

Compassionate Justice

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Preacher: Phil Pickett

[0 : 00] Well, we're back in Jonah, so if you could turn with me to Jonah chapter 3. Jonah chapter 3. It's up on the screen as well. So Jonah's, this is the second time God's word comes to Jonah, the first time he didn't listen to it.

He ran the other way, got pursued him with a storm, Jonah got chucked in the sea. Jonah came to his senses, called out on the Lord, God saved him, and now he was vomited back on dry land, and now God's word comes to him a second time.

So Jonah chapter 3 verse 1. 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. So Jonah arose and went to Nineveh according to the word of the Lord.

Now Nineveh was an exceedingly great city, three days journey and breath. 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. The word reached the king of Nineveh, and he rose from his throne, removed his robe, covered himself with sackcloth, and sat in ashes.

[1 : 17] And he issued a proclamation and published it throughout 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, but let man and beast be covered with sackcloth and let them call out mightily to God.

Let everyone turn from his evil 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.

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. Well, in the past two thousand years, the church has grown beyond recognition, you might say, throughout the world.

What started off as a few disciples huddled in the upper room has exploded into millions of people throughout the world. Different cultures in different languages, people who have known nothing of Jesus and who have become the Christian in the middle of their life, people who have grown up in the church. God's church has exploded throughout the globe.

And primarily that has been through the ordinary work of people sharing the gospel with their friends, with their family, with their colleagues. Like that slow dripping of a leaky tap, God has added people to his church, to his kingdom.

[2 : 46] However, occasionally God doesn't just add people through the drip, drip, dripping of people into his kingdom. Sometimes God turns on the faucet and he lets the water pour straight out, and he adds people in a whole load at a time.

And we call that, when that happens, when there's a great adding of people to the church, we call that a revival, or renewal, or a great awakening.

Where suddenly God, in a miraculous way, causes whole communities, maybe whole families, whole language groups, to come to Jesus and put their trust in him.

And that's taken place across the world, across denominations, across different churches. Some churches like ours, some churches very different to ours. But all of them preaching Jesus Christ and him crucified at the center.

I spent my secondary school in Wales where the church was massively affected by Welsh revivals. And as Thomas was saying in that video, Lewis has also been shaped, and Carlwate has been shaped by revivals.

[4 : 01] They often come unexpectedly, but they're always a wonderful blessing. And in our passage that we come to tonight, this could be described as maybe the first urban revival, where a whole city turns to God in repentance.

And it's definitely unexpected, maybe you might sound expected to everyone but God, because it comes from a prophet who's got anger issues, who preaches an angry message that has no hope. And you think that's not a recipe for revival. But if you haven't picked up yet, the book of Jonah is about God, and it's about his compassion, it's about his mercy, even through people like Jonah. So back in chapter 3, we're going to begin by seeing a surprising message that God uses. A surprising message that judgment is coming, that God uses to bring about this revival. And we see Jonah's message, we see this Jonah's message and this emphasis on judgment. And in the first four verses, that's the overwhelming emphasis. Jonah's commanded to call out against Nineveh, and in verse 4, Jonah just begins to go into the city.

[5 : 19] And the first thing he says is, yet forty days, and Nineveh shall be overthrown. Jonah doesn't mince his words, he doesn't kind of just tell a few people, let the message spread.

Jonah just marches straight in there and tells them, four days time, just over a month, everything is going to be rubble. Now, just imagine hearing that. Imagine if someone started touring around Lewis, maybe in a pickup truck with a massive loud speaker on the back, shouting that everyone's going to be destroyed in forty days.

If they were driving across Carl away saying that, I imagine we'd maybe kind of think twice about freedom of speech just for that person. It would be pretty outrageous. It would cause most people to be very angry.

Because the message of judgment, and particularly divine judgment, it's not a popular topic, is it? You don't need me to tell you that. And it makes, for many people, it makes them think of grotesque pictures of people falling into a fiery pit and people with pitchforks jabbing them.

Or maybe it makes people think of the preacher who preached fire and brimstone every single week and everyone had to sit far back to avoid the spittle. That's the kind of picture we have of judgment often. That's the kind of picture our society has.

[6 : 39] And unfortunately, they associate often the church, the Christian church and the God of the Bible as a God of judgment. More seriously though, it is a topic that has caused a lot of pain, both within the church and outside the church.

Many people have sat for many years under preaching that week after week is turn or burn. And they've had conversations that are marked not by love, but by a harsh warning to that judgment is coming.

In some ways, about as harsh as Jonah's message there. So as we come to this topic, as we come to this topic and Jonah's message of judgment, we need to do so remembering that, well, taking care and remembering that this is a topic that has hurt a lot of people.

And it needs to be handled carefully. It's something that is misunderstood. And if we're honest, it's uncomfortable as well. None of us want to be told that we're guilty and that we stand under the judgment of the king of the universe.

It's an uncomfortable topic. But there's no getting away from the fact that that is Jonah's message. And Jonah might have said it in a harsh way, but that is also the message that God sent him to preach to Nineveh to call out against it.

[8 : 04] That judgment was coming. Now you might hear people say, well, that's just the God of the Old Testament. The God of the New Testament, he's much nicer. He only talks about love.

The judgment is an Old Testament thing. Jesus, God of the New Testament, that's not all about judgment. The thing is, the God of the Old Testament is the God of the New Testament. We can't separate that. We might be tempted to, but God is consistent in his character throughout the whole Bible.

And Jesus, who is God, reflects that consistency. Jesus speaks about judgment a lot. But of course, we'll see that he does it in a much more gracious way than Jonah.

We've been going through John's Gospels in the mornings, haven't we? And I don't know whether you've noticed, but chapters 5-10, where we're at, there's two big emphases. Jesus, both as coming as the God who saves, but also as the God who judges.

As Jesus clashes with the religious leaders, he's unafraid to call them out. We just saw this morning how he calls out the religious leaders for the way that they've been bad shepherds.

[9 : 16] He comes to judge as well as to save. John 5, verse 21, Jesus says, as the Father raises the dead and gives them life, so also the Son gives life to whom he will.

The Father judges no one, but has given all judgment to the Son. Jesus is both Savior and Judge. It's not just an Old Testament thing. Judgement isn't just something that we can push aside. Jesus says a lot about it.

And you might be thinking, well, all this talk about judgment, or you might have heard people say this, all this talk about judgment, but I thought God was good. Doesn't that fly in the face? Doesn't judgment and good God's goodness, don't they clash?

Aren't they incompatible? Well, however, far from judgment contradicting God's goodness, you might say that God judges because he is good.

It's precisely because God judges. God is good that he judges. We all want justice. We shout in frustration whenever the referee seems to be playing for us.

[10:18] We don't want the referee to be playing for the other team or being paid by the other team more likely. When the referee makes a decision that's good for us, and we might know it's a handball, but the referee doesn't see that. That's fine. When the referee makes that decision for the other team, we hate it. We think it's unjust. We want justice, whether that's in sporting events.

We want it more seriously when we see great injustices in the country. When we see someone who has been a multiple sex offender and who hasn't been caught over many years, and there's massives of abuse, and we see that happen and we are happy.

We think it is good when that person is finally brought to justice, when that person finally has to give account for their actions. They estimate that only a tiny percentage of the Nazi war criminals were ever brought to trial.

Germany has been, as that, there's very few left alive now, probably, they estimate, but Germany has been racing against the clock, as it were, to try to bring people to justice before they die.

It might be 60 years, what, 60 years? 80 years? 75 years, since they perpetrated their crimes. But we have that kind of, such a keen desire for justice, that we want to see justice at any cost.

[11:42] There's this, we all desire justice. I mean, that's part of the reason that Putin's been labeled, we'll see, been labeled, but anyway, that's part of the reason why the International Criminal Court is sanctioned Putin.

We want to see justice for all of those crimes. We want to see justice for the horrors in this world. We hate the idea of the guilty going unpunished.

A good God has to deal with wrongdoing. He has to bring about judgment, otherwise he's not just, otherwise he is not good.

And that's what the Ninevites were about to receive, they were about to receive justice. And in chapter one, we're told, if you remember that their evil had come before God, literally their evil was in his face.

God had to do something about their evil, because it was there. It was in God's faith, God is the sovereign king of all the earth.

[12:47] He's the creator of all things. And so that means not only does he make everything and he upholds everything, but everything has to give an account to him. Everyone has to give an account to him.

And historians will tell you that Nineveh was a pretty awful city. You can read accounts of their methods of punishment and their brutality. But their wickedness, their violence was notorious.

And the king of Nineveh, we even see that, he admits that in verse eight. He says, let everyone turn away from his evil ways and from the violence that is in their hands. God can't ignore evil. He won't ignore evil.

And that's why he sends Jonah to Nineveh with a message of judgment. And when it's for people like Nineveh, when it's for the Nazi war criminals, when it's for abusers, we rejoice at justice. We rejoice at judgment. We say, this is a good thing.

The problem is, we don't want to face it ourselves. We're happy that God is, we're happy for justice when it's for others. And we're less happy when that means that we face God's judgment as well.

[14:01] You see, we'd prefer to draw a line and say, well, everyone worse than this faces God's judgment. But we're here. We're always just above the line. We don't face God's judgment.

That's for everyone who's worse than us. The problem is when we do that, we're placing ourselves in God's place. We're putting ourselves as the judge. The very thing that we're getting angry against, we're saying, I'm the judge. I'm going to decide what is right and what is wrong.

The sobering truth though, is that judgment is real and we'll all face it before we die. Now the Bible tells us in 2 Corinthians chapter five that we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ. So that each one of us may receive what is due for what he has done in the body, whether good or evil. Judgment is coming. And notice, it's for all.

Paul says in 2 Corinthians that all must appear before the judgment seat of Christ. Every single one of us. And so we need to take judgment seriously.

[15:07] It's not a comfortable thing to talk about, but it's a necessary thing to talk about. And so can I say, are you ready to stand before God?

It's not something we say every week, but it's a necessary question. Are we ready to stand before the judgment seat of God? Is that dating your diary? Because on that day, all the secrets of our hearts will be exposed.

And God will judge us according to what we have done. Or of course, if we're in Christ according to what Christ has done. We'll come to that.

Part of taking judgment seriously though as well is that we need to be unafraid to talk about it. It's not a taboo topic in some ways. Of course, I recognize that it has been massively abused and spoken of badly.

But in the effort to make the gospel seem better, we can be tempted to never talk about judgment. To say that we mustn't talk about this at all.

[16:10] We just want to focus on God's goodness and His love. The problem with that is we can't pit God's attributes against each other. We've already said that God's righteous judgment, that flows from His goodness.

That flows from God upholding what is good. It flows from His justice. God's judgment isn't opposed to that. The judgment is not opposed to God's goodness. It's also not opposed to His love.

If we tell people God loves you, that is true. And we must do that. The Bible does tell us that God so loved the world. But actually, God's love, it falls flat if we don't realize that we are undeserving of His love.

God's love is seen in them all the more brilliantly when it's against the black backdrop, as it were, of what we deserve. When we realize we're not worthy of His love.

So we need to be unafraid to speak about judgment. That doesn't mean we talk about it like Jonah. That doesn't mean we talk about it bluntly with glee even.

[17:16] Rather, in the past we read in Matthew 12, Jesus says that one greater than Jonah is here. And I take it that means also in the way that Jesus speaks about judgment. When Jesus speaks about the destruction of Jerusalem, he weeps.

Jesus weeps over Jerusalem. And he doesn't just shout like Jonah, 40 years and he's going to be destroyed and then he goes away. Jesus speaks about, well, not just about the judgment, but about grace and mercy, which we're going to come along to.

So judgment is real. We all face God's judgment because of sin. That's the surprising message, as it were, that Jonah comes in with.

But what we see now is a surprising response. Whatever is this pretty awful place that people, it's amazing, they haven't ripped Jonah to shreds after just one day.

But just after one day of Jonah preaching this, the city is completely transformed. Just look at what happens.

[18:25] He says, 40 days a Nineveh shall be overthrown and straightaway read, and the people of Nineveh believe God. They're called for a fast. They put on sackcloth from the greatest of them to the least of them.

And the word reached the king of Nineveh and he arose from his throne, removed his robe, covered himself with sackcloth and sat in ashes, and issued a proclamation that published throughout Nineveh by the decree of the king and his nobles, let neither man nor beast, herd or flock, taste anything, let them not feed or drink water.

You know, we're all taught from a young age to say sorry, but true repentance is more than words. We see that here. True repentance is not just admitting that we're wrong.

I mean, politicians do that all the time. Well, they don't really. When they say sorry, normally they're saying, I'm sorry that you felt hurt by what I said. I'm not actually going to admit what I said was wrong, but true repentance is definitely more than that.

And it's definitely more than just words. True repentance recognizes what we have done. It mourns sin. You see that that's the sackcloth and ashes that the Ninevites put on themselves.

[19 : 31] That's a recognition of how serious their sin is, but they go further than that because just mourning our sin isn't enough. We can think our sin is terrible. We can hate our sin, but true repentance goes beyond that.

It's turning away from sin. That's what the king of Nineveh says. Let them call out mightily to God. Let everyone turn away, turn from his evil way and from the violence that is in his hands.

True repentance is turning away from sin. I mean, just to illustrate that, I'm notorious for not looking at road signs and for going the wrong way. I've been on the wrong train for about two hours because of that.

But if you're traveling down the road and you take a wrong turning and you realize that you're on the wrong turning, what you need to do is turn around and go back.

That's just a very simple illustration of repentance, recognizing you're going the wrong way and turning around 360 and going back 180.

[20 : 35] You don't want to turn 360. You keep going the same way. Turn around 180 and going back the way you came. True repentance means change. It means turning around. That's a lighthearted example, but it makes a point. True repentance involves real change.

You might struggle with anger issues and with just exploding and losing your temper. You can feel really bad about that and you can say sorry to those you've hurt, your family or friends.

But if you don't change, that's not true repentance. If you continue to just explode at people and your life looks no different, well, you might mourn your sin, but you haven't turned around.

Similarly, you might struggle with addiction to pornography and you might hate it and you might think it's revolting. But unless you're seeking to put sin to death, you haven't repented.

Or you can go on with examples. It might be gossip. And every time you're on the phone with your friends, every time you're in the break room with your colleagues, inevitably the conversation goes that way to talking about other people in a bad way.

[21 : 53] And you can't help but join in and you always join in. You know you shouldn't and you feel bad afterwards, but you keep joining in. True repentance means turning away. I mean stopping that.

Now that doesn't mean that you're going to dramatically change overnight if you repent. You'll certainly struggle. As Christians, even if we turn away from sin, we'll still struggle with sin.

But the point is, is that we've turned around. You know when we take a wrong turning, we find ourselves down the wrong road and we turn around, we're still going to be on that wrong road for a while.

But the point is we're now going the right direction. Repentance is about going the right direction, not necessarily being perfect. Because we're not going to be perfect until we die and go to be with Christ.

Repentance is about turning away from sin. We're not going to be suddenly free from sin. It's about traveling in the right direction. And that's the kind of repentance that Jesus commands of us. Jesus, his opening words, and this must be significant, his opening words in Mark's Gospel is the time is fulfilled, the kingdom of God is at hand, repent and believe.

[23 : 03] Repentance is central to Jesus' message. It's central to the message he sends his disciples out with, telling people to repent and turn back to God.

And the call to repent is a call to turn from specific sins, but more importantly and ultimately, it's a call to turn back from God. A call to stop going our own way in a life of rejecting God as King and turn back to him as King.

Now we might be pretty rubbish subjects at first, but the point is we're still subjects of the King, that we've turned back to him. And just be clear, the call to repent and believe isn't a call to sort out every single sin in our life.

We don't sort out our sins and then repent. We turn away with God's help, only with God's help can we begin to change.

So repentance is necessary. So can I ask, have you repented? Are you living a life of repentance?

[24 : 09] And if you haven't repented and turned to Jesus for the first time, can I ask why not?

What's holding you back? Jesus says, repent and believe. What would it take?

What's still, what would it take to believe in Jesus? I wonder how you'd finish the sentence, I would believe if or I would have faith if. What's the if? What comes after that?

I would have faith if, I don't know, God wrote a message in the sky. God appeared to me in a dream, God healed my friend if I had an amazing spiritual experience, if something happened that could only be called miraculous.

Someone had a special word for me that I don't know. In Matthew 12, Jesus is speaking to people who say they'll only believe in Jesus if.

They'll only repent and believe if. Jesus says, and they ask for one more sign. They're like, just one more Jesus. He's already healed the demon possessed man. He's already done a hundred different things, but they're saying, I'm only going to believe if. Jesus, do one more thing.

[25 : 15] Do one more sign. In response, Jesus says, the only thing you're going to get is the sign of Jonah. In other words, the only thing you're going to get, the only sign that you're going to get is me dying and rising again.

He says, for just as Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of the great fish, so will the Son of Man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth. In other words, the only sign any of us need, and only sign any of us are promised, is Jesus's death and resurrection.

That is entirely sufficient for us to believe. The resurrection is the defining proof of who Jesus says he is and what he came to do.

Apostle Paul says in Acts 17 that now Jesus commands all people everywhere to repent because he has fixed the day on which he'll judge the world in righteousness by a man whom he has appointed.

And of this, he has given assurance or he has given proof by raising him from the dead. So you want assurance, you want proof that Jesus will judge, that Jesus will save.

[26 : 24] Apostle Paul says, look at the resurrection. Look at Jesus' death and resurrection. In his death, we see proof of the seriousness of sin, of the reality of judgment, because that's why Jesus had to die.

And in Jesus' resurrection, we see the proof that God can give life to a can raised from the dead, physically and spiritually, those who are far from him.

Jesus' resurrection is the greatest sign of all. And if you're not sure that the resurrection is real, well then, then investigate it. Look at it. The one thing you can't do is do nothing and ignore it.

If you refuse to repent, Jesus gives us a solemn warning. Jesus says, the men of Nineveh will rise up at the judgment with this generation and condemn it, for they repented the preaching of Jonah and behold, something greater than Jonah is here.

In other words, Jesus is far greater than Jonah, so we have no excuse not to repent. Now that might sound blunt, but that's what Jesus' words are not lying. People of Nineveh repented at the preaching of Jonah. Now like that's remarkable.

[27 : 34] He's a pretty rubbish prophet. He does everything wrong. He comes into the city with this 40 days and Nineveh is going to be overthrown message. There's no mercy, there's no hope.

The king says, who knows, maybe God will turn and relent. Jonah doesn't even tell them that God's a compassionate God. He just tells them the judgment is coming and yet they repented at the message of Jonah.

We've got Jesus speaking to us from the Bible, speaking perfect words of truth and life. We see his life, which is thankfully so much better than the life of Jonah, which is perfect, which is loving and gracious.

We've got all of what he says and all of who he is verified by his resurrection. We have no excuse not to repent and believe. The people of Nineveh did at the preaching of Jonah. How much more should we do it at the preaching of Jesus?

We all need to repent. Maybe for some of you that is the first time. Even if you're listening online, you might be tuning in for the first time. Maybe that is for the first time, but for all of us, Jesus calls us to live a life of repentance, to live a life of continually turning back to him and believing in him.

[28 : 54] We've seen a surprising message of judgment. We've seen a surprising response of repentance. Finally, a surprising and wonderful reaction that mercy is available.

Verse 10 is wonderful, isn't it? Let me just read it again. When God saw what they did, how they turned from the evil way, God relented of the disaster that he said he would do and he did not do it. It's one verse, but it's definitely the best verse in the entire chapter.

When we repent and turn back to God, we don't do it in vain. Mercy is available. God is ready and waiting to show mercy to the Ninevites. Jonah was ready and waiting for God to destroy them. God

was ready and waiting to show mercy.

God didn't treat the Ninevites as they deserve. That's why it's called mercy. Mercy is God treating us not as we deserve, but graciously and lovingly, completely not as we deserve.

That's because God cares about his creation. The apostle Peter tells us these wonderful words. He says, God is patient towards you, not wishing that anyone should perish, but that all should reach repentance.

[30 : 05] Isn't that wonderful? God doesn't delight in the death of the wicked. He wants to see people repent and turn to him. He wants to show mercy. Earlier we talked about that God's judgment is good because without it, he wouldn't be just.

You might be thinking, how is it just then for him to have mercy on the Ninevites if they were so awful? How is it possible for God to not deal with them as their sins deserve?

To answer that, we've got to go back to the cross. We've got to go back to that question as it were, why did Jesus have to die? Because God can't leave sin unpunished. In order for him to have mercy on the Ninevites, in order for him to have mercy on people like you and me, sin has to be punished.

Sin has to be dealt with. That's why Jesus had to die as a substitute for you and I, taking that punishment, taking the judgment of God for all who trust in him.

Jesus brought a judgment so that we may receive mercy. We see mercy here in Technicolor, don't we? God doesn't just save a handful of Ninevites, but God decides that he's going to save that whole city in one day.

[31 : 20] Isn't that wonderful? I'm not sure we could even have hope for that. I'm not sure we even pray prayers that big for a whole city to be saved. Just imagine the whole of Calaway suddenly on its knees, repenting and believing.

Imagine the whole of Edinburgh, imagine the whole of London, all in one day turning back to God. That's beyond that. We don't even know what it would look like.

What would it be like? It's beyond our imagination and yet that's what happens. The crazy thing is that they do that from the preaching of Jonah. God uses, God is so powerful, he's so sovereign, he's so in charge, that he can use a bitter and angry prophet to turn a whole city to himself.

I think Jonah's inadequacy really just highlights God's glory even more. It highlights his mercy, it highlights that it's all God's work. Just as we close, I hope that encourages us as we go out with the Gospel.

If God could use the preaching of Jonah to bring about revival, then he can use you and me too. He can use us with all of our weakness. He can use us on our bad days. He can use us when we're actually not feeling very generous and gracious.

[32 : 33] When we're not actually as loving to those around us as we should. If God could use the preaching of Jonah to bring about a whole city of revival, then he can definitely use us, all of us, to turn Calaway back to him.

Now we pray and we hope that there might be revival, like we saw in Nineveh. We hope and pray that we might see revival in our Calaway and our lifetime.

That would be wonderful. But it's also worth saying as we close that we don't need revival either.

For this community to come and know Jesus, God might turn out on the faucet to full flow.

He might, in a miraculous way, bring people by their hundreds to him. But he also might, as he does normally, and use his ordinary work of drip, drip, dripping people into his kingdom.

As people like you and me, in all our weakness, share the Gospel with those around us. And he saves people one at a time, two at a time, three at a time. So even as we pray for revival, even as we pray that we would see something like Nineveh in Calaway, not the violence, the revival.

[33 : 52] Even as we pray for that, let's also pray, let's also put our shoulder to the plow as it were and keep sowing the seed in hope that God will continue his ordinary work of bringing people to Christ.

For his name, for his glory, by his mercy.