

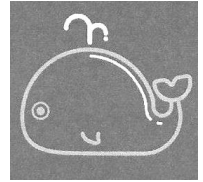


# Jonah

October 2023

## Jonah 3 Grace Proclaimed

(sermons: Oct 8)



### Jonah 3: 1-4 Jonah Preaches

- v.1 *the word of the Lord came to Jonah a second time – Jonah was given another chance to deliver the same message but the tone may have been different in the light of Jonah's experience*
- v.3 *it took three days to go through it – a visit required three days (NIV 1984): this followed the pattern of Assyrian diplomacy: arrival and presenting credentials; delivering message; response & departure. It was 'a very large city' with 120,000 inhabitants (4:2); its ruins confirm this size.*
- v.4 *Forty more days and Nineveh will be overthrown – a warning of the time limit for their response*
1. Jonah was given a second chance to obey God and deliver his message.  
Do we know times when we, or others, have been given a second chance to obey God?  
Or do we, or churches, sometimes miss out on God's blessing, which may go to someone else instead?  
Do we think that God has a 'Plan B/C/D...' for our lives, if we don't play our part in 'Plan A'?  
Should we do what we believe God wants us to do today and leave the explanations to God's wisdom?  
Is there a difference between gratefully accepting God's mercy and presuming upon it?
  2. How do we know, and how can we help each other to discern, what God is calling us to do?  
Do we sometimes need a second, or third, prompting to take a new course of action?  
Is this a sign of disobedience, or of our weakness – and have we experienced God's patience with us?  
Do we show the same patience with others that God has shown with us?

### Jonah 3: 5-9 Nineveh Repents

- v.4 *Jonah.. went to Nineveh – 500 miles straight across the desert but over 800 miles by trade routes, far away from the people and way of life that he knew, deep into enemy territory, probably on foot*
- v.5 *The Ninevites believed God. A fast was proclaimed – the Ninevites' response was immediate. The king responded to public concern with an official proclamation. Uncomfortable sackcloth signified sorrow. There are Assyrian records of such public displays of regret in response to defeat in battle, famine, disease and a solar eclipse – Jonah's warning was taken as seriously, or perhaps accompanied by, some such disaster.*
- v.9 *Who knows? God may yet relent... – the Ninevites were hoping that their public display of remorse would bring a favourable response.*
3. How did the people of Nineveh and their king respond to God's message through Jonah?  
How much of the life of the city was affected?  
What evidence is there that their repentance was genuine? What were they hoping would happen?
  4. How would you expect Jonah to feel about Nineveh's response to his preaching?  
Have we ever seen people that we expected to be hostile to Christianity surprise us by responding positively to something that we have said or done?  
Have we wondered what we did on that occasion or simply thanked God for his work in their lives?
  5. *'One of the most wonderful truths lying at the heart of the Book of Jonah is that God turns to those who turn to him. Even more wonderful is the truth that he does not turn away from those who, like Jonah, turn away from him.'* (Rosemary Nixon in *The Message of Jonah*)

### **Jonah 3: 10 God Spares Nineveh**

v.10 he relented – NIV 1984 ‘he had compassion’. The Ninevites ‘turned from’ their evil ways. God turned towards them in mercy. ‘Relenting’ is not the same as ‘repenting’. God postponed his judgement on Nineveh because of their repentance, temporary as it turned out to be.

Later the Ninevites returned to their cruel ways and other prophets again prophesied judgement. 100 years or more later Assyria was defeated by Baylon in 612BC and Nineveh was destroyed.

6. Did God change his mind about how he would treat the Ninevites?

Or was the message of judgement always conditional on their response?

7. What does this chapter teach us about God?

What does it teach us about our own place in God’s purposes?

8. ‘Now it is required that those who have been given a trust must prove faithful’ 1 Corinthians 4:2

*‘When I came to you, I did not come with eloquence or human wisdom as I proclaimed to you the testimony about God. <sup>2</sup> For I resolved to know nothing while I was with you except Jesus Christ and him crucified. <sup>3</sup> I came to you in weakness with great fear and trembling. <sup>4</sup> My message and my preaching were not with wise and persuasive words, but with a demonstration of the Spirit’s power, <sup>5</sup> so that your faith might not rest on human wisdom, but on God’s power.’ 1 Cor 2:1-5*

*‘When you’re God’s mouthpiece, it may not matter what’s in your heart. It matters to you and your own relationship with God, but not in connection with what God achieves through you, which may be unrelated to what is in your heart. It’s a reason not to assume that a successful pastor is in in close touch with God, and not to assume that an unsuccessful pastor has lost touch with God.’*

*(John Goldingay in Daniel and Twelve Prophets for Everyone)*

Do you find these words helpful in thinking about the privilege of our service of God – and of the limitations of what we can do?