

The Mystery of Mercy

Jonah 3:1-10 (ESV)

¹ Then the word of the LORD came to Jonah the second time, saying, ² "Arise, go to Nineveh, that great city, and call out against it the message that I tell you." ³ So Jonah arose and went to Nineveh, according to the word of the LORD. Now Nineveh was an exceedingly great city, ^a three days' journey in breadth. ^b 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!" ⁵ 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.

⁶ The word reached ^c the king of Nineveh, and he arose from his throne, removed his robe, covered himself with sackcloth, and sat in ashes. ⁷ 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, ⁸ 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. ⁹ Who knows? God may turn and relent and turn from his fierce anger, so that we may not perish."

¹⁰ 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.

DISCUSS

1. God can use us despite our flaws (v1)

Jonah had failed God by running away, yet "the word of the Lord came to Jonah the second time" (3:1). This shows us something about God's character: God is a God of second chances. Jonah's failure and disobedience did not disqualify him from being used by God. Instead, God restored him and recommissioned him for His purpose.

We often think our past mistakes, sins, or seasons of disobedience have exhausted God's patience with us. But the gospel reminds us that we are saved by grace, not by our performance. Because of Jesus, our failures are forgiven and our relationship with God can be restored. God's mercy is not limited. His mercy is greater than our past and sufficient to use us again.

What past failure or struggle makes you feel unworthy to come to God, and how does Jonah's second chance challenge that belief?

2. We are called to preach the gospel (v2-4)

After restoring Jonah, God sends him back to Nineveh with a clear command: “Go... and proclaim the message that I tell you” (v2). Jonah’s message was centered on God’s coming judgment, yet it carried the opportunity for repentance. Jonah did not know how the Ninevites would respond. His role was not to control the outcome, but to faithfully deliver God’s message.

In the same way, we are called to share the gospel because we ourselves have received God’s mercy. We want to emulate Jonah, to share how others can also come to know and receive God’s mercy. We are to do so by sharing the gospel to the people around us, our families, friends, and colleagues who need to hear about Christ. Our responsibility is to speak and we leave the results to God.

Who is one person God may be prompting you to reach out to, and what is one simple step you can take to share or show the gospel this week?

3. Rejoice in God’s mercy (v5-10)

Nineveh’s response was extraordinary. The whole city repented from the king to the common people. When God saw their repentance, he relented from judgment. This reveals to us God’s heart: He delights in showing mercy to those who turn to Him, no matter how undeserving they may seem.

Jesus tells us in Luke 15:10 that there is rejoicing in heaven over one sinner who repents. This means every act of repentance matters deeply to God. As His people, we are called to share in that joy. When others come to faith or return to God, it is not something to question or compare, but it is something to celebrate.

Do you find it easy or difficult to rejoice when others receive God’s mercy, and what might this reveal about your understanding of His grace?

Pray For:

1. A deeper confidence in God's mercy

Pray that we would truly believe God's mercy is greater than our sins, so we come to Him without fear or hesitation.

2. Boldness to share the gospel

Pray for courage and faithfulness to speak about Jesus in our everyday relationships.

3. Joy in God's saving work

Pray that we would rejoice whenever someone turns to Christ, aligning our hearts with God's delight in showing mercy.