

# Hey, Jo, Where You Goin with that Gospel of Mine?

*“A Walk in the Crowds”*

Jonah 3:1-10

I'd like to begin by asking you this question: *Does God ever repent?*

While you are carefully considering your answer, let me tell you why I am asking it. Our text says in verse ten that “God **relented** from the disaster that He had said He would bring upon” the Assyrians in Nineveh. This word “relented” is translated *repented* in many good versions of the Bible, including the King James Version. The Bible itself tells you God does repent.

When the Bible says God repents it *does not* mean He ever does anything wrong. It *does not* even mean that He changes His mind. It means He is responding in mercy to the faith of a condemned people. He must judge them for their sin; but if they turn to Him, He has made a way for them to escape the judgment and be saved. From our point of view God repents; but He is really acting in a way that is consistent with His nature.

A passage in Jeremiah will put this into perspective:

Jer 18:7 The instant I speak concerning a nation and concerning a kingdom, to pluck up, to pull down, and to destroy *it*,

Jer 18:8 if that nation against whom I have spoken turns from its evil, I will relent of the disaster that I thought to bring upon it.

Jer 18:9 And the instant I speak concerning a nation and concerning a kingdom, to build and to plant *it*,

Jer 18:10 if it does evil in My sight so that it does not obey My voice, then I will relent concerning the good with which I said I would benefit it.

I've taken a moment to defend the use of the word "repent" because I see it as the key to unlocking the teaching of this chapter. In these verses you see that God *does* repent; but you'll also see that He *doesn't* repent:

1. God *does* repent in response to the faith of the people in Nineveh.
2. God *doesn't* repent of His calling in the life of Jonah despite Jonah's failure.

When we last left Jonah he had been vomited upon a beach by the great fish that God had prepared for him. He had attempted to resign his commission as a prophet; he had refused to pray for the lives of the mariners on the ship in the storm; he had requested that they throw him in the sea to kill him rather than he repent and go to Nineveh. In chapter four you will see that he remained rebellious even after the revival.

This is the background as you read,

Jonah 3:1 Now the word of the LORD came to Jonah the second time, saying,

Jonah 3:2 "Arise, go to Nineveh, that great city, and preach to it the message that I tell you."

**God still sends Jonah to Nineveh!** Despite all of Jonah's reluctance and rebellion, God does not change His mind. God does not *repent* of His calling upon Jonah's life.

An important portion of Scripture puts this in perspective:

Romans 11:29 KJV For the gifts and calling of God are without repentance.

We will mention this verse again in a moment... But for now you see something truly amazing about God. He does not **repent** from His "gifts and calling."

- God's "gifts" refer to your salvation and its many blessings.
- God's "calling" refers to His eternal purposes for your life.

Let's be honest: It troubles us that God would still use Jonah after his reluctance and rebellion. But it thrills us to realize that God still uses **us** after **our** reluctance and rebellion!

God not only uses Jonah - He gives him the same commission that He had previously. If it were us, we would make Jonah earn his way back to the rank of Prophet. He'd have to prove himself. God immediately restored him to his office and service.

Forget about Jonah for a moment and look into your own life. If you are a believer, you will sometimes fall and fail. When you do, God does not repent from His gifts and calling upon your life. He works to bring you back to a place of serving Him.

When you fall or fail, put your name in place of Jonah's: "Now the word of the Lord came to **Gene** the second time..."

Then, in place of the word “second,” put in whatever number of failure you are currently working on. “Now the word of the Lord came to **Gene** [for] the **millionth** time...” This is how you are to understand and receive these verses.

The Bible is full with examples of God giving believers a second chance. He keeps giving them – and **you** – a second chance over and over again.

God told Jonah to “Arise...” Jonah had fallen. **You** will fall. When you do, God says, “Arise.” Then He sends you on your way according to His gifts and calling upon your life that He does not repent from.

Jonah 3:3 So Jonah arose and went to Nineveh, according to the word of the LORD. Now Nineveh was an exceedingly great city, a three-day journey *in extent*.

The Assyrian Empire, of which Nineveh was the capitol, extended all the way to the Mediterranean coast where Jonah had been barfed on the beach. It even included the island of Cyprus out in the Mediterranean. Jonah was still some five hundred miles from the city itself. It would have taken him at least a month to get to Nineveh. When it says that Nineveh was a “three-day journey in extent,” it means that it took Jonah three-days to *walk through* Nineveh after he arrived.

After a month’s journey, he had a three-day ministry. Jonah prepared ten-times longer than he preached! It should be a lesson to us. Power for your ministry and service comes from your secret preparation. It comes from walking with God when no one sees you.

Jonah 3:4 And Jonah began to enter the city on the first day's walk. Then he cried out and said, "Yet forty days, and Nineveh shall be overthrown!"

Jonah had been told to preach "the message [God would] tell [him]," no more and no less. You need to be confident in the simple, straightforward Word of God. It is the power of God unto salvation. Let the Holy Spirit lead you when you speak for God.

We've made an awesome *personal* application of Jonah's experience by showing you that God does not repent from His gifts and calling. There is an equally awesome *prophetic* application. Jonah is a prophetic picture of God's dealings with the Jews as a nation.

I told you I would have more to say about Romans 11:29, which reads,

Romans 11:29 KJV For the gifts and calling of God are without repentance.

This verse is in a section of Romans which promises the Jews that, even though they have rebelled against God, He does not repent of His gifts and calling of them as a nation. God will fulfill His unconditional promises to Israel. He will regather and restore them in the Last Days; they will take His Word to the Gentile nations. Their failure as a nation does not cancel out God's promised blessings.

If you are a believer, God does not repent towards you. You fall; you fail. Don't you think God foresaw all of that? He says to you, "Arise." He says it a second time... A third time... He keeps on saying it.

What if you are not a believer?

Close to one million people “believe[d] God” and were converted.

Before we see the response to Jonah’s three-day campaign, let me share an interesting fact I learned about the Assyrians. One of their gods was named “Dagon.” His name is from the root word meaning *fish*. Dagon was represented by an idol that was half-human and half-fish.

You’re on the beach at the Mediterranean coast. A great fish pukes a prophet onto shore! A man comes out of a fish... You have some fear of a god who is half-fish, half-man...  
**You are freaked!**

Word spread rapidly ahead of Jonah’s arrival. God had been preparing the citizens of Nineveh for his arrival.

Jonah 3:5 So the people of Nineveh believed God, proclaimed a fast, and put on sackcloth, from the greatest to the least of them.

Jonah 3:6 Then word came to the king of Nineveh; and he arose from his throne and laid aside his robe, covered *himself* with sackcloth and sat in ashes.

The people “believed God.” They didn’t believe *in* God; they believed God. There’s a big difference. Most people believe in “god.” In every poll in America, the vast majority of people claim a belief *in* “god.” But when you quit believing *in* “god” and really believe God as He is revealed in Scripture, then you are saved.

“Sackcloth and... ashes” are an outward sign of the inward sentiment. These people were repenting – turning *to* God *from* their idols. The king’s action was a symbol of what was happening. By taking off his robe he was rejecting self-rule and asking God to be his King.

Jonah 3:7 And he caused *it* to be proclaimed and published throughout Nineveh by the decree of the king and his nobles, saying, Let neither man nor beast, herd nor flock, taste anything; do not let them eat, or drink water.

Jonah 3:8 But let man and beast be covered with sackcloth, and cry mightily to God; yes, let every one turn from his evil way and from the violence that is in his hands.

Jonah 3:9 Who can tell *if* God will turn and relent, and turn away from His fierce anger, so that we may not perish?

What hope was there in Jonah’s message that God might “turn and relent?”

*I’m glad you asked!* There are at least two things that inspired hope:

1. God’s message was, “Yet forty days...” If God wanted to destroy Nineveh, why warn them? Why wait? This was a warning that gave hope that God was waiting to see their response.
2. The experience of Jonah gave them hope. Despite Jonah’s reluctance and rebellion, God delivered him from the belly of the great fish. God must be a compassionate, merciful, second-chance-giving God.

God has a way of revealing Himself to nonbelievers:

1. He spoke to them right where they were at. They worshipped a fish-man; He sent them a man from a fish and showed them that He was the God of both men and fish – the God of all creation.
2. He warned them, then waited, which could only indicate He was a compassionate God, not willing that any should perish.

Jonah 3:10 KJV And God saw their works, that they turned from their evil way; and God repented of the evil, that he had said that he would do unto them; and he did it not.

God does repent in response to faith. He acts consistently with His character.

Nineveh was condemned; but the people had forty days to respond to their condemnation.

**All** men are born already condemned. If you do not yet “believe God,” you are already condemned. The span of your life is your own personal “forty days” in which God *warns* you and *waits* for your response. You may have years left; or months; or days; or mere hours.

John 3:16 “For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life.

John 3:17 “For God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through Him might be saved.

John 3:18 “He who believes in Him is not condemned; but he who does not believe is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God.”



“Already condemned.” **Everyone** who is born into the world is “already condemned.” But God has sent Jesus to take **your** condemnation upon Himself and offer **you** eternal life.

God does “repent” in response to faith. **Believe God.**

It comes down to your **name** and your **number**:

1. If you are a believer, memorize verse one, insert your *name* and the *number* of your failure, and then “Arise” and “Go.” God does not repent of His gifts and calling in your life.
2. If you are a non believer, you are already condemned – but God has warned you and is waiting for you to respond to His message of salvation in Jesus Christ. You can put your name in verse four in place of the word “Nineveh.” “Yet forty days and (your name) shall be overthrown.” The real problem, though, is that you don’t know your number. Is it years? Months? Days? Hours? Minutes? Seconds?

Maybe this is where we get the expression, “Your number is up.” God knows the number of your days... But you do not.

**Believe God.**