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Second Chances

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Series: Jonah

Jonah 3

**BIG IDEA – GOD RESTORES JONAH AND USES HIM TO BRING REVIVAL**

College students are back. This means that over this last week, thousands of young people descended on the city of Winston-Salem to start college for the first time as a freshman, but others came to be sophomores, juniors, seniors, and maybe a few of you super-seniors. Good luck. We're glad you guys are here.

For me, I spent 13 years on the college campus. No, it did not take me that long to get my bachelor's degree. I spent four years at Elon University not too far from here, then I spent five years doing college ministry at UNCG, and then I spent another four years at Duke University.

So, I don't know a lot of things, but I know the college campus, and here's what I know. You know this if you went to college, and you know this if you've been *in* college. There is no such thing as being spiritually neutral in college. It's either a greenhouse spiritually or it's a wasteland.

So, you're brand new. You're a college student. I just want to invite you and let you know we want to invest in you while you're in college. We're going to do that a bunch of different ways. One of the things I want to do is invite all of our college students to our Heights Conference coming up. This is going to be epic.

Actually, we will be in it two weeks from today. It's going to be that Friday, Saturday, and Sunday, September 6-8. You're not going to want to miss it. In fact, in anticipation for this massive event that we're believing God is going to use, have you noticed the tee shirt I'm wearing? This is really cool.

Some of you have been begging for some swag. You've been asking for some merch. Here's the good news. Today, I get to be like the Oprah Winfrey of our church and say, "Everybody gets a gift. You get a shirt. You get a shirt." We're giving everybody a shirt when you leave. It's in three different colors. We'll give you the information.

Here's what I want you to know. It's merch with a message on it. If you don't know your Bible very well, that's great. Let me explain this to you. It says, "In Winston as it is in heaven." There's this moment in Jesus' life... He's discipling these guys. I don't know exactly what happened, but they looked at Jesus and said, "Will you teach us how to pray?"

They never asked Jesus how to preach, but they asked Jesus how to pray, and then he tells us that famous Lord's Prayer. He says, "I want you to pray, 'Your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.'" In other words, pray the purposes and priorities of heaven for earth.

So, we said, "What if we personalized it just a little more and said, 'In Winston as it is in heaven?'" We want here to be like heaven. What happens in heaven? Jesus is worshiped. People are changed. That's exactly what we want to have happen. So, we want you to have this shirt. It's part of a spirit of expectation and anticipation. When you wear it or wash it or fold it, whenever you see it, pray this prayer over our city.

We're going to be doing one more thing in regard to prayer. Not this coming week, but the week after, we're going to be doing multiple days of morning prayer. We're going to come to the worship center the Tuesday, Wednesday, and Thursday before the Heights Conference just to walk and pray and seek God's face and pray this prayer for our city and our church. I hope you'll be able to make it one of those days or maybe many of those days. With that said, let's pray and dive into the book of Jonah.

Lord, I want to take a moment and pray this prayer over the city of Winston. Today we're going to get to see one man, Jonah, reach an entire city by simply telling them what God told him. I pray that we would be the type of people who show up and share the gospel all over our city and all over the college campuses, Lord, that from our neighborhoods to the nations we would be praying, "May it be on earth as it is in heaven." In Jesus' name, amen.

We all love comeback stories. We love a good comeback movie. Right? It's kind of interesting that you and I will go to the movie theater and give people money to sit in front of a screen to watch a good comeback story about some underdog. If you're older, it was *Rocky*, the underdog to the champion. Maybe more recently, more popular, would

be Will Smith in *The Pursuit of Happyness*. He's a down-and-out dad who becomes financially successful.

If you're like me, my favorite comeback story movie is *Rudy*. I just love it. He wanted to play football for Notre Dame, and in the very end, he finally gets in the last game and makes a tackle. It's all a true story. Guys, we love comeback so much it's what we remember about history. Nelson Mandela, 20 years in prison, gets out, and he gets to be the first Black president of South Africa. Amazing.

Or Abe Lincoln. When he was first engaged, his fiancée died. He had businesses that failed. He had elections he lost, and then he finally wins and leads our nation through a civil war. We love stories like that. This is why we love to watch sports. Was anyone else in here thrilled when, back in 2019, Tiger Woods had a comeback at the Masters? It was incredible.

Do you know what I loved about it? Tiger Woods messed his life up badly. I remember I was having dinner with my dad when the news broke years and years ago. No one mentioned that when he had his comeback. We were all excited for him. We wanted him to win again.

Well, the reason we love comebacks is because we love second chances. I think, deep down inside, we all know that maybe, one day (maybe we already know we need it), we or someone we know and love is going to need a second chance, so we hope we believe in those things.

If you'll turn to Jonah, chapter 3, Jonah needs a second chance. Do you ever need a second chance? Here's a game you can play. The younger you are the less it works because you haven't lived a lot of life yet. Look back over your life and think, "Is there anywhere I have regret and wish I could relive?" That's where you wish you had a second chance.

To quote the great theologian EMINEM, "Life ain't no Nintendo game." Wouldn't it be awesome if it was? Like, "Oh, that didn't work out. I'll just go play that level again." Sometimes you're like, "No, I don't get to go back and do kids in the home." Sometimes people are like, "You know what I wish? I wish I could get a second chance to start over in our marriage." "I wish I could get a second chance to do a career path I would think is valuable."

Well, here's the message for today. This is, I think, the most exciting chapter. I mean, it pales in comparison to the whale. This is the most exciting chapter in the book because in this chapter Jonah, a guy we would never think deserves a second chance, gets a second

chance. In fact, he gets restored to God, restored to ministry (you need to be restored to both, by the way), and restored to others, and he gets to preach a revival.

Today we get to see the most successful sermon in human history preached by somebody who, if we were in chapter 2, probably thinks he messed up his life. Guys, some of you need a second chance, and I have good news. Because Jesus Christ was your substitute in his life, death, and resurrection, you get more than a second chance. You get a third, fourth, and fifth, and you're going to need them.

## 00 JONAH BACK ON DRY LAND

With that said, turn with me to Jonah, chapter 3. I want us to learn some lessons from Jonah. Now, remember the background. Jonah is beached and bleached. He's beached because he's back on the beach. He's bleached because he has been inside of this whale. Most people think that made him pale. The whale made him pale because of the acidic stuff in there.

So, he's beached and bleached, and he's back on dry land. Here's what happens. ***"Then the word of the LORD came to Jonah the second time..."*** You get a second chance because God comes to you a second time. ***"...saying, 'Arise, go to Nineveh, that great city, and call out against it the message that I tell you.'"***

Now, if you've been following along (and we're only in week three, so hopefully you have), you might say, "Kyle, it feels like we're back in chapter 1." It's almost like chapter 2 didn't even happen. This is really cool. Do this with your Community Group. Go look at the difference between what God says in chapter 3 and what God says to Jonah in chapter 1. It's the exact same thing.

What's the principle? When you don't obey God's Word, you don't get a different word. He doesn't come and say, "All right. All right. Let's compromise. Let's go Dutch. You go halfway, I go halfway." He doesn't say, "You know what? That was too hard of a word. You're right. He can't handle it. She can't handle it. I'm going to change it. I'm going to make it easier." That's not what he does. Instead, he's going to restore Jonah, and he's going to do this *with* Jonah. He's going to give Jonah the message so Jonah can carry this out.

## 01 HOW DOES GOD RESTORE JONAH?

So, what I want to talk to you about is how God restores Jonah. There are a couple of key principles I want you to see. The first way God restores Jonah is by speaking his Word to him. Yes, it's the same word. If you're like, "I'm stuck," the way forward is to go back. You just go back. "What's the last thing God told me to do that I've not done?" That's where you go. The way out is the will of God. You obey your way out.

So, he takes him back. He restores him by the Word. Now, the Word is so powerful, because God can use the Word to restore you in so many different ways. This is why we are Bible people here. Think about it, guys. We give half of the service to the teaching of the Bible. That's a lot of time.

Sometimes the Word of God needs to come to you and comfort you, and that's how you're going to be restored. Some of you need a second chance because something was done to you. It's hard on people. You can't ever see the person who did that to you the same. There's betrayal. There's manipulation. There's abuse. There's violence. There's gossip. There are a lot of things that can be done *to* you, and sometimes the Word of God needs to come to you and comfort you.

Sometimes the Word of God needs to come to you, and the way you're going to be restored is you're going to start to be convicted. This is what happens. Sometimes you'll be in here, and someone is teaching here, or you're somewhere else or you're reading the Bible, and all of a sudden, it hits you. It's like, "What am I doing in my marriage? What am I looking at?" You'll have this intense conviction.

God is beginning to restore you, but first he has to convict you so you know you need to be restored. Sometimes God restores us by creating faith in us. The Word of God feeds faith. It has this amazing power in our lives. It gives us the supernatural strength to do what God has said.

So, here's what happens. The Word of God comes. In fact, the Word of God has all of these different pictures. The Word of God is called *bread* because we need strength and food. The Word of God is called *medicine* because we need to be healed. If you want to fall more in love with the Word of God, you need to read Psalm 119. It's the longest chapter in your Bible, and it's a love letter about the Word of God. It's amazing.

There are three things God does to Jonah to restore him, and they're really important. First, you have to get back in the Word and around the Word. You don't have to get *through* the Word; you have to get the Word through *you*. You don't have to mark up your Bible; you have to be marked by your Bible. That's the first thing.

The second thing... I love this. When you read a Bible passage... This is a great study hack if you're like, "I need to get more out of my Bible." Read it, see what it's saying, and then

ask, "What is it *not* saying? What is the opposite of this?" Or you could ask, "What's missing?"

If you go back and look at the word God gives Jonah in chapter 3... Yes, he's saying the same word. Yes, he's going to give him the same mission. Here's what God *doesn't* do. God doesn't keep bringing up Jonah's failures and sins. You need to have a right view of God. We basically tend to view God the way we tended to view our parents.

Let me say this, parents. I love you. I know you're trying your best. I want to build you up, not beat you up. But sometimes the way parents handle discipline with their children reinforces a wrong idea of what God is like. Have you ever seen this? It's like, "All right. You did something that angered Dad, and now Dad is grumpy for two weeks."

Or "You upset Mom, so I hope you're ready for the silent treatment and the cold shoulder. I don't know when happy Mom is coming back, and neither do you. We just don't know where she went." Or the house where nothing is ever really talked about and nothing is ever finalized and there are skeletons in the closet, elephants in the corner, and snakes under the rug. No one wants to live in that house.

Here's what happens. It's not that there aren't consequences for sin; it's that Jonah already experienced those. He was on the ship. He was in the water. He was inside the whale. He had this whole conversation with God last chapter. Okay. Here's what I want you to know: God disciplines us, we confess our sin, and he covers it. That's how it works.

Listen. Sin is meant to be covered. Please, I cannot handle knowing all of your sin. You can't handle knowing all of my sin. I'll prove this to you. Genesis 3. Remember when they first sin? Adam and Eve are naked. They try to cover their sin with fig leaves. When God finally has the conversation with them, he doesn't say, "Take those fig leaves off and walk around naked." If you read the story carefully, he says, "I have to cover you with something better."

Sin is meant to be covered. The way it works is we confess, and then God covers it, and he's not going to keep bringing it up again and again. Some of you do that with yourself and the things you did in your past. God forgives you. You need to forgive yourself. You don't get to have a higher standard than God. Okay? If God says it's forgiven, it's forgiven.

The greatest image in my mind of this in parenting is when you have to (this will offend a few of you) spank your kids. Now, I know a few of you say, "We don't discipline Junior." We know you don't discipline Junior. The Kids ministry volunteers have told us you don't discipline Junior. Thank you.

You only spank as a last resort for a clear offense, a crossing of the line, during certain ages, but here's the thing. When they're young... This happened with all of my kids. A kid is 5 years old. You say, "That was wrong." They crossed a line. They're going to get spanked.

You know this if you've ever done this. The first thing they do as soon as the discipline is over is jump into your arms. Why? Because they want the discipline to be over and the relationship to be restored. That's what God is saying. God is like, "I handled it at the cross. You confessed it. You dealt with the consequences." Some of you need to hear this. "There's a lot of work to be done. Quit moping around in self-pity, which is a form of pride."

That basically leads to the third thing. So, God comes to us with his Word, he disciplines us, but then restores the relationship, because he's like, "Jonah, we have a lot to do." Here's the third thing: he gives Jonah something to do. Golly, you need something to do. Right? There's nothing more dangerous than a bored man. Stay away from him. Do not date him. He's looking at things he shouldn't.

We used to say in college ministry that May ended up being mayhem. The reason was all of the kids would go home from their great experience of being disciplined in college, and then they would just veg out and waste their lives all summer, starting in May, because they had nothing to do, no structure.

Do you know that the Protestant work ethic...? I hope you've heard of that. Where did that come from? That's an American thing. It came from the Puritans being afraid not to be busy. We say around here, "Men are like dump trucks. They drive straighter with more weight on their back." That's what you want.

Here's why. If you decided today, "Man, I'm going to start being more missional. I'm going to start doing more ministry," it would actually create more spiritual health in your life. Here's what I'm trying to say. Some of you are still stuck in some sin, and the way out is ministry to other people.

Here's what happens. If you've ever stepped out a little bit and said, "Okay. I'm going to step out, and I'm going to ask this guy if he wants to meet, and we're going to read the Bible together..." What's the first thing you're going to think if you're going to meet some guy and read the Bible with him? You're going to think something like, "I'd better be reading my Bible, because it would be embarrassing to meet with somebody where we're supposed to read the Bible and I don't read it."

Or you're like, "Man, I don't want to ask this young guy some accountability questions, because what if he asks me the same questions? I'd better be ready. I'd better be living above reproach." Sometimes it is living a missional life that helps you fight temptation.

I knew one guy who said every once in a while, the sexual temptation would be so strong. He said, "I'd be all alone. It was so strong." He said, "The only thing I could do to get rid of it was I'd have to go share the gospel with a stranger." Well, that'll change how you're feeling pretty quickly.

## 02 GOD LOVES CITIES

Jonah is restored, he's sent on mission, and he's sent to a city. I want to show you this. Look at verse 3. ***"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."*** God sends Jonah to a city. I want to talk to you about cities for a minute.

I don't know that we've ever had a conversation on a theology and philosophy of cities, but it's an important concept. In the apostle Paul's ministry in the New Testament, he only targets cities. In fact, his ministry is so successful in cities that the word we use for *pagan* meant rural person, because the only people who were not reached under Paul's ministry were people who lived out in the rural areas, because Paul went to the cities.

Now, what is a city? I mean, all cities are different. There's Charlotte and Raleigh and Greensboro and Durham and Winston and all that. What every city has in common is density and diversity. Basically, there are a lot more people in cities. That's why God loves cities. I'm not saying God loves cities more than he loves any other part. I'm saying God loves cities because God loves people made in his image.

Right now, more people live in cities than live outside of cities. You're not even going to believe this. It's such a big number I'm not even sure if it's helpful. Eight million people a month move to a city somewhere in the world. It's just increasing. But there's not just density; there's diversity. If I can try to redeem a word that has been hijacked, it would be the word *diversity*.

Basically, what it means is there are all of these types of people in cities who aren't anywhere else. The late, great Tim Keller, whom I love, who I wish was around to give us some cultural commentary nowadays... He went to be with the Lord last year. Basically, he lived in Manhattan. Think about living in Manhattan. Every time I go to Manhattan... I'm there for three days, and I'm like, "Get me out of here."



He lived there for 30 years, pastoring. After 30 years in Manhattan, he said there are four types of people who, if you don't go to the city, you will never reach. First, the next generation. The next generation always moves to the city, the vast majority of them while they're single or while they do the "double income, no kids, have three dogs" thing.

You know what I'm talking about? You see them downtown. They all live downtown. There are more dogs than kids downtown. Basically, you're not going to reach the next generation... We're not saying you have to only go to the city. I'm saying if you avoid the city, you don't reach the next generation. Most college campuses are next to cities.

Secondly, if you don't go to cities, you never reach the elites, because the elites, aka the culture-making people of any city, live *in* the city, and those who make the culture for the whole nation live in the major cities in the nation. Yes, they hate Christianity. Yes, they have a completely different worldview.

We don't like to be around people who think differently than us, but if we don't... Let me tell you what happened in the twentieth century. All of the Christians got afraid of cities and celebrity culture and mainstream media, and all of the Christians pulled out.

Then we get to the early 2000s, and everyone is like, "Why don't we have any Christian newspapers? Why are there no Christian books? Why are there no Christian movies?" It's like, "You left!" or "Your parents left." Everybody left the city. So, you have to reach the elites.

Thirdly, all of the unreached people groups in the world are moving to cities. This is interesting. When an unreached people group... I don't know. Somebody from India who's very poor. I don't know how all this works. Somehow they get to Winston-Salem. They're not living in Pfafftown.

People from unreached people groups, the poor from all over the world, feel most comfortable in a city because they can remain anonymous and there are a lot of different types of people and a lot of different types of languages. Here's the thing, guys. The Bible tells us we are to go to the world. We live in the first time in human history where the world is coming to us.

Then fourthly (you know this, and you see them), the poor are in the city. Remember the apostle Paul? In this kind of obscure passage in the New Testament, he said, "I was so excited about doing ministry, and Peter asked me if I would please not forget the poor." He said, "The one thing I was eager to do. Never forget the poor." And where are the poor? Well, they're all over the city. The bigger the city, the more poor people there are everywhere.

So, if we're going to be committed to reaching these unique types of people, we have to be, at some level, committed to the city. That doesn't mean we have to live in the city. One of the things that's unique about our church is... Not every church needs to do this, but we had a conviction to be in downtown. That's why we went to Goler AME Zion way back in 2016 right next to Wake medical school.

This is why we got Northwest Boulevard (we still have it as our student center) right next to downtown. This is why it's unbelievable that we have 13 acres in the center of our city. One real estate developer told us we're in the only part of the city where new things can be developed. This is it. Praise the Lord. We're the early adopters. We are in an under-resourced and up-and-coming area all at the same time, and we came here not just with a church vision but with a city vision.

### **03 HALF THE BATTLE IS SHOWING UP!**

Anyway, I wanted you to see that. He sends him to a city. Now I want you to see what he does. He sends him to a city but with a message. Look with me at verse 3. ***"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."***

I do love this. If you were reading this slowly by yourself and finally got to this verse, chapter 3, verse 3, you'd probably say something like, "Finally! Finally, Jonah. I mean, we did waste multiple days. We did waste multiple chapters on you not doing what God has said, but now you're doing what God has said."

Maybe here's another big idea for your life out of this book: Half the battle is showing up. Half the battle is saying, "God, I'm available." God doesn't care as much about your ability as about your availability. God doesn't care a ton about your high skills that make you look good; he cares about high surrender. "I'm all in."

Sometimes the most time wasted is the time getting started. Guys, I want to encourage you. It's simpler than you think. Half the battle is showing up. What is the hardest machine to work at the gym? The front door. Right? I promise you if you can show up and get through that front door, you will get in shape. The biggest problem in so many of our lives is we don't show up.

We're not explicitly Christian and highly relational. We're not publicly following Jesus. We're not praying with our eyes wide open. Let me ask you this question: Who has God put in front of you? God put in front of Jonah the Ninevites. Sometimes God puts in front

of you a classmate. Sometimes it's a coworker. Sometimes it's a neighbor. Sometimes it's a family member. Sometimes it's a friend.

God is just saying, "I promise you half the battle is a willingness to show up and share and leave the results to God." I know what we're afraid of. We're like, "I don't want to offend people." If you don't share the gospel, you're offending God. So you can decide. "I don't think I want to offend the Creator of the universe. I want God to be bigger in my mind than the person I'm afraid to share with."

I know that's not easy to get to, but I think I can show you how to do it. Look at verse 4. ***"Jonah began to go into the city, going a day's journey. And he called out, 'Yet forty days, and Nineveh shall be overthrown!'"*** I don't want to over push this point, but I think it's interesting that we get the moment where he enters the city.

People who are better at sharing their faith than we are talk about a phrase I want to give you. They talk about *entry points*. He had to figure out how to get into the city. Sometimes you need to figure out, "How am I going to get into a spiritual conversation?"

It's very hard to go from casual to meaningful in a moment. You know, you're talking about whether or not the Carolina Panthers are going to be good this year, and you're like, "By the way, if you die tonight..." You're like, "Uh..." It's too big of a leap. What they say is an *entry point* is when you can go from casual to meaningful to spiritual. And you'll know you're talking about something meaningful.

The way you talk about something meaningful... I can give you a hack. You be genuinely interested in the person. Basically, if you're talking to the real person, it will be so fascinating you won't be able to handle it. Not their persona. If you get to the real them, and they start talking to you about growing up as a single mom, you're like, "Dude, this is the most fascinating conversation I've ever had because I'm talking to the real you."

If you start talking to the real them, and you're the real you, then all of a sudden you're having a meaningful conversation. I'm not saying the spiritual conversation is going to go well, but you can get to the spiritual conversation. The missionary who told me this said where they're at, in their context, they'll do things like ask if they could pray for someone. I mean, not randomly, but if the person is going through something, that might be an entry point. Maybe they'll hear that my faith is sincere as I pray for them.

Another question they like to ask is "Man, would you ever be interested in hearing my spiritual journey?" That feels fairly inoffensive to me to ask that question. I mean, the worst they're going to say is "No," but if they're your friend, probably "Yes." Or here's another one. "Would you be interested if I could share with you the main message of the

Bible in less than five minutes?" "Well, the Bible is a big book, and I never..." Who knows what they would say. Jonah finds entry points. He gets into the city, and he goes in.

## 04 THE MESSAGE WE PREACH

Now look here. I want you to go back to verse 2, because I want you to see something. This is important. **"Arise, go to Nineveh, that great city, and call out against it the message that I tell you."** So, God says "Go" but gives us a message. Drop down to verse 4. We get to see him preach this message. **"And he called out, 'Yet forty days, and Nineveh shall be overthrown!'"**

Okay. Let's play the game again. What does God *not* say? This is where I think Christians get confused. Notice the emphasis is on preaching. Preaching isn't just what I do here; preaching in the New Testament is communicating theology without apology.

Sometimes you will *dialogue* the gospel. "Let's talk. Let's casually talk." Sometimes you will *defend* the gospel. There's a whole discipline called *apologetics*. Other times you will *declare* the gospel. Not necessarily with a bullhorn or on a stage but just intensely to somebody you love who's far from God and close to you.

Listen. God sends Jonah to Nineveh, and he doesn't say, "Jonah, be a good example." Could you imagine? "Live like a Christian. Hopefully they're going to ask you some questions." He doesn't say, "What I want you to do is serve them." We're not against serving people. We're not against being a good example. He uniquely talks about the need to open your mouth and tell people about Jesus.

Now, he says, "Here's the message *I'm* going to give you." Basically, when I think about evangelism, I think about my first job. I've had a lot of jobs in my life. My first job was a part-time job. It was just once a week. This happened in fourth grade. I'm glad my parents made me do this. In fourth grade, I got my first job. I was a delivery boy for a local newspaper that just came out on Thursdays.

I remember we had 54 houses in my neighborhood, and I had the bags. Here's the thing. I didn't write the news; I delivered it. That's what we are as Christians. If we're going to be faithful Christians, we just deliver the news to other people. If we were an animal, we would be the mockingbird. We don't sing our own song; we just sing what God has told us. The truth is public domain.

Here's the interesting thing. We're not to take away from the message and we're not to add to it. Let me give you the four components of the Christian message. Maybe you can

share this all in one sitting. Maybe you do this over time with someone. Basically, people have to know four things.

They have to know God made them on purpose for a purpose. Actually, that's the good news. See, the gospel goes "good news, bad news, good news." You'll see in a second. Good news is "God made you on purpose for a purpose. You're not an accident." People need to hear that. "You're not here for no reason, and when you die, you don't disappear."

The second thing people need to hear is (and they know this), "You're a sinner by nature and choice. You don't just have accidents and make mistakes; you are a sinner." You normally need to take somebody through the Ten Commandments, or any of them. The Ten Commandments are a moral mirror to look at yourself with, and they realize, "Oh man, I *am* a sinner." So that's bad news.

Good news: "God loves you." Bad news: "You've messed it up." Good news: "Christ died for you." You have to talk about his life, his death, and his resurrection. Jesus lived, and he was our perfection. That's his life. And Jesus died, and he was our punishment. That's his death. That's what happened at the cross.

The fourth thing is you have to call people to respond, especially in the Coexist bumper sticker culture that we live in now where the most likely response to sharing that is "I'm so glad it works for you. I have a friend like you. I have an uncle who lives in Detroit. I think he believes that." It's like, "This is an objective reality. I'm calling you to repent and believe in the gospel."

That's always the most awkward thing you do is when you warn people... In fact, did you notice that's what he does? He says, "Forty days, and then you'll face judgment." The hardest thing to do is to help the people we love all around us see spiritual danger, because people feel like, "This is amazing. I love my job. I love my house. I have a lot of time left. I'm a good person." It's like, "Okay, okay." How do we let people see where sin leads? How do we communicate to people "God is patient with you in your sin, but I promise you he's not ultimately tolerant of you in your sin"?

## **05 THE RESPONSE TO GOD'S WORD**

So, Jonah goes and preaches this message. He doesn't even exactly know what's going to happen. It ends up being, like I told you at the beginning, the most successful sermon in human history. Let me show you what happens. Turn with me to verse 5. ***"And the people of Nineveh believed God."***

Notice it doesn't say they believed Jonah. They somehow were able to see that this message was from God, not just Jonah. Part of it is Jonah shared this with a sense of urgency and a sense of passion. I think, based on your temperament, based on your personality, when you're sharing the gospel with someone, there needs to be a sense of urgency. Here's the way I would say it. You go, "Kyle, what does that mean?" They need to believe that *you* believe it, even if *they* don't believe it.

I was in Salt Lake City a month or two ago. I'm getting my Uber back to the airport, and this guy picks me up. He's in his 60s. We start talking. "What's your background?" I'm engaged with him. He's engaged with me. I'm in Salt Lake City, so I find out he's a Mormon. We were on a 30-minute drive together, and he's trying to evangelize me to Mormonism the whole time.

Do you know one of the thoughts I had during that? "I respect this guy. I completely think he's wrong, but wow! He cares enough about me and thinks what he believes is true that he's trying to have a genuine, earnest conversation with me about some things." I mean, did it get a little crazy? Yes. He literally said to me at one point... I don't think this is even a Mormon belief.

He goes, "You know, they're supposed to have the 2034 games in Salt Lake City. It's not going to happen." I was like, "What?" He goes, "Jesus is returning before then." It's like, "Okay. And you know this for sure." What I'm trying to say is I respected his desire to share his faith with me because he really cared about me. That's what you want people to have.

Will Metzger was a college minister for years. He tells a story where he got a phone call one night. True story. He was in his 50s at this point. The guy calls him and says, "Hey, it's [so-and-so]. I was the bus driver for your college ministry event 20 years ago. It took me forever to track you down. I want to let you know I've become a Christian through multiple events in my life, and it started with you witnessing to me on the bus."

Then he said this to him: "I don't even remember what you said. I remember how you said it, and it put me on a journey, thinking, 'This guy thinks this is real and cares about it. Maybe I should investigate it a little bit more.'"

So, let's look at their response. **"And the people of Nineveh believed God."** Faith is not believing *in* God; faith is believing God. That's what faith is. **"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."** That's a picture of repentance. We read these things and think, "Oh, those people back then were so silly putting on sackcloth."

Here's what it means. When you put on sackcloth, it's not silk, so it completely irritates your skin. It was a way to symbolically say, "I'm going to show you on the outside how I feel on the inside." Part of what God the Holy Spirit does is he often will bring us to a place of repentance through bringing the irritation of sin and its consequences into our lives. So, all of these people believed. Then look here.

***"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 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, 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.'"***

So, this repentance happens, and repentance reaches the king. I want to show you a couple of things I think we can learn at the end here from the life and the story of the king. The first thing we can see is that repentance was public. His Christian faith was public. Everybody knew about it. See, our faith is supposed to be personal, but it's never supposed to be private.

What does this mean for today? What does this mean in America in twenty-first-century Christianity? What is the public sign of faith today? It's baptism. We'll occasionally ask someone to raise their hand if they want to accept Christ, but the Bible doesn't say you have to raise your hand to accept Christ. That's not the sign.

The Bible does not say you have to walk an aisle. The Bible does not say you have to go to some class. The Bible does not say you have to fill out a form. But in the wisdom of God, God wanted a visible demonstration of the Christian's faith before both the church and the world.

Here's why I'm telling you this. Some of you come to church and go, "I don't know. It's kind of hard to apply Kyle's sermons sometimes." I'm going to give you the easiest application ever. Some of you need to get baptized, and you need to do it in two weeks. It's going to be at our Heights Conference. We're going to celebrate it together.

It just does something to you. I think so often we talk about baptism, acting like, "Well, it doesn't save you." We know that, but I'm not acting like it doesn't make a big difference in your life, going public in your faith. So, the first thing he had was a public faith.

The second thing he did was he got off the throne. If you read back, it says he literally gets up... The first thing he does when he becomes a Christian is he gets off the throne of his life. Wow. See, the reason Christianity was so offensive... If you go back and read the gospel accounts, Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John...

If you read the birth narratives of Jesus, you're going to notice this guy named King Herod is really mad at him and all this kind of stuff. You're like, "What's going on there?" It's because King Herod understood something the average Christian sometimes doesn't get, which is the main message of Christianity. Another way to say it is there is a king...and it's not you. So, there's this realization the king has. He gets up off the throne of his life. But little things matter.

Thirdly, it says he takes off his robe. That's interesting. I mean, the king never takes off his robe in public. It's because being king was no longer the most important thing about himself. How do you know you've become a Christian? I try to give us personal things we can think about.

You know you've become a Christian when being a Christian is the most important thing about you. That's how you know, "I'm in. I'm a sinner, but I'm the real deal." You know you're a Christian when what Jesus Christ has done for you in his life, death, and resurrection is the most important, identity-shaping reality in your life.

Guys, this goes on to where we're told at the very end here that the entire city repents. You know, we plan stuff out way in advance. I had no idea that right when we were going to be in this is exactly when we were going to get this tee shirt, and I didn't know all that was going to be written on it. But do you know what I thought? Basically, if Jonah could be wearing a tee shirt when he goes to Nineveh, maybe it would say, "In Nineveh as it is in heaven."

He goes and preaches this successful sermon, and what ends up happening is revival. I want to talk about revival as we close. Jon Tyson, who I've mentioned before, is a student of revival. He's a revival chaser. If he hears revival is breaking out somewhere in the world, he gets on a plane and goes. He told me, "Kyle, revival is the acceleration of the work of God among a certain group of people."

So, we're going to end today saying, "Lord, would you...?" We're going to pray this shirt, "In Winston as it is in heaven," and we're going to be praying for revival in our city, which, again, is the acceleration of the work of God in a certain church or a certain city.

Here's what it means. It means that if in the next decade God was going to save 5,000 people in this city, we'd say, "God, would you do in days what you were planning on doing in decades?" Or if God said, "You know what? I could fix that marriage over the next five years with counseling or you could have a moment and I fix it right now."

What we're praying for is renewal. *Renewal* is personal. *Revival* is corporate. Some of you are here today, and you are like the Ninevites. You never heard the message until today, and that's totally fine. Welcome. The Ninevites didn't know they were in trouble. They



were laughing and dancing and drinking, and they were the most successful city of their time. They had no idea, and then they heard a message.

Some of you heard the message of salvation for the first time, and you need to believe God, repent, and get baptized in two weeks. We're going to celebrate with you. Some of you have heard this message before, but you really, really heard it and made it personal for the first time. We would love to talk to you. We'd love to celebrate your faith through water baptism in two weeks.

Then there are a bunch of you who need restored. I don't mean dramatic restoration. There are some of you who need that. I mean daily restoration. Here's what I want to say. For some of you, there needs to be some restoration in your marriage, and I want to encourage you. You can have a new marriage with the same spouse. For some of you, your family is broken and needs to be restored. We're going to help you. We're going to walk alongside. You can have a new family with the same people.

Guys, this is a second-chance church. We don't want your life to fall apart, but this is a place where your life can fall apart and we're going to put it back together. If you don't have that type of church, guess what you have: hiding in hypocrisy. We don't want that.

So, in a moment, I'm going to pray for you. And this isn't a self-help thing. The reason you need to be restored is you have your own revival you have to preach. Jonah made a mess, and then he got to make a big difference, and you can do the same thing. This isn't just about you. Your kids need a restored you. Your friends need the healthiest, happiest, holiest version of you. It's not optional. This isn't about you. This is so much bigger than you.

So, as we close, if you'd go palms up and receive this, and wherever you are... Maybe you pray for your own restoration in some little area. You're like, "Lord, it's finances for me. Restore unto me the joy of the Lord." Maybe it's a relationship in your life. Maybe it's something you've given up on. "Lord, restore my relationship with my dad or mom," you might say. For some of you, it's something someone did to you. Sometimes it's the restoration of a relationship.

Lord, would you come and restore us? Would you come and renew us? Would you uniquely use the Heights Conference? Lord, would you bring revival? Would you bring an acceleration of the work of God among our church and among our city? Lord, as we go out here soon, may we pray over our neighborhoods, over our families, and over our city. In Winston as it is in heaven. In Jesus' name we pray, amen.