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We Can Share

Jonah 3:1-10

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Introduction:

- Have you ever drifted away from a friend because life got busy?
 - You stopped reaching out.
 - Maybe they stopped reaching out.
 - And you've come to realize, you're not that close anymore.

- The same thing can happen in our spiritual lives as well.
 - When we stop gathering with other believers.
 - When we stop reading God's word.
 - When life gets too busy to pray.
 - Slowly, we can drift away from God.

- We know that Jonah lived during a time when God's people were under threat.
 - And he may have grown bitter against nations that were a threat to the people he loved, especially the Assyrians and their wicked reputation.
 - It may have been Jonah's prayer for God to judge the Assyrians, not for God to save the Assyrians.

- And even though King Jeroboam II, the king of Israel, was an evil king, Jonah may have looked the other way because he wanted God's people to succeed.
 - He cared more about success than doing what was right, then showing compassion.
 - And so, when God told Jonah to go to Nineveh, he went the opposite way.
 - His bitterness kept him from obeying God's word.



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- But what we'll see in our story is how God doesn't give up on us when we turn away.
 - When we're going down the wrong path, God intervenes.
 - Even when we've drifted far, God is able to bring us back.
 - He's the shepherd who leaves the 99, and searches for the 1 that's lost.
- And so, if you're here today, and you feel far from God.
 - And you're not sure how to get back.
 - There's good news for you.
 - Because we're going see today how God steps in to bring us home.
 - And by the end of the sermon, my prayer is that you'll find your way back to God today.

Point 1:

- The first way God brings us back is by giving us a second chance.
 - God gives us a second chance so he can restore what's broken.
- Think about this.
 - Jonah disobeyed a direct command.
 - He went the opposite way.
 - He was willing to die.
 - He was even willing to let the sailors die rather than obey the Lord.
- But God sent a storm to turn him around.
 - Even more, God sent a fish to save his life.
 - And after Jonah cried out to God, the fish let him go.
 - God saved Jonah's life.
- And you know what?
 - The story could've ended right there.
 - It could've ended with a verse that said:



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- “And so, Jonah lived the rest of his life in Gath-Hepher, as the prophet who was never used by God again, because he ran away.”
- But that’s not how the story ends.
 - Instead, we read in chapter 3 these hopeful words:
 - **“Then the word of the Lord came to Jonah a second time...”**
 - God spoke to Jonah a second time.
 - Even after Jonah’s rebellion.
 - Even though Jonah still didn’t want his enemies to receive God’s mercy.
 - God gave Jonah a second chance to renew his devotion, and to restore his faith.
- I want to ask you:
 - Do you ever feel that God is done with you?
 - That you couldn’t be used by God because you failed?
 - You may feel inadequate to serve, even ashamed.
 - But we see in our passage today that God is able to give you a second chance.
- And isn’t this the pattern we find throughout the Bible as well?
- Moses murdered a man and ran away.
 - But God called out to him from the burning bush and gave him another chance to lead.
- Samson wasted his gifts for most of his life.
 - But then, he cried out to God and was used by God at the end of his life.
- Jonah ran away from serving the Lord.
 - But God sent a fish, and gave him another chance.
- Here we see, no matter how far you’ve fallen, God is able to restore your life and use you for his kingdom.



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- In fact, he's able to give you a third chance, and a fourth chance.
 - You might say
 - "Pastor, I've blown my third and fourth chance as well."
 - "Is there any hope for me?"
 - There's absolutely hope for you.
 - Because he'll give you as many chances as you need.
 - This doesn't mean we can live however we want.
 - But it does mean, no matter how far we've drifted, we can still return to God.

- When I was in grade school, I remember how the youth group students at my church were given the task of taking the younger kids to Santa's Village.
 - It's a glorified carnival.
 - And I still remember how one of the high school students really liked one of the other students.
 - Everyone knew that Jeanie really liked Dave.
 - And she wanted Dave to win her a teddy bear.
 - And he kept trying to knock down the target with the ball, but he couldn't do it.
 - She kept giving him dollar after dollar to win the game.
 - But he kept missing the mark.
 - I felt so embarrassed for him.
 - But no matter how many times he lost the game.
 - She kept saying:
 - "It's okay Dave!
 - "Try again!"
 - "Here's another dollar."
 - Finally, he won the bear.

- God isn't pleased by our sin.
 - But when we fail, he doesn't give up on us.
 - Instead, he tells us to try again.
 - He gives us another chance.
 - And we know that he won't give up on us, because he paid the ultimate price for our sins.
 - Not with dollars and cents.



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- But with the precious blood of Jesus Christ.
- God gave his one and only Son.
- Here we see how God is able to give to us a second chance when we fail to obey.

Point 2:

- Second, how does God bring us back to him?
 - We see how God empowers us to obey his word, even when it's hard.
 - God's Spirit works in us and gives us power to obey his word.
- And the way God does this is by changing our heart.
 - He can turn hatred into love, fear into courage, doubt into faith.
 - He's able to remove the heart of stone and give us a heart of flesh.
 - And cause us to walk in his ways.
- And one way he changes us is by revealing what's inside our heart.
 - In Jonah's case, it wasn't failure that caused hatred against others.
 - Rather, his failure revealed what was truly inside his heart.
 - And it was when he ran from God, he could begin to recognize how deep his hatred was.
 - Our failures have a way of exposing our sin, and showing our fears, and revealing insecurities we try to hide.
- Furthermore, God helps us to change, not only by revealing our hearts, but by helping us face what we don't want to face.
 - When God commanded Jonah the second time, he didn't give an easier command.
 - In chapter 1, he told Jonah to go to Nineveh and preach the word.
 - And in chapter 3, he gives a similar command.
 - God doesn't say:
 - "You know Jonah, I know how hard it is for you to face the hatred in your heart, so I'm going to give you an easier command."
 - "You don't have to go to Nineveh anymore."



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- “But instead, can you just pray for the people from your home.”
- That’s not what God says.
- Rather, he puts Jonah in a place where he needs to face the very thing he doesn’t want to face.
- The one thing that’s keeping him from growing in love.

- And it’s the same with us.
 - If we fear failing at work, he’ll remind us that when we fail, we can find our confidence in Christ.
 - If we have a hard time loving a difficult person, he may keep putting that kind of person in our path so we can learn to show grace.
 - When we grow in pride, he may put us in a humbling situation.
 - Why would God do this?
 - Because sometimes, it’s by facing the things we want to avoid that we can begin to grow.
 - **“Count it all joy, my brothers, when you meet trials of various kinds, for you know that the testing of your faith produces steadfastness. And let steadfastness have its full effect, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing.”** James 1:2-4
 - It’s by facing our sin, and our fears, and learning to trust in God in our trials that we become more complete.

- So, God helps us change by revealing our sin, and then by helping us face hard realities we want to avoid.
 - But then, he also helps us change by helping us overcome our sin so we can obey his word.

- Now, I want you to listen very carefully.
 - I said the command in chapter 3 was almost the same as the command in chapter 1.
 - But there’s a slight difference.
 - In fact, if you look closely at these verses, you’ll see how the command in chapter 3 was harder to obey.
 - Listen to each command and see if you can notice the difference.
 - Here’s Jonah 1 verses 1 and 2



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- **Now the word of the Lord came to Jonah the son of Amittai, saying, “Arise, go to Nineveh, that great city, and call out against it, for their evil has come up before me.”**
- Now listen to Jonah chapter 3 verses 1 and 2.
- **Then the word of the Lord came to Jonah the second time, saying, “Arise, go to Nineveh, that great city, and call out against it the message that I tell you.”**
- In chapter 1, God wants Jonah to preach to Nineveh, because their evil came up to him.
- But in chapter 3, God wants Jonah to preach the message that he gives to him.
- What’s the meaning of this difference?

- Jonah wanted the Ninevites to be judged.
 - And in chapter 1, that seems to be the direction.
 - God speaks about their evil.
 - Even though God is a merciful God, there’s a chance that God may judge the city.
 - But in chapter 3, it now seems more likely that God is going to show mercy and grace.
 - He doesn’t speak about their evil.
 - Rather, he wants Jonah to speak the message that he gives to him and nothing more.
 - Do you see how hard it would’ve been for Jonah to obey the second command?
 - God doesn’t give Jonah an easier command.
 - He gives Jonah a harder command!

- But you know what’s amazing?
 - Jonah obeys.
 - Even though Jonah didn’t want to show mercy to the Assyrians.
 - He still obeyed.
 - God was working his Jonah’s heart, so he could grow in love.
 - It wasn’t complete, but he was beginning to obey.

- And isn’t that what God does for us as well?
 - He puts us in the fire not to hurt us but to shape us.



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- He brings us face to face with hard truths we want to avoid, so we can grow and walk in obedience.
- A few weeks ago, there was a huge fire in our neighborhood.
 - By God's grace no one was hurt, but when I walked past the house, the back and side was burnt to a crisp.
 - Now, we have two firefighters at our church, and I told them how scary it must have been for the firefighters to put the fire out.
 - And one of them said to me:
 - "We're not scared."
 - "That's what we do."
 - And he was right.
 - The reason they're able to go into a burning house without fear is because they were trained for this kind of work.
 - Firefighters will train in controlled fire situations, with heat, and smoke, so they can know what to do.
 - So, they won't be afraid when they need to put out a fire.
- It may be scary when we face the fire, but let's remember how God is actually increasing our ability to obey.
 - In the fire, God helps us to grow in our obedience.
 - David had to face the lions and the bears before he could stand before Goliath.
 - Joseph had to walk through the prison before he could sit in the palace.
 - And Jonah had to face the bitterness in his own heart before he could carry God's message to his enemies.
- What about you?
 - Is the Lord asking you to face something you don't want to face today?
 - A sin you need to confess?
 - A fear you need to face?
 - Or is God asking you to serve in a way that may be difficult for you to do?
 - Let's not run away, but rather obey his word.
 - "Pastor, I've tried."



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- “I just can’t obey.”
 - “It’s too hard.”
 - If that is you, don’t run away.
 - Rather, return to the Lord, and you’ll see that he can help you obey his word.
- The Bible says in Ezekiel chapter 36:
 - **“And I will give you a new heart, and a new spirit I will put within you. And I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. And I will put my Spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes and be careful to obey my rules.”**
 - Here we see how God shapes us and empowers us, to obey his word.

Point 3:

- Third, we see how God’s kindness leads us to repentance.
 - God will give us a second chance.
 - God will empower us to obey.
 - And how does the Lord bring us back to him?
 - His kindness will lead us to repentance.
- After Jonah preached God’s word, we read how the Ninevites repented of their sin.
 - **“Jonah began to go into the city, going a day's journey. And he called out, “Yet forty days, and Nineveh shall be overthrown!” 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.”** Jonah 3:4-5
- What’s amazing is how this wicked city that was hostile to God, recognized their violence and believed in God.
 - This would’ve been shocking to hear, especially for God’s people.
- Furthermore, Jonah didn’t have to take the full three days to preach the word.



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- Jonah was told that he needed 3 days to preach to all the people.
- But on the first day the people responded to God's word.
- And the news began to spread.
- God had to send a storm, and then a fish to get Jonah to turn to him.
- But this wicked city obeyed God's voice on the first day.
- It just took one word from the Lord.

- And notice how full their repentance is.
 - It wasn't just the people that repented.
 - From the greatest of them to the least of them, even the king responded to God's word.
 - And this king took off his royal robes and put on sackcloth and ashes.
 - He even made the animals fast before God.
 - While the king of Israel was worshipping idols.
 - While the prophet of God was filled with hate and running away.
 - The king of these wicked people humbled himself and declared a fast for all the people in the city.

- And we can't help but ask:
 - Are God's people seeing how they need to repent, just like this wicked city is repenting?
 - Is the king of Israel seeing how he needs to repent?
 - Do you see the irony?
 - It's not God's people who are turning to him.
 - It's this wicked city, possibly the most wicked city during that time, that's turning to him.

- Furthermore, look at the humility of this Assyrian king.
 - Last week, I said that Jonah had a hint of self-righteousness when he cried out to God.
 - But in verse 9 the Assyrian king cries out:
 - **“Who knows? God may turn and relent and turn from his fierce anger, so that we may not perish.”**
 - The king in Nineveh couldn't even lift his head.
 - He knew he deserved judgment from God.



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- He's not talking about how he cried out to God.
- He's not talking about how he remembered the Lord.
- How he's better than those who worship idols.
- He sits in dust and ashes.
- And he says:
 - "Who knows? Maybe God will save us from destruction."
 - He was crying out for mercy.
- And because of his prayer, we read these wonderful words in verse 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."** Jonah 3:10
- Jonah was the messenger of God.
 - But the repentance of Nineveh was also a message to Jonah and to all God's people.
 - If they would repent, God would receive and forgive them as well.
 - God wasn't showing his judgement.
 - He was showing his love.
 - He was showing his grace.
 - Why?
 - Because it's not the judgement of God, but the grace of God that changes the hardest heart.
 - His kindness was leading them to repentance.
- For some, they find it hard to repent because they don't see the depth of their sin.
 - But let's remember that Jonah the prophet, and the evil city of Nineveh were in the same boat.
 - They both needed the grace of God.
 - Without God, Jonah wouldn't be able to see his sin.
 - He needed God to lead him to repentance.
 - Without God, the Ninevites wouldn't be able to see their sin.
 - They needed God to lead them to repentance.
 - And it's the same with us.
 - Apart from God we'd be lost as well.



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- And so, like the king, let's repent in dust and ashes.
 - Let's humble ourselves and make this our prayer:
 - Father in heaven, help me to see the depth of my sin.
 - Help me to see that I have nothing to offer to you.
 - Have mercy on me.
 - Save me from my sin.
 - Nothing in my hands I bring, only to the cross I cling.

- And for others, they don't find it hard to repent because they don't see their sin.
 - Rather, they find it hard to repent because of their shame.
 - There are those who feel that God wouldn't be able to forgive them because of what they've done.

- When I was in middle school, I was on the school's free lunch program.
 - And when I was in grade school, it was okay because no one knew that I got a free lunch.
 - But in middle school, they had a wall of names for students who couldn't afford to buy a lunch.
 - And you had to grab the card with your name from the wall to get your lunch.
 - And I hated grabbing that card.
 - I felt so embarrassed and ashamed grabbing that card.
 - And even though I could get a free lunch, I'd either bring a lunch from home or sometimes choose not eat.

- And I think there are many who treat God's grace in this way.
 - We know we need mercy.
 - We know we're broken.
 - We know we can't save ourselves.
 - But shame keeps us from confessing our sin and coming to God.
 - We can't help but think:
 - "What will people think if they see I'm a sinner?"
 - "What if I'm exposed?"
 - "What if God rejects me?"

- If that is you, think about the Assyrians.



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- They were wicked and violent.
 - They murdered and killed.
 - They tortured and destroyed.
 - And yet, God saved them from their sins.
 - And if he could save them, he can also save you.
 - He can remove your guilt.
 - He can cover your shame.
- Honestly, if I could go back to my middle school today, knowing everything I know now, I believe I'd gladly grab that lunch card.
 - I'd go for seconds if I could.
 - Because now I know my confidence comes from Christ.
 - Because now I know that his blood has covered all my shame.
 - Listen to what God says through the prophet Isaiah:
 - **“Fear not, for you will not be ashamed; be not confounded, for you will not be disgraced; for you will forget the shame of your youth...”** Isaiah 54:4
 - **“With everlasting love I will have compassion on you,” says the Lord, your Redeemer.** Isaiah 54:8
 - Let's humble ourselves before the Lord, because he's our gracious Savior, who removes our guilt and covers our shame.
 - Do you feel far from God today?
 - If that is you, God is speaking to you today.
 - And he wants you to come to him.
 - Because he wants to give you another chance and restore your faith.
 - Because when you find it hard to obey, he's wants you to know that he can help you obey.
 - And when you feel the weight of your sin, he wants you to know, he can cover all your shame no matter your past.
 - Last week I said that Jonah chapter 2 was written, not to show a model prayer, but to show a merciful God.
 - Well, I think Jonah chapter 3 was written, not to show a model prophet, but to point us to a perfect Savior.



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- And when you repent of your sin, you'll see that Jesus can remove all your sin, and all your shame.