

Yahweh's Compassion Comes to Nineveh

Jonah 3

August 6, 2023

We are in the middle of a series on the book of Jonah, so if you want to turn there now in your Bibles you can. It's been personally an encouraging study. It's been encouraging us to compassion for the lost, even the most wicked and vile of people. It's been an encouragement in the midst of trials, even discipline from the Lord to repent, to trust in the one who controls all things and is working all things together for the good of those who love him. But if you're just joining us for today, we're going to be in chapter 3, and I am preaching this week and next week, and then Travis will be back in the pulpit. And so I'm trying to finish the book of Jonah. And I could have easily split this chapter into two sermons, but I'm going to do it all today. So you kind of get a 2 for one deal. I'll try to get you all out before dinner.

But for those of you who have missed the last few sermons, we've seen that Jonah he is a true prophet, a true believer who

struggles to obey the will of God and die to himself, just like we do. And when the word of the Lord came to Yahweh the first time, Jonah was likely in the temple. And after he heard the Lord tell him go to Nineveh, after he heard what he was supposed to do to go preach to the most wicked and vile and hated people on the planet, he didn't even verbally protest. He just ran away and fled to the other side of the world, to Tarshish.

But as we saw, fleeing from the God of the seas by boat isn't a very good idea because the Lord hurled a wind onto the storm, which ended up with Jonah being thrown into the sea. The sailors find mercy, a prerequisite to what we see today, in Chapter 3. The storm quiets. The sailors rejoice, and they worship in their own deliverance. Meanwhile, Jonah is sinking to the bottom of the ocean.

Chapter 2 that we looked at last time recounts Jonah being swallowed by the fish still inside the fish. Jonah recounts his near drowning experience at the bottom of the ocean and how it was when his life was fainting away. He was about to pass out from lack of oxygen and drowning. It is at that point that he

remembered the Lord and repented. Not repenting unto salvation, but repenting out of turning away in disobedience.

He cried out to the Lord, who instantly heard his cry. His cry entered the temple instantly, and the result was the Lord rushing in by means of a great fish to swallow up Jonah and save him, just moments before death. With the fish swallowing Jonah, Jonah was saved and brought up from his watery grave. And after three days in the fish, Jonah comes to terms with the situation. He learns to be thankful for the fish of chapter 2, it's a Psalm of thanksgiving, particularly for the fish who saved him.

He prays a prayer of thanksgiving. That is, it takes Jonah three days to learn the lesson that the Lord wanted him to learn. Namely that the Lord will be merciful to whom he will be merciful, and Jonah being central to that mercy. He learns that the fish was prepared and sent to him as a good and perfect gift from the Lord to save him and to sanctify him.

And when Jonah finishes the prayer of chapter 2, the fish vomits Jonah out onto dry land. That's the end of chapter 2. That means not the fish, unless he could projectile shoot Jonah

quite far from the ocean. This means that the fish was beached because he spit him out on dry land. Which means that he might have been there for a little while. But Jonah still cooking inside the fish. Not quite yet thankful for that fish, but when he was, the moment he finished that prayer, spit out right onto dry land.

So that's where we find Jonah today. And I imagine that the word of the Lord didn't come immediately to Jonah the moment he hit dry land. I would think that the Lord was gracious to Jonah, allow him to get his bearings. I mean, just the shock of light to the eyes after being in the fish's stomach for three days would take some time to get used to.

He'd look around, he'd get his bearings, maybe wade back into the ocean. You know, far enough to not get swallowed by a fish, but deep enough to wash himself off. I know if I was in the fish's stomach for three days, a bath be pretty high on my list. But at some point, shortly after being vomited out on dry land, the word of the Lord came to Jonah again. And so let's pick it up. Let's read chapter 3.

"Then the word of the Lord came to Jonah the second time, saying arise, go to Nineveh, that great city, and call out to it the message that I tell you. So Jonah arose and went to Nineveh according to the word of the Lord. Now Nineveh was an exceedingly great city. Three days journey in breadth. Jonah began to go into the city, going a day's journey, and he called out. 'Yet forty days and Nineveh shall be overthrown.'

"And the people of Nineveh believed God. They called for a fast and put on the sackcloth. From the greatest of them to the least of them, the word reached the king of Nineveh, and he arose from his throne, removed his robe, covered himself with sackcloth, and sat in ashes. And he issued A proclamation and published throughout Nineveh by the decree of the king and his nobles.

"\Let neither man nor beast, herd nor flock, taste anything. Let them not feed or drink water, but let man and beast be covered with sackcloth, and let them call out mightily to God. Let everyone turn from his evil way and from the violence that is in his hands. Who knows? God may turn and relent and turn from his fierce anger so that we may not

perish.' When God saw what they did, how they turned from their evil way, God relented of the disaster that he had said he would do to them, and he did not do it."

In this chapter we see Yahweh's compassion come to Nineveh. And this is really a precursor to the gospel in the New Testament. Because if Yahweh's compassion and salvation can come to the most wicked of Gentiles on the face of the planet, who do not have the promises of the covenant, then there is no one out of reach of God's mercy and grace. It gives us hope for even the most wicked people in our world, for us and others, that none are outside the bounds and the reach of the Lord's mercy.

And also what we will see in this chapter is a New Testament model of how the gospel reaches the unbeliever. It hasn't changed. The New Testament model is not a novel thing. Romans 10:9 through 15 says, "If you declare with your mouth Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. It is with your heart that you believe and are justified, and it is with your mouth that you profess your faith and are saved. As Scripture says, anyone who believes in him will never be put to shame, for there is no

difference between Jew and Gentile. The same Lord is Lord of all and richly blesses all who call on him.

“For everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved. How then can they call on the one they have not believed in? And how can they believe in the one of whom they have not heard? And how can they hear without someone preaching to them? And how can anyone preach unless they are sent? As it is written, how beautiful are the feet of those who bring good news.”

We see the same thing here. Jonah is sent to proclaim the word of the Lord, and if they believe on him, they will be saved. This text follows the same pattern that is lined out in the New Testament. That's the pattern that our outline follows this morning. And as we look at this this morning, it's only going to encourage us to remain faithful, to preach the gospel, but also to examine ourselves for the genuineness of repentance.

But our outline for this morning is just a three point outline. Jonah repeats, in verses one and four Jonah repeats, number two, Nineveh repent in verses 5 through 9. And then

number three, Yahweh relents in verse 10. So let's jump right into our first point. Jonah repeat.

“So the word of the Lord came to Jonah a second time saying arise, go to Nineveh and call out against it the message that I tell you.” So Jonah is just repeating the message that the Lord tells him to repeat and he goes to Nineveh. And in verse 4, he says, “Yet forty days and Nineveh shall be overthrown.” In this section Yahweh gives Jonah a message and he is faithful and obedient to take that message to the Ninevites.

But within this section we also have four sub points. I'll just give them to you as we go. The first one we see is Jonah's second chance, Jonah's second chance at obeying, obeying the Lord. The word of the Lord came to Jonah a second time. Jonah gets a second chance to do what God had asked him to do. But what is important for us is that we see this as an exception to the rule, not the rule.

Those who disobey the Lord, and particularly the Lord's prophets, they don't often get second chances. Think of Moses when he hit the rock instead of speaking to it. There is no

second chance, forty years of faithfulness from Moses, no second chance. The Lord says you're not entering the promised land and he dies outside, getting only to see it from afar.

There's an unnamed prophet in 1 Kings 13 that God sends and tells him speak to this man, but don't, don't go in, don't stay with him, don't eat with him. But there's another man who stops and says, "Oh, the Lord told me something else. He told me, you are supposed to stop and stay with me and eat with me." And when he does, the Lord ends up putting him to death for his disobedience.

Particularly in Scripture, those who know better, they don't get second chances. So this is an exception here. And so it's instructive for us in particular when we're thinking and looking at this, when we have evangelistic opportunities instead of thinking, "Ah, Jonah got a second chance. Maybe I will, I'll, you know, God will give me a second chance. I don't need to evangelize that person this time." We want to acknowledge that this is an exception to the rule.

Never use it as an excuse to not proclaim the message that we have. We may not get a second chance. So let's not use that as an excuse to avoid the message that we have and we have been commissioned to proclaim to others. And then within this second chance is the commission to go and do it, and it is nearly the same. But, and this is our second point, Jonah's softened commission.

So Jonah had a second chance, and within this second chance, the Lord actually softens the commission. Jonah's softened commission, he says, "Arise, go to Nineveh, that great city, and call out against it the message that I tell you." and what is remarkable is that this is this sentence is nearly identical to the first commission in chapter one, with a couple minor changes. This time. there's no mention of the reason. God already gave him the reason in the first commission.

We already, we already know, Jonah already knows. So there's no point in repeating it. But then there's the addition of "the message that I tell you." So Jonah is to just repeat the message that the Lord gives him. Other than that, there's only one minor but notable change. And it's so minor in fact that the

ESV doesn't even change it in the ESV translation. The change is in the phrase "call out against it."

The ESV has the same in chapter 1 and chapter 3, but the Hebrew there is a change of preposition. The change is from the preposition "against" in chapter 1. But here in chapter 3 it is a change to the preposition "to." So it is from chapter 1 preach "against" Nineveh to a change to preach "to" Nineveh. I think in this, this very minor change, the Lord softens the command to Jonah, because Jonah the prophet, he is already so against Nineveh that he doesn't need to be encouraged to preach against it. He needs to be encouraged to preach to them, not at them, so to speak.

Jonah was to see them as a people who needed to be preached to sinners to whom he wanted to see come under conviction to see salvation, not just people he hated, that he wanted to see come under grave judgment. And we should take this same encouragement into our own lives and into our own gospel proclamation. Are there those out there that we would rather see judged and punished for their wickedness rather than preach the gospel to them?

Are there those that we would just rather rail against with condemnation, maybe on Facebook, rather than preach to them for the salvation of their souls? How about those who identify as LGBTQ+ or promote their ideology? Do we have a tendency to just rail against those people, hate them for their wicked ideology, or do we have compassion and feel mercy for them?

To preach the gospel that they might be set free from the slavery that they're under to their ideology? Do we preach at them and against them, but not to them as image bearers of Christ for their advantage, for their salvation? And you might be wondering, why jump to that group of people? And it isn't just because I think we need to reach them with the gospel. But next week we're going to see a direct correlation between the Ninevites and LGBTQ people.

You have to come back next week for that. But I want to point that out. I'm not just pulling these people out of a hat. The Assyrians and the LGBTQ group today have much in common, but you got to come back next week for that. For now, we need to be reminded that even the most commonly hated people among our

tribe, they need to be preached to, not hated and avoided. Not just preaching at them from afar that they might come under judgment. But preaching to them because we love them and we want to see them saved and set free.

So the Lord softens here and maybe clarifies Jonah's commission. Possibly even, even indicating the change that is to come. So Jonah we see here he has a second chance. We see Jonah's softened commission. And now we see Jonah's prompt obedience. Look at verses 3 and 4. "So Jonah arose and went to Nineveh according to the word of the Lord. Now Nineveh was an exceedingly great city, three days journey in breadth. So Jonah began to go into the city, going a day's journey, and he called out."

Like chapter 1, at the first commission, there's no verbal communication from Jonah to God, but this time instead of fleeing, he obeys, and the grammar emphasizes Jonah's obedience. In the first chapter, there was a certain verb, an infinitive, that just emphasized his flight. But here there is a string of certain verbs, and having them all strung together, it emphasizes his obedience, his sequential obedience to the Lord.

So Jonah, he wastes no time, just like he didn't waste any time fleeing from the Lord. He doesn't waste any time obeying the Lord. He leaves for Nineveh right away. And this is informative for us. He doesn't try to talk himself out of it. And we all know when we delay in our obedience, it gives us plenty of time to come up with excuses for why we shouldn't do what we know God wants us to do.

No, Jonah obeys without delay, without time to talk himself out of it. God says "go," Jonah says "okay I'm going." And we as well. We should be as resolved as Jonah is here to obey right away. Be resolved as Jonah was to obey. And remember chapter 1:3, chapter 1 verse 3, all the way through chapter 2 and the discipline of the Lord. All of that could have been avoided if Jonah had just obeyed the first time.

So bypass the storm, bypass the drowning, bypass getting swallowed by the fish, and obey. And we know from chapter 4, we'll see next week, that Jonah still wasn't real excited to go, but he knew disobedience wasn't an option, so he went. But he did it promptly, right away. And we should pray in our own

hearts that we have a change of heart to want to obey. But we also need to be resolved, as Jonah is here to obey promptly. Not delay and talk ourselves out of it, but obey promptly what we know God wants us to do.

But his obedience, it wasn't a light thing. Nineveh, Nineveh was five hundred miles away from wherever this fish dropped him in Palestine on the shore. Which means it probably took him about a month to travel there. I know many stories, when you read about Jonah, it's like Jonah still, Jonah walking into Nineveh, still covered in fish guts and everything. It had, it was a month. I doubt he stayed in that same state. I doubt you could tell that he came out of a fish.

But it was no light thing. It took him a long time to get there, the reference to a three day journey, it's not how long it would take him to get there, but it's how long it would take him to preach through the entire city. The city was a great city. Ancient Nineveh at this time, it was in a oval shape. It was about three miles across.

So think of an area about the size from here all the way to 23rd Ave. If you know where 23rd Ave is between 10th St and highway 34. That's how big this city was back then, a massive city for the time. And if you were going to walk through it, yes, it would take much less than three days. But if your task was to preach through it, it would take three days to make it all the way around to preach through the city of Nineveh.

But as we will see, Jonah was so wildly successful, his mission was complete in just one day. It's kind of ironic, Jonah took three days to get his heart right before the Lord in the belly of the fish. But these wicked Ninevites, they seem to repent at the first hearing of Jonah's message. But Jonah went right into the city. He went preaching for a day, and then that brings us to sub point D, Jonah's faithful discourse.

Look at the end of verse 4. This is his message, "He called out, 'Yet forty days and Nineveh shall be overthrown.'" Jonah's sermon, as it is recorded in Hebrew, is only five words long. It's eight in the English. The only way to get this down to five words in English is to shorten it to about "forty days and you're dead." It's about the only way to get it down to five

words in English. But that's what Jonah was proclaiming, "forty days and you're going to be destroyed."

Now, there could have been more to it than that. It just isn't all recorded here, which is often the case in Scripture. Things are condensed for time's sake, but what is here is informative for us. If it's not the total message this was the essence in the heart of the message that Jonah repeated throughout Nineveh. It's not a conditional statement, it's just an indicative of what is going to happen. A pronouncement of doom.

Forty days and you're going to be destroyed. Overthrown is the word in the ESV. It's a word that refers to being demolished. It's actually the same word used in Genesis 19 in verses 21, 25 and 29 that the Lord uses to speak of what he's going to do to Sodom and Gomorrah.

So Jonah, he's out preaching, proclaiming Sodom and Gomorrah level doom upon Nineveh. And because he hated them, he was probably pretty content to declare such doom upon these people. He hated them. He wanted to see nothing more than these

people have that same fire and brimstone come down from heaven, as happened in, to Sodom and Gomorrah.

But he went about the city calling out, "Forty days and you're dead. Forty days and you're going to be destroyed." Now, what is instructive for us in the message itself, the message that Jonah preaches, if you were to go to any Church growth seminar in America, or any Church growth strategy, or even the various evangelism frameworks that people have today, you likely won't find the first or the central line of that message to be "forty more days and you're dead." That's, in in America, that's a very bad church growth strategy.

For most of church growth strategies, evangelistic strategies, they probably would have had Jonah going around telling the Ninevites, "Hey, God loves you and has a wonderful plan for your life. I mean, look at me. God loves me, has a wonderful plan for my life. I was just thrown off of a ship, almost drowned, in three days in a fish. Don't you want to be like me?" No, Jonah was called to pronounce judgment upon them.

Why? Because even the most wicked and vile people on the earth, they have the law of God written on their heart. They know that they have violated it. Their conscience convicts them, though they try to suppress it, their consciences convict them. The Ninevites knew they were guilty. They needed the fear of God put in them.

Why? Because as Proverbs 9:10 says, "The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom." And this fear of God is coupled with special revelation. Abel, as 2 Timothy 3:15 says it is able to make you wise for salvation. It isn't all the good parts about the gospel that make people wise for salvation alone. It's the fear of the Lord and His judgment that makes them fear Him. And this is instructive for us because we often leave that part out.

Thinking if we just tell them all the benefits of believing, that, that will motivate them to believe. But that isn't what the Bible teaches. And if you weren't here several months ago when Travis taught through the parable of the rich man and Lazarus, you should go back and listen to that. He had a whole sermon on, on this. I'd point you back to that.

But we must be faithful, as Jonah was faithful, in proclaiming the coming wrath of God. That if people do not repent of their ways, fire and destruction awaits them. It isn't the benefits of the gospel that strike fear in people, making them ready to receive the good news. It's the bad news that they are standing ready to have the full cup of God's wrath poured out on them. God stands over them ready to pour his wrath out upon them, and unless they repent, and come under the covering of Christ, that cup of wrath will be poured out in full in an eternity conscious torment in hell.

They need to be warned, "forty days and you're dead." That doesn't mean we don't then turn and tell them all the good parts of the gospel. That is the gospel, the good news. But if you don't tell them the bad news first, that they deserve to die for their sins, then there is no good news. There is nothing that they need to be saved from.

So even here in the Old Testament, we see that we like Jonah we need to be faithful and preach to people, pressing them to repent because their eternal souls depend on it. Not because

they will have a happy, clappy life here on this earth if they believe in Jesus. But there are eternal consequences. We must be faithful to preach the bad news and then give them the hope of the salvation that we have in Christ.

So in your gospel proclamation, brothers and sisters, be faithful, as Jonah was to repeat that message, the full gospel, not leaving out any portion particularly that people deserve to die for the sins that they have committed. So we've seen that Jonah, he repeats the message that the Lord gave him. He does it faithfully.

Now point number two, we see in the text that Nineveh repents. Nineveh repents, and this is the greatest miracle in the book. While we might look at the fish saving Jonah as an unbelievable miracle, some liberal scholars, they can't believe the book because of the story of the fish. It's just too great of a miracle. It's not believable. The greatest miracle in this book is that this Pagan city repents and believes in God.

Look at verse 5. Jonah, "Yet forty days and Nineveh will be overthrown." He's only gone one day into the city in verse 5,

and the people of Nineveh believed God. They called for a fast and put on sackcloth from the greatest of them to the least of them. So Nineveh repents. This point could have just as easily been Nineveh believes, but that doesn't fit with my other outline points. So it's Nineveh repents.

But repentance and belief are theologically two sides of the same coin. Trusting and believing in God is turning away from your sin to trust and believe in God and repentance is just the other side of that. It is turning away from your sin or turning away to believe in God. It's just the looking at the other angle, turning away from sin or turning to God in belief.

But look at verse 5, "and the people of Nineveh believed God" is what the ESV says. A couple of things to note here. The verb. It's at the front for emphasis. They believed. In the Hebrew, there's a word for, in the English translation, it says people. In the Hebrew, it's just the plural noun for men. Yes, it is probably referring to both genders of people, not just men exclusively. But if Jonah wanted to say people, there's a Hebrew word for that, He didn't use that word. He wants the readers to

know that this is primarily a movement of men. The men leading.
The men believed God.

Now, many translations, they leave out a preposition that's in the Hebrew. The literal translation is, "and the men of Nineveh believed in God." They believed in God, and from what I can tell, this little word is omitted in many translations because of an interpretive issue which often happens, and that is that many do not think the Ninevites believed unto salvation, which is what that little preposition in would indicate.

One commentator puts it this way when he says, "Obviously the Ninevites did believe. The important question here, however, is what did they believe? The NIV is correct in translating this phrase, the Ninevites believed God. Although the Hebrew can be translated literally, [not can, it is translated literally] and the men of Nineveh believed in God. This phrase does not carry the same significance as the modern understanding of 'in God,' [he puts in quotation marks] denoting a conversion to faith. The Hebrew phrase means only that they believed what Jonah's God said would happen."

So the big question is, did the men of Nineveh experience a conversion of real faith in God unto salvation, or did they just believe what God said would happen? Turn over briefly with me to Genesis chapter 15. The problem with that question, did they believe unto faith or did they, did they just believe what God said would happen? The problem with that question is it's a distinction without a difference.

Another problem with that, what that commentator says is that he insinuates that there is a modern notion of believing in God that we should not inject into this passage. The problem with that is the idea of belief in God as we think of it today is not a modern idea at all. But it goes all the way back to Genesis chapter 15 with Abraham.

So hopefully you're there. But Genesis 15 look at verse 5, "And he [this is the Angel of the Lord] brought him [that is Abraham] outside and said 'Look toward heaven and number the stars if you're able to number them.' Then he said to him 'so shall your offspring be.' And he [that is Abraham] believed the Lord and he counted it to him as righteousness."

This is the same verb to believe as in our text in Jonah. It's the same preposition in Jonah here that is left untranslated. Abraham believed in the Lord or believed in Yahweh. And it is in fact this verse that Paul points back to as the point of Abraham's justification, his salvation before God. He counted it to him as righteousness.

Abraham was declared righteous here. True faith because of what? Because he believed that what God said would happen would happen. So to say that the Ninevites didn't believe in God unto saving faith, they just believed that he would do what he said he would do is a distinction without a difference. It's the exact same scenario with Abraham. Abraham believed, and he was saved and justified because he believed that God would do what he said he would do. Here it's a promise unto salvation or a promise to his offspring. For Nineveh, it's a promise of judgment, but it's exactly the same. The same language, but you can flip back to Jonah.

It's the exact same scenario, exact same wording in Jonah that we have in Genesis and what Jonah was preaching to the Ninevites it was just the bad news of what we know as the

gospel. But they believed and they were saved. And I think many modern believers, they find this hard to understand and hard to believe we are, because we are so conditioned with that you get saved by, you know, the, the modern colloquial term of asking Jesus into your heart.

But Jesus hadn't come yet, so how does anybody get saved? Did Jonah go around preaching people, to people to ask Jesus into their heart? No, he didn't. Everyone in the Old Testament, just like Abraham, was saved by believing in the Word of God that was revealed to them and trusting that he would do what he said he would do. For Abraham, it was promise of offspring.

For the Ninevites, the gospel came in the form of: You deserve to die for your sins. They believed that and they cried out to God for mercy. Belief and repentance, just like it is in the New Testament, it was a gift from God to the Ninevites unto salvation. They believed what they had heard, the true prophet of God say, they believed, and they were saved and converted.

Salvation doesn't come by some ritualistic prayer. It is a gift that God gives even to Pagan Ninevites. When he gives it

the heart is regenerated and this new convert believes and repents of their sins that have been revealed. So I'm arguing that the Ninevites, they were genuinely converted. First of all because of the similarity to the language used of Abraham. But as we look at this, we're also going to look at their repentance to see if it seems genuine.

So in this section, we're going to see seven marks of repentance. Seven marks of repentance in the Ninevites. I'll run through them quickly if you're taking notes, and then I'll repeat them throughout. But first we see an external remorse. Next we see submission to God and then humility and then a reiteration of the same message. We see a change of behavior, we see cries for mercy and we see an acceptance of consequences. These are all things that are easily connected to the New Testament. I'll make direct connection to, to some of them. Other ones are just obvious.

But first of all, an external remorse. Look at verse 5. "The people of Nineveh believed God. They called for a fast and put on sackcloth." Just as Jonah called out warning of coming destruction. So the men, they believe the message and they call

out for a fast to show genuine remorse over what they feel in their hearts.

They were giving up the comfort of food, the necessity of food, because there was something more important. Their lives were at stake. They knew they deserved to die because of their sin. They were grieved by their sin and God needed to be entreated.

They put on sackcloth. Sackcloth was a piece of clothing, either small, that was just a loincloth that was worn, or it was an entire overlay that went on the entire body. But it was rough, scratchy, itchy. Think of, of a burlap sack, and wearing that for undergarments, would not have been comfortable. But these kinds of clothing were worn in times of sorrow and mourning. And these outward actions that you could see, these outward actions in an ancient Near East were symbolic expressions of inward feelings.

Now one could perform these outward actions without genuine feelings of sorrow and mourning. But those who truly had these feelings, the outward actions were unavoidable. They were

fasting and putting on sackcloth because they were genuinely remorseful for their sin. If you've ever experienced great sorrow and grief, you know this particularly with fasting.

A couple times in my life, once with the sudden loss of a family member, and once with the revelation of great sin in a family that I was close to, for a period of 24 hours I didn't eat. Not because I wanted to show sorrow, but because I was so grieved in my heart, so distraught, that I didn't even think about eating. I didn't even want to eat. I had no desire.

The grief so affected me physiologically that there was no hunger pangs. That, or the grief that I felt in my soul was so much greater than the feelings of my stomach produced. I didn't even notice. For the heart that is genuinely sorrowful and mourning, the outward action has naturally come.

And yes, someone can fake it, but if the feelings are there, it will come out in some outward action. If someone is genuinely sorrowful over sin, over their own sin, they will have some outward action revealing their grief. That may not be tears of weeping. But if you're preaching the gospel to someone and

they claim to believe, but there's no sorrow for sin. They immediately turn and ask what's for lunch. You know, you're probably going to want to press them further.

So a mark of repentance is that the penitent sinner has some show of remorse. The Ninevites here, they show their remorse by calling for a fast and putting on sackcloth. And this happened from the least of them to the greatest. And it's from here that the scene shifts from all the men of the city, the people in general, to the king, the greatest among them.

And as we read this, we should see this as the king, as the representative head. He represents what's going on in the hearts of the rest of the people. Just Jonah shifts to him to show what's going on in the hearts of the rest of the people. The king is just an example of the rest of the people.

What we see from the King first is our second mark of repentance and that is submission to God. Look at verse 6. "The word reached the King of Nineveh and he arose from his throne and removed his robe." "Reached" is a word that has the lexical range of to try to touch or to strike or to go as far as, as to

reach. The ESV takes the meaning to be the latter, but what is clear is that the word didn't just reach him and fall on deaf ears, but it pierced his heart as well.

And what did this message do when it struck the king? It resulted in the king arising and stepping down off of his throne. In the ancient Near East, the throne was not just a part of the royal regalia, but it was a symbol of power, order, and a seat of judgement. In his book "The Symbolism of the Biblical World," Othmar Kiel writes this. He says, and I quote, "To sit on the throne means to be king. It is the throne which makes the king a king. And when the king must be especially secure in his kingship, as in the administration of justice, he sits upon the throne." End Quote.

So stepping down off of the throne such is fitting for someone struck by the word of God who believes in God. Such a one gets off the throne and recognizes he is not the judge, he is not the authority. He really has no power whatsoever. Jonah indicates here that the king submitted himself to another King by getting off the throne. Recognizing another higher authority,

a higher power than himself, he recognized that he was unworthy to sit on the throne. Moreover, he removed his robe.

Robe is a word that can be a noun or an adjective. If it's an adjective, it means noble or majestic, but here it's clearly referring to a noun, A mantle, A cloak, or just majesty in general. In other words, the king removed and set aside that which was majestic to him. It often refers to the majestic robe that the king would wear, but it was that which made him majestic and glorious looking. We can assume if it was his robe, it was also any crown he wore. And in the removal of this, and in other places in Scripture where the same verb is used, it can refer to a loss of status.

Aaron, when he sinned in Numbers 20:26, he was stripped of his priestly attire for his sin, and given, it was given to someone else to take his place, showing that he was unworthy of that seat. So this king, he strips the robe from himself, showing he thinks he's unworthy even to be king. In New Testament language, the king is dying to self. He's setting his position aside. He's showing outwardly that he is not the

authority over his own life. There is a higher authority that he must submit to.

True repentance, true belief in God crucifies self. One takes himself off the throne of his heart and puts God up there. One who claims belief in God but still sits as the authority in their life sits as the ultimate judge in their life, such a one is not truly repented. But the one who submits to the Word of God, even an earthly king, that's a mark of genuine repentance. And remember, the reason Jonah mentions this here is because the king is a representative, which indicates that all those in Nineveh, this was their heart. The king represents a people who submitted themselves to God's authority. This doesn't mean every single individual in Nineveh repented, but it is obvious that the king repented and many of those in Nineveh did as well.

So the marks of repentance we've seen so far. Outward actions, the real remorse demonstrate an inward reality of true sorrow for sin, dying to self, submission to God's authority. Now, third, humility. Look at the end of verse 6. "The King sat in ashes." To sit in ashes is also a sign of great sorrow and mourning. But this word in particular, it's used especially as a

sign of mourning and penitence to designate humility or abasement. To sit in ashes is to declare that "I am nothing and I am worthless," just like everything else you cast into the dirt or into the fire. It's a sign of self abasement.

Humility here by this king, that is unsurpassed save for Christ himself who got off of his throne and humbled himself to die for us, it's the same imagery here. The king humbles himself, gets off his throne and sits in ashes, the lowliest place he could go to demonstrate that he understood he was nothing before God. And this is the same experience we all have when we come to see ourselves as sinners before a holy God. We all think like Isaiah, "Woe is me, I'm nothing. I deserve to die."

It's a mark of all those who believe in God. We know we are nothing in and of ourselves. We are privileged to know that God, he's just going to let us be slaves. We think it's a privilege to do that, unworthy even to sit in the ashes at his front door. And anyone who claims belief in God but still holds himself in high regard needs to repent and remember his place. Because a mark of true repentance is that one understands his lowly place

before God and exhibits humility. But that brings us to the fourth point, a reiteration of the message.

Those who have truly repented, they can't help but reiterate the message to others. In verse 5, the people call for a fast, no doubt declaring why they were calling for a fast, "we deserve to die, we need to fast and put on sackcloth." Reiterating the message of doom. And this word makes its way all the way to the king. The word "reached" the king, that implies that it wasn't Jonah who took it, but it that it was word of mouth.

Message spread so fast throughout Nineveh that Jonah didn't have to go even if he went. It sound, the, the text makes it sound like it went faster by word of mouth from the people than Jonah could have traveled. But the message was reiterated all the way to the king. Now look what the king does in verse 7. "He issued a proclamation and published through Nineveh."

Now, there are some great leadership principles here that we could look at because the king, he doesn't set aside his position of leadership that God has given him, though he in his

heart he's submitting to God. The king is still using his position of authority for the glory of God. But to our point, today the king reiterates the message of doom and calls for action. He preaches, so to speak, the message that reached him, sending it back out amongst all the people.

The one who hears the gospel and yet walks away unchanged and never to speak of it again. It doesn't go around warning others of the doom that is coming. Well, that's not genuine belief and repentance. The men of Nineveh call for a fast. The king proclaims the message with all his authority, because they are concerned for their fellow Ninevites. They're concerned for the lost among them.

Jesus said, a city set on a hill is a light to those around you. How about you? Are you a light? Those who have experienced genuine repentance and belief, they're concerned for the souls of those around them. Are you? Do you reiterate this message, the gospel?

Are you content to just letting people perish around you? That's the fourth point. Let's keep moving. We got three more to

get through. The fifth mark, genuine repentance is marked by a cry for mercy. Look at the rest of 7 and into 8. This is the decree that the king sent out, "let neither man nor beast, herd nor flock, taste anything. Let them not feed or drink water, but let man and beast be covered with sackcloth, and let them call out mightily to God. Let everyone turn from his evil way and from the violence that's in his hand."

The king extended the fast that all the men called for by including animals. We'll talk more on the inclusion of animals next week, I didn't have time to get into that today. With the inclusion of animals, he calls for all the people to put on sackcloth, outwardly expressing sorrow for sin. And then the king declares, "Let them call out mightily to God."

Mightily is a, it's a good word to translate the Hebrew word used here. It refers to doing something with force, like stealing something from someone with force. As we saw when I was teaching through 1 Samuel 2:16, the sons of Eli, they didn't want boiled meat, so they went and stole the meat took by force, the meat from people offering it in the temple, they're wrestling it away from them. Another word that standard lexicons

use to translate this Hebrew word is vehemently. Cry out to God vehemently.

The king, he understands the urgency of the situation. He doesn't think, "Well we've got forty days. Let's use the thirty-nine to do whatever we want. Then we'll cry out to God right before judgment." No, the heart of the true believer is struck. There's an urgency to cry out to God vehemently for mercy because he knows how undeserving he is. He knows how sinful he is. He knows that he deserves to die to be destroyed.

You cry out vehemently when you understand how dire straits you are in. A New Testament counterexample of this is in the parable of the Pharisee and the tax collector. It's a familiar passage I'll just read if you want to listen along. Luke 18, just 9 to 14, "He [Jesus] told this parable to some who trusted in themselves that they were righteous and treated others with contempt. Two men were going up into the temple to pray, and one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector. The Pharisee, standing by himself, prayed thus. 'God, I thank you that I am not like the other men, extortioners, unjust adulterers, or even like this tax collector. I fast twice a week. I give tithes of all

that I get.' But the tax collector, standing far off, would not even lift up his eyes to heaven, but beat his breast, saying, 'God be merciful to me a sinner.' Jesus says, I tell you, this man went down to his house justified rather than the other. For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, but the one who humbles himself will be exalted."

The tax collector here in Genesis, or in in Luke, they were the most reviled people of their day, kind of like the Ninevites at the time of Jonah. But this tax collector, he was saved, went away, justified. He was declared righteous with a very simple prayer for mercy. Likewise, the Ninevites, they knew that they were deserving of death. They knew they were unworthy, so the king made a proclamation that they should all cry out, cry out vehemently.

For what? Well, it doesn't say explicitly. Guilt is implied. Confession is implied. Thus it is implied that they would cry out for mercy. They knew judgment was imminent. It was forty days away. They knew they were guilty, so crying out for mercy was the only option. And this is the heart of every true

believer, a recognition of guilt and crying out to God for mercy.

Knowing that God is the only one who can save us from the penalty that our sins deserve. There's nothing we can do. And if Jesus said, simple prayer of crying out to mercy is enough to demonstrate true repentance. Here we see the same thing from the Ninevites. They cry out to the Lord for mercy.

Two more, number six, change of behavior. Look at verse eight. The king tells them, he calls out to them. He says let everyone turn from his evil way and from the violence that is in his hands. There are two things that the people are called to repent and turn from. One's general and the other's more specific. And the grammar in the command, it actually points to the, this reality as well, a general as well as a specific.

There's a command, plural command to let them, all the men let them turn. And then there's a singular man. So it's let them all, of them, each to a man, turn from his evil way. General command but specific to each man. What the king calls them to turn from is also general to the specific. They are to turn each

man from his evil way. Way is just the Hebrew word for a path that denotes general path of life, general behavior of life, the way you're going in life.

So the king calls them to repent of the entire general way that they have been living their life. Repent from walking down this evil path. They had been living in rebellion against God in general. The way they lived their life was a way of life and rebellion to God. So generally they were called repent of an, being a Ninevite, and by implication walk in a way that pleased the Lord instead.

But the king gets specific, he says, moves from the specific, general to the specific. He calls them to repent and turn from the violence that is in his hands. In distinction from the general way of their life. This is a command to repent from the specific sins they had committed with their hands.

For the Ninevites, who were Assyrians, they probably had, each to a man, shed blood, murdered someone. They were known for violently cutting off people's appendages, torturing people to death. They had each, to a man, been murderers and image

destroyers. Their hands had a lot of blood on them, and the king calls for wholesale repentance of murdering other image bearers.

But this was the practice that had given them such prominence, such dominance in the known world. Everyone feared them for their cruelty, and that's the way they liked it. They had huge stone reliefs, carved billboards, so to speak, with images of such atrocities, limbs flying through the air that had been cut off, of their gruesome images. They liked it that way. But the king says no more. The one to be feared is not us it's God. He calls for wholesale repentance from what made the Ninevites, Ninevites.

They were to exhibit radical change in general and in specific lifestyle. And beloved we are living in a time where this mark of repentance is blurred. Liberal theological institutions have come up with an entire category of Christians to blur this line. They call them carnal Christians, that is, Christians who act just like unbelievers, carnal as unbelievers, but who prayed the prayer in Jesus. The Bible doesn't have this category.

Jesus said in Matthew 16:24, "If anyone wants to come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross and follow me." He said in John 14:15, "If you love me, you will obey my commands." True belief and repentance is marked by a death of the old self, a radical reversal of behavior. And if you sit here and profess Christ, but your life is not radically different from the old you before you were saved. Not, not that you're perfect, but if you don't represent a radically different life, and you're thinking as it works itself out into behavior, you really need to examine yourself.

If you don't, as John the Baptist said, "Bear fruits in keeping with repentance," then you should not be sure of your salvation. Belief is the other side of the coin of repentance. And if there is no repentance, guess what that means? There's no belief. And the most radical change is at the heart level.

You are different because your desires have changed. But if you simply just stop murdering and torturing people, but you still hate men in your heart, that's not genuine change either. Jesus said if you hate your brother, you commit murder in your heart, and if you hate your brother, you do not love God. 1 John

4:20, John says you are a liar. You're deceiving yourself. He says, for if you do not love your brother whom you can see, how can you love God, whom you cannot see?

If you can't love your brother, who's there next to you? You wouldn't treat Jesus any differently than you treat him. If Jesus was right here, you'd hate him just like you hate your brother. You'd find some reason to distrust him and hate him and not be happy with the way he speaks to you. Don't be fooled. Don't deceive yourself. If you have an enduring anger in your heart for your brother, you do not love God. So the king, he called for wholesale change of behavior because he was convicted in his own heart and he knew the people needed to repent. And as the representative head of Nineveh and the people's initial response, we can assume that there was a national repentance in this generation in Nineveh.

So the six we've seen so far, we've got one more external remorse, submission to God, humility, the reiteration of the message, a cry for mercy, a change of behavior, and finally an acceptance of consequences. Look at verse 9. Who knows? God may turn and relent and turn from his fierce anger so that we may

not perish. Genuine repentance produces a godliness that doesn't have regret. It is without regret.

It accepts the consequences as just. The king called for national repentance, even though there was no guarantee that the Lord would relent from his disaster. They were not changing to avoid the consequences. They had the attitude that God may turn and relent, but they had accepted that they deserved any punishment that they received. Again, this is a mark of genuine repentance. 2 Corinthians 7:10 says, "For Godly grief produces a repentance that leads to salvation without regret."

The Ninevites, they were not thinking, oh man, I wish I hadn't have done all that bad stuff. Now I've got all this bad, all these consequences I've got to deal with. Godly grief has no regret because the believer knows there's no going back. Need to learn and move on. The believer is willing to accept the consequences for his sin, not opine and whine about wishing they had made different choices to avoid consequences. The Ninevites put themselves in the hands of the judge of all the earth, trusted him to do what was right because they knew they deserved

the consequences that the Lord gave them. Even if he did destroy them, like he did Sodom and Gomorrah.

But how about you? Are you marked by accepting the consequences for your sin, determining not to do it again, but accepting any consequences, knowing that you deserve them? Or do you just sit and mull over the what ifs, or the I wish I had not, because what you really want more than anything is just to avoid the consequences of your sin. Beloved, I would encourage you to reflect on these marks of repentance from the Ninevites to see if they're reflected in your life.

Because as I mentioned, modern American Christianity has such a misunderstanding of this doctrine. Don't take it for granted. Don't overlook shortcomings, but work out your faith with fear and trembling, reflecting on these things and examining yourself faithfully. But I think the Ninevites repentance was genuine. I've connected so many of those things to New Testament ideas of repentance.

The nation repented. I think they had a clear and genuine understanding of repentance, even clearer than many Americans

do. We would do well to take heed and, and learn from them. So examine yourself friend. If you sit here today and those marks are not there, even if one of them is not there, that doesn't mean you're not a Christian, but you might have some repenting still to do.

But finally, point three, and much shorter. Don't worry, I don't have seven more sub points for this one. Look at verse 10. "When God saw what they did, how they turned from their evil way, God relented of the disaster that he said he would do to them and he did not do it." Write this cross reference down and, and read it later. Jeremiah 18:5 to 11. In that passage the Lord tells Jeremiah that if he, that is God, pronounces destruction on a nation and they repent, he will turn back his anger. And if he pronounces good on a nation and they turn and do wicked, then he'll destroy them.

What the Lord is saying is, if you walk in the path of wickedness in the way of wickedness, living a life of evil deeds, then you're on the path that the Lord is about to pour destruction upon, pour his wrath out upon. But if such a person who's walking in this path, repents and walks in this path, then

he has moved out of the line of fire of the wrath of God, and he walks on the path of the Lord's blessing.

God's wrath is poured out upon all who walk on the path of wickedness. But if you repent and you get on the path of blessing. God do, doesn't pour his wrath out on those in the path of blessing. So it isn't a change in God. This is it's accommodating language in the Scriptures to help us understand these truths. But when you synthesize everything the Scripture talks about with regard to God, relenting, that's what it's talking about.

It is not a change in God. It appears as though God has turned back from destroying them, which he has. But it's not because their deeds are no longer deserving of wrath, but because they have moved and they have received mercy and forgiveness. It's not because it's a change in God. It's because it's a change in target.

If the Lord's eternal disposition is wrath against sin, then when someone repents of their sin and moves over to the path of blessing, they're no longer hit by God's wrath. But the

Scriptures are clear. God does not change. Moreover, God knows the future. God knew Nineveh would repent, and that is precisely why he sent Jonah there. But it was also true that if they did not repent, he would destroy them.

This threat of judgment, it's what sobered them. It wasn't an empty threat, and God didn't change, but the Ninevites, they heeded God's threat and moved from this path where they would have received wrath to this path of obedience and blessing. And this promise is true for all of us, beloved. If we have repented, we have moved from the path of wrath to the path of blessing in life. There is no more wrath for us, it's been poured out on Christ.

But if you are here today and you have not repented of your sins, those marks of repentance are not in you. You still sit on the seat of authority in your own heart. You're still living a life of sin, doing whatever you desire. You still have blood on your hands, so to speak, as the Ninevites did. The Lord stands over you with his cup of wrath ready to pour out upon you.

Only you don't know if you have forty days or forty seconds. Don't wait. The Ninevites did not wait till day thirty nine. Don't think you can wait longer to enjoy your sin. God stands over you with a cup of wrath filled with brimstone and fire, ready to pour out upon your head. You need to heed this warning to the Ninevites. You deserve to die and spend an eternity in hell, but you don't have to.

Cry out to the Lord for mercy. Humble yourself, believe and trust in the Lord Jesus Christ and you will be saved. No longer trusting in your own deeds to save you. But trusting wholly in the righteousness of Christ as we sung about this morning. But judgment is coming. Don't wait. Repent Now, dear friend, let's pray.

Father, there is so much packed into this one chapter, so much that we can learn from. And I just pray that by your Spirit you would cause all of us to soak these truths into our minds and into our hearts, that we might be faithful. Gospel proclamation bears to the world that we don't shrink back and soften the message beyond recognition, but also that we are not hard and calloused beating people with it, but that we

faithfully go out and, and seek to preach to image bearers,
fellow image bearers who need your mercy and grace as we have
experienced. And I pray for those who sit here who do not know
you, that you would bring conviction to their hearts and light
into their heart, that they might see how they have failed to
repent, and that when there is no repentance there is no belief.
But we pray, Lord, that you would massage these things into our
hearts and minds, that we might make use of them this week. By
your Spirit and by your power we pray in Jesus name. Amen.