

## Jonah 3:1-10

Do you ever wonder what your life would be like today if you had the opportunity to go backward in time and **change** a few things? Lots of people think, “If only I had the **chance**, I’d do things a **lot** differently. If only I could go back to **college** or **high** school, I’d **apply** myself better, instead of sluffing off. If only I had the **chance** to start my **marriage** over again, I’d get it started **right** this time. If only I had the **opportunity** to go back 10 or 20 years and enter a different **occupation**, I’d be a lot better **off** right now.” More often than **not**, things **don’t** happen that way. You get **one chance** to do things right, and there is **no** going back. Yet, these are things which people like you and I think about, even though we **know** that “the grass is **always** greener on the **other** side of the fence.” Trying to change the **past** will have very **little** effect on the **future**.

But there **are** times when a second chance **can** bring about tremendous **changes** and **benefits** for the future. One such example is presented to us in our text for today. God offers **A Second Chance** - first of all to His prophet, **Jonah** - and then also to the heathen people of **Nineveh**.

The story of the Prophet Jonah is probably one of the most **familiar** Bible stories to young and old alike. God originally called Jonah to be a prophet with **these** words, “*Go to the great city of Nineveh and **preach** against it, because its wickedness has come up before Me.*” God told Jonah to **go** - but Jonah said **no** - he **refused**. In fact, instead of going to Nineveh, Jonah went 180 degrees in the **opposite** direction, and headed for **Tarshish** - the most **distant** location in the known world. Jonah’s plan was **clear**. He would hop onto a boat, and **escape**, both from the **LORD**, as well as from the **challenge** which the LORD had given to him.

As you well know, Jonah didn’t **make** it very far. A very severe **storm** came up, and the heathen sailors on the ship threw Jonah **overboard** in order to appease the anger of Jonah’s God. But before Jonah could **drown**, God sent a great **fish** to swallow Jonah **whole** and **alive**. While Jonah was **inside** this great fish, he had a lot of time to **think** - to think about what he had **done**. What a **foolish** thing to do - to try to run away from **God**! How did he **ever** think he could get **away** with it? If only he had **another chance** - he would **never** try to run away from God again.

Of course you know what **happened**. After Jonah lived inside this great fish for three days, God caused the fish to vomit him up onto the shore. We can well

imagine that Jonah was **thankful** - but at the same time he was still very **sad**. After all, who would ever **believe** him when he told them what had **happened** to him? And worse than that - after he had behaved so **foolishly**, **God** probably wouldn't want him to be His **prophet** anymore. Jonah thought he has spoiled everything. Even though he was still **alive**, his whole life seemed to be **ruined**. But, that's when the words of our **text** took place.

We read, "*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.'*" God did **not** reject Jonah because of his disobedience. Instead, He **renewed** Jonah's commission, and gave Jonah **A Second Chance**. God's call was essentially the **same** as it had been the **first** time. What would Jonah **do** this time? Would he repeat the steps he had taken **before**, or would he swallow his pride and do things **God's** way? This time Jonah **listened** to the LORD, and **obeyed** His command. Jonah had learned his lesson the **hard** way, but he had also learned his lesson **well** - it doesn't **pay** to fight against God's commands. So, Jonah **went** to Nineveh, and he **preached** there.

I think it would be well for us to consider a couple of applications to our **own** lives at this time. First of all, Jonah had behaved like a **child** having a **temper** tantrum. You've all **seen** those, haven't you? The child may lie on the floor and **scream** at the top of his lungs - or he may **pound** on the floor with his hands and feet. He may **throw** things, or **slam** doors, or do a variety of **other** unpleasant things. And the child has a **purpose** for all of these actions. He is **demanding** to have things his own **way**. We live in a world which is **filled** with such demands - some of which are **rational**, and others which are **not**.

Yet, strangely enough, the Bible tells us that in order to be truly **successful** in life, we must **give up** our demands, and **surrender**! We must surrender our lives **unconditionally** to the will of our **God**. God has given every one of us the **mission** to go and share the Gospel of Jesus Christ with others. That's the **same** mission He had given to **Jonah**. When Jonah **refused**, God gave him **A Second Chance** - but, He didn't **have** to. Are we making use of **our** first opportunity to share Jesus with others? Do we talk about Jesus **freely** when God opens the door for us to share our faith? Or do we shy away? God may not **give** us **A Second Chance**. I recall a time many years ago, when I was still living in Milwaukee, when a **Korean** man came to our church, asking if this was the church which had Korean services. I simply told him **no**, and that I didn't know where that church

**was.** It was the perfect opportunity to invite him to come and worship at **our** services. But I **didn't** - and I didn't tell him anything about **Jesus**, his **Savior** either - and I never **saw** that man **again**. I **missed** my **first** chance, and I didn't get **A Second Chance**.

The other application which we could consider at this time is the way in which God brings **erring** Christians **back** into His loving care. We may feel that God was being a little **rough** with Jonah. But it **worked!** Instead of **losing** a prophet for the time being, and perhaps even losing Jonah's **soul** for all **eternity**, God used His divine power and grace to put Jonah back on the **right** track again. Remember that when you feel as if God is being too rough with **you**. What are a few **days**, or **weeks**, or **months** of intense suffering - in comparison to suffering for all **eternity** in hell!

Now, back to the **text**. Jonah wasn't the **only** one who received **A Second Chance** - so did the people of **Nineveh**. Who **were** they? Nineveh was a **great** city. It was the capital city of **Assyria**, the most powerful nation in the world at Jonah's time. The Assyrians were **renowned** for their extreme **cruelty** - slaughtering innocent people, decapitating enemy soldiers, burning young men and women alive, as well as many **other** horrible atrocities. No **wonder** Jonah didn't want to **go** there! Who could **blame** him? After all, how would **you** feel if God chose **you** to go and preach repentance to your **worst**, most **vicious** enemy? In essence, that was the task which God had given to Jonah. All **Jonah** knew about these people was that they were a great, fierce, and cruel **military** nation - a serious **threat** to the existence of his own country. But **God** saw them **differently**. God saw them as a nation of helpless idol-worshippers, who would be lost forever unless they were **warned**. And God had chosen **Jonah** to bring them that warning.

Their **first** chance to turn to the LORD had been **lost** when Jonah refused to **go** to Nineveh. But God, in His love, gave them **A Second Chance**. Jonah's message was a **simple** one, "*Forty more days, and Nineveh will be **destroyed**.*" It was a message which was meant for the entire city - young and old, great and small. So, as Jonah walked through the city, he preached to whomever he **encountered** - to whomever would listen. But the news of this strange prophet and his message of destruction spread **quickly**, and by the end of the third day, Jonah had preached to virtually **all** the people of Nineveh.

Then comes probably the most **remarkable** happening in the entire Book of

Jonah. The Ninevites **believed**. And it wasn't just a **superficial** belief either - it was **true, saving** faith. In fact, the same word is used concerning the faith which **Abraham** had in God. We could also point to the **fruits** of their faith - fruits which the LORD says come **naturally** when true faith is present. The Ninevites **repented** of their sins, and asked for God's **forgiveness**. Isn't that **amazing**? Jonah was only **one** prophet - he had been previously **unknown** among the Ninevites - he had only preached **one** sermon - and he gave them **no** special **signs**. Yet, the Ninevites **believed** and **repented**. Once they had learned of their **sin** and their impending **destruction**, they turned to God for His **forgiveness**. God's Word is always **effective**.

Here again there is a lesson for **us**. God places great value on **all** human beings. Each and every one is a **soul** to be won for Christ our Lord. No effort is too **great** to accomplish that goal. God went through a **lot** to lead the Ninevites to repentance. The only thing which temporarily blocked the way, was an **unwilling** servant - **Jonah**. May we **not** be unwilling servants, so that God will have to turn **us** around the way He did with Jonah. Let's always make use of our **first** opportunities to share the Gospel with others, for we may not get **A Second Chance**. Amen.