Congregation of the Lord Jesus Christ,

After the sermon we are going to sing the hymn, ‘*We Have a Gospel to Proclaim*.’ And we will sing that hymn because that is the main message of Jonah. As we will see today, having spent three days and three nights in the belly of the fish, where he thought he had died, Jonah emerged, alive. And having personally witnessed God’s amazing grace, he went and preached repentance to a foreign nation.

So now I want you to listen to these words that Jesus spoke to His disciples before He ascended to heaven: “*Thus it is written, that the Christ should suffer and on the third day rise from the dead, and that repentance and forgiveness of sins should be proclaimed in His name to all nations … You are witnesses of these things.*” Can you see the parallels? They are strikingly plain, aren’t they! Those who have personally experienced God’s amazing grace are to tell people that Jesus died and rose again for the forgiveness of sins, and to call on them to believe and repent.

So, no surprises about where this sermon will head: We have a Gospel to proclaim. And we will get there by considering what must surely be the greatest revival ever – a whole city believed and repented! For that’s what revival is, boys and girls; people believing in God and repenting of their sins. So **the greatest revival ever means we have a gospel to proclaim**. That’s our sermon theme this afternoon. And we will see all this under four headings – **the God of Second Chances**, **Jonah’s Very Short Sermon**, **Nineveh’s Instant Conversion**, and **God’s Compassionate Mercy**.

1. So we begin with **the God of Second Chances**. We read, “*Then the word of the LORD came to Jonah the second time*. *"Arise, go to Nineveh, that great city, and call out against it the message that I tell you."*”
   1. So Jonah was given a second chance! And it’s worth pausing here to note that Jonah did not deserve this second chance. If the story of Jonah finished at 1:15, “*So they picked up Jonah and hurled him into the sea*,” it would have been exactly what Jonah deserved. But it doesn’t end at 1:15, does it. For after his three days in the fish, the call to preach to Nineveh came a second time. But when you think about it, this is a story that is repeated in the Bible over and over again!
      1. Think back to **Adam and Eve** in the Garden of Eden. They were given commands about exercising dominion over creation, but what did God say would happen if they ate the fruit of the Tree of the knowledge of good and evil? They would? Die. So the Bible could have finished at Genesis3:6, with ‘they ate the fruit and they fell down dead on the spot,’ but it doesn’t, does it. God came to them, they hid, He called them out and promised Messiah. So Adam and Eve were given a ‘second chance.’
      2. And think about **Abraham**. God promised him a son and heir. So what did Abraham do? He listened to his wife and slept with her servant, Hagar, who conceived a son. So God could have come to Abraham and said, What have you done? That’s it. I will find someone else to be the father of faith. But that’s not what happened, is it. God gave Abraham and Sarah a second chance and Isaac was born.
      3. And think about **Moses**. Thinking that the people of Israel would understand that God had raised him up to deliver Israel out of Egypt, Moses killed an Egyptian bully. But instead of being hailed as their deliverer, they rejected Moses and he was forced to flee Egypt and live in the Wilderness until he was 80 years old. So you can imagine him thinking that his leadership days were long gone. But what happened? The burning bush, the call to be Israel’s deliverer, and the rest is history. Another second chance!
      4. And we could add **King David**, the adulterous murderer, and **Peter**, the denier of Christ, who also received ‘second chances.’
      5. So Jonah is actually in very good company!
   2. And notice also that **God did not remember Jonah’s sins**. He didn’t come to Jonah and say, Now Jonah, you better not do what you did last time. I don’t want to have to chase you around the ocean again and tell a fish to swallow you, you disobedient prophet. There is nothing like that. Instead, as we come to v2, it is as if chapters 1-2 had not happened. It is as if God started afresh with Jonah. For we basically read what we read in 1:2: “*Arise, go to Nineveh, that great city, and call out against it the message that I tell you*.”
      1. And this should not surprise us because in **Isaiah 43:25**, God says, “*I am He who blots out your transgressions for my own sake, and I will not remember your sins*.” Is there anyone here today who is glad to hear that? I am! And **Psalm 103:12** says, “*As far as the east is from the west, so far does [God] remove our transgressions from us*.” Anyone here glad to hear that? I am!
   3. Well congregation, this is the gospel that we must proclaim!
      1. **Ephesians 2:1-6** says, “*And you were dead in the trespasses and sins in which you once walked … carrying out the desires of the body and the mind, and were by nature children of wrath*.” And it could finish there, right? It could finish with, So God condemned all of humanity to hell. But it doesn’t; it continues on with “*But God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which He loved us … made us alive together with Christ- by grace you have been saved- and raised us up with Him and seated us with Him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus*.”
      2. So the gospel is about a second chance! We deserve condemnation but we can be saved; we can receive mercy; we can have eternal life in heaven! And when God forgives us, He remembers our sin no more! And He can even use us to do amazing things in His service that we thought might no longer be possible!
      3. Do you think there might be people out there who would be glad to hear that the God of the Bible removes our sins from us as far as the East is from the West and He chooses not to remember our sins and can still use us in His service? Of course there are. Think of those who have gotten caught up in addictions or sexual sin or gambling; who have massive guilt and regret about things they have done. They need to hear this good news. But they will not hear it if you do not tell them!
2. Well, let’s continue to wallow in the glorious gospel of Christ as we turn our attention secondly to **Jonah’s Very Short Sermon** in vv2-4.
   1. In contrast to chapter 1, where the first words after the Lord’s call to Jonah to go to Nineveh and preach were, “*But Jonah*…” this time **Jonah obeyed the Lord** and headed to Nineveh.
   2. Now, the description of Nineveh in v3 is a little hard to understand in the original language. That is why you will see superscript numbers and notes at the bottom of the page that offer alternative or extra translations.
      1. The Hebrew includes a word after “*exceedingly great city*,” which elsewhere in the Bible indicates superlative, or mega, which is why translators add “*exceedingly*” to “*great*.” But this is the only place in the Bible where the word appears in this particular form, which could mean “***to God***,” which would make it “*a great city to God*.” And I believe that is what is in view here. If you look at the last verse of Jonah 4, God tells Jonah that He was right to pity Nineveh, “*that great city*,” because there were “*more then 120,000 persons [there] who [did] not know their right hand from their left hand, and also much cattle*.” And we will look at what that means exactly when we come to that verse but it is enough to note now that Nineveh was important to God because a lot of people *and animals* lived there. God cares about His creation. And this is not to say that He cares more about big cities than He does little villages; not at all. But Nineveh was a big city, with many people and animals in and around it, so God was concerned for Nineveh; it was “*a great city to God*.”
      2. And archaeologists know where Nineveh was and they have mapped it out and **it wouldn’t have taken three days to get from one side to the other**; not even one day. What could be meant is that it took Jonah three days to get to Nineveh, but most scholars think it would take longer to get to Nineveh from Israel than just three days. So again, my view is that what we are being told here is that for Jonah to visit every corner of this great city and preach his message would have taken three days, but, as v4 continues, **just one day into his preaching tour**, there was no need to continue because of the instant and incredible response to Jonah’s sermon.
   3. And this must surely be one of the shortest sermons ever, right? “*Yet forty days, and Nineveh shall be overthrown*.” And we have no reason to believe that Jonah said anything more than this; he just walked around saying, “*Yet forty days, and Nineveh shall be overthrown*.” And if you look at v2, Jonah was commanded to preach the message that God told him to preach. So Jonah’s sermon, “*Yet forty days, and Nineveh shall be overthrown*,” was the message God gave him. And there are two points of application that I want make here:
      1. The first is that **the church’s core calling was and is and always will be to preach the gospel**!
         1. The command that Jesus gave His disciples before He ascended was: I am the Christ and I suffered and rose from the dead, therefore proclaim repentance and forgiveness of sins in my name.
         2. And this is the message that the Spirit of God has used to bring people to faith in AD 33, AD 100, AD 700, AD 1200, AD 1500, AD 1800, and that He is still using in AD 2020!
         3. You don’t have to *change* it, you don’t have to *adapt* it, and you don’t have to add a fog cannon and a band and a barista coffee machine! You just have to preach the gospel!
         4. And I say this because there are magnificent church buildings all around the world where there are massive soup kitchens and concerts and counseling services, but on Sunday the pews are empty because the Gospel is not preached. And that is not to say that there is anything wrong with soup kitchens or concerts or counseling, but the calling of the church is to preach the gospel!
         5. May ARC always and forever remain committed to preaching Christ, who died and rose and ascended, and repentance and forgiveness of sins in His name.
      2. But secondly, in terms of your personal evangelism, **you do not have to preach the whole Bible and have all of the answers; you just need to proclaim the gospel**; you just have to tell people that they are sinners whose only hope is Jesus – so believe and repent.
         1. During the week, a very godly servant of Christ, Ravi Zacharias, died of cancer. He was a well known apologist and debater. You can see him on Youtube fielding pretty tough philosophical and religious and ethical questions from College students, and debating Christianity with Atheists. And it is good to think about how to answers the questions and objections that non-believers might have. There is a place for apologetics – defending the faith.
         2. But you don’t have to be Ravi Zacharias! Evangelism is telling people that they are sinners who need the salvation that can only be found in Jesus. Don’t *invite*; Don’t *suggest*; *proclaim* Christ crucified and a coming Judgment Day; tell people that they *must* believe in Jesus Christ and repent of their sins. That is what People have to wrestle with!
3. So Jonah’s very short sermon was a call to repentance. And that brings us, thirdly, to **Nineveh’s Instant Conversion**, in vv5-9.
   1. And the two most important words of v5 are “***believed God***.” It is not that the people of Nineveh believed *Jonah*; it is that they “*believed Go*d.”
      1. And if you get this you will be set free to evangelize! When you proclaim the gospel, you become a vessel or instrument for the Spirit of God to speak to a person. Back there in Nineveh, it is was if God Himself was walking around speaking to the people; and it is as if God Himself speaks to whomever you are talking to when you proclaim the gospel.
      2. So if they believe, it is *God* whom they have believed, and if they refuse to believe, it is *God* whom they have rejected.
      3. When you proclaim the gospel, you are, as it were, releasing the Spirit of God to do His work. And as we see here, He loves to use the proclamation of the gospel to convert people.
   2. And that is what we need to think about next – the two halves of conversion – **faith and repentance**.
      1. As we just saw, the people of Nineveh believed God. So by the power of the Holy Spirit, they understood that Jonah was preaching about THAT God – Yahweh.
         1. You will remember that when Jonah preached to the sailors on the ship and said that he “*feared the LORD, the God of heaven*,” the response of the pagan sailors, who had clearly heard about THAT God; the God who performed amazing miracles for the Hebrews, they were exceedingly afraid and eventually they called out to the Lord and feared the Lord and offered sacrifices.
         2. So we are being told here that the people of Nineveh feared Yahweh and recognized Him as the one, true God.
      2. And part of the reason why we can be sure about this is that they **repented**, because faith and repentance always go together. What does repent mean, boys and girls? It literally means to turn around 180o. And in this context it means to be sorry for your sin and to turn away from your sin; to leave it behind you.
         1. And this is what we see in v5b: “*They called for a fast and put on sackcloth*.” This was a visible sorrow. They had come under the conviction of the Word and Spirit. They realized that they had offended God. So they stopped enjoying food and drink, and they took off their comfortable clothes and wore rough sackcloth to demonstrate their sorrow.
         2. And in v6 we read that Jonah’s message **came to the attention of the King**. And He too left his throne and put on sackcloth and sat in ashes; again, very visible signs of sorrow at sin.
         3. But he did more. He issued a proclamation that called for a public fast – neither the people *nor the animals* were to eat or drink anything! And the animals also had to wear sackcloth, it says in v8, and the people and animals were “*to call out mightily to God*.”
         4. And then **the very important repentance words that end v8**: “*Let everyone turn from his evil way and from the violence in his hands*. *Who knows? God may turn and relent and turn from His fierce anger, so that we may not perish*.” So the King and the people understood that how they had been living was offensive to God and it had to stop; there had to be a turning away from evil toward what is good.
      3. So I want to say a word here about **the neglected half of conversion, which is repentance**. We hear a lot about faith, which is good; it was the main message of this morning’s sermon. I hope you believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that He died and physically rose from the dead and physically ascended into heaven; and that you believe that your sins are forgiven and that you have eternal life in His name. But *have* you repented of your sins and *do you* repent of your sins, regularly?
         1. Let me give you one biblical example of repentance. In **Acts 19** we are told that Paul planted and pastored the church in Ephesus for two years. And there is a bizarre story about some Jewish exorcists who arrived there and tried to remove evil spirits in the name of Jesus. But the evil spirits said out loud that they recognized Jesus and Paul but not these unbelieving exorcists, so they leaped on them and beat them up so badly that they ran away! And this made such an impression on the believers at Ephesus that we read: “*Many of those who had believed came, confessing and divulging their practices. And a number of those who had practiced magic arts brought their books together and burned them in the sight of all. And they counted the value of them and found it came to fifty thousand pieces of silver*.”
            1. And the way this is described indicates new believers *and* those who had believed for some time. And there was a very public outpouring of confession that was accompanied by a very visible change as these books were burned. 1 piece of silver was a day’s wages back then. So 50,000 pieces of silver was the annual income of 190 people. What would be the equivalent of the annual income of 190 people today? 9.6 million dollars! And it was all burned.
         2. So how upset about how your sin offends God are you? What do you need to ‘burn’? What behaviours, attitudes, and things do you need to turn away from?
4. So the people of Nineveh believed in God and repented. It is incredible! God’s Word and Spirit working together can do what seems unbelievable! And that brings us, fourthly and lastly, to **God’s Compassionate Mercy**, as we see it described in v10.“*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. Now, there is the whole topic here of God **relenting**, and if that means that God actually changes His mind, like we change our minds, and I may or may not come back to that after I am back from holidays ☺. But the major point here, and what we want to focus on as we draw to a close this afternoon, is that while God would have been entirely within His rights to destroy Nineveh, He did not; He showed mercy. And congregation, this is the gospel! The people of Nineveh deserved to be destroyed because of their wickedness, but God showed mercy. The Great Commission that we heard at the beginning of the sermon is that *that … forgiveness of sins should be proclaimed in [the] name [of Jesus Christ] to all nations*. It is the message that the Apostles preached, again and again, in the Book of Acts. It is the heart of the message of every epistle in the New Testament. And it should be the heart of what is heard in all our worship services and in our personal evangelism. What sinners need to hear is: You are a sinner; Judgment Day is coming; repent and believe in Jesus Christ, and your sins shall be forgiven and you shall have eternal life.
   2. And we all have people who we know and love who have not been converted. And they may seem far from God, but look what the God of mercy can do! And He does it as we proclaim the forgiveness of sins in Jesus!

So, We have a gospel to proclaim, Good news for men in all the earth;  
The gospel of a Saviour’s name, We sing His glory, tell His worth.  
  
Tell of His birth at Bethlehem, Not in a royal house or hall  
But in a stable dark and dim, The Word made flesh, a light for all.  
  
Tell of His death at Calvary, Hated by those He came to save,  
In lonely suffering on the cross, For all He loved His life He gave.  
  
Tell of that glorious Easter morn, Empty the tomb, for He was free.  
He broke the power of death and hell, That we might share His victory.  
  
Tell of His reign at God’s right hand, By all creation glorified,  
He sends His Spirit on His Church, To live for Him, the Lamb who died.  
  
Now we rejoice to name Him King, Jesus is Lord of all the earth,  
This gospel message we proclaim, We sing His glory, tell His worth. Amen.