

Chapter 10

JONAH GOES TO NINEVEH

Now the word of the LORD came unto Jonah the second time, saying, "Arise, go to Nineveh, that great city, and preach to 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 exceeding great city, a three-day journey in extent.

The third chapter begins the third major movement in the story of Jonah. The first major movement in the first 16 verses of chapter one covered Jonah's disobedience, his flight from God, and the great storm. Chapter 1:17 through chapter 2:1-10, described Jonah's preservation in the belly of the fish, and his prayer to God. The third major movement covers Jonah and the city of Nineveh. In this chapter we will see Jonah's proclamation or his speaking for God. In chapter 1 he was fleeing from God; in chapter 2 he was praying to God; now in chapter 3 he is preaching for God. In Chapter 4 we will see Jonah and the Lord, where Jonah is corrected in his theology, and he learns more of the character of his God.

The outline of chapter 3 can be understood in this manner. In verses 1 and 2, we have Jonah restored and re-commissioned to Nineveh. Verses 3 and 4 cover Jonah's faithful preaching to Nineveh. Verses 5 through 9 describe Nineveh's repentance and conversion. Verse 10 sets forth God graciously revoking the sentence that he had passed upon the city.

We look first in verse 1 at Jonah's restoration to his office as a prophet. We read, "**Now the word of the LORD came unto Jonah the second time.**" As believers in Christ, this reveals to us that God is the God of second chances. We all fail our Lord over and over, so we should be very thankful that we have a merciful God who gives us many second chances. We should be thankful that we have been able to confess our sins and find God to be merciful. After being scourged by the Lord for his stubbornness and disobedience, Jonah is now restored to the office of the prophet and given a renewed commission to Nineveh. It is indeed an illustration of God's grace and mercy when this rebellious servant is not only pardoned and restored to favor, but he is allowed to continue to serve the Lord in a role of special duty.

This is illustrated elsewhere in the Bible in the life of Simon Peter, when he stumbled and fell by denying the Lord as set forth in Matthew 26 and John 21. Remember how Peter boasted that he would not deny the Lord, and yet he did so, even cursing before a little maid. Then we read that as Jesus was going up to the judgment hall, the eyes of Peter

and Jesus met. Jesus didn't say a thing, but the Bible records that Peter went out and wept bitterly. After the crucifixion had taken place, we do not find Peter or any of the Apostles sitting at the tomb ready and waiting for God to fulfill His word in raising Jesus from the dead. They believed it was all over. Peter had already made up his mind to go back to fishing. He said, "Jesus is dead, and is not coming back." For three years these individuals had sat under the greatest teacher that God had ever sent to mankind, and they still did not understand what the ministry of Jesus was all about. After Jesus rose from the dead, He had a private conversation with Peter and re-commissioned him. Jesus not only restored Peter to his office, but He gave him one of the highest privileges that could ever be given a human being when He said "**Feed my sheep.**" (John 21:17). What a blessing to know that God is the God of a second chance, however, we should never presume upon it. Simon stumbled and denied the Lord, but he was restored by the mercy of his Savior.

If you are a child of God, and you are living in sin and disobedience, you can come back to God, but you had better mean business and be sincere. You can go to Him and tell Him what you can tell no one else. You can go directly to the throne of God where Jesus Christ is interceding and tell Him anything. You have an Intercessor because Christ has opened a perpetual way of access to the Father. We have access to the Father through our Lord Jesus Christ. I John 2:1 says, "**If anyone sins, we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous.**" What a blessing it is to be a Christian, and when we stumble and fall into sin and disobedience, to be able to go to the Father. He receives us and accepts us because He is the God of the second chance.

To illustrate, suppose a bank employee confiscated five hundred thousand dollars from that bank and fled to South America where he stayed for several years. Later he comes back and asks the president of the bank to give him his job back. What are the chances the president would restore him to his job? If you were that president, would you give him his old job back? It is unlikely. Our character is not as great as the character of our God. He is a God of compassion, and as He purposes and wills to do so, He bestows upon His people the opportunity of a second chance to be restored to His favor and fellowship.

This is also illustrated in the life of the prodigal son in Luke 15:11-32. After the prodigal had ruined his life through disobedience in the far country, he came home to the father, cast himself on the father's mercy, and asked for a job as a hired servant. Then to the amazement of the elder brother, the prodigal did not receive a beating, but a banquet. He did not get kicked around, but a kiss. He did not get rejected, but accepted unto the

father's arms. How wonderful and amazing is the character of the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.

After presenting to you such a marvelous compassionate character of God, there needs to be a caution set forth regarding presuming on this compassion. After Jonah was put back on dry land, and God gave him this second commission, what if he disobeyed God again and took off for Tarshish? What would have happened to Jonah? Many Christians who are restored to God's favor haven't stayed that way very long, but have run right back into the pig pen where they were before. What does God do in a case like that? This question was asked by a lady to the late J. Vernon McGee, a noted radio minister in Southern California. Dr. McGee replied to her that there would have been a second fish out there waiting for him. The principle that Dr. McGee was making was that if a backslidden believer doesn't learn his lesson the first time, then God will put him back in the trial until he does learn it. Now while I agree with Dr. McGee, I don't believe his answer goes far enough. After healing the lame man in the Bible, Jesus told him in John 5:14, **"See, you have been made well. Sin no more, lest a worse thing come upon you."** This is where I don't quite agree with Dr. McGee. I believe he is on the right track, but I believe that God is saying to Jonah, giving him a second chance, "Now you go and preach to Nineveh, and if you don't, I have something worse for you than a three-night reservation in a whale motel. **"Go and sin no more lest a worse thing come upon you."** I give you a caution as a believer that while God is the God of the second chance, do not abuse that privilege. Why do I say that? After spending some time conveying to you the character of the goodness of God, why would I present this cautioning question? Because in Romans 11:22 Paul says, **"Therefore consider the goodness and severity of God: on those who fell, severity; but toward you, goodness, if you continue in His goodness. Otherwise you also will be cut off."** We need a balanced view of God where we not only see the goodness of God in giving the second chance, but we also need to see the severity of God in dealing with His sinning people. God gives second chances, but we must heed His instructions and seize the opportunity to sincerely correct our ways. If we do not, something worse may happen as long as we remain backslidden believers. This caution is for God's wayward children or the backslidden believer, not the individual who has sinned away his day of grace.

Now let us examine Jonah's re-commission to the city of Nineveh. **"Arise, go to Nineveh, that great city, and preach to it the message that I tell you."** First look at the urgency of this commissioning. **"Arise and go"** is the exhortation. Jonah must go quickly because Nineveh's cup of wrath is nearly full and God's judgment is about to fall. There is no time for Jonah to deal with personal or family affairs. He is not given time to go back to

his homeland to let everyone know where he has been during his absence. There is no time for a period of rest and relaxation to recover from the stress brought upon his own body and mind from the time spent in the belly of the fish. God said, **"Arise and go."** There is no time to rest or relax. If God has a disposition to show mercy, God Himself has set limits upon His long-suffering and patience as to how long that mercy will be extended. Nineveh was given forty days. The Scriptures tell us that **"Now is the day of salvation."** (II Corinthians 6:2). God does not promise you forty days. If you are outside of Christ, you cannot presume on forty days to get right with God. I exhort you that today is the day of opportunity to repent and come to faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. Come to Christ today. Do not think about it for forty days, for **"Today is the day of salvation."**

Also, there is an urgency placed upon the believer to share the gospel with others. We are not to suppose that we can trifle with God and insist upon our personal ease and comfort while refusing to urgently reach people with the gospel. **"Arise and go"** calls for activity. There must be no lethargy, or lukewarmness. The commission of our Lord to believers and churches involves both a reaching and a teaching. We cannot teach the gospel to people until we first go and reach them through personal contact.

Did God instruct Jonah to erect a building for a meeting place outside the city limits of Nineveh, and then put up a sign announcing when preaching services would begin? Then did God tell him to wait for some stragglers from Nineveh to come by to see what was going on in his little building of evangelism? God did not tell Jonah to do that. On the contrary, Jonah was to reach the Ninevites by making personal contact with them, and crying out to them the message of God. God had commissioned Jonah to go to Nineveh, He had not commissioned the Ninevites to come to Jonah. Jonah must "reach" before he can "teach." He must make contact before he can teach them the message. He must go where they are. Some people pervert the precious doctrine of the effectual call of the Holy Spirit into concluding that it is the Spirit's commission to send elect sinners to the gospel messengers so that the messengers can fulfill their duty in teaching them the Word of God. That is theoretical hyper-Calvinism. However, you do not have to be a theoretical hyper-Calvinist to be a practical hyper-Calvinist. A church can be committed to a full freewill Arminian theology and still be hyper-Calvinist in its methodology. Any church which is not aggressively seeking to make contact with lost people is disobedient to the Lord's commission, and if it does not repent and make an active change, it will be but a matter of time until Christ pulls his candlestick from its midst and pronounce "Ichabod," the glory is departed. I don't care whether you are a hyper-Arminian or a hyper-Calvinist or somewhere in between, if your methodology is such that a church waits for God to send sinners to it, it has Ichabod or death on its church sign. All of those churches in the Book

of Revelation which had been started in Asia Minor, started under sound Apostolic teaching. One hundred and twenty-five years later, we do not find them in existence. What happened? You remember that God had warned these churches that "except you repent, I will pull the candlestick out of your midst." Evidently they did not heed that warning.

Now look at the difficulty of Jonah's commission. He was to go into Nineveh, that great city, and not only actively make an effort to reach the Ninevites with the Word of God, but he must aggressively and boldly confront the difficulties involved in dealing with sinful and wicked people. Jonah is not marketing a product that the Ninevites will be anxious to hear. The Ninevites have not exactly invited Jonah into their city to preach to them. Jonah must aggressively confront people who will not welcome him or his message. Jonah must face hostility like that of entering into a den of lions. The design of God in setting the greatness of Nineveh before Jonah was to impress upon the prophet's mind the great difficulty of the work assigned to him. Taking the Word of God to people is one of the most difficult assignments that God gives to you and me as believers. Why is that so? Because this task that was assigned to Jonah will require a superhuman effort accompanied by a supernatural work of God to bring forth a supernatural outcome. While using his gifts as a prophet, Jonah was to despair of absolutely any confidence in himself to accomplish the task that God had assigned him to do. He was to trust God's strength alone to bring forth the outcome in Nineveh.

In applying this truth to the commission Christ has given to His church, confusion can again enter the picture between our theology and our methodology. We rightly confess as believers in sovereign grace, that unless God does something, it will not be successful. Psalm 127:1 states that, "**Unless the Lord builds the house, they labor in vain who build it.**" We confess to the truth of that statement, but we have a tendency in our methodology to turn right around and conclude that the less we labor, the more that God will be glorified in the outcome. We wrongly conclude that since only God can do it, we should do nothing, but let Him do it. Again, that is a wrong conclusion from correct theology.

Some even go to the extent to believe that to obey the commission of God somehow gets in the way of the Holy Spirit doing His work. This again is a tenant of hyper-Calvinism that puts the responsibility back on God what God has placed on us. It is trust and obey, not trust without obedience and not obedience without trust. Trusting and obeying is the way to fulfill the great commission that God has assigned to us as His people. So while I am obeying His commission, I am to trust God for the outcome. The text I just read, "**they**

that labor, labor in vain,” if they are laboring, but not trusting. What if Jonah had reached the conclusion and said, “Since only God can convert the Ninevites, I will just get in the way by going, so I will just keep my mouth shut and stay where I am.” He did not come to that conclusion, but went and labored in a difficult circumstance. Remember that Jesus said of His people, **“You are the light of the world,”** and **“you are the salt of the earth.”** (Matthew 5:13-14) What did He mean by that? He meant that salt and light are to influence everything we touch. The more contact that salt and light make, the more they influence. No individual or church should be satisfied if they are not aggressively confronting the forces of darkness around about them. We have no right to come into the doors of our inner secret chambers and feel safe in asking God to convert people if first we are not out making face to face contact with those people in Nineveh. We must trust and obey at the same time.

Next, we should look at the uniqueness of the commission given to Jonah. He was to preach to Nineveh **“the message that I tell you.”** Jonah’s mission not only involved activity, **“arise and go,”** it not only involved being aggressive, bold and courageous in confronting sinning people with the commands of a holy God, but it also was a declarative mission as well. This is seen in the word **“preach.”** Adam Clark, in his commentary, states that this word “preach” means “a crier, a herald, a preacher. One that makes proclamation with a loud and an earnest cry.” While Jonah was to cry out in an earnest fashion, he had no liberty whatsoever to make up his own message. It was to be what God bade him to preach. There must be no adding to or subtracting from the message given by God. Biblical obedience to the commission of our Lord requires the declaration of a message to the ears of the hearers. It is important that the preacher or the proclaimer (all of us are criers and heralds) herald forth the truth of God to others. It is also important that the preacher possesses a godly character before he attempts to declare a message to others. However, it is essential in biblical witnessing that a message be declared and not just the character of the messenger. There are those today who assume that living a life of moral goodness before others is sufficient without declaring the message of the word of God to them. This is a very subtle way to avoid the offense of the cross. It allows us to remain safe and secure in our little spot of dry land without having to face the wrath of the Ninevites face to face. I wonder how many cowards there are in all of us. Do you fear the faces of men? Do you fear to be mocked and scorned and rejected when you try to convey the message to others? God’s word to sinners is offensive by its very nature. That message calls for an acknowledgment and a confession of one’s personal sinfulness. It calls for a belief of the truth of God. It calls for a repentance or a change of mind and direction in one’s course of life. In the sinner’s case, it is a change from ungodly living to godly living. You cannot be saved without an about change or turnabout in your life. The

message is "repent or else you perish."

Upon arriving in Nineveh, Jonah did not walk around the city for forty days with his mouth shut, hoping that the Ninevites would observe how good a person he was and that there had been a moral change in his character. No, he cried aloud the message which God had burned on his lips like He did with Jeremiah of old. Jonah gave a faithful warning to the people. A lesson we need to learn from Jonah's method is that the Great Commission of our Lord cannot be fulfilled without time, trouble, expense and labor. When Jesus said, **"go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature,"** that is not going to be done without time, trouble, expense and labor. Jonah is not authorized to sit, keep his mouth shut, and hope that the Ninevites will come by and say, "hey, there is something different about you. Tell us about yourself." No, Jonah was to take his message to the Ninevites and engage in a direct confrontation with lost people in an aggressive manner, not a cowardly, timid manner, but by boldly, thrusting forth the truth of the living God.

Thirdly, let us look at Jonah's renewed obedience in verse 3. **"So Jonah arose and went to Nineveh, according to the word of the Lord. Now Nineveh was an exceedingly great city, a three-day journey in extent."** Notice that when the commission came to Jonah the second time, he was prompt with his obedient response. It says, **"Jonah arose."** Contrast this to Jonah's response to the first command in Jonah 1:2-3. **"Arise, go to Nineveh, that great city, and cry out against it for their wickedness has come up before me.' But Jonah arose up to flee to Tarshish."** Do you see the contrast? Upon receiving the second commission, Jonah immediately arose and went to Nineveh. He did not consult with flesh and blood and wonder what the outcome of all this would be. He did not wonder how this was going to affect him or his relatives. He did not wonder what this commission was going to involve or how it was going to affect his own interests. All of that was in consideration when he went away from God the first time, but now it is God's word that takes priority, not Jonah's personal interest, welfare and comfort. Now, Jonah gladly goes with thanksgiving in his heart for God's mercy in his life. Jonah can now truly say with the Psalmist, **"I shall not die, but live, and declare the works of the LORD. The LORD has chastened me severely, but He has not given me over to death."** (Psalm 118:17-18). This passage truly describes Jonah. An afflicting experience will produce obedience to God's word. Psalm 119:67 states: **"Before I was afflicted I went astray, but now I keep Your word."** God has ways of correcting His people through affliction. Jonah could have related to David's words in Psalm 51:12-13, **"Restore to me the joy of Your salvation, and uphold me by Your generous Spirit** (or your free grace). **Then I will teach transgressors Your ways, and sinners shall be converted to You."** All this goes through Jonah's mind, and he is now ready to go to Nineveh. Psalm

119:59-60 can also describe his attitude. **"I thought about my ways, and turned my feet to Your testimonies. I made haste, and did not delay to keep Your commandments."** Do you not think we might be inclined to have a little more pep in our steps if we had spent three days and three nights in a whale's belly, and if we knew the God who had put us in there could put us back in there again or something worse? When God comes to me and says "this is the task that I have assigned to you, now go do it," I think that might be a little motivating factor for me to get to the task that God has assigned for me to do.

Not only was Jonah's obedience prompt, but it was also complete obedience. Jonah immediately went unto Nineveh. He did not delay his obedience, and he was careful not to stop short of his destination. **"Jonah arose and went to Nineveh."** Nineveh was a beautiful city with great riches. We will describe it later, but when Jonah arrived, he did not linger at the gates or take a sight-seeing tour of the city. He didn't say, "Well, I will scout out this city and, wow, look at those towers, look at all those beautiful gold and silver monuments. I think I will put off preaching a little while and just check into a good motel, get a comfortable bed, then get a guide to take me around this city. I will really enjoy myself and then I will get to the task that God has assigned to me." No, there was none of that. Jonah has put aside all of his comforts and his concern with personal ease, and now his only concern is obedience to the preaching of the word of God to Nineveh. He didn't satisfy his curiosity by surveying the lofty towers, the gorgeous temples, or the stately palaces.

Let me chase a rabbit here for just a moment. This message may not mean a whole lot to this church, but it is a message to the other churches around our country. Here is something else that Jonah did not do. He did not take a survey of the area to find out what the Ninevites wanted out of the ministry of a Hebrew prophet. If you don't know what I am talking about, then you do not know what is going on in "churchanity" today. Jonah did not inquire of the Ninevites what they desired for him to preach. If he did, there might be responses like, "Well, we would like a child care center in our church, or a recreation center for our kids. Also, we could use something for the elderly. If Jonah wrote all this down, he could have surmised, "I will know what to preach now to Nineveh, and if I preach those things, everybody will love me and come to hear me preach. Then there might even be a bigger opportunity somewhere for me to get a bigger church and wider exposure for my ministry." There was none of that. Jonah must preach what the Lord told him to preach. If people will not come to a church unless it can provide some monstrous entertainment program, child care for the kids, elder care for the elderly, and recreation for the youth, they are not coming to God's church. God says his prophets are

to preach what he tells them, and I don't find those things in the pages of this Book.

Jonah was not a man-pleaser. He had learned his lesson in the belly of the great fish, and he did not modify his message so he would not offend the Ninevites. I dare say that in some of the churches today, you could join and attend there for three or four years before you ever heard a message that offended you. It is reasoned, "First we have to get them into the church, then we will start telling them some of the things that God requires of them." However, Jonah went right to the task. He immediately began to confront the sinners with the fact that there was a holy God who was angry with them. You do not go out into the highways and byways and inquire of sinners what they want out of a church. If you go out and make contact with sinners, you are to confront them with the message of a holy God and His wrath upon sin. Their only hope to escape the wrath of God is to turn from their sins and bow before the Lordship of Jesus Christ, confessing that God raised Him from the dead. That is the gospel message that is to be proclaimed. A direct confrontation with sinners is hard work. It is work the flesh does not want to do, and it is not just left up to the minister or the leaders of the church. Everyone in the congregation has that same commission. Yes, you have that commission, and I have that commission. We are to be promoting the truth of God and his sovereignty before a needy humanity. Is it not true that God has a right to command men to repent? And is it not true that men have a responsibility to repent? Then it is the duty of the gospel messenger to bring that confrontation together so that the sparks fly. If you try to get people soothed and settled in before you slip in the gospel message somewhere, you are not getting to the task by being fully obedient. You must go into Nineveh, Jonah. Don't waste time looking around, satisfying yourself. You must get to the task that God has assigned you or else a worse thing is in store. Jonah followed the Lord fully.

Lastly, Jonah's obedience was not only active obedience, prompt obedience, and complete obedience, it was also divinely directed obedience. The text says, "**Jonah arose, went to Nineveh, according to the word of the Lord.**" He is no longer consulting with flesh and blood to determine what is the best course of action. Having been taught by the rod of God, he is now obedient to the word of God. The word of God now takes precedence over Jonah's personal bias and his prejudices. There is a great need in our churches today to examine their message and their methods by the directives to be found in the word of God. It is not enough to profess a belief in the Bible's inspiration, but we must also acknowledge its authority in all areas of doctrine and practice. There are conservative churches across this land who proclaim that they believe the Bible to be the verbally inspired word of God. However, they do not want to submit their church doctrines and programs to the authority of this Book, for fear something they love might have to be forsaken. Let's examine just

one aspect. "Do you mean that we might have to cut out the tradition of walking the isle to be saved? We have done that for a hundred years." Did Jesus do it? I was talking with a sincere but unknowledgeable person the other evening up in northern Alabama. She attended a freewill Baptist church and was telling me about how her church was "bursting out at the seams." She said, "I am just praying so and so will walk the isle Sunday." I said, "what does that mean?" She answered, "Well, that is when you get saved." I asked, "that is when you become a Christian?" She said, "Oh yes! That is what we have believed for years." I said, "Could you show me that in the Bible, where that expression is found in the word of God?" I also asked, "Do you believe the Bible?" She commented, "Oh, I believe this Book." Then I said, "Well, I am also interested in how a person becomes a Christian, and you are telling me that in order to become a Christian, a person has to walk an isle. I am interested in this because this other church tells me a person becomes a Christian when they get baptized. Another church tells me a person becomes a Christian when they are confirmed. This other church tells me that a person becomes a Christian when they go to confession and partake in the mass by sticking out their tongue and partaking of communion. I am confused. Where are all these terms in the Bible?" She answered, "Well, I don't know, we have just always done it this way." People may profess to believe in the verbal inspiration of the Bible, but they are not bowed to the authority of the Bible. You do not become a Christian by responding to an invitation to move out of your seat, walk down to the front, bow before an altar or shake a preacher's hand or sign a decision card. That is not the way you get to the Lord Jesus Christ. You may have done that and truly been converted, but it wasn't that process which saved you. If you say that is when you were saved, you had better look carefully back into the Book. I remember talking with an Associational Missionary who was chastising me because I did not use the altar-call system. He said "You are not giving people an opportunity to get saved." I asked, "Is that right?" He said, "That is right." I replied, "Do you believe that a person is lost back here in his seat, and he has to walk fifteen or twenty steps to get saved down here at the altar?" He said, "Well, no, I don't know, I am not sure that is what I mean." So I said, "Suppose a person stepped out from his seat, was coming to the front, and had a heart attack and died right in the isle, where would he go, heaven or hell?" The Associational Missionary said, "I think he would go to heaven because he started down the isle." I said, "Who do you think caused him to make that start?" If you have any desire to come to the Lord Jesus Christ, it is God who initiated it. You don't start something and meet God somewhere along the path.

When do you think divine regeneration takes place, if a person comes and confesses Christ here today? It took place before they ever took one step to walk an isle. You don't walk an isle to get saved or to get regenerated. You confess Christ because he has done a work

within you. Bring that to the authority of the book. Multitudes of doctrines and practices need to be put back in the prospective of the word of God. Jonah, don't you preach or teach anything but what I tell you in this book. It would probably cause a house cleaning if the typical congregation analyzed its practices to see if we have any warrant for these practices in the pages of God's word. Whatever doctrines and practices are found to be false, they must be submitted to God's word and discontinued. When you see people who are in love with those doctrines and practices, you will see that they will hold onto those and let the word of God go lacking. So they will only give "lip service" to this Book unless they are bowed to its authority. Our belief system, methods, and our practices must also be brought in subordination to this Book. Thus saith the word of the Lord. Let us pray.