

## Who Knows? God's Relentless Grace.

### Jonah 3

**MPS** God, who is sovereign to save, calls His people to be a faithful witness so the nations can hear and believe.

**OBJ** Every person should believe in God and repent because of four lessons of His relentless grace.

**INTRO** Has God ever done something you didn't like? How did you respond? Did you know that's what God would do in that situation, or did it shock / surprise you? Today in our study, Jonah obeys what God told him to do and the result is exactly as he knew it would be. And most confusing is that he is neither surprised nor satisfied.

**READ** Jonah 3:1-5

*Then the word of the Lord came to Jonah the second time, saying, <sup>2</sup>"Arise, go to Nineveh, that great city, and call out against it the message that I tell you." <sup>3</sup>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. <sup>4</sup>Jonah began to go into the city, going a day's journey. And he called out, "Yet forty days, and Nineveh shall be overthrown!" <sup>5</sup>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. **Jonah 3:1-5***

**TRANS** In the third chapter of this study we are learning about God's sovereignty in salvation. And as we stated last week, the greatest value for us in this study is not to focus on Jonah, but to focus on God and His work. God has demonstrated a divine relentless to save so far, and He will continue to do so today. And as we saw last week, we do not always like God's work in salvation.

**God, who is sovereign to save,  
calls His people to be a faithful witness so the nations can hear and believe.**

**OBJ** HOW does God's relentless grace work? **Four Lessons of God's relentless grace.**

Jonah 3 begins with what may be one of the most encouraging sentences in all of Scripture; "*Then the word of the Lord came to Jonah the second time*". Of all that we have seen God do in the first two chapters, we are reminded here that God gives "second chances". He doesn't owe anyone a second chance. He doesn't always relent to give another chance. **But you can be sure that when you hear the gospel, God is offering you an invitation to believe and trust in Him!**

**Lesson #1: God gives second chances. 3:1-2**

God gives Jonah a second chance. Let that sink in. **Did anyone come in looking for a second chance from God today?** If so, then you probably want to know; **WHEN does God give second chances?** Every time God's Word is heard is an invitation to trust and obey. (Romans 10:17) And consider what God's second chance for Jonah entailed. **God gave Jonah a second chance to obey his first command.**

**Why wouldn't God change His command or adjust His will?** God's command is not negotiated by personal preference. God gives His command to fulfill His divine will. It is in the command of God's Word that we learn what His will is. It is in the command of God's Word that Holy Spirit empowers us to fulfill His will in our lives. It is in obeying God's command that we show that we love Him and our lives are aligned with Him. (1 John 5:2; John 15:14) The work God has commissioned us to do is to teach disciples to obey His commands. (Matthew 28:19) **God gives His command because as we trust and obey He makes us more like Jesus and brings us into His divine work in all creation.**

**TRANS** We don't always know WHY God gives second chances, but we can see WHY clearly here.

**Jonah's second chance became Nineveh's first.** We really have no idea how God wants to use us by a faithful testimony. John Piper once stated, "God is always doing 10,000 things at any given moment." I think that's probably an understatement. But what we do know is this; **God calls us to a faithful witness because He has ordained to use us for the salvation of the nations.**



**Jonah arose and went to Nineveh**, “*according to the word of the Lord.*” Obedience in accordance with God’s Word must be our aim in all things. There is no grace that is absent of obedience, because God doesn’t give grace that is too impotent to produce our obedience. [Christian, know this: when we live in disobedience to God’s Word, it is always because we are running from and rejecting God’s relentless grace.](#)

**God calls Nineveh a great city.** The text qualifies this statement in a few ways. “*Great*” refers to numbers and Nineveh had a large population, approximately four times larger than Samaria, Jonah’s home region. Nineveh was three days journey in breadth. Though we don’t know all this phrase means, it is safe to say it couldn’t be completed in a day. When Jonah arrived, he went a day’s journey and proclaimed his message, “*Yet, forty days, and Nineveh shall be overthrown.*” [Nineveh had the greatest revival in recorded history, all who heard the message believed God.](#)

But we must be careful not to celebrate Jonah wrongly in his second chance. All obedience in accordance with God’s Word is beneficial for our lives. But not all obedience to God is done in the same spirit. ILLUS John Wayne, the infamous old school actor, stated, “Life is hard. Life is harder when you do stupid things.” Obedience blesses us with the joy and goodness of God when we trust and obey in love. But the blessing of obedience becomes hard truth when we begrudge God for making us do it. [God’s grace is always sweet, but when you sour it with a hard spirit you build a grudge toward God.](#)

**Lesson #2: God is sovereign to save, and He has ordained for the gospel to go forth by the faithful witness of His people. 3:3-5**

**God uses imperfect people to serve His perfect will.** Three contrasts demonstrate this second lesson, how God who uses imperfect people remains sovereign in salvation. First, Jonah likely only did the bare minimum necessary to satisfy what he perceived as his obligation to God. He surely did not go ‘above and beyond’, or give 100%. While we can’t say all that Nineveh being “*three days journey in breadth*” means, a contrast can be drawn with Jonah who, “*began to go into the city, going a day’s journey.*” This is the last reference to Jonah in the chapter, leaving us to conclude this is all he did. The author shows by contrast to the size of the city the extent to which Jonah went as an expression of his tension with God. ILLUS Jonah was like a ferro rod. A ferro rod is used to throw a spark to start a fire. But one must know how to arrange the kindling to catch the spark. Jonah threw a spark hoping it would miss the kindling. God blew His Spirit across the “spark” of Jonah’s witness to become a raging fire of revival across that whole city. The only person that suffers in this situation is the one who missed God’s blessing because of a hard heart. [While Jonah still burns within, God is burning in gospel mission across that whole city of Nineveh.](#)

A second contrast shows God’s relentless grace to save. Contrast the size of the city, “*three days journey in breadth*”, versus the time God gave; “*Yet forty days, and Nineveh shall be overthrown!*” God gives them forty days to repent when city is only 3 days in size. There were many people in Nineveh entangled in the great evil that God wanted to save. [God is gracious and patient, not wanting any to perish but all to come to repentance!](#)(2 Peter 3:9)

Finally, a third contrast between Jonah 3:1-5 and Jonah 1:1-3 reminds us; when we fail to obey the Lord, people that otherwise would have been greatly impacted for the gospel suffer. **Can’t God send others?** Yes. But He chose Jonah. The work God was doing in Jonah required Nineveh, as the work He was doing in Nineveh required Jonah. I have often been asked, “**If God is sovereign in salvation, then why bother preaching the gospel?**” The answer is simple, obedience. God’s plan is that His sovereign salvation come through the preaching of the gospel. Paul’s statement in 2 Corinthians 4:7 explains, “*But we have this treasure in jars of clay, to show that the surpassing power belongs to God and not to us.*” This question also gestated, “**If God is sovereign to save people, then why do I have to share the gospel?**” We don’t have to, we get to. God, by His sovereign plan, ordains His children to share in His eternal work of salvation. And when we do not, or refuse to, we are the ones who miss the great blessing of God. When we stop thinking of sharing the gospel as something we have or ought to do and start practicing it as the joy of life that it is for the one who is In Christ, everything changes. [We cease to be the silent absence, as Jonah was, and begin to intentionally bring Jesus into every conversation.](#)

**TRANS** What God does in salvation is never limited to what we do in serving Him. His work is so much greater!



**READ** Jonah 3:6-9

<sup>6</sup>The word reached the king of Nineveh, and he arose from his throne, removed his robe, covered himself with sackcloth, and sat in ashes. <sup>7</sup>And he issued a proclamation and published through 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, <sup>8</sup>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. <sup>9</sup>Who knows? God may turn and relent and turn from his fierce anger, so that we may not perish.” **Jonah 3:6-9**

Jonah 1 showed that no matter how far or low you go, you are never too far to be reached by His relentless grace. Chapter three reveals that no matter how high you go, you are never beyond your need for God. When God’s Word reaches the King, he immediately responds in belief and repentance. He puts on sackcloth and ashes that demonstrate the way they saw their life in light of God’s message, in utter poverty and death. He issues a proclamation for the whole region and all creatures to respond, to call out to the Lord mightily, to turn from his evil way, and pray that God relents from destroying them. Notice that they knew their ways were evil. How? God’s Word tells us that God has made it plain in creation, and that His Law is written on the heart of every creature!(Romans 1:19-20; 2:15) God’s message through Jonah gave hope for salvation, to people who did not otherwise know God, such that they believed and responded in repentance. Revival changes everything, aligning all things in response to God’s Word. When revival comes, even the dog notices the change.

**Lesson #3: God relents when people repent in faith toward Him. 3:6-9**

**Repentance is never pretty but it always leads to a glorious response from God.** All the Ninevites believed and turned in faith to God in repentance, and showed it by outward adornments and actions. When God saw their response of faith, he relents and brings salvation. *When people respond to God in faith, God relents from judgment to bring salvation for the glory of His Name.*

“*Who knows?*” What a great and penetrating question! If someone knew that God would relent from judging Ninevah, wouldn’t they tell them! *Why would someone withhold this good news and NOT tell these people that God will gladly relent because of His relentless grace?* “Who knows?” Jonah knew. And the reason he doesn’t tell is because he is, evidently, gone by now. He doesn’t tell because he wanted God to destroy them. He doesn’t tell because he doesn’t want them to believe and repent. *Jonah didn’t want God to do what he knew God would do, so he gave it the most “fractioned effort” he possibly could.*

**TRANS** *What kind of hatred must consume a heart to KNOW that God will save, and yet not tell them?*

**ILLUS** Magician Penn Jillette, a famed Atheist, provided one of the most clarify statements on proselytizing, evangelizing, that still rings true today when he said, “I’ve always said that I don’t respect people who don’t proselytize. I don’t respect that at all. If you believe that there’s a heaven and a hell, and people could be going to hell or not getting eternal life, and you think that it’s not really worth telling them this because it would make it socially awkward—and atheists who think people shouldn’t proselytize and who say just leave me alone and keep your religion to yourself—*how much do you have to hate somebody to not proselytize? How much do you have to hate somebody to believe everlasting life is possible and not tell them that?* I mean, if I believed, beyond the shadow of a doubt, that a truck was coming at you, and you didn’t believe that truck was bearing down on you, there is a certain point where I tackle you. And this is *more* important than that.”

*Christian, is there any hint of this kind of hate in your heart?* Hate seems like such a strong word, and yet that’s the word an atheist used to describe what he would call it. *Are there any people that you are uninterested in sharing the gospel with to see God move in saving power?* This is not an easy passage or question to face and honestly answer. Even mature Christians must be honest in their admission. “Who knows?” The truth of the gospel that should motivate every Christian to be zealous in sharing God’s love with people. *If you know there is any reason that you would not share, there IS still hope today. Remember, Jonah writes this to tell about himself.*

**READ** Jonah 3:10

<sup>10</sup>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. **Jonah 3:10**

#### Lesson #4: Knowing that God relents invites us to repent. 3:10

God relents of the disaster He said He would do to them because they turned in faith and repentance to trust in Him. This is what relentless grace is all about. God relents on all who turn to Him. And when we remain hardened toward God in our obedience, we refuse His great blessing upon our own lives. **Do we stand ready to forgive when people repent? Are we ready to repent for any hardness in our heart toward people?**

God loves the people we loathe. And He loves us so much, that He wants to use us to share the gospel with them. Christian, God sends us to all people, even those we loathe, because He is transforming our heart to be like His! And when we go, His most powerful work is done in us as He uses us to do His work in others. **No matter how bad society may become, and no matter how far from God culture may get, LifePoint, we must never lose hope of all that God can and wants to do by preaching the gospel!**

**God, who is sovereign to save,  
calls His people to be a faithful witness so the nations can hear and believe.**

**CLOSE** God – forgive us when we live like Jonah, imposing our will, allowing others to suffer, because we want what you give so freely and in abundance, to keep all to ourselves, or within the circle of those we like. Give us a heart to love people so much – as you have loved us – that we will go wherever you lead us to tell the good news of Jesus because we know! Give us your heart to love people – and welcome them into our fellowship as one together with us, as our brothers and sisters in Christ, because we know! Holy Spirit, convict and cleanse us where we would allow to see someone suffer because of our silence, instead of sharing the gospel with the same zeal as your relentless grace has come to us in Jesus Christ.

