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## JONAH 2:10-3:10

Jonah Series

Please open your Bibles to Jonah 2:10. Jonah 2:10 is where we're going to pick up the story today. This is the gross part of the story. If you're in your Bible, look at Jonah 2:10. It says this – *And the LORD commanded the fish, and it vomited Jonah onto dry land.*

I'm sure if you've been with us, you know that Jonah had a little bit of trouble accepting the message when it came to him. God had a message for Jonah, but Jonah didn't like it. I would suggest that happens to us sometimes where the message God says to us we might not like. But it's the message that God has for us and we need to be able to listen. We need a bigger picture of God when we don't understand or don't like the message.

So Jonah was thrown into the sea and this fish swallowed him up. He was in there three days. I'm just imagining here he gets thrown up, *vomited*, the Bible says, up *onto the dry land*. He probably went back into the water there to wash himself off, and probably just looked around and was grateful for the day. Do you ever go out in those days and you just go, "Wow, it is a great day to be alive." I think that's where he is. It's a fresh start for him.

There are some times when people go through bad experiences in their lives, painful things that happen in their lives and then they somehow overcome those, they go to the next stage, and there's a fresh start for them. But what happens is they go back to their old ways instead of moving forward. I really think that Jonah made some changes in the way that he was thinking in order to be able to move forward in his life. I would just suggest that sometimes we get the freedom back or we start moving in the right direction, and we just go back to the wrong kinds of things. We get rid of the consequence and we don't change what's going on inside of our hearts.

The real idea here that we're going to talk about this week and next week is this concept of repentance. Now usually when we think of repentance, we think of repentance as that change of focal point in our spiritual lives that dramatically adjusts everything about who we are. That's what repentance is. Where we give up our old ways, we follow Christ fully, and that's like the classic view of repentance in the Bible. We understand what that looks like. But I would suggest that we are always in the business of repenting. Because repentance simply means to turn.

I'm going to talk more about this next week as I share with you some specific techniques that I think are helpful, that I use as I train parents to help their children change. So as children are changing, these techniques that we use embody all that we know about repentance from the Bible so that these children can make changes. I'm going to share those with you next week.

Even if you're not a parent you're going to benefit from this because a lot of times parents will listen to this teaching that they have and they'll say to themselves and they'll say to me, "This isn't just for kids. I need this too." When you understand these particular ideas about repentance and these techniques that you can apply to your own life, you learn how to think differently, you learn how to recover from mistakes, you learn how to not blame other people for your problems, you learn how to not be defensive when somebody challenges you. You learn how to not beat yourself up when you make mistakes. You learn how to process sins, mistakes, offenses the right way, the godly way because it's based on the theology of repentance.

But I couldn't tie all that in this week. So I'm going to go through this same chapter next week and I'm going to teach you these tools that I think will be transforming for your life. I think they're really powerful tools that will help you.

Let's go back to our story now. Jonah gets vomited up onto dry land. I love Jonah 3:1, which says this: *Then the word of the LORD came to Jonah a second time: "Go to the great city of Nineveh and proclaim to it the message I give you."* I like it because God gives us second chances. God lets us start over. He lets us try again. You've made mistakes, you made lots of mistakes in your life. There's some times when people make so many mistakes they start feeling inadequate inside, they feel damaged inside, and because they made all those mistakes they just feel incompetent. So they're continually having problems in their lives.

I just want you to know that God allows us to move forward. We are not hopelessly messed up. God is a God of second chances and He wants us to deal with the past properly. I think that's what I'm going to share with you more next week about this idea of leaving the past and going forward, what that looks like in practical terms for us. But it's this sense that we have to deal with the past properly in order to move forward, then we go forward with this newness that we have, this freedom that we talked about in that one song today. Because God does this miracle inside of our heart.

It's described in this verse in 2 Corinthians 5:17 when it says – *Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come: The old has gone, the new is here!*

That can happen in any one of our lives that we allow the old to go away and we are a new person as we move forward. That's what's going to happen in the passage that we're looking at.

So I like verse 1 and 2, but I also like verse 3 because notice what verse 3 says. It says – *Jonah obeyed the word of the LORD and went to Nineveh.* So he did the right thing.

When I'm working with children and I'm trying to teach them about obeying their parents, I said if your parents tell you to do something and you don't do it, sometimes you get disciplined for that. But the neat thing is that it comes around again because the word of the Lord or the word of the parents comes a second time and then you have a choice to do it or not do it.

Now I say to kids, "What if Jonah wouldn't have done the right thing this time, what might God have done?"

Kids often say things like "He'd kill them."

“Well I don’t think He’d kill them, but He might do something else. What else could He do?” They talk about spiders and storms and all kinds of things that could happen in the life of a person. The point is God is getting Jonah’s attention, He’s got his attention and now Jonah is going to move forward.

But what I see here is this is a detour that Jonah took in his life. This is how things are going: We’re going along in life and things are going well. But when we don’t do what God says, we’re not obeying the Lord, we’re doing the wrong thing, then we have to take a detour in life. Those detours are opportunities for growth. They’re often painful places to be. We have to take a painful detour in order to dig ourselves out of debt, or to learn how to overcome this particular problem, or get out of this addiction, or whatever it is. We have to take this detour in order to come back to the place where we need to be so that the word of the Lord can come a second time and we can go forward.

Now the first two chapters of Jonah are dedicated to the detour of His life. Three days he spent inside of this big fish. When the Israelites came to the Promised Land, they’re at the Promised Land with the option to go in. Would they choose to go in or would they not have the faith to do so? Of course we know the story. They didn’t trust God enough to do that, and so God took them on a forty-year detour. That just seems so long. Forty years. I just hope it doesn’t take me that long to change. I don’t want to go on a forty-year detour.

But just keep in mind when they went on this wilderness detour it was a training experience where God gave them food every day. He had a pillar of fire by night, and a cloud during the day. They’d learn how to follow Him. They’d learn how to trust Him. Every day they learned those things daily so that forty years they’re doing that. When they get done with the forty years they come back to the same place again, the same place where they left off on the detour, and the word of the Lord comes to them a second time. He doesn’t always say the same words as it does in Jonah. But they were invited to come into the Promised Land and now they can do it. Now they go in and conquer the land because they’re ready to go.

We just have to understand the detours. If we can learn from the detours, God can do amazing things in our lives. The detours are valuable places where we learn things. If you’re in a detour today, you want to learn what you need to learn so that when God speaks again you’re able to go forward and do what He wants us to do.

I’m just reminded of the passage of scripture in Matthew 11:30 where He says, “*My yoke is easy and my burdens are light.*” If we can follow the path that He’s designed for us, we don’t have to keep going on the detours. We want to go in that direction and move forward the way God would have us go.

So now as we get to this part of the book of Jonah, he’s on the right track, he’s doing the right thing, and he’s going to obey the Lord.

Now we continue on in verse 3 where it says – *Now Nineveh was a very large city; it took three days to go through it.*

I was pondering three days. That's a really big city. Maybe there's a lot of open area and maybe that's why it's called this big city with all the open area in it. Maybe it's the circumference, he got around it the whole time. Or maybe it takes three days because he goes in for a little ways and then he goes and speaks and goes and speaks and it takes him three days to do it that way. I don't know, but it's a huge city that he's involved in.

It says *it was a very large city; it took three days to go through it.* Verse 4 says – *Jonah began by going a day's journey into the city, proclaiming, "Forty more days and Nineveh will be overthrown."*

So he had a message from the Lord that he's proclaiming to the people so that they would understand it. It's a hard message. There's no politically correct way to say this, that you're in trouble here. You're going to die if you keep living this way. You're going to lose that job, you're going to lose that relationship. You're going to lose that house, that bank account unless you make a change. There's no easy way to say you are in trouble and you're going to make a change. So he goes through and he proclaims this message is a very direct message because God desires salvation, not destruction. That's what He desires. So he's saying come on guys, make a change here. He's saying it's a limited time offer of forty days.

There is a point in our lives where the consequences of our actions eventually catch up to us so it just becomes overwhelming. God is saying, "Look here, guys, make a change." That's what He's saying. When you change, good things will happen.

The number forty is being used here. Forty days and you can make a change. Now all of us need to make changes in our lives. But seldom do we wake up and instantaneously stop a behavior that's creating problems for our lives or start a new behavior that's helpful. Usually it takes time to make that change. It's surprising to me how many times the word forty days is mentioned in the Bible as a period of time where things happen before newness, some kind of new things, happen.

Look at Noah's ark that was pelted with rain for forty days. Forty days of rain as part of something that was going on before a new mankind and a new start for mankind took place. Newness took place after a forty-day period of time.

Moses went up on to Mount Sinai. He was up there for forty days receiving the Ten Commandments. A very important time, forty days, when God is going to change the way He's working with him, He's making a covenant with him called the Mosaic covenant, and He's establishing law and order through all the law that Moses brings down from the mountain. Something new that God is doing in that forty-day period of time.

Joshua and Caleb were part of the twelve spies that went into the land to scope it out for forty days. It was a period of time where they would be checking this out. They'd be coming back and reporting to the people who were preparing themselves to either go into the land or stay in the wilderness. So they chose to stay in the wilderness, but it was an opportunity for them to make a major shift in their thinking and recognize the power of God that He could help them. Forty days they scoped out the land.

For Samuel we see that the Philistines were attacking or accusing or riling the Israelites up for forty days until David came in as a shepherd boy, killed Goliath, and kind of changed the whole situation. A new thing took place after those forty days.

Elijah was by the brook there with the angel comforting him and taking care of him when he was discouraged and depressed for forty days before God gave him a new assignment that he would be taking and running with in his life.

Remember Jesus was tempted by the devil for forty days in the wilderness before He started his new public ministry. After the resurrection Jesus for forty days spent time with the disciples and other people before He went up to heaven and ushered in the new era of the church.

That's fascinating to me. Forty days. It really struck me that forty days is used there. Why forty days? I don't know. Maybe God has designed us so it takes forty days for us to change. You've heard that you can start a new habit in twenty-one days, whatever. Maybe God says forty days for a new habit to develop. Maybe if you're going to change your life you need to do that.

I remember two years ago I determined that I would lose weight. Where I was going was not good and I needed to lose weight. I eventually lost thirty pounds. But in that moment and that time I determined I would work on this for forty days based on this same principle that God can change people in forty days. It took me forty days to change patterns and thinking and all kinds of stuff in my own life. I really appreciate that because it wasn't just a temporary change. It was a permanent change in my lifestyle I need for forty days. So I focused on that, concentrated on that for that period of time and allowed God to work. A spiritual experience, not just a physical one, in my life.

I work with parents and help children change through their parents. This next week on Sunday I start training a new group of coaches. These are coaches all around the United State and Canada who each one in order to come into my group of training must bring a parent and parent's problem in the group. In the group we're discussing those problems and sending solutions back with those people.

This is what I tell the coaches. You are going to see miracles take place in the lives of these people. I get so jazzed by this. This is so exciting for me because after about week three or four, I start hearing the stories about the major changes that are taking place. The parents in one way or another are saying, "Wow, I didn't know this was possible. I call that a miracle." I said you're going to see miracles in the lives of people in forty days. Now it's an eight-week program, but there's about forty days with those eight weeks that they're really concentrating and focusing on. Why? Because forty days seems to be this pattern that's being used here that we can make changes in.

Just ask yourself this question: Where could you be in forty days? Are you fed up with some area of your life and you want to make some significant changes? You say, "I'm going to adjust and I'm going to make changes. I'm going to make this a spiritual experience and allow God to work in my life over the next forty days and make some changes." God does amazing things in

finances, in emotions, in relationships. He does amazing things, I would suggest miracles, in the lives of people when He works.

Now this is Jonah going in and he's giving the message out to these people for forty days. The interesting thing about the story is that they respond on day one. My guess is it's going to take them forty days to change some of their thinking and some of their behavior, but on day one they make the change.

So read the next verse, verse 5. It says – *The Ninevites believed God.* That was really fast. If you think as the prophet, you're going in there and you're going to have to convince these guys, you're going to have to yell at them, you're going to have to give them all the reasons and explain all the ways. That isn't what happened. Sometimes we contact people or we share with people the gospel of Jesus, we talk to them about who Jesus is and they're ready. I know I have a problem, I see the benefit of this, I want it. That's exactly what's going on with the Ninevites. They were ready. They need God. They know it. They want God.

Their seriousness is demonstrated in the rest of verse 5, using two words there to describe how serious and passionate they are about the change that needs to take place, *fasting* and *sackcloth*. I'm just going to point that out as we go through. Verse 5 – *A fast was proclaimed (a fast demonstrates they're serious. We're going to take this really seriously), and all of them, from the greatest to the least, put on sackcloth.* Sackcloth was a way that they demonstrated sorrow or regret or this idea of repentance, this sense of we want to do this different. We're serious about this.

Verse 6 – *When Jonah's warning reached the king of Nineveh, he rose from his throne, took off his royal robes, covered himself with sackcloth and sat down in the dust.*

The idea here is that this is a revival. Now I want to take the words repentance and revival and I want to broaden your understanding of them. Repentance is often what we use to describe this turning yourself completely over to God and repenting. If you haven't done that, then that is the repentance that you want to do. It is total spiritual repentance where you're giving yourself to God and it's a transformation of your heart that's re-centering your heart on God. It's just miraculous; it does amazing things to you.

But I also want to suggest that repentance is also like what I did with my food. I was eating a particular way and I made a change in my lifestyle. That was repentance, a change of heart for me. It's the same thing that happens when a child learns to be kind to his brother, respectful to his mother, or clean his room, and change the pattern that's going on. That's a change of heart.

In the same way when we think about revival we think about how God transforms either a person or a group of people through the power of prayer, that God does amazing things, and people are transformed from the inside out. But the word revival comes from revive, which means to make life come about again inside of someone.

I would suggest that we all need revival regularly. Just think about your life, whether it's forty days or one day. Just think what might God want to revive in you? Maybe you've come to a

place where you feel hopeless about something, or you feel we can't do this anymore, or even that God can't use you and you need that area of your life revived, and that is available. It's available today. It's available because of what God wants to do in our lives.

The Ninevites demonstrated this. Jonah in his repentance and doing what God wanted him to do, we see all that, but we don't see in Jonah very much regret. We don't see that at least described. But the Ninevites, these people in Nineveh, this is the biggest transformation of a people group in the Bible that we see. A whole people group was ready to make a transformation in their lives. They declare a fast, they respond immediately, even the king responds, although I'm not sure everybody needed a proclamation.

In verse 7 notice the proclamation goes out. *This is the proclamation he issued in Nineveh: "By the decree of the king and his nobles: Do not let people or animals, herds or flocks, taste anything; do not let them eat or drink. But let people and animals be covered with sackcloth. Let everyone call urgently on God."*

That word *urgently* is important. In fact I would suggest there's several things that describe this kind of a broken prayer that we see, this characterization of a repentance kind of a prayer. I want to draw your attention to this because I think this may be what God speaks to you about as we're going through here. I want you to see the different ways that this is described. Let me continue reading a little bit and then we'll come back.

It says – *"Let them give up their evil ways and their violence. Who knows? God may yet relent and with compassion turn from his fierce anger so that we will not perish."*

Interesting way that we're looking at God here. In fact the word repent there is used about God. That God will repent and change His mind. That's the idea. It's a human way of looking at God, to imagine God with compassion or imagine God changing His mind is a human way of understanding God so that it makes sense to us.

God has a master plan and one of the things He does is He uses our prayers as part of accomplishing that master plan. So we come to the Lord and we pray. God uses the prayers to change the course of human history and we see that change take place. So it is a description of what is happening that God may come and do those things, that He'll change what's going on. We pray in hopes that God will respond to our prayers. He always responds, but He responds in ways that are different than what we would wish. The point is we're coming before the Lord saying, "God, here's what I wish. Here are my desires that I'm giving to you, but your will be done," is the kind of prayer that we pray.

I want you to see what this repentance prayer looks like in the lives of the Ninevites and I think what it can look like in our lives too. The first characteristic I think of repentance prayer is brokenness. It's coming to this place where we say, "Lord, I can't do it this way anymore. I'm done." We're still struggling like the guys on the boat when Jonah said, "You've got to throw me over, you've got to get rid of me. I can't be on the ship." The Bible said they went back and rowed harder. That's what people do today. They just row harder instead of having this

brokenness that says, “Okay, I’m going to do, Lord, what you tell me to do.” They demonstrated this brokenness with an outward response to what was going on inside of them.

I think there’s an appropriate time to be sad. I don’t think as Christians we always just put a smile on our face and everything is happy. I think God gives us joy in the midst of any circumstances. But there’s an appropriate time to be sad and this is it. Sad in the sense of repentance and brokenness. That’s what they’re experiencing. It’s the same thing.

You remember David when he sinned with Bathsheba and the Bible says he wrote this song after he experienced the forgiveness or he wanted forgiveness from God. In Psalm 51 it says right in there that *this psalm was written right after the sin with Bathsheba and prays this psalm*. He says – *Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a right spirit within me. Restore to me the joy of your salvation, and uphold me with a willing spirit*. Lord, I’m doing this with all of who I am. If you go five verses later in that same psalm, it says these words – *My sacrifice, O God, are a broken spirit; a broken and contrite heart, O God, you will not despise*.

So *the sacrifices of God are a broken spirit*. There’s this brokenness that comes on us. We say, “God, I can’t do this on my own. I need you. I need what you want to do in my life.” Sometimes God uses big fish experiences to break us, but I do know that sometimes it’s just we come in our hearts, we say, “God, I need you,” and that constant brokenness that we have, that humility allows God to work. Because who does He give His grace to? He *gives grace to the humble*. So humility is key to experiencing that grace that He wants to give to us. There’s this very important concept. This brokenness is important.

Just ask yourself about your opinion of the church today. Do you think the church is healthy today? I’m sure there are a lot of people who would say the church is healthy, but I think there are good things about the church today and while sometimes people say the church is doing great, compare that to the world, because the world is doing terrible. So if we can’t compare the church to the world, then what do you have? You have some good stuff in the church. But if you compare the church today to the New Testament church, wow, we’ve got a long way to go. The church has a long way to go and I think it starts with this brokenness that God wants to do in our lives.

The second thing is characterized by the word the king says in the passage we just read. Urgent. There’s a sense of urgent that we need to have. People who pray revival prayers are people who pray long, hard, intense, unyielding prayers from the depths of their hearts. It’s a life-changing prayer. It’s a prayer that comes right from where they are. One writer says it’s called full throttle praying. Just totally dedicated to coming before the Lord. It’s not just “Lord, I want to pray revival prayer for my marriage one week.” No. This is like full on praying.

We like this verse in Jeremiah 29:11-13. It says – *For I know the thoughts that I think toward you, says the LORD, thoughts of peace and not of evil, to give you a future and a hope. Then you will call upon me and go and pray to me, and I will listen to you. And you will seek my face and find me, when you search for me with all your heart*. That heart that says I long for God as the most important thing in my life. He’s everything for us.

The third dimension of a repentance prayer has to do with behavior change. If you look at the verse and the passage, do not do evil is what it's talking about. Do the right thing. We also see that in James 5:16. This is a verse about powerful prayer. It doesn't say that the prayer of a man is powerful. That isn't what it's saying. It's this *prayer of a righteous man*, a person who's choosing to do what's right and comes before the Lord. That is a powerful prayer that we have. So we see the king making this proclamation, we see the people making a change, and God, we'll see, is going to spare the city. We'll talk more about that in a couple weeks when we come back to the response.

Next week we're going to spend more time on this repentance. I think there's more here for us on some practical level that's very helpful. I think if we're serious about being His people and about God being found in our lives, everywhere in our lives, we must make sure that our hearts are holy and our hands are holy. Our hearts are pure. That's what God wants. We want to serve Him with all of our hearts. It's just amazing.

Look at verse 10. I want to conclude with that verse today. Verse 10 says – *When God saw what they did and how they turned from their evil ways, he relented and did not bring on them the destruction he had threatened.*

Here's what's happening in the passage. Jonah shares the message, the people believed in God, and Nineveh became a new creation. God did amazing things in their lives. That is the greatest miracle of this passage.

Now some people like to look at the book of Jonah because of the miracle of the fish and all of the stuff. People like those kinds of miracles – how can a fish swallow a person and how can a person live in a fish for three days. All that is a miracle, no doubt. But the great miracle is when God changes a human heart. When He changes the hearts of people in Nineveh, that is the greatest miracle. That is the amazing thing that took place in this story.

God delights in doing those kinds of miracles. He changes us. I love watching that take place. I see it regularly in the lives of children and parents. Sometimes you'll share a story of what God is doing in your life or in the life of someone you know, a miracle that God is doing in some way. It's amazing. I love hearing those miracles. It's why I get up in the morning. It's what I enjoy, watching God work and see what He does in people's lives.

New life is available. It can start today. What might God do in your life in the next forty days? Let God speak to you in that. And maybe He'll prompt you in some way to dedicate a new area of your life to Him that you haven't before. Wow. And that would be a miracle. Because at the end you're going to say, "Wow, I didn't know that could happen." It could be so surprising what God could do in our lives.

Would you stand with me, please? Let's pray together.

[PRAYER] Heavenly Father, I want to thank you for your grace in our lives, how you change us. Lord, it is a challenge. We are busy people. We have so many things going on, so many commitments. It's hard to imagine such a major event take place in our lives. Lord, I pray that

you would make a way, that you would provide the motivation, that you would provide the opportunity, and you'd provide the grace to make it happen in our lives each one. Thank you for the privilege of being part of the miracle you want to do in other people's lives and in our own hearts. Do it, we ask. In Jesus' name, amen.