

## The One That Almost Got Away

### Part 3 – Second Chances

#### Intro

We all have those stories of the *one that got away* – whether it was a fish, a deer, or a relationship. And then there are those moments where a person, an opportunity, or game *almost* got away – but somehow, we held on, stepped, did the right thing, or make the correct decision, and it didn't. We held on just barely with the tips of our fingertips.

#### Jonah's Story

The telling of Jonah's story [likely from his own recounting] shows a similar moment in his life. One that he almost let slip away, but one in which God would not let him go so easily.

God specifically and uniquely called on Jonah to travel to the city of Nineveh and share the truth of God with the people there. Nineveh was an exceedingly great city. She was the shining example of human endeavor. However, for all of her structural beauty and thriving commerce, the people of Nineveh were equally as wicked.

Instead of following God's call in his life, Jonah ran [literally] the opposite direction. He wanted no part in taking the love of God to such a dreadful group of people. He boarded a ship and attempted to sail as far from Nineveh and God as possible.

Jonah ends up getting tossed overboard and swallowed by a large fish, ultimately spending 3 days in the belly of this huge animal. What seemed like a punishment from God [for Jonah's disobedience and rebellion] was actually God's grace.

As we saw last week:

**God will do, and use, whatever it takes to align our hearts with His.**

After spending, what must have felt like an eternity, in the deep, dark recesses of the terrible circumstance Jonah finally *prayed*, for the very first time in our encounter with him. Immediately, God caused the fish to spit Jonah out on dry land.

#### Jonah 3:1-2

**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."**

God is giving Jonah a second chance. For the second time, God is asking Jonah to be His messenger. His desire is for Jonah to walk across the street, into the office down the hall, and share a message.

Maybe you've found yourself in that place where you wish you could go back and do it over, make a different decision, or get a second chance. We all have. But God, in His kindness and mercy, offers us those second chances.

### *History of Man & God*

This is the story of God from the beginning of time. Looking back throughout the course of history, men have had their moments where they trusted and believed in God – only to fall away or fall in love with other things. Over and over again, we [as a whole] have ridden the roller coaster of belief and trust in God, ourselves, and other gods. We have placed our trust in nations, in weapons, in relationship, in fame and fortune. You name it, and we have trusted in it at one time.

Yet, every single time, there is God – waiting: sometimes patiently and other times powerfully. Waiting to give us a second chance. Relentlessly pursuing after us. Giving us opportunity after opportunity – to trust in Him and to follow His plan for life.

The history and story of God is filled with His compassion toward mankind.

In Jonah's case, God was determined to:

#### **God's Determination**

**1) Get the message of rescue to Nineveh**

**2) AND to use Jonah to bring it to them**

#### **3:3-4**

This time around Jonah listens to God's desire for His life and makes his way to Nineveh. Can you imagine the feelings and thoughts he has going through his mind? My guess is that you do. You've probably had those instances when you KNEW God wanted you to do a specific thing, talk to someone, take a step toward something. Everything within you questions and panics – *How am I supposed to...? There's no way they will ever. This is a waste of time. What if they...?*

So, I imagine that Jonah is possible dealing with these emotions, and possibly even *going through the motions*. He is convinced that God is control, but He just doesn't know it yet.

Give him credit, he takes a step toward God's call in his life. He *walks across the street* and makes the journey to Nineveh, and then spends the next few days walking around the city, speaking and teaching the message that God has given him – namely, repent [turn from your evil/wicked ways] and trust God, or the city will be overthrown.

And the entire time maybe he's thinking - *there's NO way this is ever going to work. These people aren't going to admit they are evil. They're not going to believe and trust in God. There's not a chance in the world they would ever repent.*

#### **3:5**

**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.**

Here's Jonah walking through the city – [soberly and without any conviction or emotion] *calamity is coming for the city, everyone must turn and repent, believe and trust in God. Ok, ok. I'll go and tell THOSE people [but I'm not going to like it].*

Then, out of nowhere, literally, the entire city believes. No one could have seen it coming. No one would have predicted it. And everyone would have called you a liar if you had told them so ahead of time.

**You and I may never know the condition of the heart of man or the purpose of God's plan...until we say yes.**

### Who Is It For You? Who Is Your Nineveh?

Who is that neighbor, co-worker, friend, family member in your life who [you know] needs a second chance? How many times have you felt the *nudge of God* in your heart to walk over and say something, to send them a text, to be willing to sacrifice on their behalf, to sit down and have a conversation.

While we, as a people, LOVE an underdog story – we are as equally in love with a *fall from grace* story...possibly even more. We [secretly] love to see someone fall – someone we know, someone we hate, someone who seems to have it all. As we are over in the corner high-fiving ourselves at their destruction, God has already been preparing for their recovery, renewal, and come-back story.

We stand over on the side, huddled together in quiet whispers, *can you believe it...did you hear about what happened to them...I cannot imagine what they must be going through*. However, God is actively and compassionately pursuing their salvation as we sit and watch their life fall apart – thinking *we sure are glad it's not us*.

Who is it for you, that you know needs to hear the compassion of God and experience His love toward them?

In our mind *there is NO way they will ever believe*. I think we could be surprised at what we just might find. Listen to the words of the king.

### 3:8b-9

**Let everyone turn from his evil way and from the violence that is in his hands. Who knows? God may turn and relent and turn from his fierce anger, so that we may not perish.**

This *wicked* king, who [previously] knew and wanted nothing to do with God, displayed more faith and understanding than Jonah – who had possibly been walking with God for years.

You and I never know what God might be doing in the hearts of the people He is asking us have compassion toward. We have no idea what has been going on in their life to bring them to a place of believing & trusting in God. And we may never know...unless we go.

Who knows, we might be just as surprised as Jonah to learn that their faith [at least in that moment] has far surpassed our own?!?

### 3:10

**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.**

Here's what we do know – it is God's desire and plan to pour out His compassion on people, in a way that we lead them to repentance. His compassion toward should be enough to help us have compassion toward them.

### Time of Prayer

[ask people to take a few moments and pray to have the courage 1) to listen and believe God's call in their life and 2) to take the first step toward that person they know deserves a second chance – and that they know they are called to be the ones to share it with them]