Jonah: The God of Another Chance

by Bayless Conley

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Hi there, and welcome. We are talking about Jonah, and if you haven't been with me for any of the other messages, rest content. Today will be pretty much complete in and of itself. Though I would encourage you, if you can, to go back and find the previous messages from this amazing book and listen to them. You should do it.

Jesus, when some of the religious leaders came to Him one day and asked to see a sign from Him, said, "A wicked and adulterous generation seeks after a sign, and no sign will be given to it except the sign of the prophet Jonah. For as Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of the great fish, so the Son of Man will be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth."

We have no greater thing that we can put our trust upon that the book of Jonah was not some allegorical tale, nothing greater than the fact that Jesus quoted it as being an actual thing that happened. He attested to the veracity of the story of Jonah. And it's interesting, this sign—Jonah was swallowed by the great fish and was in the belly of that fish, as the Scripture says, three days and three nights. He was spit out on the dry land, went and preached in Nineveh. And Jesus said, "So the Son of Man will be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth."

I've had people want to push back on that and say, "Well, Jesus wasn't three days and three nights in the heart of the earth." They say, "He was crucified on a Friday. It all started Friday morning. He was in the tomb Friday night, Saturday, and then He rose from the dead on Sunday morning. That's only two nights. That's not three days and three nights."

Well, actually, it's a Hebrew idiom that was the common phrase of the day. A day and a night just referred to a day or any part of a day. You actually find that in other places, even in the Bible—in the book of Esther, when she is going to go before the king and take her life in her hands to petition him. She says, "Get everybody to fast for three days, day and night." But then, on the day of the third day, she went in before the king. But, again, the phrase "a day and a night" refers to an entire day or any part of a day in Jewish language. You find it in sacred writings. You can find the same thing in secular writings as well.

So, just like Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of the great fish, Jesus, after He died, was three days and three nights in the heart of the earth. Then, Jonah came up and preached. And salvation, as it were, came to Nineveh when they repented. Christ came up, and we preach now to a lost and a dying world. When they repent and put their trust in Christ, they can be saved. And just another interesting fact and parallel here: Jonah went and preached. He said, "Forty days, and Nineveh will be destroyed." It was a 40-day period.

Well, we find out in Acts 1 that after Jesus was raised from the dead, He spent 40 days with the apostles. He showed them irrefutable evidence that it was Him. He spoke to them about the kingdom of God—40 days and 40 days. There are a whole lot of parallels there. But in this story of Jonah, God says to Jonah, "Go preach to Nineveh, that great city. Cry out against it. Their wickedness has come up before Me." Nineveh was the capital of Assyria, and they were one of

the most savage nations that has ever existed in the history of mankind. They were some of the most violent people who have ever lived.

Most of us know a little bit about Roman history. When Rome would come in and conquer an area, they would set up a garrison there to keep order. They instituted Roman law, and it became a Roman colony. They had soldiers there to keep the peace. Well, the Assyrians didn't do that. When they would come in and conquer a place, they would kill almost all the women and children, and all the men, those whom they didn't take captive. Any they left behind were afraid to rebel. It was a typical practice of the Assyrians to skin the men alive and hang their skins on the city walls. Or they would impale them on poles and leave them to die with a pole under their rib cage as they were suspended between heaven and earth. They just put this fear, through their savagery, into people. And God said, "Listen, their wickedness has come up before Me, and judgment is coming to them. Jonah, you need to go and cry against them."

So, Jonah decides he doesn't want to go. He's a prophet. He probably has an inkling that Assyria is going to eventually be the undoing of the Jewish nation. And, of course, the first captivity was into Assyria. Jonah didn't want that to happen. The Assyrians were the sworn enemies of the Jews. We read later on in the book, and Jonah admits, he said, "I didn't go, because, God, I know You're merciful and kind, and You'd show mercy to them." Jonah didn't want them to repent. He wanted them to perish. So, he gets on a boat headed to Tarshish.

Instead of going to Nineveh, Jonah goes to Tarshish. Tarshish, my friend, was in modern-day Spain, about as far away as you could get from the capital of Assyria at that time in the known world. And just something interesting, I pointed this out in a past message, but I feel like I should comment on it again. When Jonah ran from the will of God, when he said no to God and went the opposite direction which God was pointing him in, we read this "as Jonah arose." This is Jonah 1:3 NKJV.

> [3] But Jonah arose to flee to Tarshish from the presence of the Lord. He went down to Joppa, and found a ship going to Tarshish; so he paid the fare, and went down into it, to go with them to Tarshish from the presence of the Lord.

Then we come to verse 5. This great storm arises on the sea. The mariners were afraid. Every man cried out to his god. They threw the cargo that was on the ship into the sea to lighten the load. But Jonah had gone down into the lowest part of the ship and laid down and was fast asleep. So we read here in verse 3, from the moment Jonah ran from God and said no to God, he went down to Joppa. He went down into the ship. Then in verse 5 NKJV, he had gone down into the lowest parts of the ship, and had lain down. From the moment he turned his back on God's will, he went down, down, down, down.

My friend, I'm probably talking to somebody whose life has gone down, down, down, down. You need to do what God has told you to do. Anyway, Jonah is—maybe it was because of his nationalistic spirit. He was a patriot of Israel, and he didn't want them to eventually be destroyed by the Assyrians. Maybe there was another reason that he didn't want to go preach to them other than the fact that he didn't like them, which is the one that is stated in the Scriptures. When all the guys figured out and Jonah confessed, "This storm is here because of me. If you want the storm to stop, throw me into the water."

Now, when Jonah told them to do that, he did not know that the Lord had prepared a great fish to swallow him. He thought he was going to die. Think about that. Jonah would have rather died than obeyed God and potentially seen these Assyrians repent of their sin and find mercy from

God. Jonah would have rather died. God preparing the great fish to swallow him was a mercy that saved his life.

I have met people in my short life of 70 years, as I sit and speak to this camera right now—I have met people who would rather die and go to an early grave. By the way, bitterness, inward hostility, holding a grudge, and unforgiveness will open the door to sickness. It will open the door to depression. It will open the door to the works of the enemy. There are some people who would rather hold onto their grudge, even if it means going to an early grave and dying of a sickness, as opposed to letting go of a wrong that someone has perpetrated against them.

Rather than forgive, rather than release, they would rather hang onto that grudge and remain angry and remain bitter as opposed to forgiving. Jonah was super stubborn, and there are some super stubborn people in the world, and unfortunately, even in the Church sometimes. I just want to encourage you, if you have anything against anyone, forgive them, just like God, in Christ, has forgiven you. And that is not to say that you weren't hurt. That is not to say that you weren't wronged. That is not to say that in some cases you perhaps should seek restitution.

Mercy and justice balance one another. But as far as you and your heart, if you hang onto bitterness, if you hang onto animosity, if you want to see something bad happen to someone, you need to get before God and pray until that gets out of you. Jonah wanted something bad to happen to the people of Nineveh, to these Assyrians. Anyway, three days and three nights in the belly of this great fish, and Jonah repents. And he vows to go do what God told him to do. We come to Jonah 2:10 NKJV, which says,

> [10] So the Lord spoke to the fish, and it vomited Jonah onto dry land.

Jonah 3:1–2 NKJV,

> [1] Now the word of the Lord came to Jonah the second time, saying, [2] "Arise, go to Nineveh, that great city, and preach to it the message that I tell you."

Very interesting. If you look in Jonah 1:1–2 NKJV, it says,

> [1] Now the word of the Lord came to Jonah the son of Amittai, saying, [2] "Arise, go to Nineveh, that great city, and cry out against it; for their wickedness has come up before Me."

Now the second time the commission comes, Jonah 3:2 NKJV: "Arise, go to Nineveh, that great city, and preach to it the message that I tell you." It's virtually the same call that he received originally from the Lord. God gave him another chance. It has been said God is the God of a second chance. My friend, He gives a lot more chances than that. He is merciful, and He is waiting for us to fulfill and to do the things that He has called us to do. And it's interesting, it's just worth commenting on.

The second call was the same as the first. God does not change His mind like the weather. Romans 11:29 NKJV says, "The gifts and the calling of God are irrevocable." The old King James says, "The gifts and calling of God are without repentance." In other words, God does not change His mind. You may, like Jonah, have run from the call of God on your life.

Listen to me. God has not changed His mind about what He has called you to do. I realize there will be some people watching me who say, "Bayless, I have messed things up so bad, it's not

possible for me to go back and do what I was originally called to do." I realize sometimes that is the case. You get someone who maybe messes up morally to the degree that they have such a reputation and a blot against their name. The book of Proverbs says, "A man who commits adultery with a woman lacks sense, he sins against his own soul, and he gets a blot that will not be wiped away."

Now, God certainly forgives sins that have to do with our sexuality and our morals. But people never forget those things. Sometimes, because of the nature of a sin and because of the circumstances surrounding it, it's not possible for that man or that woman to go back into the same position they once had. So, here's the deal: if that is you, you just need to say, "Okay, God, I realize I still have a call on my life. I have repented, I have made restitution where I can, and I've asked You to forgive me. So, what can I do now? What sphere of influence can You give me?" Even if God just says, "Just get on your knees and pray for the local pastors in your town. You do that for three hours a day," or whatever He says.

Or maybe you can sit down and you can write and get some things published. Or maybe you can work at a job, and then you support a mission work like the one that you once did. There's something that you can do; there is some aspect of that calling that you can fulfill. And it may not be the same scope, it may not be the same field of labor that you had previously because of the sins and the mistakes that you've committed. But you can do something, and yes, God forgives and forgets, and you can go on. You just need to be happy to do that.

But there is no excuse to just give up on the call and to do nothing. God told Jonah to go to Nineveh and preach—very specific instructions. And there are specific things that God wants each of us to do for His kingdom.

We all have our Ninevahs. We all have our specific instructions. Now, there are things that we are all called to do as believers, and it's worth the study: get your Bible, get a concordance, and just look up the words "call," "calling," "called," "calls," and find out the things that God calls all Christians to do.

Get busy doing those things first. And then the specifics for you: maybe you have a calling to work with kids. Maybe you have a calling from God to achieve great success in business so that you can fund missions work and fund the vision of your church. Or maybe you have a call from God to lead a women's group, or maybe a call from God to do something in the arena of prayer and to solicit and gather other people to pray with you.

I don't know, but I do know this: There are some things that God specifically wants you to do, and they have to do with the destiny that He has planned for you. If you've been running from God like Jonah ran from God and you've tried to avoid His call, friend, get your heart right. Let God renew the call to you just like He did to Jonah, and then get up and go, which is what Jonah did. The calling came to him a second time, and then he got up and he did something; he acted on it. You might say, "Well, I don't know what God's will for me is." Now again, look at the general will of God.

If you're not willing to take time to search the Scriptures to find out the general things that God has called us all to do, I'm not going to say you're wasting your time, but if you're not willing to do that first—the things that the Scriptures clearly tell us all as brothers and sisters, as men and women of God, as children of God—if you're not willing to take the time to search that out and do those things, then you may be spinning your wheels. If you're praying, "Oh God, show me what to do. I just need to know what You've called me to do."

First, do the revealed, the known will of God, and then He will show you that which is not yet revealed, the specific things for your life. I know I'm talking to somebody right now. Somebody's going, "Well, you mean I have to study? That is going to take time." Yes, my friend. Let your delight be in the law of the Lord day and night, and then you'll be like the tree planted by the rivers of water, which bears fruit in its season and its leaf doesn't wither, and you'll prosper in all things that you set your hand to. God told Joshua that this Book of the law shall not depart from your sight. He says, "Meditate in it day and night that you may observe to do all the things that are written in it."

So yeah, for some people that is like, "Oh, you mean I have to do something? Can't you just lay your hands on me and everything will happen?" No. "Can't you just pray the prayer of faith for me and then everything will just happen?" No, you need to be a disciple of Jesus. A disciple means "a disciplined follower," and the first place you need to be disciplined, my dear brother and sister is in God's Word. So, get in there and find out the things that are the general calling of all believers and do your best to employ those things, to imbibe them, to have them in your life, and to be actively participating in doing those things.

Then once you're willing to do that, when it comes to maybe a specific thing you're called to do—whether that's to lead a men's group, to pastor a church, to serve as a missionary, to be a businessman, to be a businesswoman, or maybe for just this season, you're to pour into your kids and raise them up to be godly young men and young women, or whatever the specific thing for this season is for you—take time to wait on God. Seek Him for direction. Jesus said, "When the Holy Spirit comes, He will teach you all things. He will bring to your remembrance all things that I've said to you, and He will show you things to come." Of course, Jesus said, "When He comes, He'll glorify Me."

So, anything God's called us to do, ultimately, it's going to glorify Jesus. But Jesus said, "When the Holy Spirit comes, He will speak, He will show, and He will reveal. He'll show us things to come." The Holy Spirit will talk to you. That is normal Christianity for every believer. God speaks to us through His Holy Spirit, but first He speaks to us through His Word.

The truth is, a man or woman with no direction can take no direct action. Here's something that's worth considering: if you really don't know what the specifics are for this season of your life and you've gone, "God, what do I do? What do I do?" You're never out of the will of God while you're waiting on God to know His will for you. I'll say that again. You're never out of the will of God while you're earnestly waiting on God to discover His will for you. In Ephesians 5, it says, "Do not be unwise, but be wise, understanding what the will of the Lord is."

So, we're literally commanded to understand what the will of the Lord is. God would be very unjust if He commands us to know His will and then He won't reveal it to us. Well, first again, He's revealed it in His Word, but then He will speak to us by His Spirit, and you can know the will of God, but all of heaven doesn't open up the first five minutes you get on your knees and wait on God. You need to make a business of waiting on God and seeking His face. God told Jonah, "Go to Nineveh and preach the message that I tell you." There is some wonderful advice, I think, just for preachers in that. If I can—I don't want to say if I can digress, but I just want to spend a moment here because it's what I'm called to do.

I have been a pastor of a church for almost 45 years now, if you count the time when I was an assistant pastor before we started Cottonwood Church back in August of 1983. To the preachers, to the pastors, to the evangelists, we need to wait on God and see what message

He wants us to preach. God told Jonah, “Go, tell them and preach the message that I give you.” Again, that means taking time to wait on God. It has been said that a lot of Sunday sermons are kind of like a Sunday afternoon meal: nothing but leftovers and too long away from the fire.

Preachers, pastors, ministers, take time to wait on God, get the Word of the Lord for the season that your church is in and preach what He tells you to preach, and preach it the way that He tells you to preach it. I know there are some—you’ve seen some things in the Word, you’ve got it burning in your heart, you want to preach what may seem like a hard message about discipline and holiness, but you’re afraid you’re going to offend people. Listen, if you always seek to please people, you’ll never truly please the Lord, and sometimes you have to plow some people’s fields crossways.

I had a friend, and this was 50 years ago—so it may not seem like a lot of money now, but it was then—a lady came to him in church. He’s a pastor of a very small church, 50 years ago, and she said, “Listen, I have a $10,000 gift that I want to give to the church.” Now, that was a huge amount of money back then, especially for a pastor at a very small church. That is going to pay the rent on the little building they were in for six months.

She says, “I have a $10,000 gift that I want to give to the church. However, I don’t want you preaching on this Holy Spirit and speaking in tongues thing.” That was the caveat that she brought to him, and he said, “I’d love to have the gift, we could use it, but I’m not going to compromise and I’m not going to cease to preach something the Word of God clearly teaches.” So she got mad and left.

I had a lady one time actually sort of similar; she had been a supporter of ours. She actually was someone who was overseas and had given a fair amount of support to the work, but she wrote me a letter. She started supporting it because she loved what we taught. But then I taught a message that we broadcasted about the baptism in the Holy Spirit. Just as we read about it in the book of Acts, “They were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak with other tongues as the Spirit gave them utterance.” In Acts 19, Paul asked those guys, “Did you receive the Holy Spirit since you believed?” They said, “We haven’t even heard there was a Holy Spirit.” Paul laid hands on them and they all spoke with tongues and prophesied.

When Philip went down to Samaria and preached, and there were signs and wonders. The apostles came from Jerusalem and laid hands on people, and they were all filled with the Holy Spirit. The apostle Paul saying to the Corinthian church because all they wanted to do was speak in tongues, “I speak in tongues more than you all,” but he gave them guidelines for speaking in tongues and for the gifts of the Spirit in the church setting.

Anyway, I was preaching this message, we put it on the air, and this lady wrote me a letter. She was very upset and she was going to withdraw all of her support, not going to support us anymore because she didn’t believe about the baptism in the Holy Spirit and speaking in other tongues. Well, we definitely could have used her support. We’re doing a lot of things in a lot of countries. And the truth is, it matters a lot, the partners who we have help us to do this and to bring these messages to the world in 140 different countries in 11 different languages at present, and that is growing.

But I wasn’t going to compromise because the Word of God clearly teaches these things. I’m not sorry, it’s too bad that I plowed her field crossways, but the Word of God is the Word of God. So, again, I’m going to get off my little soapbox there, but to the pastors, the preachers, and the ministers who are watching me right now, do not be afraid to preach the whole counsel of God.

Don't be afraid to preach about judgment, about sin, about repentance, about the return of Christ, about the baptism of the Holy Spirit, about healing, about miracles, about the fact that angels are still ministering spirits sent forth to minister for those who are the heirs of salvation and they're still active today, et cetera, et cetera.

Just don't back off from any portion of the Word of God, and if God has laid it on your heart to bring a certain message at a certain time to your flock and to your people, you just go for it. The Lord is your support. You never forget that. God is the one who supports you. He is your source and He is your source alone. He uses different people at different times, but we need to seek God in our preaching.

So, Jonah gets up and goes to Nineveh. It's interesting because neither during his first commission nor his second commission did Jonah show any fear about going to Nineveh. Very interesting. Nineveh was not a safe place for a Jew to be, but he showed no fear, and I think that just tells us that when we're following God's direction, we can trust in God's divine protection. When God is sending us, He will protect us. As we read the story, and I'm going to just read on a little bit here. In Jonah 3:2–3 NKJV, God said,

> 2 "Go to Nineveh, that great city (it was a big city), and preach to 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, a three-day journey in extent.

Some people, some scholars believe it took three days to just walk straight through. Others believe that it took three days to walk around the city walls, and some people think that just refers to the fact that it took Jonah three full days to walk through the city and to preach in all of the different suburbs of that city to bring his message of coming repentance. But Jonah did it, and the Ninevites, from the king all the way down to the lowliest person, all repented and God had mercy.

I'm going to close with this: our God is full of mercy. He's full of compassion, He's ready to forgive, and if you've missed the mark, if you've sinned, listen, God is rich in mercy to all those who call upon Him, and whoever calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved. You haven't gone too far, you haven't sinned too much.

God loves you and He will be rich in mercy and compassionate towards you. He will forgive you and wipe your slate clean if you will repent and turn with all of your heart and all of your soul to the Lord. Jesus said, "The one who comes to Me, I will not turn away." My friend, that includes you. It may be hard for you to wrap your mind around this, but you are loved by God. We'll see you next time.

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