failure, it will make you a far worse person or a far better person, but it matters how you respond to it. Do we receive these things as God reaching out to us, or do we receive things as a stiff arm from the Father towards us really has everything to do, it makes all the difference. God loves to use failures. He loves to use sufferers. He's using me, for crying out loud. But we must first take a step towards Him in repentance and faith. God can use a Jonah, and he can use us, too.

The second thing I want you to see here is this, that's God is a good Father. Here is the truth that God is a great father. By saying, "Well, isn't great just a superlative for good?" Well, I see what we're thinking there. Great in terms of strength, His dynamism, His might, and His power, if we were to just name the obvious. There's some of us here in this room that have fathers that have used their strength inappropriately towards us and other people. We've seen fathers beat us, beat us, or mom, or someone else. We've seen people with power, and they use that to tear people down and not build that up. That is not true with the God of the Bible, and we can come to Him and we can find refuge in Him.

Three ways that God is great in Jonah, chapter three. First, God is great to work through the big things and the small things alike. Think about this with me. God can use a word, a wind, a whale, a worm, and a Jonah. He's at work in all of these details. That's His greatness on display. That's God's power that He has. His great power is seen in storms. It's seen in seas. It's seen in unlikely settings.

It's seen in a king who repents. Check it, we're not pantheists or pantheists, that we think, "Oh, God is in the wind, and God is in the waves." No, we see God as creator and sustainer of all of those things, and God's able to curve them, and to shape them, and to move them towards the ends which He desires, which is for our good and for the good as neighbors as well. He's great. See it on display through the creation and the subtle details of Jonah's life.

Second, our God is great in bringing repentance to a city. He makes kings bow, not from the presence of the Lord, but from the simple prophesy and a simple preached word. That's greatness on display.

Let me illustrate what I mean. If someone of great fame were to walk into this room, many of us would stand, and applaud, and get out the phones and be ready to take pictures, right? For example, imagine if Kevin Durant, Steph Curry and the Warriors were to come in right now. In fact, we have the most incredible thing on tap. Larry, do you mind opening the door? They're not coming. I'm just kidding. I just want to see how many of you would turn around.

If these guys showed up, right, I see you continuing to turn. They're not coming. If these guys were to show up, what would the response be like? Many people would be sharing. A few haters would be standing and booing and pointing the finger, because these guys won ... This finger, not the other one. These guys won the NBA finals this last week, right? If they came in, people would go nuts.

Think about how a great God took this city. This city is opposed to God. They don't want anything to do with God. They're against Him at every point. Nineveh is not neutral. Nineveh is opposed to God in every single way, and God, He is so powerful, He can take a reluctant semi disobedient prophet, and He can send him in with a half-hearted five word sermon that doesn't make a whole lot of sense, and He can bring the king of a city, He can bring the governor of a state, He can bring the president of a country to His knees.

Power on display through the book of Jonah. God is great in bringing a city to repentance. They put on sackcloth. They put on ashes. They called a fast in the land. A fast is a way of saying, "God, I want you this much." I'm a huge foodie. Love to eat all the time. Can't get enough of it. Fasting is a way that we say to God, "God, I want you this much. I'm going to take the thing I love, I'm going to take the thing I'm doing, I'm going to put it aside, because I want more of you in my life." Sackcloth and ashes is a way of communicating to God that inward reality of, listen, is this is all we had, and we had God, we would be enough.

Look at these people giving their lives with repentance. Repentance, it begins with an inward conviction, and it is seen with an outward change. Look at the repentance under the greatness of our God. God is worthy of all worship. The Father is honored by the insignificant and the important alike. In Nineveh and in Raleigh today, we will honor him by what we say and we honor Him by what we do, and God uses His power towards good and just ends to bring a city to repentance through the reluctant word of a reluctant prophet.

Last, God is good and God is great in how He calls and sends. See, Jonah has been in the fish, and if we could just think about this for a moment, right? I have never had the thought, I've never had the thought that it would be a great idea to go and find a fish big enough for me to fit in, and to get inside of it and to vacation for a couple days. Anybody else? How many hits has that gotten on Expedia, right? I doubt many, because none of us think, "This is going to be fun. This is going to be appetizing. This is going to be great. This makes for some great stories on Facebook and Instagram. I'll get in the fish, and I'll take pictures. It will be awesome." Nobody thinks that.

This is where Jonah's been. As best as we can imagine, he's probably bleached white from the stomach acid of the fish. He gets vomited up onto the land, smelling like fish guts, covered in sand.

And God is great in how He calls and how He sends, because in Jonah 3:1, "Then the word of the Lord came to Jonah the second time." This is greatness. Think about this. Jonah 3:1 teaches us that mission is not for the well rested. Mission is not for the elite. Mission is not for the ready. Mission comes to people who were in failure, who were struggling, who were suffering. These are the moments when God is liable to come to us and say, "Listen, don't you see that I'm at work. Don't you see that I'm at work in your life, and I have a plan, and I want to work in your situation? Don't you understand who I am? Don't you see what I'm trying to invite you into now? Now let's go. Let's pick up. Let's go to Nineveh." God doesn't come to Jonah and say, "Listen, bro, you look rough. Take two weeks off. Get some Gatorade and then we'll go." He says, "Now." Who is suffering? Who is in failure? Who is in struggle? Who is in weakness that's hearing now from God as well?

And God is great, this is greatness, because the way that He calls us and the way He sends us, this is a bit of a daunting image, and I think that's the point, because our God is like a spiritual tornado. He never sucks us in without intending to send us out. Genesis, chapter 12, God calls Abraham. He says, "I'm going to bless you, so that you will be a blessing to other people, and to get out of your country. Pack up and go."

God doesn't intend to bless us without, also, intending to bless other people through us. God doesn't come to us, God doesn't heal us of things, our sin and our vice, that thing that seems like it's going to undo us. God doesn't come to us and heal us of that without intending to redeem that, and restore that, and making that the very vessel and vehicle of our ministry in the world. He's great in how he draws us in, heals us, and then send us out.

What does this mean for us? By way of application, let's consider where Jesus is sending us, because in John 20:21, Jesus came and said, "Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, even so I am sending you." The Father and the son address us through Jonah, chapter three. They say, "I'll use you and get out." What's the question that God is saying to you now? Do you need to get out of the belly of a fish, of a situation? Get out of your country and step out in faith? Get out of comfort and serve in ministry? Get out of what's safe and serve and honor him in a place or risk?

He doesn't draw us in without intending to send us out. The Father sent the son. Now the son sends the church, and in a very powerful and specific way, Jesus intends to send each of us. He's great.

Last, God is a gracious Father. God is a gracious Father. This is what happens when his good character and His great power meet. God is a gracious Father. Versus nine and 10, "'Who knows,' the king says, 'Maybe God will turn and relent from His fierce anger, so that we may not perish,' and when God saw what they did, how they turned from their evil, God relented of the disaster that He said He would do to them, and He did not do it."

If we all were very honest with each other, again, in our flesh, we'd admit, "I don't expect for God to work like this. I don't expect for Him to be a good Father who is going to give a first chance. Then a second chance, and He's going to stay patient, and He's going to stay faithful." Many of us would say, "I don't know fathers like that." God's a good Father. He's a great Father, and He's a gracious Father.

We can see two children in this story. The father has one child named Jonah, and God has many children in a city called Nineveh, and God intends to love both of them, with their own problems, with their own dispositions, with their own issues and strugglings, and God will get through to both.

He's gracious in three ways. First, He's gracious to turn from His anger. When the king heard the news, he repented. He called to God, and he told the whole city to do the same. See, God's love and anger worked together. They don't make a whole lot of sense without each other. When the word touched even the king, he said, "Let's turn from the evil that's in each of our hands."

Listen, I know we have a lot of problems in our world. Many of these problems are associated with the cities of the world. Make no mistake, from Jonah, chapter three, the way that cities are changed is repentance, and the way people repent is to hear the gospel, however passionately or reluctantly we may share it with them. Do we want to see our world change? Do we want to see our own city change? Let's share the gospel, and let's trust that God can bring people to repentance, because when he does come to repentance, He is gracious to turn away from His anger.

God is, also, gracious to make rebels his family, right? We have a four year old daughter, and when we're going through the alphabet, N is not for neutral. N is for Nineveh, and Nineveh is not neutral towards God. Nineveh is opposed to God in every single way. It's a bad place. It's an evil place. Yet, God delights in making the rebels of Nineveh his sons and his daughters the same. Notice how God works. God is so gracious to overtake one man, to get half-hearted obedience started. That's all God needs sometimes to get a movement going, to get half-hearted obedience in one of His children, to send that child into the greatest, most threatening city the world has ever known, and God doesn't get a mere revival going. God overturns the whole place. He transforms the whole place for His honor and His glory.

He's so gracious. He makes outsiders His family. He did it in Nineveh, and He's done it to the Nineveh in each and every one of us. He's so gracious.

And God is gracious to bring our shame upon Himself. In Luke, chapter 15, Jesus told a series of stories to people who were a lot like the people who we see in the book of Jonah. The book of Jonah is intended for God's people. It's actually intended as a message, as a mirror to hold up for God's people to look into to see who God is, yes, but really where we are and how we align with the heart of God. Jonah was intended to go to the people of Israel, God's people, as a way of showing them and teaching them this is what you're like. You're like a Jonah. You've struggled to obey. You're not on mission. You can't get with it with what we're doing, but look at how I'm great, and look how I'm working even in your unfaithfulness.

In Luke, chapter 15, Jesus was speaking to a similar group of people, and He told a series of stories to teach them what God is like and what they were like, and really to teach them about the shape and desires of their own hearts. Jesus told three stories. The first one, He told the story of a widow, this needy, tender lady, who didn't have much, but she lost a coin, the widow's mite, and she overturned the entire house to find it. The punch line of that story right there is Jesus is saying, "This is what I'm like. You could think of me like a needy widow. I lost something that's very valuable, and my purpose and what I'm about, I'm here to overturn a whole house if necessary to find what is mine."

Then he told a second story. He told the story about a shepherd who had 100 sheep, 100 sheep. He lost one of them. Instead of being content with 99 sheep, he goes after that one. He leaves the 99, searches after the one. Finds it, brings it home. The punch line of the story, "I'm like a good shepherd. I'm willing to leave 99 that I have, to go find one that got away. Put it on my shoulders and bring it home. This is what I'm like."

Then Jesus told one more story. This was the story of the father with the prodigal sons. There's an older brother, who apparently loved the father, who was apparently always around the house, always doing good, trying to stay in the father's good gracious, and there was a younger brother. That younger brother, one day, he got sick and tired of the father. He came to the father and he said, "I want my share of the inheritance." That's a lot more complicated than going to PNC and withdrawing some cash. He would have to rearrange his entire life to make this happen. But that's what the younger brother said. This younger son, "I want my piece of you, because I'm done with this."

The father, in some mysterious grace, he gives the child what he asked for. The father takes his cash and he goes away to the far country, and the text says he wastes his life on loose living. You're thinking he went to the casino. He's hanging out in strip clubs. He's wasting his life away.

One day, the cash run out. He got to the end of himself, and he found himself sitting in a pig sty, eating the same pods that the pigs would eat, and reality started to set in. He had this thought, "What am I doing here? I have a father back home who loves me so much. I'm going to get my life together, and I'm going to go home to my father, and I'm going to sell myself into my father's house, and I'm going to become one of his servants. Then he'll welcome me in."

One of the most shocking things happens next. He's on his way home, and the text tells us that when he was a long way off, the father, the father was on the porch peering off into the distance, as if the father was waiting on the child to come home, because the father was eager to encounter his wayward son again. The father was desirous of his child and ready to bring him back home, and the text says when the father saw him a long way off, the father ran.

That might not seem like much, but what's going on in an honor and in a shame culture, is when the father has to take off and run, he exposes himself by hiking up his robe a little bit. You can see his thin calf muscles, and it's embarrassing, because he hasn't been doing leg day, and he starts running after the guy, bringing the shame of the culture on himself. That was a joke. You laugh. Bringing the same of the culture on himself. Also, this wayward son had wasted his life. He's brought disrepute on the name. He's got a debt that's going to have to be absorbed. The father doesn't get to him, and start pummeling him with his fists. The father gets to him, and hugs him, and starts kissing his neck, and he's so proud, and he's celebrating this wayward son has come home.

One of the punchlines of this story is that Jesus is saying, "I'm kind of like this loving father. This is what I'm about. I'm like this widow. I'm like this shepherd, and I'm like this father. I'm trigger happy with my grace. I'm waiting on somebody to make a right move, because I'm eager to move towards him." James 4:8 is true. You takes a step towards God, he takes a step towards you.

Here's the shocker in this story. That younger son, he's not the only son. There's an older son, who is in the house. There's an older son that turned his lip up at God when he sees God moving in grace. There's the older son who sees the father giving love to a place where it doesn't look like love should be given, and he gets mad at the father. He pouts against the father. He goes outside to pitch a fit. Sound like anything you've heard before?

The story of Jonah, the story of the father and the prodigal sons in Luke 15, they have so much to do with each other. At the core of both of them is the loving father, who had evil, who had disaster, and had wrath that he's set to bring on anyone that opposes him, but he's willing to set it aside when his children repent and come home. God did indeed relent when He relented through redirection. God was able to bring the wrath that He had coming on the Ninevites, he absorbed it into His own life by sending it upon His son. He's gracious towards us.

This is what the Bible talks about when it says that He made him with no sin, to be sin, so that we can become the righteousness of God.

By way of application, all of this is possible, because the spirit went to Jonah a first time and a second time, and the spirit brings this word to us today. Let's listen to the spirit and respond in obedience, simple obedience. This is what the message of Jonah is all about. Look who God is. Look at who we are. Let's respond in obedience and faith. The word of the Lord came to Jonah a second time. The spirit was at work. Is the Lord coming to you again today? What is He saying to you? Let's pray.

Father, we thank you for your word. We thank you that you have been gracious to many in this room, hundreds and thousands of times over in giving the gospel to us a first time, and then again, and again, and again. God, you are so good.

God, you're, also, great in the way that you're able to work in our lives and in our situations to continually show us who you are, and we thank you that that greatness doesn't crush us, because you've chosen to crush Christ in our place. God, we're so thankful.

God, we thank you for the book of Jonah. We pray that it would be a good mirror for each of us to look into, to see your gracious and compassionate character. God, will we have hearts that rejoice with the things that you rejoice in, and we celebrate the things that you celebrate, and, God, for the areas where we're inevitably off, we ask for the grace of repentance, to admit I'm wrong and you're right, and, God, we look forward to the grace and embrace that you have for us at the end of that.

Father, many of us who are family members here at this church, we count it an honor to be able to contribute to your mission through giving an offering now. As we have a few moments to reflect and to think about Jonah, what you're saying to us this morning and what you have for us, God, we'd pray that you'd help us to do so with grateful hearts, and we ask for it in Jesus' name. Amen.



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