

The Second Chance

By Don Green

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Bible Verse: Jonah 3:1-3
Preached on: Sunday, August 26, 2018

Truth Community Church
4183 Mt. Carmel Tobasco Road
Cincinnati, OH 45255

Website: truthcommunitychurch.org
Online Sermons: www.sermonaudio.com/tcomm

We're remembering the Lord at his table. It was a wonderful introduction to our time in God's word here this morning from the book of Jonah. I invite you to turn to the book of Jonah 3 with me. When you remember Christ in communion, when you remember that a full atonement for our sins has been paid, you start to realize something that is wonderfully liberating in your life. It means that you as a Christian, you are not meant to live in perpetual regret over your past sins. Yes, you have sinned and you have sinned greatly against God in many ways in the course of many years, but the whole point of salvation is that God in compassion has removed your sin from you. The whole point of salvation is that God does not hold the sins of his children against them any longer and we can see this in different ways. We see it in communion. We see it remembering that Christ has made a full atonement for our sins. We remember that our sins, the Scriptures say, have been removed from us as far as the east is from the West, Psalm 103:12. These are wonderful aspects. True Christianity is not a legalistic club beating people again and again and again for their past sins, the whole point of Christianity is that Christ has removed our sins from us; that he has forgiven us; that he has paid the price that we would be forgiven, he has paid the price so that God would not hold our sins against us any longer.

We can see these things in other ways as well. We see the mercy of God displayed in the life of Peter. In John 21, after the Lord's resurrection, you remember, don't you, that Peter denied the Lord three times before he was crucified with curses, denying that he knew the man's name, and yet what happened afterwards? The Lord restored him. "Peter, do you love me? Peter, do you love me? Peter, do you love me?" Three times Peter said, "Yes, Lord. You know that I love you." And the Lord said, "Feed my lambs. Feed my sheep. Tend my sheep." The Lord graciously forgiving Peter – get this – graciously forgiving Peter for denying him in his greatest hour of human need, at the greatest hour of extremity on the night before he would be crucified Peter said, "I don't know the man," and Christ comes to him and extends grace and forgiveness to him and restores him, and not only restores him, puts him into spiritual service for him. This is a great salvation. This is a great Lord. This is a gracious Lord.

A lesser-known man illustrates the point. Some of you will remember in the book of Acts that a man named John Mark deserted Paul in ministry to such a point that Paul refused to take him on a subsequent missionary journey in Acts 13 and 15, you can remember that

and read about that; but later on at the end of his life in 2 Timothy 4, Paul wanted that very man, wanted John Mark to visit him because he was useful for service. You see, this introduces us, this reminds us of something very very great, that when God forgives sin, he does so completely. Though your sins were scarlet, he has made them white as snow. Though you were polluted with guilt, God has removed that, given you a new nature in Christ and made you clean, welcomed you into his fellowship not grudgingly, not unwillingly, not holding your sin against you, but the doors of heaven, the doors of intimacy with God have been flung wide open despite your sin.

You see, that is good news. That is the nature of God. That is what Christ has done for you, what Christ has purchased for you. To remember that is to remember the greatest news, the greatest story that could ever be told, and not just a story but a story about what is true, what is rooted in historical fact, what is rooted in the immutable character of God as it was expressed at the cross of Calvary. Your sins can be forgiven in Christ and if you are in Christ, your sins are forgiven and even if you have stumbled along the way in your Christian life, there is a blessed realization that comes from that, there is a blessed realization that your past failures need not be the final chapter of the story of your life because our God shows sovereign compassion, our God restores sinners to a place of service, a place of privilege, and though your sins are great and mighty against God, though your rebellion has been stubborn and full against him on an ongoing basis for a very long time, a patient, gracious God still offers forgiveness while you are breathing here today. You see, the door to intimacy is not locked on God's side. If you find yourself outside the fellowship of God, it's locked from within. It's locked because you want it that way. God is a God of gracious sovereign compassion to sinners who come to him in Christ, and when you come to him in Christ, you can have a fullness of peace, a certainty of conscience that God has received you, has forgiven you, and that your prior sin is not the final word in your life.

We've been studying the book of Jonah and we come to a portion of Jonah that reminds us of that. Turn in your Bibles to Jonah 3 as we'll look at the first three verses for our text this morning. A warm welcome to those of you that are visiting with us. We are so glad that you are with us. We have been, just for those of you that are new to us, we have been studying through the book of Jonah for several weeks now and that's why we come to this particular text. Last week we studied chapter 2, now we enter into chapter 3 and let me read that text for you here this morning. Jonah 3:1 says,

1 Now the word of the LORD came to Jonah the second time, saying, 2 "Arise, go to Nineveh the great city and proclaim to it the proclamation which I am going to 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 days' walk.

Now, we remember the story. God commanded Jonah to go to Nineveh the first time. Jonah refused and ended up in the belly of the fish as a result. God had disciplined Jonah and at the same time rescued him in the stomach of the fish. Last week in chapter 2, Jonah repented, Jonah thanked God for the deliverance. He said, "I will pay what I have

vowed," in chapter 2, verse 19, and the fish spit him up at the command of God and Jonah landed on dry land, and that brings us to our text here this morning, Jonah 3:1 through 3.

Now, the Bible does not tell us a lot of the details that we might otherwise like to know in our curiosity. It does not tell us how much time passed from when the fish spit Jonah out until God called him the second time. We don't know how long the time lapse was there. We assume that it wasn't very long but we don't have any chronological indicators, we just know that God came to him a second time. There are some other things that we don't know about this second call to Jonah. We don't know where he was. We don't know his circumstances. We don't know those things and so there is a lot that we don't know about the nature of this second call and I'm glad for that. I'm glad that we don't know those things because it allows us to focus all the more on what really matters here. What really matters here, this absence of information highlights the only thing that matters in chapter 3 is this, is that God came to Jonah and once again placed his sovereign call on Jonah's life. Jonah's rebellion had not changed God's will that he go to Nineveh, Jonah's rebellion had not hindered God's ultimate purpose of bringing salvation to the people in the city of Nineveh. From a human perspective, it was an interlude, it was a parenthesis that had nothing to do with the ultimate outcome because God in sovereign compassion had purposed to show mercy to the people of Nineveh.

And here in Jonah 3, beloved, I want you to say something else tied in with the things we were saying earlier in the introduction: while God had a purpose of sovereign compassion on the city of Nineveh, don't miss the fact that God was having sovereign compassion on Jonah as well. Yes, Jonah had rebelled horribly against him. Yes, Jonah had suffered horribly as a result. Yes, the rebellion was real and genuine and his hostility toward the will of God in chapter 1 was severe, but don't you see, beloved, that God still restored him to service? God still called him to go? The fact that Jonah had rebelled like that had not forfeited his prophetic call upon his life? So Jonah's rebellion had not changed God's will. Yes, Jonah would still go to Nineveh as we see in chapter 3, verses 1 and 2.

Chapter 3, I want you to see this. Chapter 3, when you read the whole book together, you see the mirror image of the opening of the book in chapter 1 with the mirror image in chapter 3. Look at chapter 1, verses 1 and 2 just by way of reminder. Jonah 1:1,

1 The word of the LORD came to Jonah the son of Amittai saying, 2
"Arise, go to Nineveh the great city and cry against it, for their wickedness
has come up before Me."

That was the call that Jonah rebelled against. Now notice with that parallel in mind, look at the first two verses of chapter 3 again.

1 Now the word of the LORD came to Jonah the second time, saying, 2
"Arise, go to Nineveh the great city and proclaim to it the proclamation
which I am going to tell you."

Do you see the parallels? "Arise, go to Nineveh and proclaim. Arise, go to Nineveh and proclaim." It's the same parallel. It's the same message. It is the same command that God gave him the first time and one writer says this about the parallels between those two passages, "By paralleling here the book's opening remarks almost word for word, the author skillfully conveys the idea that Jonah is being offered a new beginning." God is dealing with Jonah a second time and by giving him the same command that had been given to him in chapter 1, Jonah now has the opportunity to fulfill what he had refused to do the first time and there is precise direction in this renewed call.

Look at the end of verse 2 with me. What is the substance of what he is to preach to Nineveh? Look at verse 2, he says, "go to Nineveh the great city and proclaim to it," what? "Proclaim to it the proclamation which I am going to tell you." God has placed Jonah under strict orders now. He said, "You will speak what I have told you to speak. I will give you something and what I give you, you are to repeat to the people of Nineveh because that is the message that I have for them. I give you a message that you are to relay to them faithfully." So after that stroke of discipline, Jonah has the discipline of chapter 1, Jonah now has no option but to obey. He must proclaim what he is given. No more, don't add to it. No less, don't take away from it. God has put him on a tight leash as he sends him out.

Now, let's pause for a moment just to think about ourselves in light of this and think about some of our spiritual lives, some of you here having wandered away from Christ in recent days, maybe recent months, having something that is kind of marking your life as a pattern of disobedience, of rebellion. You're here under the word of God, you're here after communion and you are realizing, "Man, I have strayed far from where I used to be spiritually." Well two things about that. One is to remember what we've talked about, that God in grace has not abandoned you to your rebellion; you have not forfeited every possibility of ever returning to him. Christ died for even those sins of rebellion that you have committed in your Christian life, but let me just draw something out by way of pastoral encouragement and care and direction that I've shared with many people over the years. If you find yourself now sitting here today having recognized this period of rebellion that you've gone to and you say, "Well, where do I go from now?" Beloved, chances are that there is a way, there is a consideration for you to ask this question, let's put it this way, say, "Where did I start to stray? Where was the departure point? Where did I start to stray and wander and turn away into sin rather than continuing in that first love that I had?" What do you do? Well, you repent of that and you go back to the point of departure and you start back there where that's possible, where that's available, and make that the fruit of your repentance that you go back to that point and pick up where you left off, whatever that means for your individual life, to go back there and to pick up the pieces and start right back there. Since so many of these things occur in a family context, departures and things like that, departures from God occurring in a family context, perhaps going back to that family member and seeking reconciliation and restoration and confession and apologies and request for forgiveness right there. Yeah, that might be hard. That might be a difficult point to do. That might be really really humbling, but do you know what? Do you know what? If that is the point at which you departed from obedience to Christ, that's exactly the place that you should go back to.

You do it not for the sake primarily of the human relationship, you do it for the sake of Christ and what he has commanded and he comes and he gives you the same command again. Whether it's a spouse, a child, a parent, whatever the case may be, so many of these things are found right within the context of our home life, our family life, sometimes within body life within a church. To go back and to make effort to restore relationships that were broken by your sin, that's a great place to start. That's a great place to show forth the fruit of true repentance in your life, to do just that. You say, "I caused a breach here. Let me go back and repair it," and let that be a manifestation of the sincerity of your repentance. I ask you to do that. I beg you to do that. That would be a great fruit. That would be one magnificent result to come from having been with the people of God on Sunday, August 26. Go back to the point of departure just like God sent Jonah back to his point of departure. May God commit that to your heart with the power of the Holy Spirit.

Now, continuing on in the text. After God has given him this command, there is finally a sense of progress with Jonah. After he had departed and turned away and shown such stubborn rebellion against God, finally in verse 3 he goes to Nineveh rather than going away from it. Chapter 3, verse 3. So, verse 3, in accordance with this command from God,

3 So Jonah arose and went to Nineveh according to the word of the LORD.

Compare that to verse 3 in chapter 1 where he rose up to flee to Tarshish from the presence of the Lord. Chapter 1, he turns his back and goes due west when Nineveh was east. Now in chapter 3, he's going to Nineveh. Now we kind of rub our hands together and say, "Something good is going to happen here." Now we are going to see the fruit of obedience instead of the fruit of sin. Now we'll see God's blessing on obedience rather than God's discipline upon his children when they sin. So Jonah arises and goes to Nineveh.

Now, as we learn later in the book, at the time that he went out, Jonah probably didn't feel like it. He probably didn't feel like it and chapter 4 verses 1 and 2 make that rather obvious. It says in chapter 4, verse 1, after the city had repented, we'll get to that over the next couple of weeks, but for today just say that it greatly displeased Jonah and he became angry and he says in verse 2,

2 He prayed to the LORD and said, "Please LORD, was not this what I said while I was still in my own country? Therefore in order to forestall this I fled to Tarshish, for I knew that You are a gracious and compassionate God, slow to anger and abundant in lovingkindness, and one who relents concerning calamity.

We need to deal with this issue. In fact, someone asked me about this a week ago. On the one hand in chapter 3 you see him going to Nineveh, but in chapter 4 you see him and he is greatly displeased, he's angry after the results are brought forth. How are we to

understand this? It would seem that even as Jonah is going to Nineveh, he's got reservations in his mind. Certainly his subsequent anger gives us a sense of that but, beloved, I don't want you to miss this really important fact: even if he didn't feel like it in chapter 3 as he was going, what did he do? He obeyed. He did it even though he did not feel like it.

Now, that is a crucial matter to see. It is always right for you to obey even if you don't feel like it. It's better to obey with a joyful heart but when the commands of Scripture come to you, when God's word lays conviction upon your heart about something in your life, it is always right to do what Scripture calls you to do even if you're struggling with it inside. Phil Johnson puts it like this, he said and I quote, "There are lots of times when we as sinful people do not feel like obeying, but we are supposed to live by faith, not by our feelings." You see, Jonah's repentance here was real. We know that because, as we saw last time in Jonah 2, he made a confession, he offered a sacrifice of praise, he offered thanksgiving, he pledged himself to do what he had vowed to do, and we know that his repentance was real not because we can see inside his heart but by the way that God responded to his repentance. He released him from the belly of the fish and sent him on his way; God accepted that repentance from Jonah as sufficient grounds to move on.

Now, there are a couple of really important, really really important spiritual things for us to see as a result of this, one that is very encouraging, the other that is instructive to our sometimes rebellious hearts. Beloved, repentance can be genuine even if it is not perfect. You do not have to wait, you should not wait until you feel like you have a perfect repentance before God will accept you. Repentance can be genuine even if it is imperfect. Faith in Christ can be genuine, it can be saving faith even though it is mixed with elements of uncertainty, a lack of clarity, even though it is dressed in the robes of immaturity. Well, of course, faith is going to be immature in its early stages at the beginning of the Christian life. Of course it is. Do you expect a human baby to be born and suddenly have all of the characteristics and mature reflection capabilities of an adult? No, we understand that a baby is born and grows into adulthood. We don't expect perfection and maturity right from the start, we realize that genuine motions of faith and repentance can be present in a heart even if they are sometimes mixed. This is a really crucial point. It is a way out for some of you who are overly introspective and, "Oh, have I repented enough? Do I have faith enough? Is my faith strong enough?" Let me just answer that question for you: no, it's not. No, your repentance is not sufficient for the depth of your guilt. No, your faith is not sufficient for the wonder of the grandeur of what Christ has done for you. You see, the sufficiency in salvation is not found in your response, the sufficiency is found in the sufficiency of Christ and faith in him can be real even if it is imperfect. A man in the New Testament said, "Lord, I believe. Help my unbelief. Lord, I repent. Help me to repent of my inadequate repentance."

So repentance can be genuine even if it is imperfect, as Jonah's apparently was here. That's important. That's encouraging to realize and it frees you, what that does for you, beloved, pay attention. I'm trying to help you here. I really am. That's why I do what I do. Understanding what we've just been talking about is the key that lets you out of the dungeon of your constant introspection for some of you, "Have I repented enough?"

What's going on in my heart?" Beloved, would you just stop looking inside and look out to Christ and you'll find all the grounds for faith you need. You will always find defects with what you find inside your own heart. You will never find defects in Christ when you are looking up to him. That's the key to spiritual growth. That is the key that releases you from introspection. You see, the whole point of salvation is of course you are insufficient. No, you are not enough but Christ is enough. No, your faith is not enough but Christ is enough. No, your repentance isn't sufficient but Christ is sufficient to satisfy God. Lay hold of him and be at peace. Forty percent of my counseling would go away if people would just embrace that one point and they would find themselves liberated to walk in the joy that God intends for his children to walk in.

On the other side, what we see and I've already made the point of this, but it's worth saying. This is a little bit more direct, maybe a little bit more by nature of exhortation and even rebuke: your obedience is not excused. You're not excused from obedience until you feel like it. You see, what places the obligation of obedience on you is the word of God, not the way that you feel about the word of God. If we were only supposed to obey in our external life only when we felt like it, then that would mean that obedience was excused simply because you didn't want to do it, and then the only time that you would be under an obligation to obey God was when you felt like it. Does that sound true? Does that sound right? That's no way to establish a spiritual life and God's word is the call, God's word is the standard, God's word places the obligation upon us. So, yes, you should have a pattern of your life of seeking God in his word, Christian, even if though sometimes you don't feel like it. You should go to his word even when you don't feel like it. Yes, you should pray even when you don't feel like it because God has commanded us to be a people of the word, he has commanded us to pray and you're not excused from that command of obedience just because you were out late Saturday, some of you doing things you shouldn't have been doing, and now you don't feel like it because you feel guilty and you don't want to approach God on his terms. That doesn't excuse you from obedience. What kind of thinking is that? That's nonsense. So we shape what we do, we shape what we think by God's word, not by our mixed and sinful feelings.

So Jonah here in verse 3 goes to Nineveh even though we have reason to believe from chapter 4 that he probably didn't feel like it when he did. That's okay. God will continue to sanctify you as you pursue him in response to his word instead of going primarily by what you feel inside. "God, I'm doing this in response to your word," is the way that your mindset is. "I respond to your word not to my feelings of indifference, coldness, isolation and rebellion."

Now with those things said, let's go back to verse 3. There are some really wonderful things to see here about this that will set us up for the next week or two. So look at verse 3 with me again.

3 So Jonah arose and went to Nineveh according to the word of the LORD. Now Nineveh was an exceedingly great city, a three days' walk.

A three days' walk. So Nineveh is a great city and the author goes on to explain what he means by that, a three days' walk.

Now, it's possible and you've probably thought about it along these terms, it's possible, it's genuinely possible that when Scripture says Nineveh was a three days' journey or a three days' walk, it means that the city and its surrounding suburbs were so large that it took Jonah 3 days to go throughout the city to proclaim his message. It's very possible that that's what it means. There is some historic information you can find about the size of the cities. Maybe it was the city proper and the surrounding suburbs. That could be the message that it is intending to convey to us. Hold that thought there for a moment.

You know, another thing that Scripture doesn't tell us about this event is that Scripture doesn't tell us anything about how Jonah actually entered into the city. This is really important in my opinion. It doesn't tell us how Jonah got in there, how he got access to it. I mean, the cities back then had walls around them and they would have been guarded at the gate, how did Jonah get in to talk to these people to preach his message? You know, a casual reading of the text and perhaps just the general sense of how we've thought about the book of Jonah over the years might make you think that he went in just as a total utter stranger. Some people will embellish details and say, "You know, sure his flesh was bleached out by the acid from the fish's stomach so he looked really bizarre, and he goes in and he just starts preaching like a weird man from outer space and all of a sudden people just started responding to him in faith." Possibly that's what happened and the idea is that he just wandered into the city unnoticed and started shouting his message from a street corner, you know, he stood on a box with a bullhorn and just started preaching 40 days and Nineveh will be overthrown. Maybe that's what happened. There is a lot of good, really good research that is out there that suggests the three days that is involved here should be understood in a much different way. As these scholars have examined different things about ancient culture and the way that cities were operating in those days, they say this three days is an established practice of diplomacy, of foreign diplomacy, of how cities would receive foreign guests, and what would happen is this, as I said a city like Nineveh would be guarded and it would have a diplomatic protocol for receiving official guests. Three days would be done like this: you'd arrive the first day and present your credentials from a foreign government, "Why are you here? Who are you? Who do you represent?"; you would fulfill your purpose of your visit on the second day; and you would leave on the third day. If that's what is in mind here, I tend to think that that makes a lot more sense of the story. It would explain an awful lot. Jonah comes as a representative of the one true God. He announces the purpose of his visit. He doesn't go in unnoticed, he goes in and he announces why he's here and the city receives him like it would a foreign diplomat and thus gives him access to preach and he preaches and he fulfills his purpose and he goes on his way.

Beloved, think with me about this. If Jonah was officially received in that manner, received by the authorities, which makes sense that he would be rather than coming in as a foreigner unannounced and going through guards and all of that. How did he gain access to this guarded city, this great city? If Jonah was officially received, then it would explain why he had ready access to the populace and do you know what? It would also

readily explain how the message got so quickly to the king which we see later in Jonah 3, it was because they had given official sanction to his visit.

Now, we can't be dogmatic on this point at all. Either of those could possibly be true. But here's the thing that sticks in my mind. Maybe you know about this. If there was an official reception to Jonah in the manner described, it would explain a very profound historical factor to this day. There is in northern Iraq a city called Mosul that is in the area of ancient Nineveh. In that city, in that place, is a burial place traditionally known as Jonah's tomb. The very place where Scripture tells us he went, there has been for millennia a place marked out as Jonah's tomb, you can Google this, and it was preserved until 2014 when ISIS bombed it and tried to destroy it, those Muslim extremists tried to destroy it, but for all of this time and there are still ruins there and they will probably find a way to restore it somehow, a very long process. But beloved, think with me, chapter 3 describes a great repentance by the city of Nineveh, there is this tomb that has existed for millennia in honor of the prophet that the Scriptures describe. Was Jonah received officially and then after his ministry remembered in honor by grateful men? We can't be dogmatic but this would explain an awful lot about an awful lot, but ultimately the text points us to something that's even higher than those things which, admittedly, you know, we're reaching through the mist based on things, reaching back trying to understand things that we see only in shadow form on those things, but ultimately this text points us to something that's even higher than that, something that's grounded in spiritual certainties.

Look at chapter 3, verse 3 with me again.

Now Nineveh was an exceedingly great city, a three days' walk.

You may have in your Bible a marginal note that says what that text reads literally in the Hebrew there: Nineveh was a great city to God. Nineveh was a great city to God. Nineveh was important to God. Nineveh, the city, mattered to God. He chose it to receive mercy.

Look at chapter 4, verse 11, as this just explodes on our mind as it reveals things about the nature of God to us and what we are reading about here in chapter 3, and why did God go to all of this trouble with this horribly rebellious prophet? Why did he go to all of that trouble? Why did Jesus Christ go to the cross at Calvary and go to all that trouble for sinners like you, rebels, disobedient, enslaved by various lusts, hateful, envying? Why would he do that? Well, chapter 4, verse 11, God tells Jonah,

11 "Should I not have compassion on Nineveh, the great city in which there are more than 120,000 persons who do not know the difference between their right and left hand, as well as many animals?"

The concluding verse of the book of Jonah tells us that the city mattered to God. It was a part of his eternal purpose. He had a purpose of compassion upon them that was established before the foundation of the world. As Jonah trods off to Nineveh for the

second time, there is an execution, there is a carrying out of the purpose that God had in his mind to show compassion on the inhabitants of that city. As Jonah goes to Nineveh, God is having compassion on his rebellious prophet, restoring him to service that he didn't deserve. Nineveh as it awaits unknowingly, as Jonah's arrival is pending, they are on the pulsating verge of earth-shaking, heaven-shaking compassion from the God who made the heavens and the sea. You see, ultimately what we see going on in these three verses, it's not so much about Jonah, it's not so much about Nineveh, it's not so much about foreign protocol or how big the city walls were or how wide their suburbs were or anything like that. Don't miss the big point. Don't miss what's at stake here. A holy God who had every reason to judge every one of them had determined to show compassion on every one of them and we see an insight, we see a playing out of what the nature of the sovereign compassion of God is. On a pagan city, he has compassion. He sends them a prophet that they could not have asked for. They were outside the promises that God made to Israel. They had no claim on him and God sends a prophet to them to bring salvation to them; Jonah, a rebellious prophet, walking in steps of mercy ordained for him before the foundation of the world.

This is magnificent, beloved. We are seeing a practical working out of the nature of the sovereign compassion of God here on people who are completely unworthy and we get a sense of the depth and the breadth and the height of the greatness of the mercy of God in the midst of all of this. It's put on grand display for us. Psalm 130:4 says, "there is forgiveness with You, That You may be feared." 1 John 1:9 says, "If we confess our sins, He is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness." That table that we were just at a few short minutes ago is the ultimate expression, the ultimate reminder of the great compassion that was shown at the cross of Calvary when this God became flesh and offered up his life, his righteous perfect life as a sacrifice for guilty sinners.

Beloved, are you starting to get the point? Are you starting to grasp something of the nature of the magnificent mercy, kindness, compassion, love and patience of God? For many of you, you need to look at yourself in the mirror and say, "Out on my unworthy thoughts of God." Those of you that have grown up in legalistic environments or in ritualistic religion and you are conditioned to think about God as a severe, unbending, unmerciful, impossible to please God, don't you see that he's actually someone completely different from what you've thought? How can you look at Christ on the cross and think that God is anything other than merciful and compassionate toward sinners? How can you look at this wicked city of Nineveh and see God sending a prophet to them and think that he's anything other than a God of sovereign compassion? How can you see Jonah walking to Nineveh a second time and God dealing with him and accepting his service even if it is imperfect? How can you look at your own life, marred as it is by sin and rebellion and cold indifference towards this God, and find that Christ has still nevertheless put his love upon you, brought you into his family by his shed blood, how can we say anything other than what 1 John 3:1 says, "Behold what manner of love our Father has given to us, that we should be called children of God; and we are"?

You see, as Jonah goes to Nineveh, there is metaphorically speaking, there is emanating out from that event the greatness of the mercy and compassion of God and Jesus himself said that Jonah was a sign of his own ministry. Jonah was a lesser sign pointing to the greater sign of Christ. For those of you living with the consequences of sin and your foolish decisions, take heart. He's a God of the second chance. For those of you awash in guilt and shame, take heart that he's a God of compassion. I can say on biblical authority God brought you here today, sinner, to hear just exactly that, that God in love offers you forgiveness in the Lord Jesus Christ. With Jonah, at the cross in the proclamation of the Gospel, we see that he is the God of sovereign compassion. Christian and non-Christian alike, go to Christ by faith and work this out in your heart before him. See it for yourself. You're not so great a sinner that you've sinned outside the bounds of the compassion of God. Christ calls you to come, to be forgiven, to be cleansed, and to go forth in newness of life.

Let's pray together.

Father, we commit these things to you. We've remembered so many wonderful things here today in communion and through your word. I pray for each one here, that these life-giving words of your mercy and compassion in Christ, would hit the mark that you intend with each one. O God, don't let your word come back to you void but as you have sent it out, now bring forth the fruit that you have appointed to come from this very hour that we have spent together. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

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