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**“THE SHORTEST SERMON”**

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**Scripture: Jonah 2:10-3:10**

When we last left Jonah, he was praying. At the end of the prayer, the Bible says:

*“Then the Lord spoke to the fish, and it vomited Jonah onto the dry land.”* Jonah 2:10

What would you do if you were Jonah at this point? His life had been spared. No longer was he in the belly of the great fish. Now he was standing on solid ground again. God had come through.

The first thing I think I would do would be to get cleaned up. After being in the belly of the great fish for three days and three nights I doubt that you would look or smell very good. But the Bible doesn't go into those details does it? Instead it says:

*“The Lord's word came to Jonah a second time: ‘Get up and go to Nineveh, that great city, and declare against it the proclamation that I am commanding you.’”* Jonah 3:1-2

It's good that God gave Jonah a second chance, isn't it? I like it when someone gives you a second chance. I like it when you have one more try. I have heard people say that God is a God of second chances—and for the most part, that is true, isn't it? In the story of Jonah, he is given a second chance. In the story of the prodigal son, he is given a second chance also. Peter, after he denied Jesus three times, is given a second chance, too. I like it when that happens.

But let me throw a word of caution in here: God does not always give second chances. Sure, sometimes He does...many times He does, but not always. Do you remember the warning we have in the Bible which says:

*“Remember Lot's wife.”* Luke 17:32

Do you recall that Lot and his family were told to leave Sodom because God was going to destroy that place? Lot was told, *“Escape for your life! Do not look behind you, and do not stay anywhere in the valley; escape to the mountains, or you will be swept away.”*

As they were fleeing, Lot's wife looked back and she was turned into a pillar of salt. There was no second chance in that situation. You see, God has mercy on who He chooses to have mercy on. And He will give second chances to those He chooses to give second chances. That is why God is God. But I always like it when God grants a second chance. And here's a truth:

Jonah's disobedience hasn't cancelled God's call! Nineveh still needs a messenger. The word of God still needs to be preached there. So Jonah is offered a second chance. What does he do?

*"And Jonah got up and went to Nineveh, according to the Lord's word."* Jonah 3:3a

At this point there is no debate. There is no argument. There is no heading in the wrong direction. There is no disobedience. At this point, Jonah obeys God. Today, I want to talk about obedience.

## **1. Obedience to God is always important!**

The Bible tells us:

*"Does the Lord want entirely burned offerings and sacrifices as much as obedience to the Lord? Listen to this: obeying is better than sacrificing, paying attention is better than fat from rams."*

1 Samuel 15:22

You know, most of the problems in our lives would be gone if we simply obeyed God's word. We would not be aboard the ship of despair if we were obedient. We would not be tossed by the wind and the waves of this world if we simply followed God's leading. We would not find ourselves in a whale of a problem if we simply did what God wants us to do. But we are a lot like Jonah in the fact that sometimes we would rather disobey.

I want you to note here, though, this is the first and only time in the book of Jonah where he obeys the Lord. He got up off the beach, cleaned himself off, and headed for Nineveh. Good for him. Before and after this episode, Jonah has a stinky attitude, but at this point, he obeys God's call. God gives Jonah a second chance to do what he should have done the first time and this time, Jonah is successful.

We should always try to obey God. He is looking out for our good. The Bible says:

*"I know the plans I have in mind for you, declares the Lord; they are plans for peace, not disaster, to give you a future filled with hope."* Jeremiah 29:11

He wants us to succeed. God has a plan and purpose for this world and us. In obeying God we are working with Him and not against Him. It is always important to follow God's will for our lives and to obey Him.

## **2. Obedience to God is not always easy!**

So Jonah sets out for Nineveh. Each step that he takes toward Nineveh sets him on a collision course between his prejudice and the unlimited love of God. Jonah does not like the people of Nineveh. He does not think that God should be involved with Nineveh...and for good reason. Nineveh was a city given over to greed, immorality, and bloodthirsty violence. They were known for their cruelty. They didn't believe in God. They didn't know God. They didn't

worship God. They worshiped idols. Jonah thought they were not worthy of salvation. They are not worthy of redemption. They are not worthy of God's attention at all.

But God called him to go and nowhere did God ask Jonah his opinion. God asks Jonah for his obedience not his opinion. For Jonah, his obedience in this matter was not easy. You see, his attitude stunk. He did not want to go to Nineveh. Yet he would.

But here is another reason that it was not easy for Jonah to obey God:

*"Now Nineveh was indeed an enormous city, a three days' walk across."* Jonah 3:3b

I can almost hear Jonah cry out, "Three days! You want me to walk across the city for three days? Lord, I've got other things to do with my time. I need to plant my garden. I need to watch the Super Bowl. I need to go fishing. I don't think I can give You three days."

I can almost hear God say, "Speaking of fishing...Jonah, how long were you in the belly of the fish?"

Jonah: "Uh, three days and three nights."

God: "Jonah, what would you rather be doing, walking across Nineveh for three days, or spending some more time in the belly of a fish?"

This leads to an important point, doesn't it? You don't have to always like what you are called to do, but you need to do it anyway. You don't have to love Nineveh, but you do need to obey God. Following God is not always easy, but it's important.

For Jonah, obedience to God was not easy, but...

### **3. Obedience to God is simple!**

All Jonah has to do is do what God asked him to do. That's pretty simple, isn't it? What did God ask Jonah to do? Go to Nineveh...preach to them the message God tells him to preach. Jonah didn't have to spend long hours in his study preparing his sermon. He did not have to look through concordances and Bible commentaries. He didn't have to come up with a sermon structure or outline. God was giving him a message. What was the message? Look at verse 4:

*"Jonah started into the city, walking one day, and he cried out, 'Just forty days more and Nineveh will be overthrown!'"* Jonah 3:4

Folks that was the complete message God gave Jonah. "In forty days Nineveh will be smashed."

To be honest with you...I've never preached a sermon that short in my life. How simple can it be?

“Forty more days and Nineveh will be overthrown. In forty days destruction will overtake Nineveh. Forty more days and Nineveh will be demolished! In forty days Nineveh will be smashed. Forty days from now, Nineveh watch out—destruction is coming!”

That is a pretty depressing message if you ask me. There was none of this “God loves Nineveh” stuff at all. It was a message of impending judgment and nothing more, sent by God through one man...Jonah.

Can you imagine how it must have been?

Jonah was crying out: “Forty more days and Nineveh will be overthrown.” (He’s not from around here, you know.) “Forty more days and Nineveh will be demolished!” (He’s got a strange accent.) In forty days Nineveh will be smashed. (He smells kind of fishy, don’t you think?)

But they listened. But they heard him. But they paid attention. You wouldn’t think it would have much chance of success. But it did! It works. God sends Jonah...they listen...how simple could it be?

For you see:

#### **4. Obedience to God produces fantastic results!**

Look at the results of Jonah’s preaching:

*Jonah started into the city, walking one day, and he cried out, “Just forty days more and Nineveh will be overthrown!” And the people of Nineveh believed God. They proclaimed a fast and put on mourning clothes, from the greatest of them to the least significant. When word of it reached the king of Nineveh, he got up from his throne, stripped himself of his robe, covered himself with mourning clothes, and sat in ashes. Then he announced, “In Nineveh, by decree of the king and his officials: Neither human nor animal, cattle nor flock, will taste anything! No grazing and no drinking water! Let humans and animals alike put on mourning clothes, and let them call upon God forcefully! And let all persons stop their evil behavior and the violence that’s under their control!” He thought, who knows? God may see this and turn from his wrath, so that we might not perish. Jonah 3:4-9*

Notice what happened when Jonah preached to the Ninevites:

- A. They believed God.
- B. They called for a fast.
- C. They put on sackcloth or mourning clothes.

Notice that the scripture doesn’t say “they believed Jonah”. It says they believed God. Jonah was just the messenger, but it was God’s message.

When did all of this happen? On the first day of the three day journey. It seems that as soon as Jonah started preaching, people started responding. WOW! There has never been anything like

this in history. Billy Sunday never saw anything like this. D. L. Moody never saw anything like this. Billy Graham never saw anything like this. This truly was the work of God. The minute Jonah opens his mouth, people start to respond. But notice what happens when the message reaches the king of Nineveh.

- A. The king stood up—a sign of his serious intent.
- B. The king removed his royal robes—a sign of humility.
- C. The king covered himself in sackcloth or mourning clothes—a sign of mourning.
- D. The king sat in the ashes—a sign of repentance.

The king of Nineveh gets it. He knows they are guilty. He knows they should be punished. He knows that Almighty God has every right to destroy them. But he hopes that the mercy of God will spare them. He says:

*“Who knows? God may see this and turn from his wrath, so that we might not perish.”* Jonah 3:9

At this point, the king’s only hope is in the mercy of God. Nowhere in the Bible can we find that the king of Nineveh knew any of the Hebrew scripture, but Isaiah 55:6-7 seem to fit the situation perfectly.

*“Seek the Lord when he can still be found; call him while he is yet near. Let the wicked abandon their ways and the sinful their schemes. Let them return to the Lord so that he may have mercy on them, to our God, because he is generous with forgiveness.”* Isaiah 55:6-7

The whole city repented. They all believed in God. Think about that. A whole pagan city believed in God. The whole city believed God—everyone believed God. Every blue collar worker as well as every white collar worker. Everyone believed God. We’ve never seen or heard of anything like that.

It’s like saying...Everyone in Columbus believed in God. Everyone in Chicago repented. Everyone in L.A. became a Christian. It’s hard to believe, yet it’s true.

The greatest revival in history happened because of a one-sentence sermon preached by a prophet who didn’t even want to be there. He was a messenger who was hoping that Nineveh would be destroyed. He was a messenger who hated the people he was preaching to. Yet God was able to use him because of his obedience. You see, obedience to God brings fantastic results.

## **5. Obedience to God makes God smile!**

Look at what happens in verse 10:

*“God saw what they were doing—that they had ceased their evil behavior. So God stopped planning to destroy them, and he didn’t do it.”* Jonah 3:10

Folks, here is a fact: You never know what God will do. God saves people we would never save. You never know who God will touch next. Nineveh was ripe for revival. They just didn't know it. But God did.

Three days before Jonah showed up, it was business as usual in Nineveh. Two days before, the same thing. One day before, no one had an inkling of what was about to happen. And on that very day of revival, no one knew what was about to happen. That is, except God.

You see, God always intends to show mercy when people turn toward Him and away from their evil ways. God is always one who will accept you if you truly repent and seek Him. That is why the Bible says:

*“Seek the Lord when he can still be found; call him while he is yet near. Let the wicked abandon their ways and the sinful their schemes. Let them return to the Lord so that he may have mercy on them, to our God, because he is generous with forgiveness.”* Isaiah 55:6-7

How about you? Are you ready to turn to God? Are you ready to obey Him?

**Genesis 19:15-26 (CEB)**<sup>15</sup> *When dawn broke, the messengers urged Lot, “Get up and take your wife and your two daughters who are here so that you are not swept away because of the evil in this city.”*<sup>16</sup> *He hesitated, but because the LORD intended to save him, the men grabbed him, his wife, and two daughters by the hand, took him out, and left him outside the city.*<sup>17</sup> *After getting them out, the men said, “Save your lives! Don't look back! And don't stay in the valley. Escape to the mountains so that you are not swept away.”*<sup>18</sup> *But Lot said to them, “No, my lords, please.*<sup>19</sup> *You've done me a favor and have been so kind to save my life. But I can't escape to the mountains since the catastrophe might overtake me there and I'd die.*<sup>20</sup> *This city here is close enough to flee to, and it's small. It's small, right? Let me escape there, and my life will be saved.”*<sup>21</sup> *He said to Lot, “I'll do this for you as well; I won't overthrow the city that you have described.*<sup>22</sup> *Hurry! Escape to it! I can't do anything until you get there.” That is why the name of the city is Zoar.*<sup>23</sup> *As the sun rose over the earth, Lot arrived in Zoar;*<sup>24</sup> *and the LORD rained down burning asphalt from the skies onto Sodom and Gomorrah.*<sup>25</sup> *The LORD destroyed these cities, the entire valley, everyone who lived in the cities, and all of the fertile land's vegetation.*<sup>26</sup> *When Lot's wife looked back, she turned into a pillar of salt.*

L: The Word of God for the People of God.

**P: Thanks be to God!**