

# The Gospel Of Second Chances

Jonah 1:1-3; 3:1-9 with Matthew 12:38-41

The song Orphans of God says, “There are no strangers, there are no outcasts, there are no orphans of God.” The prophet Jonah learned this lesson in a very unique way.

(Prayer)

Today, I’m going to tell you a couple of big fish stories. We begin with Jonah.

This little story of four short chapters has given rise to almost as much discussion and difference of opinion as the first four chapters of Genesis. The controversy as to whether this is a historical event or a parable is not going to be settled in twenty minutes or so. To those who have a hard time believing that Jonah lived three days inside a great fish, I ask this: do you believe that Lazarus walked out of a tomb after being dead four days? Do you believe that Jesus came out of a tomb after three days? Do you believe that God spoke to a void and the Earth was born?

If you have a problem with any of the miracles of the Bible, be consistent. Either God is big enough to handle the hard stuff or he is not. Is one miracle any more difficult than another for God?

But, whether you believe Jonah’s story as real or a parable doesn’t change its uniqueness and its message. Unlike the other Minor Prophets, this book is written as a story of the prophet’s personal struggle

with God over a mission on which he had been sent.

Each chapter in this small but important Bible book is rich in application to the Christian life. So, let’s begin.

**1:1; The word of the Lord came to Jonah son of Amittai:**

We know that Matthew and Luke recorded that Jesus made reference to Jonah when asked for a miraculous sign. But, Jonah is also mentioned in 2 Kings. According to 2 Kings 14:25, Jonah, the son of Amittai, of Gath-hepher, a prophet and servant of God, predicted the restoration of the land of Israel to its ancient boundaries through the efforts of Jeroboam II. (14:25) “He {Jeroboam II} restored the boundaries of Israel from Lebo Hamath to the Sea of the Arabah, in accordance with the word of the Lord, the God of Israel, spoken by His servant Jonah son of Amittai, the prophet from Gath-Hepher.”

So, we know that Jonah was a real person and who he claimed to be in his story.

Now, let’s look at his dilemma. **1:2; God told Jonah, “Go to the great city of Nineveh and preach against it, because its wickedness has come up before me.”**

At first glance, you would think that Jonah or any prophet would jump at the

chance to deliver a “burn” notice to Israel’s enemies. But, we read in chapter 4 that Jonah knew that this wasn’t a burn notice. **“I knew that you are a gracious and compassionate God, slow to anger and abounding in love, a God who relents from sending calamity.” (4:2 in part)**

Jonah apparently had a patriotic and popular ministry, and lived and ministered during the golden age of the Northern Kingdom. To go to Nineveh as God’s spokesman, the capital of the empire that for decades had terrorized the people of Israel, was out of the question. He was more than willing to speak for God when the message was good for his people. But he was unwilling to carry a message to an enemy who would do his country harm, especially if that message might result in good for that enemy.

We can understand that, can’t we? Nineveh was the capital of one of the cruelest, vilest, most powerful, and most idolatrous empires in the world. According to *Ancient Records of Assyria and Babylonia*, here are some random entries recorded by rulers describing atrocities during *Assyrian and Babylonian* conquests: [The heads of their warriors I cut off; their young men and their maidens I burned in the fire; I flayed [him], his skin I spread upon the wall of the city; I cut their throats like lambs.] These are some of the less descriptive entries.

Lets bring this to today. From The Voice of the Martyrs Inc. (Canada):

Seven churches bombed

(July 15, 2009)

Church and convent bombed in Mosul

(December 02, 2009)

Bomb attacks target churches in Mosul

(December 16, 2009)

Update: More bomb attacks on churches in Mosul

(December 23, 2009)

Christians shot, kidnapped in Mosul

(January 07, 2010)

Elderly Christian man killed in Mosul

(January 14, 2010)

Another Christian killed in Mosul

(January 21, 2010)

Four Christians murdered in Mosul

(February 18, 2010)

Nineveh Plain lies to the east, northeast of the city of Mosul in the Iraqi province of Ninawa. Most of the inhabitants are Aramaic speaking Christians based in the traditions of Syriac Christianity.

We could understand if a close relative of one of these killed, if asked to go preach to the group that did the killing, would passionately refuse the mission. I wouldn't expect a 'whatever' attitude from the person who was asked. Like:

Would you mind going and preaching to those thugs who shot your children and kidnapped your wife? Yea, whatever. Or, nah. I don't think I want to. That's not going to happen, is it? You won't get a passive 'whatever' answer like that, will you? This is the answer Jonah gave by his actions.

1:3; Jonah ran away from the Lord...

Jonah not only refused to go to Nineveh, he packed his bags and booked a Carnival cruse possibly to the coast of Spain. There was no passive refusal here. We don't have a polite plea for God to get another prophet to go in Jonah's place. This is a 'no way, Hosea,' I can't believe you would ask me to do this, I quit and I'm 'outa' here, refusal.

In Jonah's mind, God might as well have asked him to preach to pigs. It's just not going to happen, God. I getting as far from Nineveh as I possibly can!

Do you really think Jonah thought he could hide from God? You would think that God's spokesman would be familiar with the thought in **Psalm 139**, if not the Psalm itself:

- <sup>7</sup> **Where can I go from your Spirit?  
Where can I flee from your presence?**  
<sup>8</sup> **If I go up to the heavens, you are there;  
if I make my bed in the depths, you are there.**  
<sup>9</sup> **If I rise on the wings of the dawn,  
if I settle on the far side of the sea,**  
<sup>10</sup> **even there your hand will guide me,  
your right hand will hold me fast.**

- <sup>11</sup> **If I say, "Surely the darkness will hide me  
and the light become night around me,"**  
<sup>12</sup> **even the darkness will not be dark to you;  
the night will shine like the day,  
for darkness is as light to you.**

Whether Jonah thought he could hide from God or not, he had turned the switch off. He wasn't listening. He had resigned his post as prophet and was running away. But God stayed with His runaway. Like the Psalm said, "your right hand will hold me fast."

Jonah was going to experience the power of God in such a way that maybe even a prophet couldn't imagine. You could say that this was Jonah's mountaintop experience; but it wasn't going to take place on a mountaintop.

1:4; Then the LORD sent a great wind on the sea, and such a violent storm arose that the ship threatened to break up. <sup>5</sup>All the sailors were afraid and each cried out to his own god. And they threw the cargo into the sea to lighten the ship.

But Jonah had gone below deck, where he lay down and fell into a deep sleep. <sup>6</sup>The captain went to him and said, "How can you sleep? Get up and call on your god! Maybe he will take notice of us, and we will not perish."

<sup>7</sup>Then the sailors said to each other, "Come, let us cast lots to find out who is responsible for this calamity." They cast lots and the lot fell on Jonah.

While Jonah was below deck asleep, a storm struck, which terrified even the ship's experienced crew. Recalling that Jonah had told them he was fleeing from God (1:10), the mariners took Jonah's advice and reluctantly threw him over the side. The storm calmed immediately, and Jonah sank beneath the waves.

There are several "miracles" in the passage, not just one. God's control of the sea, bringing a great storm, shows He controls nature. When lots were cast to determine who had offended God and brought the unusual storm, Jonah was chosen. When Jonah was thrown overboard, the storm stopped. Why then be surprised when the text tells us God "provided" a "great fish" to swallow Jonah, or that he was preserved alive in its belly? Either God is fully capable of controlling all events in this world, or He is not. It is not the miracles of Scripture that are questionable, but our limited view of who God is.

Isn't it interesting that though Jonah wasn't listening, the sea was; a storm heard God call; a great fish obeyed and swallowed this worm of a prophet.

Do you think that God warned the fish that this rebellious prophet would turn its stomach?

In Matthew, Jesus used the rebellious Prophets story as the only sign to "A wicked and adulterous generation."

Matthew 12:38-41: some of the Pharisees and teachers of the law said to him, "Teacher, we want to see a miraculous sign from you."

<sup>39</sup>He answered, "A wicked and adulterous generation asks for a miraculous sign! But none will be given it except the sign of the prophet Jonah. <sup>40</sup>For as Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of a huge fish, so the Son of Man will be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth. <sup>41</sup>The men of Nineveh will stand up at the judgment with this generation and condemn it; for they repented at the preaching of Jonah, and now one greater than Jonah is here.

Jonah 3:1 records that the word of the Lord came to Jonah a second time. God did more than stay with his runaway prophet. He gave him a second chance. Perhaps this is the greatest miracle of the story.

How many times have we turned the switch off on God, but he has never turned the switch off on us? And he goes beyond patiently waiting for us to turn the switch back on. He loves us so much that he will use a gentle nudge or the crisp crack of a 2x4 to bring us to our knees and get our attention.

I want to close this big fish story with another fish story. **John 21: 4-14**

<sup>4</sup>Early in the morning, Jesus stood on the shore, but the disciples did not realize that it was Jesus.

<sup>5</sup>He called out to them, "Friends, haven't you any fish?"

"No," they answered.

<sup>6</sup>He said, "Throw your net on the right side of the boat and you will find some." When they did, they were unable to haul the net in because of the large number of fish.

<sup>7</sup>Then the disciple whom Jesus loved said to Peter, "It is the Lord!" As soon as Simon Peter heard him say, "It is the Lord," he wrapped his outer garment around him (for he had taken it off) and jumped into the water. <sup>8</sup>The other disciples followed in the boat, towing the net full of fish, for they were not far from shore, about a hundred yards. <sup>9</sup>When they landed, they saw a fire of burning coals there with fish on it, and some bread.

<sup>10</sup>Jesus said to them, "Bring some of the fish you have just caught."

<sup>11</sup>Simon Peter climbed aboard and dragged the net ashore. It was full of large fish, 153, but even with so many the net was not torn. <sup>12</sup>Jesus said to them, "Come and have breakfast." None of the disciples dared ask him, "Who are you?" They knew it was the Lord. <sup>13</sup>Jesus came, took the bread and gave it to them, and did the same with the fish. <sup>14</sup>This was now the third time Jesus appeared to his disciples after he was raised from the dead.

Following breakfast, three times, he asked Peter, "Do you love me?"

Jesus met the disciples on the shore and after he had fed them breakfast, he asked Peter, the groups' spokesman, some pointed questions. They had already heard, "If you love me, you will keep my commandments." They already knew that the most important commandments are: love God with all your heart, mind, soul, and strength, and love your neighbor as yourself: that these two commandments fulfill all the Law and Prophets. And their neighbor has been identified in the Samaritan parable. Now, here, on the shore, with all the familiar sounds and smells that fishermen are accustomed, Jesus provides more detail concerning love for his band of 'fishers of men:' feed my sheep.

Some of these sheep that Jesus died for are going to be unkempt and dirty. Push aside your prejudices and feed them. Some are going to be awkward or pushy. Swallow your pride and be patient. Some have gone astray. Find them. Bring them back, if they will come. Feed my sheep.

From these two big fish stories, we, as well as Jonah, and the disciples on the shore, learned in God's own unique way, that "There are no strangers, there are no outcasts, and there are no orphans of God."

We are all his sheep, unless we choose not to be. Have you made your choice?