

Reading: Jonah 3:1-10

Theme: Called to Obey.

In chapter 3 of Jonah, we arrive at the turning of the tide. Until now the book has been about Jonah's stubborn disobedience, defiance and rebellion. It has shown us how he suffered for it and the means God used to bring him to his senses. During this chapter we see Jonah going God's way. Last week we saw **1. The second chance (v1)** - he had a new life and a new opportunity to live for God. We saw how this second bite of the cherry came to one who was a **restored rebel, a person of prayer and an afflicted, but affected man.** God had shaped and also worked in and upon Jonah to prepare him for his work ahead. This second chance came to Jonah but we also see that Jonah received:

2. The same commission. (v2)

Jonah did not invent, make up his calling. We read "*the word of God came to him a second time*" (v1). It was God who spoke clearly and unmistakably to Jonah and he was left in no doubt this second chance came from the Lord. With the completion of Scripture, it is a very rare thing for God's word to come in such a way to a person and it is not usually revelation, but illumination. Yes, in ages past God did speak to and through prophets, but He has spoken finally through His Son the Lord Jesus. All that He would say has been recorded for us by the gospel writers and the Apostles in their writings, so we view Scripture as God

breathed, complete and sufficient for all matters of faith and for life lived for God.

It may seem a tremendous ideal that God would speak individually to each of us, but God has bound Himself to His word; as it is read, studied and preached the Holy Spirit can take and apply that word to many or to an individual and meet their individual or collective needs and situations. Preaching has been ordained of God, from Him, so that we cannot boast of our "inner knowledge" or "personal insights", but we are reverently dependent upon God to enlighten us by His Spirit through His written word.

Here the Lord spoke to Jonah and gave him the same commission and he has to go to Nineveh, has to preach to it. God didn't beat about the bush or alter His requirements for Jonah. The commission was renewed and Jonah had to go and preach to Nineveh. Jonah had been through much suffering, but it was not wasted, for being mixed with faith, it produced a harvest of righteousness and peace as he was trained by it (Hebrews 12:11). We are not to be glib and say that suffering is always good for us, for it can do us much harm physically, emotionally and even spiritually, unless we see it as something to train us - so we will profit by it and the effort will not be wasted. Yet as Jonah is re-commissioned by God, the Lord does not make the task any lighter and easier. Nineveh is still called "*the great city*". The job had not become easier, nor had

the requirements of God's word become easier, nor had God changed His mind. The commission was still *"Go to the great city of Nineveh"* .

No doubt all of Jonah's reasons for not going would have resurfaced in his heart and mind. This would have caused him heartache and anguish. Yet Jonah now received the commission as one who knew, in a real way, God's power and strength. It was true that he, as a man, was weak and insignificant, but as big and as awesome as the task was, Jonah knew his God was greater. We all need to realise this. There maybe someone watching or listening, who is thinking about becoming a Christian, yet you fear that you will never be able to keep it up. You would be perfectly correct in fearing that, as you, on your own, would never be able to keep it up, but God will be with you to keep you standing as He does with each and every Christian. In fact, every Christian there has ever been, is and will be, was, is and will be dependent upon God and His keeping them safe – from the youngest, newest Christian, to the wisest, oldest Christian are all kept safe and secure by God's power.

Just as our salvation comes from the Lord completely, so we are dependent upon Him to bring us safely through life to heaven. Yes, He has told us we are to work out our salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God who works in us to will and to do with His good pleasure (Philippians 2:12-13). There seems to be a stark contrast, almost an

insolvable problem, for we are urged, warned and encouraged in Scripture to do our utmost to live holy lives, to keep close to God and yet at the same time we are told we are unable to do so except by God's help and enabling. Realise that left to our own selves we would soon flounder and fail. We need to draw near to God and He will draw near to us and we will be enabled by the Holy Spirit to live as we should, as we are commanded and do so in dependence upon God.

Jonah is told now not only to go to Nineveh and preach against it (1:1), but to proclaim (preach) the message God gave him. He had to go into it and say what God wanted him to say. When Jonah got there, he had to tell them that 40 days and the city would be destroyed! What a message, but Jonah was able to preach it, for he knew God's power to fulfil such a threat. He preached such a message as one who knew the terror of the Lord in his own life.

We are to realise that not only were Jonah's orders the same, but his method the same also - he had to preach, proclaim God's word. Many in our day and age dismiss or belittle preaching; they will put anything else in its place, perhaps just giving a nodding recognition that it should be done. People say that preaching is out of date, people will not, or cannot listen to such; that this generation need signs, proofs, demonstrations; need gimmicks, sales techniques; need to compete with the entertainment the

world gets and we need to get the atmosphere right and conducive.

Yet preaching is God's primary method of saving, of confronting people with the gospel. In NT the Apostles and disciples went everywhere preaching and gossiping the gospel - the verbal word. To the Jews and Greeks this was foolishness and they wanted signs or eloquent wisdom, but it pleased God by the foolishness of preaching to save souls and transform this world. We are not to decry preaching as it is God's primary means of saving people and relevant throughout all ages - the gospel has to be clearly, relevantly proclaimed to our generation.

Jonah was not told to go and be a witness by his life – no doubt that was involved, but he was called to preach, to proclaim God's word. With us, we are not just to be silent witnesses, but speak as we have opportunity. Jonah had to proclaim not his own ideas or philosophy, but the message God gave him. It would appear he didn't know what that was as he set out to Nineveh, perhaps not knowing it exactly until he arrived at Nineveh. We do not have liberty to preach what we want - our own ideas and feelings. We must proclaim God's word. This is the type of preaching God will own - that which glorifies Him, that which tells of the way of salvation He has provided and the wonderful Saviour He has sent. We are to present the gospel, the glorious benefit of accepting Christ, the awful

consequences of rejecting or neglecting Him - which is hell forever. Oh, that more Christians, more churches would clearly preach God's word and it would go forth effectively in the power of the Spirit in churches and in believers' lives.

Jonah was re-commissioned, had the same commission as he had received before and he had to go to Nineveh and proclaim God's message to them. We, in our days, still have the Lord's commission to go into all the world to make disciples of all nations, baptising them in the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit and teaching them to obey all His commands (Matthew 28:19-20). Will we listen to His commission? Then we see in Jonah:

3. The submissive obedience. (v3a)

Jonah did not argue, or run away, or raise objections this time; but he obeyed the word of the Lord. Now he takes up the second chance he is given and it seems he went immediately to Nineveh. In fact, we are told he got up and went to Nineveh *"according to the word of the Lord"*. Nothing was then more important to Jonah than obedience to God's word. When he had gone his own way, done his own thing in disobedience to God's word when it first came to him, he had suffered greatly. Even before he suffered physically, he knew he was doing wrong - no doubt his peace and relationship with God was marred and spoiled. Then he had gone according to his own desires, fears and prejudices, but now he went according to the

word of the Lord. He realised something of what we sing *"Trust and obey! For there's no other way to be happy in Jesus, but to trust and obey."*

What do we let rule our lives? I ask the question that way, for more often than not, we let things rule our lives - our desires, fears, pride, temperaments, point of view, but we should let God's word rule the whole of our lives, thoughts, attitudes, words, actions and not just what is convenient for, or preferable to us! God has fixed standards that are not arbitrary, nor can they be played around with as we feel fit, or think convenient. He commands all to repent and believe on the Lord Jesus as their Saviour. Have we done that? He says we are to live holy lives. Do we? He says we are to live godly lives in an ungodly world. Do we aim at that, or do we ignore that using any excuse?

Jonah obeyed the Lord. I'm sure he still did not want to go, that there were still doubts and fears in his heart and mind, but he made it his chief business to submit and obey to God's word. This evening that can be a challenge to us to examine our lives and hearts. If we are far distant from the Lord, perhaps never made Him our Saviour, then we need to come to Him and ask Him to receive us. He has promised that all who go to Him, He would in no wise ever cast out. Perhaps we are a believer and we are like Jonah and we have been running from God even though we own Him as our Saviour, if that is the case then we

need to come and seek to be right with Him and walk with Him in obedience once again.

As Christians we need to see that our first calling and love are being fulfilled and maintained. We are called to follow Him and be His witnesses in this world. In every area of our lives, we need to obey Him totally. It is not easy and there is so much that rebels against such loving obedience - our own hearts, the world and the devil. I pray we will all go on to serve the Lord, to serve and live for Him as and where He requires us and that we would do so to His glory, His honour and to please Him in all things.