

Second Chances (Jonah 3-4)

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Preacher: William HC

[0 : 00] Chapter 3. Chapter 3.

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. 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, that 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.

[1 : 34] But it was pleased Jonah exceedingly, and he was angry. And he prayed to the Lord and said, O Lord, O Lord, is not this what I said when I was yet in my country? That is why I made haste to flee to Tarshish, for I knew that you are a gracious God and merciful, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love, relenting from disaster.

Therefore now, O Lord, please take my life from me, for it is better for me to die than to live. And the Lord said, Do you do well to be angry? Jonah went out of the city and sat to the east of the city and made a booth for himself there.

He sat under it in the shade till he should see what would become of the city. Now, the Lord God appointed a plan and made it come up over Jonah so that it might be a shade over his head.

He saved him from his discomfort. So Jonah was exceedingly glad because of the plan. But when dawn came up the next day, God appointed a worm that attacked the plan so that it withered.

When the sun rose, God appointed a scorching east wind and the sun beat down on the head of Jonah so that he was faint. And he asked that he might die and said, It is better for me to die than to live.

[2 : 51] But God said to Jonah, Do you do well to be angry for the plan? And he said, Yes, I do well to be angry angry enough to die. And the Lord said, You pity the plan for which you did not labor, nor did you make it grow, which came into being in the night and perished in the night.

And should I not pity Nineveh, that great city, in which there are more than 120,000 persons who do not know the right hand from their left and also much cattle?

So do keep those two chapters open. And by the way, if English is your second language and you'd like a bit of help with the translation, do scan that QR code.

We are trialing a bit of an AI-assisted live translate. So, It can pick up Cantonese, Mandarin, a few other subtitles for your benefit.

So, hopefully that will be a service to you and particularly some of the families here. So, otherwise, let's, can we put up that QR code again just for a bit longer?

[4 : 04] Just for those who need it. Yep. Okay. And let me pray while we ask God to help speak to us. Father, we thank you for this part of your word.

Let it sit deep within us. Let this be a story that tells us, shows us what are the idols in our hearts.

Let it reveal how kind you've been to us, supremely in Jesus, and challenge us that we would show the same kindness to people who are not like us.

We pray all these things in Jesus' name. Amen. Okay. All right, Vincent, you might have to click for me. I can't find, oh, there it is.

Great. Okay. It's summer. It's holiday time. We've been watching a lot. Who's been watching movies at home? You know, just binge watching. Yes. Yep. Thank you, Constable Simon.

Anyone else? Yeah. Who's watched this movie before? Let me put this screen. Yeah. Okay. Surely. Some of us. Okay. This is the Pixar movie Up.

[5 : 11] It's an oldie, but a goodie. As some of you might know the story, there's two main characters. Carl Fredrickson, he's a grumpy, elderly man. He escapes being sent to a retirement home by flying his house up into the sky, doesn't he?

With the help of hundreds of balloons tied to his chimney. I think they tried to do this in real life. I'm not sure they succeeded, but it's a lot of fun to imagine what it would be like. I can't spoil too much of the plot for you because some of you might need to watch it.

But he sails off to Paradise Falls, but he ends up having to share this kind of South American adventure with the young boy, right? Russell, the wilderness explorer. From one generation to another, there's just all kinds of comedy, there's chaos, and actually eventually a beautiful story of intergenerational partnership, friendship, and love.

And one reason I like Up, it's actually an incredible story of redemption and sacrificial love, if you think about it, if you've got eyes to see it, right? And one of the reasons I also like this movie is that here is an older man, and he gets a second chance to appreciate what matters in life and to be kind of the father figure that he was never able to be.

Second chances. Do you believe in second chances? Yeah? If you don't believe in second chances, then Jonah is your story, right? Because what happened in Jonah's story? Here is a prophet.

[6 : 40] What a character. I feel like he's like a smush between the old guy, Carl Fredrickson, and Russell, right? Because he's often a wilderness explorer, but he's pretty angry, like the man that starred the movie.

Jonah. Last week, we went down and down and down with Jonah, some of you who were here. This week, we kind of go up with him, don't we, right?

Up to the city of Nineveh, and then up to a hill to discover how much kindness God has for these people, these people in that city who need to hear good news.

Those of you who joined us last week, we've already heard the story of chapter one and chapter two, so I won't recap it too long, but in essence, God said go, but Jonah said no.

In essence, Jonah, he ran away, right? Tried to run away, actually, but God kind of stopped him, and then he got thrown overboard the ship, and then he was praying, right?

[7 : 41] He was praying down in the depths of the fish, and we met someone who was very mixed up in how he saw life, knew his Bible well, but was very mean to other people, even the sailors who were repenting up on the ship before him.

You remember all that? And yet, despite all his hypocrisy, his selfishness, his complacency, we saw a merciful God who was willing to give Jonah a second chance, to preach to the Ninevites, to fulfill his calling.

And because the God of second chances to Jonah is the same God that we have today, we too have been given a second chance in Jesus, someone greater than Jonah.

Now, that's the one-minute summary of what we learned last week, wasn't it? And so today, I want to look at chapter 3 and 4 with the time that we have. In Jonah chapter 3 to 4, we see three main scenes that was read so well by Alan, and we see three things, revival, rage, and then compassion, right?

There's a revival in the city of Nineveh, and there's a bit of anger coming out from Jonah that we'll look into, and then finally, we're going to have a look at what a compassionate God would say to Jonah and to us.

[8 : 56] Okay, so look at your Bibles again. Chapter 1, sorry, chapter 3, verse 1. Listen to verse 1 again. 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.

You want to imagine the scene, right? Where's Jonah right now? He's on dry land. Maybe he's still smelling, dripping with fish vomit, right? That was the last location he was in, in the fish. And the Lord says to him in verse 2, what does he say?

Go to the great city of Nineveh. Proclaim to it the message I have given you. Jonah's tried running, but he knows he can't. So this time, Jonah, he obeys.

You see that, verse 3. He goes. He obeyed the word of the Lord, went to Nineveh. We need to remember how hard this was for him. Okay? Because remember, who were the Assyrians?

They were not friendly people to the Israelites. And, you know, if you were given the job title prophet of Israel, you probably would have wanted to be like all the other prophets who got to stay in Israel and just say, you know, judgment's coming on those guys and those guys.

[10:08] Please turn to God. Or, hey, Israel, you're doing the wrong thing. Please turn back to God. Lots of other prophets had hard messages, but at least they got to stay in Israel to share their message.

Of all the prophets in the Bible, only Jonah is told to go and tell his message kind of like an enemy territory. Okay? It's like an away game that none of us, you know, that's the worst ever.

Right? You want to imagine, you know, would you send your son or daughter to, I don't know, Saudi Arabia and then to preach at Mecca? Right? That's the toughness of his job.

So we want to have a little bit of sympathy for poor Jonah. He does go up to Nineveh, though.

Right? And in our Bibles, we learn it's a city so large it takes three days to travel through it.

But he's just a third of the way into town, verse 4, when he cries out his message. This is only five words in the original language. Yet 40 days and Nineveh shall be overthrown.

[11:08] But what happens next? Verse 5. They repent. Not just one person, not just two. That'd be nice. Everyone repents. Did you see that?

Right? And there's a bit of comedy here. People and animals. Right? What's going on here? And they all show their sorrow by fasting and everyone's dressed in sackcloth.

Kind of just like mourning clothes for when you're sad. Right? Okay? It's kind of like, you know, the PJs that you wear when you're depressed and you don't want to get out of bed. Right? Mourning.

This is after they hear, though, one of the shortest sermons of all time.

Can you imagine that? Imagine all of, I don't know, ISIS turning or North Korea turning to the Lord. We have a word for this, don't we, in Christian circles.

We call this revival. Revival can be a very popular word depending on what church background you come from. What does a real revival look like? Our story tells us.

[12:05] We see, I think, in Jonah chapter 3 two elements of true revival. One is that it's sparked by crisis. Sparked by crisis. Historians point out that around the time of Jonah's mission, actually, Assyria, right, historically, was also struggling at the time with various calamities and disasters.

You know, famines and plagues, revolts. There's even a record of an eclipse that scared people. Jonah happened to be preaching to a troubled city, filled with people, perhaps, that were more receptive to the word of God.

But we need to remember, it wasn't his great sermon that did it, right? A five-word sermon doesn't, you wouldn't learn much out of it. It was the God of second chances, turning hearts round.

And actually, there was a study conducted after the earthquakes in Christchurch here in New Zealand. And they found something similar too, right? They found that after the earthquakes, actually, I quote the study, religious faith increased among the earthquake affected, despite an overall decline in religious faith elsewhere.

Like we heard from our brother Edmund, sometimes when life is comfortable, we can start to believe that we don't need God. We're only in paradise. Sometimes we need a crisis in our life.

[13:27] And that sparks us to turn to the Lord, doesn't it? Maybe an unexpected illness in the family is what will force you to look for hope in the Lord.

Maybe a serious injury that impacts your life choices causes you to rethink, who am I? Where am I going? God can use suffering.

We don't wish it on anyone. He can use suffering to turn you, your family, back to the Lord. But maybe you're here right now, and you're going through something that's been hard. I'm so sorry.

But let Jonah be a reminder. If you're wondering, you've been wondering, why this pain, oh Lord?

Why the loss and hurt that's happening in my life right now? Now listen for a moment to C.S. Lewis. He writes this. We can ignore even pleasure, but pain insists on being attended to. God whispers to us in our pleasures. He speaks in our conscience, but shouts in our pains.

[14:27] It is his megaphone to rouse a deaf world. Sometimes, brothers and sisters, a crisis is God's way of stirring hearts back towards him.

But notice too in the passage what revival looks like. It actually looks not just like a crisis, but what happens after the crisis? People, what's the word here? They turn.

They repent. Right? You see that? Have a look in your Bibles. It's not from me. It's from the Word. Right? There's all kinds of people repenting, turning. You notice the word turn, right?

Happening. Actually, the author uses the word four times in verse 8 through to 10. This word repent or turn. The city turns from evil and violence.

Verse 8. They pray God may turn from his fierce anger and then God sees them turn from their evil ways and then he turns from his threat to destroy the city. So, this is what happens in a true revival.

[15 : 27] It might be a crisis, but there will be people who turn to the Lord. Okay? If there's no desire to give up wicked ways, then maybe you've had a revival moment yourself.

If there's no desire to turn from your wicked ways, it's not revival. I can speak this from personal experience. You can raise a hand, you can say a prayer, and the true revival will happen when God starts to turn your hearts towards him.

Once you start saying no to sin and yes to God, that's when the real magic happens. Now, one author put it this way. Men, they can produce evangelistic campaigns, but they cannot and they never have produced a revival.

man can do nothing. God and God alone does it. God sparked the revival in Nineveh. God turned the Assyrians, young and old, to repent, to give up their violence, their wickedness, and God is the one who gives them a second chance.

It's a beautiful story, isn't it, of a city that turns. The end. That's not the end, though, is it? There's still a whole chapter to go, right? What happens next?

[16 : 42] Chapter four. But Jonah was greatly displeased and became exceedingly angry. Wow, this was not the chapter I read, you know, in the kids' version of Jonah.

Can you imagine the scene right now? Chapter four, verse one. Imagine, who plays piano here? Yeah, we are in Asian church, some of you. Imagine getting first prize in a piano competition, right? And they give you the trophy and you're like, yay, and then you smash it on the ground and stamp on it. Would you do that? Or imagine hearing the news.

You're going to be a parent and you're excited, right? And then you go to the radiologist, you get the ultrasound, oh, what a cute picture, and then you tear it up.

Would you do that? That's crazy. What's Jonah up to? Right? He's a prophet. This is like, you know, a home run when a whole city repents and yet he's angry. What's going on here, Jonah?

[17 : 42] He tells us, he prayed to the Lord, oh Lord, is this not what I said when I was still at home? That's why I was so quick to flee to Tashish. I knew that you are a gracious and compassionate God, slow to anger and abounding in love, a God who relents from sending calamity.

Now, oh Lord, take away my life, for it is better for me to die than to live. Really, Jonah? We see his heart laid bare before the Lord.

Right? This is a private conversation. Jonah knows that God shows mercy to wicked sinners and he's honest. He hates it. He'd rather die than see Israel's sworn enemies spared.

And I love how the Lord responds. Right? Look at verse 4. Do you do well to be angry? Just a gentle, simple question.

Jonah doesn't answer. What does he do? You know, we saw this acted out so well, right, before, right? He's out of the city and he just sits there. He gets very uncomfortable. The Lord is kind.

[18 : 51] Gives a shade plant to cover him. Why is he on that hill, though? I think he wants to see what will happen to that city, right? Okay? Nice view from the top of the hill. What's God going to do?

Is he going to judge this city of Nineveh? All right? I can't wait, perhaps, is what he's thinking. And you know, God looks after him even in his wickedness, right?

His selfishness. That shade plant covers him from the sun, delivers him from his trouble, makes him very happy. But as we read in that chapter, as we saw in the skit, when it disappears, he's very angry, isn't he?

He says again, verse 8, I'd rather die. And so this picture, this is like Jonah's last scene in the story, right? Do you remember last week, chapter 2, Jonah was praying, and he was like, those people who worship vain idols, you know, there's no hope for them.

Here we are, and who's the idol worshiper here, right? Struggling to let go of a plant. That's the punchline, isn't it? Here is Israel's hero, more attached to a plant than to lost people.

[20 : 01] National hero? Yeah, right. Why the rage? We want to ask a bit deeper, why is he so angry?

Could be many things that we could talk about, but we talked about some of the sins that were in his heart last week, and we want to reflect that, do we share those sins as well? This morning, I want to put it another way though, okay, because I think Jonah's wrestling with two problems here, and you may have wrestled with this too, so that's why it's worth bringing it up. First problem is this, an intellectual problem, right? Here's a question, how can God truly love Israel, his chosen people, while he's still showing mercy to his enemies? Have you ever thought about that? Right? Essentially, how can God be just, right, and loving? Right? Imagine you're Ukraine, how can God be good to us if Russia is still at our doorstep? So Jonah can't understand what's going on here. But there's another deeper problem here as well, isn't there? Right? And we saw it in the plant, see in his heart his anger, Jonah's not trusting God with his anxiety, and this is his deeper heart problem because he's holding on to something more than God himself.

[21 : 17] Right? For him, he loved Israel so much that he'd rather a whole foreign city of those people to perish than to give them good news.

And church, if our love and concern for something, anything, pushes us to rather those people perish than to come to life, then whatever we're holding on to, that's an idol as well. That's our golden calf. That's our shade plant. And you're looking at me and going, well, I don't have idols, right? I don't have cats that wave in my shop window. I don't, you know, put offerings to gods or little shrines.

I'm okay. We all have idols. All right? Simply put, right, an idol is anything you hold on to, you love more than the living God himself.

Right? It could be anything, it could be good things even, right? It could be family, it could be money, it could be comfort, it could be your reputation, it could be your health and fitness.

[22 : 21] So, the question to work out if something's an idol in your life, ask yourself, how would you respond if God took that thing away today?

How would you respond? If it makes you mad, makes you angry, maybe, like Jonah, you've got a plant that you're too attached to, a person you're too attached to, some results or a family thing or a position that you're too attached to.

that's become an idol in your life. Church, can I ask you, what lives in your head instead of Jesus? What makes you angry if you don't get to have it?

Have a think of your past week. And church, have a think, are you more passionate about something in this world rather than the kingdom of God, for example?

Do you care more about your car than growing in Christ this year? Are you more anxious about your exam results or your child's exam results than whether they grow spiritually this coming year?

[23 : 30] Are you angry at someone else in this church or another group in this church? Maybe they're not making space for you. Maybe they're leaving you out. We can be more like Jonah than we think.

Revival, anger, let's turn briefly to compassion from God. And this is beautiful, isn't it, verse 9 to 11 because this is God himself speaking.

And basically what he says, verse 9 to 10, it's not too hard to work out, right? He basically says, Jonah, you wept for a plant but I weep for people.

I've underlined the word concerned there in verse 10 and 11. This word concern or pity is translated from the original language and means in its essence to get emotionally involved even to the point of tears.

Try and imagine that kind of feeling, right? That's God's compassion, right? Compassion. It's a wonderful word, right? It's someone that feels deeply, for something going wrong, right?

[24 : 41] Even to the point of tears. That's our God here at this point revealed to Jonah. Can you see how different God is to Jonah right this moment?

Jonah, he's attached to a little plant that comes and goes. He can't bring himself to love a lost people. Jonah loves the plant because it was useful to him, right?

And then when it's gone he gets angry. Yet God, he loves a city like Nineveh. He's willing to give this troubled people a second chance, right? When they repent.

Friends, when we lose our cool, when we get angry, listen to the Lord's gentle reminder. Turn from your rage. Look at my compassion. See what I get emotionally involved with.

See who I care for deeply. It's easy for us to know God's mercy up here, right? We can just sing it. God, you're so merciful to me. We sang His mercy is more, right?

[25 : 41] It becomes an intellectual thing. How does it move here to our hearts? We need God's compassion to move us, to guide us. That's how.

That's how. So, let God's compassion be what revives our hearts, as it were. Church, God doesn't want us to accept our serving role here, or to try out different service times, or to join a mission team out of guilt or out of pressure.

Please don't do that. Please don't sign up to a serving team or say yes to someone's request, just so that people will like you more, or that you'll please them. Rather, this is the motivation that we need.

God's compassion for those who have yet to hear of His grace and mercy. And then, and then we go give ourselves for their sake, because God did for their sake as well.

What should move us to inconvenience ourselves as English service going on tour? God's compassion for people. What should move us to keep showing up, I don't know, at your family dinners where no one else is a Christian and it's really hard?

[26 : 51] God's compassion for those people. people. Why should we train and invest in young people? Make sacrifices for their future so that they would know the gospel, that they would pass on the gospel from one generation to another, and yet, do that knowing that they may not stay at this church forever?

Why would we do that? Well, God's compassion for people. He got emotionally involved for a group of people that didn't deserve it. We can too. And let's think about our city for a moment.

Auckland is an incredible city, but it's also full of trouble, isn't it? Yes, I know at times the grass feels greener somewhere else. I don't know.

There's more money in another city. There's more family somewhere else. Yet, we think of the hundreds and thousands of people here in this land who don't know their right hand from their left. in your school, at your workplace. And how wonderful that the nations have come to us. How can we get emotionally involved even with tears?

[28 : 03] One of my earliest moments here at PCBC, believe it or not, was in 2003 or 2004, over 20 years ago. And one of the pastors said to me, I'd just been checking out church at the time, I'd just started a new service, and then they said, you know, to me and my friend, hey, William, I'd love for you to join the worship team.

And I'd love for your friend to join the worship team. So, William, can you play the bass? And can you, my friend, play the drums? And then we looked at each other, and we thought about it.

And then within a month, we left church. That was my runaway moment. And it's not that I ran away from this church forever, I'm right here, but I'm sure some of you have had that moment as well, that moment of challenge and crisis.

How will you turn? Maybe let God's compassion for brothers and sisters here move you, because it did for me. Maybe you're here and you're like, we're about to have some fellowship with people who don't even speak our language.

What do we do? Well, Jonah got five words out, so, I don't know, have a go, right? Maybe, very practically, at morning tea time, you can say something like, good morning, God loves you.

[29 : 20] That's five words. Next challenge, you could say, ■■■, to Moile, right? Good morning, God loves you. You could try that. Just stick with the English, though.

Don't make yourself a fool like me. But maybe God's compassion for the nations might move you differently, right? Maybe you could adopt a missionary, a cross-cultural worker that you've been praying for, that you know of, and making hard sacrifices to bring the gospel to someone.

Maybe God's compassion might move you. You have a cushy job. You are well off. But you need to make that sacrifice to go to a lost people, to come alongside people who need to hear the Lord Jesus.

So maybe your career choice might change. You're not thinking potential salaries, you're thinking kingdom impact. As C.T. Studd, he was a famous cricketer, he once said, there's only one life that will soon be passed.

Only what's done for Christ will last. How will God's compassion move you in 2026? Because in Jesus, you and I, we know God's compassion, don't we?

[30 : 32] And we know God's compassion in a way that Jonah never got to experience. Remember that question at the start? How can God be just and loving and merciful at the same time?

Jonah never got the full answer. But PCBC, you and I, we have the full answer, don't we? It's only in the New Testament that a couple of Pharisees and teachers, they get served by Jesus.

They're told, you wicked and adulterous generation, someone greater than Jonah is here. He's telling me I'm self, of course. Jesus, the true prophet, the one who draws near the great city of Jerusalem, then weeps for her.

He got emotionally involved as well, didn't he? Even with tears. Jesus, the Lord Jesus, he's our Savior. He looks at crowds of people. He's filled with compassion because they're like sheep without a shepherd.

Everything Jonah failed to do, Jesus did, and he goes one further. Jonah, he'd hurl himself into the water to escape his mission. Jesus, he hurls himself into God's wrath.

[31 : 42] Why? To fulfill his mission to save sinners. On that cross, as Jesus took the full wrath of God for sin against not just Nineveh's sin, your sin too, we see God's compassion fully displayed, right?

That's the good news. In Christ, we have a compassionate God. He got emotionally involved, even with tears. He died on the cross for our sins. Do you believe in second chances?

Because that's the gospel, right? This is Jesus Christ who gives us a second chance through his death. His burial, his resurrection. And if you don't believe this, maybe you're here, you've heard this, you're not sure, I want to ask you, will you receive him as good news today?

Would you commit to turn from your idols to trust in Jesus today? The Bible teaches us when we fully grasp how compassionate God is, we will put aside our idols to extend mercy to those who don't love him.

We'll seek their good. We'll seek their flourishing and their salvation. And maybe, perhaps, we'll become a church that might pass the gospel, might work together from one generation to the next.

[32 : 54] Wouldn't that be crazy, right? Comedy, chaos, but maybe closeness and cooperation for the sake of his mission. Wouldn't that be good?

What happened to Jonah in the end? Well, one author suggests we ask the question, who told the story? Who knew how reluctant and furious and angry Jonah got?

Who would be honest about their failings and yet be happy for it to be written down? So maybe we have this book because Jonah himself, despite his early failures, used a second chance, told the story of good news.

And we have it today to share, to learn from, and to live it out in the power of Jesus. Because now in Christ, the God of heaven and earth has given us a second chance at PCBC.

Will you take it? God's spirit moves us. Should we not? Let's pray. Lord, we ask that you would help turn our eyes to Jesus this morning.

[34 : 07] Thank you that his word will not fail us as he promised. Thank you that as we believe and trust in him, all will be well. And Father, would you give us your compassion for a world that is dying?

And would you help us by word and deed to tell of your perfect salvation? We ask all these things. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.