

The God of Second Chances

Jonah 3; June 11, 2017

We're going to see today that God is a God of second chances. Have you ever just wanted a "do-over" in life, an opportunity to erase a response or opportunity from the whiteboard of your life and give it another shot, a second chance?

If you watch sports, guys all the time probably wish they could redo some plays that didn't go so well. Don't you think the Seattle Seahawks, in Super Bowl 49, wish they had a second chance at the goal line with 26 seconds left to beat the Patriots (for those of you that don't know what I'm talking about, they had one of the most efficient teams at running the ball but instead threw the ball from the one yard line and it was intercepted).

Here's one second chance that many of you may not know about: it was the one that my wife, Leigh, gave me. You see, we met our freshmen year at ASU through the ministry of CRU and dated for about a month until I did something really stupid and "lamo": I told her I just wanted to be friends (guys, don't do what I did - it's a horrible excuse). We both went about our ways for a couple of years and then eventually I came crawling back and pursued her again. I'm so glad she gave me and "us" a second chance. Now that we've been married for over 13 years, she's been incredibly merciful with me...she's extended hundreds of chances and she continues to imitate God's boundless mercy as she forgives me over and over.

Transition: our story today is a story of second chances. Let me review the story in Jonah so far to catch everyone up to speed.

The Context: A brief recap of the story

- Chapter 1: Jonah went from God's prophet to God's fugitive. Rather than accepting the assignment to go to Ninevah to call them to turn from their evil, Jonah went in the complete opposite direction and set sail for a city called Tarshish. (Map) Jonah ran from God. BUT... God ran after him! And God pursued him by sending a storm, which culminated in Jonah being thrown overboard to what he thought would be his death, but God had a different plan. He rescued Jonah from drowning at sea by sending a great fish to swallow him alive and preserve his life.
- Chapter 2: While Jonah was in this large fish, his despair drove him to pray for God to save him. The Lord heard his prayer caused the fish to vomit Jonah up on to dry land.

A. Jonah's commissioning and flight (1:1-3)

B. Jonah and the pagan sailors (1:4-16)

C. Jonah's grateful prayer (1:17 - 2:10)

Transition: When the story picks up in chapter 3, it deja vu all over again, with God sending Jonah to Nineveh. He's giving him a second chance. Will we witness, as one commentator says, a "vicious cycle of sin or a spiral of spiritual progress" (Youngblood, 122)?

Read Jonah 3

A'. Jonah's recommissioning and compliance (3:1-3a)

B'. Jonah and the pagan Ninevites (3:3b-10)

C'. Jonah's angry prayer (4:1-4)

D. Jonah's lesson about compassion (4:5-11)

The Point: Repent (confident in God's boundless mercy) and extend God's boundless mercy to others.

- God is a God of boundless compassion not just for Israel but also for the nations (the pagan sailors and the Ninevites).
- This is a lesson God is giving Jonah a second chance to learn.
- Introspective question: is your heart more like Jonah or God?

I. Extend the boundless mercy you have received (3:1-3a).

These words are almost a verbatim repetition of 1:1-2 with a few slight differences.

- Here, God just tells him to call out against Nineveh "the message that I tell you" and in 1:2 he was to call out against it "for their evil has come up before me."
 - Jonah is simply a mouthpiece for God to speak through him. He doesn't have the freedom to craft his own message. He just speaks what God tells him.
- Second, Jonah's response is different. Instead of fleeing the presence of the Lord, he arose and went to Ninevah.

Has Jonah had a complete change of heart?

- Just looking at these verses alone, it seems that Jonah has had a complete change of heart, but the end of the story paints a different picture.
- In 4:1-4, Jonah, for the first time, verbally objects to God's commission and he's flat out angry.
- What can we conclude?
 - His compliance here is definitely an improvement over his response in chapter 1, it still lacks real heart alignment with God's heart. His attitude remains fundamentally unchanged.
- God is not after mere external obedience to his plans. He's after your hearts.
 - I'll never forget an illustration that my college minister shared with me. I've heard different versions of this story but the point is the same. Imagine that you get on the T with one of your kids and you grab a seat but they're still standing in the middle ready to play a game of "balance." You politely ask them to sit down and when they refuse you gently force them to grab a seat. That's when they look at you and say, "I may be sitting down on the outside, but on the inside I'm still standing up."
- While God wants our hearts to align with his heart, he can still use our twisted attempts to accomplish his kingdom purposes.

Why does God give him a second chance?

- To cultivate mercy in his heart.
- God is not only patient with those who have yet to hear and respond to his mercy (like the Ninevites), he is also patient with those who belong to him to form his heart in us.

Some implications:

- If you have received the boundless mercy of God, why would you not want to extend that same mercy to others.
- If God has blessed you with the knowledge of salvation, then you are to be a blessing to others (Gen. 12:3) and you don't get to pick and choose who you are a blessing to.
- Why did God send Jonah to Nineveh? The goal of proclaiming judgment was so that they would repent and this is what Jonah feared.
 - Jonah was grateful for his own deliverance but resentful of the potential inclusion of the nations. He failed to see that God's mercy to him was no different his mercy to the nations.
- There is no nation or people beyond the range of God's boundless mercy.
 - As you guys know, I'm coaching my sons little league baseball team. We're in round 1 of the playoffs right now with a big game tomorrow night. In baseball, I'm so thankful that there's a fence in the outfield. If it weren't there, we would've given up many more runs this year. But when it comes to God's mercy, it's boundless. There's no fence around it. God is "rich" in mercy and it's for the world.

II. Repent, confident in God's boundless mercy (3:3b-10).

These verses mirror both the structure and content of 1:4b - 2:1b

- Jonah's speech to the sailors and Jonah's announcement to the Ninevites.
- The Gentiles respond favorable in both accounts (sailors and Ninevites).
- God relents from his wrath and judgment in both accounts (the storm calmed and Nineveh escaped judgment).

Why the repetition?

- God is teaching Jonah and Israel a lesson: God is a God of boundless mercy not just for Israel but for the nations and anyone who has received his mercy is in no position to "begrudge its extension to others" (Youngblood, 128).
- "The book of Jonah and Jesus magnify the Gentiles' willingness to repent and God's mercy on the Gentiles, both to condemn Israel for their hard hearts and to save Israel by rousing them to envy (cf. Rom. 11:11-14)" (Waltke, 834).

Jonah's Message of Judgment (3:3b-4)

- Nineveh was an exceedingly great city, three days journey in breadth.
 - We know from chapter 4 that it's population was over 120,000 (4:11). The great size of the city highlights the greatness of its wickedness and the potential disaster

judgment would bring.

- There's a footnote that says, "a great city to God." If this is the correct reading, it could be a reference to God's sovereignty. This is "God's city" and it would reinforce one of the main points of the book: "God's mercy is as broad as his sovereignty" (Youngblood, 132).
- Jonah affirmed God's sovereignty, he just struggled with extending God's mercy to be equally universal in scope.
- Jonah went "a day's journey" (the city was a three days' journey breadth) and proclaimed that Nineveh will be "overthrown" in forty days.
 - Jonah's message seems underwhelming:
 - There's no, "Thus says the Lord...", no indication of the grounds for judgment and he doesn't tell them what they might do to avert God's judgment.
 - Summary: Jonah may not have repeated the message exactly as he received it (so Youngblood, 133).
 - Why the mention of forty days?
 - The flood narrative (Gen 6-9): this was an example of God's judgment that was universal in scope and even before Israel was formed.
 - Moses' intercession for Israel after her sin with the golden calf (Exod. 34:28; Deut. 9:28 - 25).
 - Moses was prostrate before the Lord for the entire forty days receiving neither food nor water.
 - "Overthrown"
 - This language recalls the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah in response to extreme wickedness (Gen. 19: 21, 25, 29).
 - These echoes present two possible fates (destruction or mercy).

If at any time I declare concerning a nation or a kingdom, that I will pluck up and break down and destroy it, and if that nation, concerning which I have spoken, turns from its evil, I will relent of the disaster that I intended to do to it. (Jeremiah 18:7-8 ESV)

- The people repent
 - Despite Jonah's shortcomings with his own twisted heart and perceived half-hearted delivery, the effects were immediate and impressive.
 - They "believed God"
 - There's an allusion to Genesis 15:6 when it says, "Abraham believed God."
 - "The greatest of them to the least of them"
 - This wasn't an isolated response. It was citywide.
- The king repents
 - It sounds like the message reached the king through the people and not through Jonah's proclamation.
 - Sackcloth and ashes:

- The sackcloth was a thick cloth usually made from goat's hair and it was worn to symbolize the rejection of earthly comforts and pleasures.
- Their repentance anticipates the wide-scale repentance of the Gentiles that would happen in the messianic era (Matt. 28:18-20; Luke 24:47).
- His proclamation:
 - "Call out mightily to God"
 - "Let everyone turn from his evil way and the violence that is in his hands"
- Repentance defined:
 - Ills: picture a room with two walls opposing each other.
 - "To *repent* means essentially 'to turn,' particularly with the connotation of turning away from sin to another path. It has to do with leaving behind the old in order to follow Jesus" (Smallman, 28). The life of being a disciple is "...never presented as *adding* Jesus to the life I am already living, but *turning* to Jesus to walk a new path" (Smallman, 28).
- "Who knows? God may turn and relent..."
 - The sailors and Ninevites are very uncertain about God's character and have no assurance of God's mercy (cf. 1:6; 3:9).

God is Merciful and Relents (3:10)

When people repent, God is compassionate and merciful to relent and forgive.

- Notice what caught God's eye: he saw their ethical transformation, not simply their religious rituals.
- What we see here is God's holiness and mercy on display.
 - Because God is holy, he must punish all sin.
 - He won't tolerate the wickedness of Nineveh or the disobedience of Jonah.
 - So you ask, how could God "overlook" their sin?

"for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and are justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, whom God put forward as a propitiation by his blood, to be received by faith. This was to show God's righteousness, because in his divine forbearance he had passed over former sins." (Romans 3:23-25 ESV)

- God could overlook sins and forgive in the OT because those sins would be placed on his son, Jesus.
- Because God is also merciful, he desires to forgive.
 - He responds to those who cry out to him for mercy.
 - He responds to humble repentance and earnest prayer.
- God's mercy is meant to lead us to repentance.

Or do you presume on the riches of his kindness and forbearance and patience, not knowing that God's kindness is meant to lead you to repentance? (Romans 2:4 ESV)

Conclusion:

- “God, give me your heart.”
 - Help me to hate sin the way you hate sin. Help me to repent.
 - Help me to extend your boundless mercy without borders to those around me.