

Reading: Jonah 2:10-3:10

Theme: The Second Chance!

We noted last week that God's people can sink into despair in various situations in life just as Jonah sank into the deep sea, but God provided a great fish to swallow him down and preserve his life, yet that preservation was not the best experience in many ways! To be in the belly of the fish for three days and three nights would not have been a pleasant experience and Jonah may have felt God had forgotten him, maybe finished with him, even though he had repented and prayed to God. Yet God was in control even of such a distasteful preservation and at the right moment, He commanded the fish and Jonah is spued out onto dry land. One moment he was in a dark and confined smelly place, and the next he goes through the regurgitation process and plop – he was in the light, the fresh air, the sounds and the smells that he'd never thought to have again and no doubt he, and probably the fish too, felt a lot better! If anyone was walking along nearby when Jonah was ejected from the fish, it would have been a shock and been an unbelievable fisherman's tale!

Jonah must have been a sight as he probably laid there on the ground - smelly, slimy, probably his hair, clothes and skin bleached by the natural acids in the fish stomach. As we noted last week Jonah had not passed through this experience without it having an effect on his heart, mind and life. He had realised how God miraculously and wonderfully used that fish to be his means of deliverance. Probably as he was there on dry ground, he may have put into poetry his experience and prayer in the fish and reviewed this glorious answer to his prayer. In our lives, no matter our calamity, trouble or distress, we can take comfort in knowing that God is in control. Things may not be as we want

them in our times and lives - finances, health, marriage, relationships, family problems, other problems and difficulties, but we are to realise that God knows exactly what we are going through and He can suddenly open up our eyes and understanding, to the benefit, the good that such has been to us and we find, as in Jonah's case, that the very thing which ensnares us can be a means of deliverance from something far worse.

Jonah had a new beginning; it is if he has a new life. Most certainly he was alive, but alive for what purpose? Jonah had looked death in the face and lived. Many who have had experiences like it - after radical, incredible surgery, or been wonderfully rescued from certain death and they speak of a new impetus in life, of seeing life in a different light. Jonah was not only alive, but recognised this showed God's goodness to him personally and in essence God was saying to him that the Lord would start again, continue to work in and use Jonah. We need to see and recognise that Jonah was just not pardoned and forgiven, as amazing and wonderful as that was, but he was personally restored to not only favour with God, but once again given the office as a prophet and messenger for the Lord.

It is exactly how the Lord works - Peter, boastful, arrogant, self-certain Peter, denied the Lord Jesus 3 times before people, including 2 little maids, but the Lord didn't write him off, dismiss from any second chance or put him in a lowly, servile position. Not at all, the Lord Jesus actively sought to encourage Peter. After Jesus' resurrection an angel told the woman to go and tell of the events and "*tell His disciples and Peter*" (Mark 16:7) emphasising Peter was not left out or written off. Jesus had to gently, but firmly restore Peter and give him again the

shepherd's heart and commission - feed my sheep and lambs (John 21)! Peter, Jonah and many others throughout history, including many of us here are saved, know God's forgiveness and we are all saved to serve. Jonah was a believer and was restored to service. From the early verses of this chapter, I want to note 3 things, but see the first this evening:

1. The second chance.

As Jonah lay there on the ground, or perhaps he had recovered some of his strength, God showed him why he had been spared, for he was to be reinstated as God's man as a prophet. God had truly forgiven Jonah. There was no holding of grudges, or constant dangling of his failure before him as the reason why he was not to be trusted. God had forgiven him and would not bring it to mind, nor would He torment Jonah with his failing. God says in His word (Isaiah 43:25) *"I, even I, am He who blots out your transgressions, for my own sake, and remembers your sins no more."*

What God says in Isaiah 43:25 stands true for us in our lives. On TV there are a number of programs with actual video clips of things that went wrong, either in real life or in the filming of programs or films. It must have been embarrassing enough to make the mistake, let alone to have it viewed by millions of people! Yet some people are like that - they never let you forget your mistakes, your shortcomings or faults. They may say they will forgive, but may add, they will never forget, and you are quite sure about the latter!

We can thank God that He is not like others. When we trust the Lord Jesus as our Saviour, all our wrong is totally removed from us, blotted out and He will never bring such to remembrance.

He deliberately chooses never to recall them and never to accuse us of such. Sadly, we can do that work of accusation for the devil, as the wrong we have done, perhaps even many years ago or recently, still haunts, plagues and accuses our hearts and minds. Yet we are to take heart, for our God will never remember such. It may be we have recently done something and we feel God could never forgive or accept us now, but He will give us not just a 2nd chance as He did with Jonah, but many, many chances! We are not to abuse God's grace!

When we give into temptation or are duped to compromise and fall into sin, we are not to be further fooled and snared by the devil to remain stubborn, defiant and refuse to acknowledge our sinful thoughts, attitudes, words or actions as being rebellion and as sin against God Himself. Yet we can also be fooled into thinking we could never be pardoned and God has cast us off and there is no hope for us. On such occasions we can so easily find excuses to pass the blame – it was our circumstances, the opportunity, other people and yet we refuse to acknowledge before God our actions, words, attitudes, thoughts were wrong and therefore sin. We need to be as Jonah, we need to admit our sin, be brought into a right relationship with God and may have further chances to serve the Lord after we have done that.

Jonah had this second chance and we will look into this to help and encourage us in our own lives. Jonah had been through so much and this had prepared him to take this message by this second chance, but now he's a messenger who is not as he was - for we see he was:

a. A restored rebel.

Previously Jonah had been used as a prophet of the Lord, then he rebelled and ran away from Mission Nineveh. Yet he was given, as we will see, the same commission, and has this second chance of serving God in the same way. Jonah was not the same rebel as he was. He was now one who had known God's anger against him, but also knew God's forgiveness, mercy, love and miraculous deliverance. He had witnessed God's amazing power first-hand, had been awed and terrified by that, but had also known God's loving deliverance and concluded "*Salvation comes from the Lord.*" This 2nd chance came to this restored rebel, one who rejoiced in God's goodness and mercy and was aware of the greatness and sovereignty of his Lord.

We need to realise these things. Until we see something of God, this great God, not as a grandfather figure, but as the Judge and Lawgiver, we will have little or no reverence for Him. We will continue to do as we please so easily and not what He wants; we will continue to rebel against Him and think nothing of it; but if we knew of His greatness, His majesty and glory, we would see something of how small, pathetic and dirty we are compared to Him. Sadly, there is little or no fear in many people of this holy God. Have we ever feared Him? The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom, have we become even a little wise?

Only as we see of His greatness and our smallness will we begin to see something of the wonder of His undeserved love. It is incredible that this awesome God should give us any good thing, but that He should show a wonderful love in providing a way for us to have all our wrong and guilt removed, to become His children and to be at peace with Him is staggering! His forgiveness can never be earned by us, but it is freely given as a king grants a royal pardon and is given to us - who definitely do

not deserve it. Yet we can ask for it because the entire penalty for our wrongs, our sin has been paid for by the King's own beloved Son - the Lord Jesus. Because of who He is and what He has done we can be accepted and be freely given this royal pardon from the Almighty and sovereign King of all Creation.

Jonah knew such pardon for his rebellion and knew God's greatness. So, when this second chance came, I can imagine he almost did not believe it, but it was real and he was re-commissioned - He was pardoned, cleansed and reinstated to his prophetic office. I think Jonah realised the high honour that had been put upon him! Do we have gratitude and wonder in our lives that such a God would offer to us this glorious gift of new life and to serve Him? Perhaps to some of us here it is a call to serve Him again, to take up the Christian life which we abandoned. To others it might be a call to serve Him in a new and fresh way. All of us need to see the amazing wonder of our God restoring us as rebels to Himself in salvation and He keeps on restoring us to Himself and He would use us for His glory in His service. Jonah is now:

b. A person of prayer.

As a prophet of God, no doubt Jonah had prayed and believed in prayer. As he was restored, the man of God had again prayed to his God (2:1). Now this 2nd chance comes to him, and it found him as a person who has experienced answered prayer and knew it from recent personal experience - his God is the One who answers prayer in a glorious way. Now he is able to pray in a way that he hadn't before and there would be no indifference or apathy in his praying. Many people look at prayer as a last resort; the thing to do when they cannot do anything else; when they reach the end of themselves and abilities. Yet Jonah now

knew the reality of prayer. He had prayed before, even come to God in prayer in the fish with the same belief in prayer that he always had, but now he **really knew** God answered prayer and as Jonah is given this 2nd chance, he went on to face Nineveh, with all his fear about its problems and was armed with the certain hope and confidence of this great and mighty weapon of prayer. Jonah knew he was not alone, he had One to call on who was his shield and defender. As he went seemingly alone and unprotected into Nineveh, he knew his God was there and would protect or deliver him.

Do we have a similar assurance regarding prayer? Do we know we can go to God at any time as our Father and He will hear us and answer us in far greater ways than we could ever ask, think or imagine? As Christians we have a great prayer answering God - not for our selfish ends, but for His glory and we can make use of this privilege of prayer very often. Jonah was prepared as he was:

c. An afflicted, but affected man.

All the suffering God had brought on Jonah for his disobedience had affected him, but it also prepared him for serving the Lord. Before he was afflicted, he went astray, now he is willing, desires to go God's way and as the second chance comes, he snaps it up willingly and readily. He was now prepared to speak of the Lord's greatness, power, the fear of the Lord, the love and the forgiveness of the Lord. Incredibly God's dealings with him were preparation for future service as God chipped and shaped this living stone, polished him for his place and service in His work. It wasn't easy for Jonah to experience this. Previously Jonah was not prepared to go to Nineveh - temperamentally,

spiritually, or prayerfully. Now he was, for God, as the Mastercraft man, had honed and prepared Jonah for this work.

In our lives God is not wasting His time in the experiences He allows us to go through and He can use those to shape us for present and future service. It is not always easy or pleasant to be on the receiving end of such reshaping and preparation, but we have such a wise, gentle God and He knows exactly what He is doing. I pray we will all learn from what God sends our way as individuals and as a church and we would not be stubbornly indifferent to God's dealings with us. Most of all, may we all see that even as God deals with us, He deals with us not as we deserve, but in love and grace and this goodness should bring us to trust Him first of all as our Saviour and then to trust and obey Him more and more as He makes known His will for our lives.

My prayer is that, whether young or old, we would make this evening the time when we commit or recommit our lives to our Saviour and we would be willing to be used for His glory and His service however and wherever He would lead us.

God willing, next time I hope to look at:

2. The same commission.
3. The submissive obedience.