

“The God of Second Chances”

Today we are going to talk about second chances.

When I was in college I had a math test that I was not prepared for, and I did what a lot of students do when that is the case I got sick, so I could miss the test. Soon I began to feel guilty about what I did so I went to my math teacher, Dr. Lloyd Davis, and I told him about my dishonest act. I told him that I was not really sick and that the reason I missed the test was because I was unprepared.

Dr. Davis was a believer in Jesus Christ and a believer in God’s grace. I remember him saying something to me about his faith being the reason for him forgiving me for what I had done, and for giving me another chance to take the test a couple of days later. He could have given me a zero, and he could have docked my grade big time, but he did neither. He gave me a second chance to take the test.

I had forgotten about that story until this week when I began to reflect on the importance of getting second chances in life.

Where would we be in life if we didn’t get second chances?

Today we come to the story of Jonah’s second chance to preach the gospel to the Ninevites.

Then the word of the LORD came to Jonah a second time: “Go to the great city of Nineveh and proclaim to it the message I give to you.” -Jonah 3:1

Jonah’s call to preach the gospel of God’s love was difficult on three fronts, and we take that into consideration it is easy to see why he needed a second chance.

Jonah’s Difficult Calling

First, God called Jonah to take his word to the Assyrians, a wicked and pagan people.

We learn this in the very first verse of the book. “The word of the LORD came to Jonah son of Amittai: ‘Go to the great city of Nineveh and preach against it, *because its wickedness has come up before me.*’”

The Assyrian Empire was in what is today known as Iraq; and when they took over a nation they would exile their captors throughout other parts of their empire, and would replace them with foreigners, so as to weaken that nation’s ethnic and religious foundations. The Assyrians knew that if they could pollute the blood line and the religion of the Jews they would remain a weak and defeated people.

Because of this, the Jews understandably hated the Assyrians, Jonah included. Who would want to take the gospel to these kinds of people? It is understandable why Jonah ran when God first called him. He did not want Assyria, a wicked people, to be saved.

Second, it was difficult because Jonah, just like most of his own people, struggled to grasp the truth that the God of the Jews, Yahweh the LORD, was also the God of the nations.

From the beginning God had made it clear that he had given birth to Israel for the special purpose of blessing all nations of the world.

God formed this tiny and insignificant people, Israel, for the purpose of shining the light of His truth into a dark, sinful world that was confused about who God was, what God was like, and how people could be saved.

The Scriptures tell us that when God called Abraham God told him that He would make a great from his offspring for the purpose of blessing all the nations of the earth. (Gen. 12:1-3)

God also told Moses that the Israelites were to remember the sojourner amongst them (*a foreigner traveling in their midst*) because they too were once were slaves in Egypt. (Exodus 23:9)

And then if there were still any doubt, God, through the preaching of Isaiah, reminded His people of how God had called her for the purpose of being “a light for the Gentiles” so that God’s salvation might “reach the ends the earth.” (Isaiah 49:6)

But Jonah’s response to this calling from God, at first, was to miss it. Somehow he either didn’t see it, or he just made the conscious decision that the gospel was only for Israel, so he chose not to share it.

Thirdly, Jonah’s call to preach the gospel of God was difficult because the message that God had called him to preach was difficult in and of itself.

God called Jonah to preach a message of repentance, and that is never easy.

Repentance is exactly the kind of message that we need to hear, but it is not the one we always want to hear, especially in our day and age.

Matthew Henry in his commentary on the text said this, “What is preached against us is preached to us, that we may hear it and take warning; and what is preached to us, if we do not give ear to it, and mix faith with it, will prove to be against us.”

Today we are much like the Israelites were back in the Old Testament days. Everything around them was falling apart. The people had turned to idolatry and their nation was crumbling, and the only thing they wanted to hear were prophets who would tickle their ears and “cry peace when there was no peace.” Most of the prophets gladly obliged, and Israel soon self-destructed.

But the kind of preachers that God calls are preachers of repentance. That's what the true Old Testament prophets like Isaiah, Jeremiah, and Ezekiel preached. In the New Testament it was what John the Baptist preached; and it was what our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ- the eternal Son of God and God incarnate- preached, a message of repentance. The results weren't always pretty. Isaiah was martyred, John the Baptist was beheaded, and God in Christ was crucified, but that didn't matter. The true prophet must preach a message of repentance anyway.

I am sure that in the back of Jonah's mind he was fearful about confronting the Assyrians concerning their sin.

How would they respond to my preaching? Would I come out of Nineveh alive? All of these things Jonah must have wondered, as he thought about preaching to them, and for that reason his calling was no easy task.

Jonah's Failure and His Second Chance to Preach God's Word

It was because of all these things that Jonah blew it. He failed, at first, to do what God called him to do and he ran.

He ran as far away as he could from God's calling in his life, fleeing in a ship in the totally opposite direction of Nineveh. But God saved him from his running by having Jonah thrown overboard, in the midst of a storm, so as to be swallowed by a great fish.

There in the belly of that whale for three days and three nights, Jonah found salvation from his running, and then God spewed him out of that great fish onto dry land, in order to give Jonah a second chance at His calling.

Then the word of the LORD came to Jonah a second time: "Go to the great city of Nineveh and proclaim to it the message I give to you." -Jonah 3:1

This time Jonah gets it right. He goes to that great and wicked city and he preaches the gospel of God's love for all the nations of the world, by calling upon the Assyrians to repent from their sin and turn to Yahweh, the one true God of not only Israel, but of all the nations of the earth.

Jonah finally got over the fact that that he did not like the Assyrians, and he got over the fact that the God who had birthed his very own people, the Israelites, was also a God who had bigger plans for the world than just the Jews; and then he got over the fact that he was going to have to do the dirty work of preaching repentance if he was going to honor God's will in his life, and then he went. He went to that great and wicked city and he proclaimed God's Word to them. "Forty more days and Nineveh will be over thrown," Jonah preached.

His message worked, not because of his words, but because Jonah preached God's Word to the Assyrians.

The text tells us that because of Jonah's preaching, the Ninevites believed God, a fast was proclaimed, and the people, from the greatest to the least, put on sackcloth (a sign of mourning) and repented.

But Jonah's preaching not only penetrated the hearts of ordinary, everyday men, his preaching also convicted the heart of the king. For the King of Assyria ditched his fine clothes for sackcloth and ashes, and then he himself preached, by calling on his own people to give up "their evil ways and violence."

That's what makes a message work. It's not in the power of the speaker. If it was in the power of the speaker then Moses would have never had a chance. Moses was a stutterer. If it was in the power of the speaker then the apostle Paul would not have had a chance. Paul told the Corinthians that he did not come to them with "wise and persuasive words," but rather he came to them preaching "Christ crucified," so as to not empty the gospel of its power.

What makes a message work is the proclamation of the Word of God, and that is what Jonah did, he proclaimed the Word of God. The text tells us that the "Word of the LORD came to Jonah a second time," and that this time "he obeyed the word of the LORD."

The God of Second Chances

What we see in this text today is a picture of a God who gives second chances, and it is a picture that is not out of focus with the consistent lens of Scripture.

In our story today Jonah gets a second chance, and so does Nineveh.

God has always been in the business of giving fallen sinners second chances.

God gave the whole human race a second chance when He promised Adam and Eve, after eating the forbidden fruit in the Garden, that Eve's offspring would one day "crush the head of the serpent." (Gen. 3:14)

That's the first promise of redemption in the Bible.

For if God did not us give second chances there would be no such thing as salvation, only damnation.

In our New Testament text we read of the story of Jesus' restoration of the apostle Peter to his place in the gospel ministry.

At a time when Jesus needed Peter the most, Peter failed his Lord by denying that he knew Christ three times.

Peter, unlike Jonah, didn't just fail once in bearing witness to Jesus, but three times! "I do not know the man!" screamed Peter from the top of his lungs. But in this text we find our Lord

asking Peter three different times, “Do you love me?” That was Jesus’ way of saying to Peter that I forgive you for each of the times you failed me.

The God of the Bible is a God of second chances. He’s even more than that. He’s a God of 490 chances. (Matt. 18:21-22) Remember what Jesus’ answer was to Peter when he asked him how many times do I have to forgive my brother?

We must be careful here as we talk about the God of second chances to not make the mistake of thinking that God’s grace is somehow inexhaustible, and that our chances in life are unlimited. It is not, and they are not.

We must always hold in tension with the God of second chances, the God of judgment who will judge us when His grace is abused by sinners who refuse to repent, and submit their lives to the Lordship of Christ. Does not the writer of Hebrews tell us that if we deliberately keep on sinning after we have received the knowledge of the truth, no sacrifice for sins is left, but only the fearful expectation of the judgment of God?” (Heb. 10:26-27)

We all must take more seriously God’s call to repentance in the book of Jonah. For when we do we will find, just as the Assyrians did in the book of Jonah, that God will relent and not bring upon us the destruction that is owed us for our sin.

Conclusion and Invitation

Today I invite you to give your lives, your failures, and all of your sins to the God who most clearly and decisively gives us all second chances through the gift of His eternal Son, the Lord Jesus Christ.

It does not matter what your sin is or bad you messed up, or how many times you have messed up; there is nothing that the cross of Christ cannot take care of. Today is the day of salvation and God is ready to give you a second chance, if you will repent and turn to the Lord Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of sins and life with God.

Jesus said, “Behold I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in and eat with that person, and they with me.” (Revelation 3:20)

In the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, amen.