

INTRODUCTION

Have you ever wished that you could have a second chance at completing a task that you made a mess of? Perhaps it was a DIY job in the house that you have done but you know that if you had another chance to do it again you would do a much better job. You learnt from your mistakes but unfortunately you can't have another chance, you cannot undo what you have done. Even within our Christian lives we can sometimes wish we had another chance.

I do wish I could preach some sermons again to the same congregation because I have felt so unhappy with my first attempt. Others of us may wish we could have witnessed to that relative before they died and so on. There are a whole host of avenues that we probably wish we could have another chance, a replay of the same situation but this time we would do it differently and see a different outcome.

Well I'm sure that as Jonah lands on the dry land, he must have had real regrets that he made a mess of it. I'm sure he longed for a second chance, and that is exactly what God gives him for in verse one we read that 'the word of the Lord came to Jonah a second time.' This time Jonah takes the opportunity and the result is staggering. I thank God that he is the God of the second chance. Perhaps you have been running from God over the last couple of weeks perhaps God has been speaking to you and you have repented of your sin and have come back to the Lord. You might be wondering if God can or even will use you again? Well take heart from these verses. For although Jonah may have turned his back on God, God has not turned his back on Jonah and indeed he welcomes Jonah back into the fold and when God welcomes us back he does not hold grudges or keep us at arms length as we often do.

To prove that Jonah is welcomed back by God, his word comes to Jonah a second time. Have you wandered from God, but are now back in the fold, then do not doubt that God will use you again; he used Jonah as His instrument in a revival. Just simply obey his word, follow the prompting of the Spirit and above all seek to bring glory to God in all that you do.

1. THE MESSAGE

Jonah is told once again to go to the great city of Nineveh and proclaim the message that God gives to him. When Jonah goes to Nineveh he seems to waste no time in proclaiming his message, especially if the term 'a visit required three days,' is speaking of a particular pattern of etiquette to be followed when visiting a city of significance. Certainly this would apply to ambassadors and diplomats and visiting prophets as well. The etiquette went something like this, as I understand it. On day one the prophet would arrive and settle in. On the second day they would make their formal presentation to the appropriate city authorities as to the reason for the visit. On day three they would conduct their business and then depart. If this is what verse 3 is referring to then Jonah is so keen not to make a mess of it second time around that he ignores proper protocol for on the first day, Jonah begins to proclaim his message.

Notice that his message (v 4) is the same message that God gave Jonah before he rebelled and ran away from the Lord (1:2). Jonah would have saved himself so much trouble if he had obeyed the first time instead of running away. We too would save ourselves a lot of trouble if we simply obeyed God instead of rebelling. His message was one of judgement. God's message doesn't change because we don't like it and if we are going to be a true servant of the Lord then it is our task not to change the message, but to be faithful and proclaim it.

O there are plenty of people who change God's message, so that what we have is a whole hosts of churches with men occupying pulpits who simply do not like what God says so they tell us what they think. It is no wonder that people in our country do not take seriously the church. Who on earth wants to go to a building on your day off just to hear the opinion of another man? But when churches get back to proclaiming God's message then perhaps once again the people in this land will begin to listen to the church. How many of us like the doctrine of hell? Not many of us and in many ways it would be better if the doctrine of hell did not exist. But it does exist because God's character demands it; he is Just and demands justice. It is so easy to water down a doctrine of judgement and sadly many churches have done so, for it is not easy to tell people the truth about judgement.

Therefore even Evangelical Churches speak more about God's love than God's judgement and I would argue that only majoring on the love of God actually distorts his love. Is his love not seen in a greater light if people can understand that God is wrathful towards sin and that we deserve his judgement as a result? But even though he is wrathful towards us, he loves us deeply and demonstrates his love through Jesus death for our salvation.

Is his love not greater when seen in that light rather than people thinking that God loves us because we are not bad people and are loveable. We are not loveable but God loved us and gave himself for us.

Please let us be honest with people, tell them the truth, do not deceive them or mislead them. It's not our responsibility if people reject the truth, but it is our responsibility to tell them the truth. We must do all that we can to make the truth clear and understandable, but as long as we tell them the truth we will not be held accountable for people's rejection of it. However if we have deceived people into thinking that everything is Ok between them and God when in reality God is wrathful towards the sinner, then we will be held accountable.

I think we need to return to the balance of Scripture perhaps years ago the emphasis was on the judgement of God and people got the impression that God is some tyrant who enjoys seeing us suffer. But today the emphasis is on the love of God and it gives the impression that God's love is such that he will accept us all no matter what. The truth is that God is just and loving he accepts those who turn to him in genuine faith and he rejects those who reject Him and he does send people reluctantly to hell, for his justice must be done.

What we probably have in verse 4 is a summary statement of God's message, Jonah probably told them why God's judgement was coming upon them and I can imagine him giving them a personal testimony of God's dealing with himself, Jonah could clearly testify what it is like to ignore God. Jonah now has first hand knowledge not only of the judgement of God but also of the love, grace and mercy of God. Surely that would have had a great impact upon Jonah's preaching and upon the people for surely a story like Jonah's would have spread like fire around Nineveh.

2. THE RESPONSE TO THE MESSAGE.

The people's response to God's message is nothing short of a revival. I know that that word is used rather loosely in some circles today but I think this can surely be called a revival.

a) They Believed God (v 5) – Notice that they believed God. They accepted that Jonah's message was God's message and that is the first requirement for any revival. God uses ordinary people to proclaim his word. If people come into our church and listen to me or anyone else preach then unless they are convinced that what they hear is God's word and not my word then it will have no impact upon them. After all who wants to hear what I have got to say on any subject.

But once people believe that it is God's message then they will listen. That is the first sign of a revival, people believe God, and they believe that the preached word is God's word. You see if people just thought that here is Jonah just ranting on, then are the people going to listen? No! But in Jonah's situation God is at work stirring the hearts of the hearers, convincing them that God is speaking and therefore they better respond.

If we want to pray for revival then please pray that people may be convinced that the preached word is God's word. Pray for that for me or any other preacher, pray that God may work in the hearts of those who listen to first of all convince them that this word is not the word of the preacher but is God's word. Our land needs to recapture the sense that God speaks through his word.

If people believed God today we wouldn't have evolution being taught in our schools we wouldn't have statements from our leaders trying to convince us that Islam is a valid religion. We wouldn't have shops opening on the Lord's Day or bills going through parliament supporting gay rights and so on. All these things are happening in our land simply because we do not believe God. One reason why people do not get saved is because they are not convinced that the message they hear from churches is God's message.

I have to confess sometimes they are absolutely right for what they hear in many of our churches is only the word of men and of course that means that when they hear the true message of God they don't believe it because they have become use to listening to the words of mere men. We need to pray that God will work in the hearts of people of this land so that they will be able to distinguish between the words of men and the word of God. Only God can do this and this is what we ought to be seeking God for.

b) Notice the Outcome Of People Believing God (v. 9) – There is real repentance from the top down (v 9). They expressed their sorrow for sin in a way that was culturally acceptable. When it affects the king he calls upon the whole city to call upon God and to turn from their evil and violent ways (v 8). This is true repentance. O we might express it differently in our own culture, but the real sign of revival is not only believing God's word but a grieving and turning from sin.

How we need to pray for such a thing today, can you imagine such a thing in our own land. Just think if our Queen on Christmas day called for national day of repentance because she has believed God and turned from her sin.

Can you imagine our Prime Minister standing outside 10 Downing Street with a whole crew of cameras and reporters just waiting on his speech? Then he opens his mouth and announces his own repentance towards God and calls upon our land to do so. Are such things possible today? Of course they are for this is what will happen if God comes upon our land with revival blessing. People from the very top down through all the strata of society will believe God and will turn from their evil and violent ways. Please pray that this will happen for our land so desperately needs a touch from God.

3. GOD'S RESPONSE TO THE PEOPLE'S REPENTANCE

How is God going to act in response to Nineveh's repentance? The king shows great wisdom here for he does not assume on the graciousness of God (v 9) He repents and calls upon the citizens of the city to repent but he recognises that because they are repentant it is not automatic that God will be forbearing in his reaction. The King knows that the repentant sinner has no case to argue before God for his acceptance.

In fact a sign of a truly repentant heart is one that acknowledges they have no rights before God, no claim to his forgiveness. If God grants forgiveness He does so out of his grace not because he owes us because we have repented. Repentance is actually our duty before God, it is what we should do, it earns us nothing before God, and all that we receive from him is by His grace alone.

However notice that God does respond to their repentant hearts he has compassion upon them (v 10) and does not bring about his threatened destruction. He simply relents. Some people have great problems in understanding how God can relent or change his mind. God said he would bring destruction upon the city but now he relents from doing so. This was Jonah's problem and we will look again at this next time. Is not God unchanging? If so how can he change his actions? Well we must remember that although God is unchanging in his nature, he responds in mercy to changing situations. In other words God's statement about judgment is a conditional statement, God sends sinners to hell.

However if a sinner realises his terrible plight and turns from his sin then God acts according to the new circumstances. His words on judgement are meant to alert the sinner of their danger and to bring them to repentance. If a sinner repents then God acts to the changed circumstances. So although God is unchanging He responds to changing circumstances. He acts in different ways according to the circumstances; if circumstances change then God changes his actions.

His character doesn't change but his actions can and do. God's just judgement takes into account the attitude and situation of those whom his demands are addressed. It is only because God does respond in this way that a sinner who comes to believe in Jesus can know His acceptance.

So as I conclude isn't this chapter a great encouragement to us. This sort of response to the preaching of God's message makes my heart rejoice. If God can do this in pagan Nineveh then surely he can do the same in pagan Britain. We must be like Jonah and obey his voice and proclaim his word. We must be truthful with people, tell them the bad news of judgement as well as the good news of grace. We must pray for God to work so that we will see this sort of response, that there may be genuine repentance.

Finally we ought to praise God that he responds to changing situations, and has compassion and mercy upon repentant sinners.

Amen