

A Great Recommission

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- [0 : 0 0] If it could this evening with the Lord's help and the Lord's leading, if we could turn back to that portion of scripture that we read.
- The Book of the Prophet Jonah and Chapter 3. Jonah Chapter 3 and if you read again just from the beginning.
- It says there, 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 rose and went to Nineveh according to the word of the Lord. So Jonah rose and went to Nineveh according to the word of the Lord.
- Have you ever had deja vu, that strange feeling where you think that you've seen it all before, you've seen it in a dream.
- [0 : 5 9] And sometimes deja vu is one of the strangest feelings that you experience because you think that you've seen it already or you've already been there.
- In fact it's said that the phrase deja vu, that's what it means. Because apparently deja vu is a French phrase, what literally means already seen.
- So deja vu means already seen. And in a sense when you come to Jonah Chapter 3, that's what we're being confronted with. We're being confronted with deja vu because although it was only, well it was three months ago now, we've already seen this.
- We've seen this occasion take place. We've already seen the Lord commissioning Jonah to go to Nineveh. We've already seen Jonah attempting, well running, he was running away from, he was told to go to Nineveh but he decided to go the opposite direction to Tarshish.
- But you know in this chapter, the Lord isn't commissioning Jonah. We see the Lord recommissioning Jonah. He's recommissioning Jonah to go to Nineveh. The Lord is giving Jonah another opportunity to follow the Lord's commission upon his life by going to Nineveh and preaching what he's been called to do, preaching a message of repentance.
- [2 : 1 7] And this evening as we consider Jonah Chapter 3, I'd like us to consider it under three headings. Three headings, a prophet recommissioned, a preacher resurrected and a people repentant.
- A prophet recommissioned, a preacher resurrected and a people repentant. So first of all, we see a prophet recommissioned.
- A prophet recommissioned, we were told 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.
- Now, when we speak about Jonah being recommissioned, I'm sure that we're all aware of what we call as the great commission. We're aware of the words of the great commission and the close of Matthew's gospel.
- In Matthew Chapter 28, prior to Jesus ascending to heaven, Jesus issues the great commission to his disciples. He says, all authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me.

[3 : 20] Go there for a make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I've commanded you and behold I'm with you always to the end of the age.

Jesus issued the great commission and he issued that commission not only to the disciples in the first century, but also to us who are his disciples in the 21st century.

The great commission is to go with the good news of the gospel and make disciples, not converts, but to make disciples of all nations.

The great commission is as relevant today as when Jesus first said it to the 11 apostles. But you know as we consider Jonah's recommission to go to the midi, I want to suggest to you that the great commission at the end of Matthew's gospel is actually the great recommission.

It's the great recommission. And I say that because when you go all the way back to Genesis Chapter 12, where the Lord first called Abraham to himself, the Lord promised Abraham.

[4 : 32] He called him out of all of the Caldees and promised to Abraham that through his seed, all the nations of the earth would be blessed. And when the Lord called Abraham, he produced a people as we know to be the children of Israel.

They were the seed of Abraham. And when the Lord called them out of Egypt, you remember that they were brought up out of the land of Egypt, brought out of the house of bondage. The Lord saved them and made them his own people.

And the Lord called the Israelites. He said that they were his peculiar people. They were his treasured possession. And as his people, his covenant people, the Lord commissioned them to be a light to the nations in order to draw the nations to worship the Lord.

But instead of being a light to the nations, the Israelites, they hid their light. They veiled their light. They kept the light of salvation to themselves. And the result was that the Israelites, they became a proud nation.

They viewed themselves as the Lord's people, which they were, but they viewed themselves as a cut above everyone else. They were a cut above the Gentiles.

[5 : 43] And what happened in the end was that they forgot that salvation was all of grace and that salvation was all of the Lord. And they became proud and an insular people.

And one commentator, he describes the Israelites as those who put up mirrors around themselves. Because all the Israelites wanted to do was just look at self.

They wanted to focus upon themselves and they didn't want to go beyond the boundaries of Israel with this message of salvation. And so instead of being outward looking towards the other nations, they were inward looking.

Instead of being open minded to fulfilling their great commission, they were narrow minded. In fact, that's why Jonah didn't want to go to Nineveh in the first place.

Because Jonah knew that the people of Nineveh weren't Israelites. They weren't direct descendants of Abraham. They weren't part of the covenant of grace. They weren't children, the children of Israel.

[6 : 43] And with that, Jonah didn't believe that the ungodly people of Nineveh deserve the Lord's salvation. Jonah didn't believe that the people of Nineveh were worthy of the light of the Lord's salvation being preached to them.

Which is the real reason why Jonah ran in the opposite direction towards Tarshish. Jonah didn't think that what the Lord was doing was right. Jonah didn't believe that salvation is of the Lord.

Jonah only believed that salvation was because you were a Jew. He believed that salvation was all because of the family you were brought up in and the privileges you were given and the opportunities that were afforded to you.

In other words, Jonah believed that there are only certain types of people who can be saved. Which as you know, is not true.

But you know, we can often be guilty of forgetting that salvation is all of grace and it's all of the Lord. We can often be guilty of categorizing people and making a judgment on them just by looking at them or even speaking to them.

[7 : 52] And we put them into this certain box thinking, well, it's impossible for that person to be converted because of their background or their upbringing or their addictions or the problems going on in their lives.

And you know, it's so sad because so many Christians, me included, we excuse ourselves from our great recommission because we say that our villages are full of income.

We say that our island is full of people who don't want the gospel. They don't care about church. They don't understand our culture. But you know, none of that should ever be an obstacle.

That should always be an opportunity. None of it should be an obstacle. It should always be an opportunity because if salvation, as Jonah discovered in the belly of the wheel, if salvation is all of the Lord, then they're able to be saved like everyone else.

They're able to be saved like you and like me. And you know, sometimes I think we need to repent of our sin, our sin of thinking that God is too small to save them.

[9 : 01] Our sin of thinking that salvation is because of our culture and not because of the Lord. You know, we need to repent of our sin and present the gospel to them because that's what Jonah did.

Jonah confessed his sin in the belly of the wheel and he confessed that salvation is off the Lord. And once he confessed his sin and that salvation is off the Lord, the Lord recommissions Jonah to go back to Nineveh and to preach the gospel.

And that's what we see in the opening verses of this chapter. The prophet Jonah, he's recommissioned and even when you read the verses one and two in chapter three, and then you see that they're almost identical to the verses, the opening verses of chapter one.

As we were saying, it's like deja vu. In chapter one, it says, now the word of the Lord came to Jonah, the son of Amitya, saying, arise, go to Nineveh, that great city and call out against it, for the evil has come up before me.

And then you go to chapter three, 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, arise, go to Nineveh, that great city and call out against it.

[10 : 17] In chapter one, Jonah was commissioned to go to Nineveh. And as we said before, when the Lord gave Jonah the commission, arise and go.

The Lord expected an immediate response, but Jonah arose not to follow the Lord's commission, but to flee from the Lord's commission. But now we see in chapter three, after being corrected by the Lord, challenged by the Lord, in the belly of the whale, Jonah is recommissioned with the same commission, arise, go to Nineveh, that great city and call out against it.

Now, the reason I emphasize Jonah's recommission is because the story of Jonah, as you know, it's much more than a prophet who ran away from the Lord and was swallowed by a big fish.

The story of Jonah, as you know, it's all about Jesus and the message of the gospel. The story of Jonah is about the great recommission.

Because as an Old Testament book, the story of Jonah, it was written for the purpose of challenging the Israelites. And at the time of writing this particular book, the Israelites, they were failing to be obedient to their great commission, the commission of being a light to the nations.

[11 : 38] And they were a proud nation. They were hiding the light of salvation. They were keeping it to themselves. But what the story of Jonah presented to the Israelites at the time is that because Jonah was recommissioned to go, so too must the Lord's people be recommissioned to go to all nations.

And you know, that's what we actually see fulfilled in the New Testament. Because as Paul reminds us, the Church of Jesus Christ is, we are the new Israel.

We are the New Testament Church, and we're meant to be a light to all the nations. That's why Jesus says in the Sermon on the Mount, you are the light of the world.

A city set on a hill that cannot be hidden. Nor do people light a lamp and put it under a basket just like the Israelites did. They hid their lamp under a basket. They veiled their light.

But Jesus says, no, you're to put your light on a stand and give light to the whole house. And in the same way says Jesus, let your light so shine before others that they may see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven.

[12 : 46] And so the story of Jonah, it should make us realize the preciousness of the Gospel and that we as God's covenant people, the new Israel, were not to be proud, narrow minded, and inward looking.

And we're not to be that because we have been recommissioned to go and make disciples of all nations. We have been recommissioned to go and make disciples of all nations.

And so we've seen a prophet recommissioned. But secondly, a preacher resurrected. A preacher resurrected.

It says in verse three, 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 to the city going a day's journey and he called out, he had 40 days and Nineveh shall be overthrown. So when Jonah was recommissioned to go to Nineveh, Jonah were told he arose and went to Nineveh according to the word of the Lord.

[13 : 54] It took a little bit of time, but Jonah eventually did as he was commanded and obeyed the word of God. But you know, the truth is we can be so like Jonah.

I don't know about you, but I often find myself so like Jonah, so stubborn, so disobedient, not wanting to do what the Lord is asking us to do.

But it's often the Lord that brings us round to his way and to his will. He brings us round to his way of thinking and shapes us and directs us to obey the word of the Lord.

And so Jonah, he follows the Lord's commission and he heads east towards Nineveh. And the city of Nineveh is 500 miles away, 500 miles east of Israel and it's situated in the modern city of Mosul, which is in northern Iraq.

And Nineveh was this large and wealthy city. It was a mighty fortress. It was a key city in the ever expanding Assyrian Empire, but Nineveh, as you know, wasn't just renowned for its strength.

[15 : 01] It was also renowned for its sin. The people of Nineveh hated God. They hated God's people. And in their hatred of others, they exploited the helpless.

They were merciless in war. They partook in idolatry. They committed prostitution. They performed witchcraft. They were extremely proud of all their achievements and their sin angered the Lord, which is why the Lord recommissioned Jonah to go and preach against it.

But what's interesting about verse three, as I were told, Nineveh was an exceedingly great city. Literally the translation is Nineveh was an exceedingly great city to God.

An exceedingly great city to God. And you see that if you're using the ESV Bible, that's in the foot note. Nineveh was an exceedingly great city to God.

And what's implied is not Nineveh's structure or Nineveh's sin, but that Nineveh was special to God. Nineveh was a special city. It was a city that was important in God's sight and God cared for the city of Nineveh and God loved the people of Nineveh.

[16 : 15] Of course, Jonah couldn't understand why God would love the ungodly and unclean and gentile city of Nineveh. But what Jonah still needed to rediscover and what we often need to be reminded of is why would God love anyone?

Why would God love any of us? And yet we're told here Nineveh of all places, Nineveh was an exceedingly great city to God.

And so was Corinth, you know, the Greek city of Corinth. It was just like Nineveh. It was very ungodly, very worldly.

And so was the church in Corinth. You read through first Corinthians and the church in Corinth, we reminded there there was a worldly church. It was full of division.

It was there was sexual immorality. There was homosexuality. There was pride. There was idolatry. There was the abuse of spiritual gifts. And yet when Paul preached in Corinth, we're told in Acts chapter 18 that many of the Corinthians believed and were baptized.

[17 : 22] So many people were converted that the Lord said to Paul one night in a vision. He said, do not be afraid, but go on speaking and do not be silent for I am with you.

And no one will attack you to harm you for I have many in this city who are my people. I have many in this city who are my people.

And with that commission, Paul stayed. He stayed a year and a half in the city of Corinth, preaching the gospel. And it was all because Corinth was a great city to God.

And the Lord said, I have many people in this city. And you know, I don't know about you, but you know, we should think of our communities in relation to those verses where the Lord said, I have many in this city who are my people.

You know, we should hope and pray that the Lord will offer to us. I have many in these communities who are my people. Because you know, I'm sure that if you're like me, you long for the day that many in your home and in your family and in this community will come and gather with us just like we are this evening.

[18 : 42] That's our longing that many will come and make themselves known as the Lord's people. Nineveh was an exceedingly great city to God.

We're told in verse four, Jonah began to go into the city going a day's journey. He had called out yet 40 days and Nineveh shall be over three.

So when Jonah, he traveled 500 miles to Nineveh, we're told that Jonah went into the city a day's journey. Now, that's often cost confusion because we're told at the end of verse three, we're told there that the city of Nineveh was three days journey in breadth.

And then we're told in verse four, Jonah went a day's journey into the city. It doesn't mean that Nineveh was so big that it would take you three days to walk through the city. What we've been told there is that when Jonah arrived in Nineveh, he preached God's message throughout the city of Nineveh for three days.

And on the first day of entering the city, we're told that Jonah preached to the people saying 40 days, 40 days and Nineveh will be overthrown.

[19 : 52] Because message was a message of God's imminent judge 40 days, 40 days and Nineveh will be overthrown. But you know, we have to question, well, is that all Jonah said to these people?

He traveled 500 miles and is that all he had to say to them? 40 days and Nineveh will be overthrown. Surely Jonah had to say more than that.

Surely there was more to his message than just 40 days and judgment is coming. Although there's nothing in the book itself to confirm this.

I want to suggest that it's Jesus who affirms that Jonah said a lot more than these few words of judgment. Because when Jesus addressed the people of his day, he said, this generation is an evil generation.

It seeks for a sign, but no sign will be given to it, except the sign of Jonah. For as Jonah became a sign to the people of Nineveh, so will the Son of Man be to this generation.

[20 : 58] But the question is, well, what was the sign of Jonah to the people of Nineveh? What was the sign of Jonah to the people of Nineveh? Because the story of Jonah, as we know, it's about Jesus and the message of the gospel.

And as we've said before, although it was a long time ago, Jonah is a type of Christ, not in every aspect of his life, but he is a type. Therefore, the sign of Jonah, I want to suggest, is the death of sin and the resurrection to new life.

The sign of Jonah is the death of sin and the resurrection to new life. Because when you read the story of Jonah, when you consider the life of Jesus, you see that both Jesus and Jonah, they moved in the same direction.

Both Jesus and Jonah moved in the same direction. Jonah's movement was down, down, down. He went down to Joppa, down into the heart of the ship, down into the belly of the fish, down, down, down.

Same movement as Jesus. Because Jesus's movement was down, down, down, from the crown to the cradle to the cross, from glory to Golgotha to the grave. Jesus went down, down, down.

[22 : 14] It's the same movement. They moved in the same direction. And even Jesus, he compares his death and burial to Jonah. He says this in the New Testament.

He said that the sign of Jonah was that 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.

So Jesus described his movement just like Jonah's, down, down, down. But it was after three days and three nights that Jonah was delivered from the belly of the grave or the belly of Sheol as it's described in the Bible.

Jonah was vomited out, vomited out onto dry land. That's what we're told at the end of chapter two. The Lord spoke to the fish and it vomited Jonah out upon the dry land.

Jonah was resurrected. vomited from the grave, brought from what was in his experience death, brought from death to life. And you know, the story of Jonah, it's the story of the gospel.

[23 : 19] Jesus went down, down, down into the depths of the earth from glory to Golgotha to the grave. But on the first Lord's day morning, Jesus was brought up, up, up.

He was resurrected from the grave. He was brought from death to life, just like Jonah brought up from the grave.

And so the sign of Jonah is the death of sin and the resurrection to new life. The sign of Jonah is the death of sin and the resurrection to new life.

And so when Jonah was recommissioned to go to Nineveh, what did he say to these Ninevites? What did he say to them? He preached the gospel to them.

He preached the gospel through his own experience. Jonah preached the death of sin and the resurrection to new life through the promised Messiah.

[24:17] Jonah preached the gospel to them. When Jonah was recommissioned, he preached Christ. And needless to say, when Jesus issued the great recommission, that's what he told us to do.

He told us to go and tell people about the sign of Jonah. Jesus told us to go and preach about the death of sin and the resurrection of new life. Jesus told us to go and preach about his humiliation and his exaltation.

He told us to preach about the fact that he went from the crown, to the cradle, to the cross. And now that he's back at the crown in glory. Jesus told us to go and preach about the death of sin and the resurrection of new life through the promised Messiah. And as a people we've been recommissioned to preach Christ and you know we're to preach Christ through our character, our conduct and our conversation. We're to preach Christ through our character, our conduct and our conversation. Because the result of preaching Christ is that there will be a people repentant. Our aim and our hope is that people will repent. That's what we see lastly here, a people repentant, a prophet recommissioned, a preacher resurrected and a people repentant. Look at verse 5. 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 arose from his throne, removed his robe, covered himself with sackcloth and sat in ashes. When Jonah preached the death of sin and the resurrection to new life through the promised Messiah were told that they believed God. They believed God, they had faith in the promised death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. But more than that they responded in repentance. They responded in repentance. They proclaimed a fast, they put on sackcloth and ashes which was a symbol of mourning and they were mourning over their sin. They were mourning over their disobedience against God. They were mourning over the fact that they had lived their lives in rebellion against a holy God. But you know this didn't just affect a few people in Nineveh. We're told that it affected all the classes of people in every part of the city. It affected everyone, from the least to the greatest. Even the king we're told, the king of Nineveh was affected. We're told that when Jonah preached the death of sin and the resurrection of new life, the word reached the king of Nineveh and he arose from his throne, removed his robe, covered himself with sackcloth and sat in ashes. The king repented of his sin and turned to the king of kings for forgiveness.

And you know even that movement arising from your throne, that's what every sinner does when they're converted. We abdicate our throne, the throne of our heart and we find ourselves in sackcloth and ashes repenting before the Lord. But more than that we're told that the king called the people of Nineveh to be a repentant people. We're told in verse seven and he issued a proclamation and published through Nineveh by the decree of the king and his nobles, led neither man nor beast, herd nor flock, taste anything. Let them not feed nor 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 way and from the violence that is in his hands. Let everyone turn from his evil way. You know, the people of Nineveh repented at the preaching of Jonah and there was this, I suppose it was a mass revival, a mass revival in the city of Nineveh. But you know, it was because of the inward looking, narrow mind itself, righteous people of Israel that Jesus said, the men of Nineveh will rise up at the judgment with this generation and condemn it. For they repented at the preaching of Jonah and behold, a greater than Jonah is here. You know, the people of Nineveh repented and their repentance should have been a warning. It should have been a warning to Jonah and to the covenant people of Israel that the gospel is for everyone. The gospel is to be proclaimed to whosoever.

It's not to be kept to ourselves. It's not to be veiled. It's not to be hidden away. Hidden away. No, the reminder from the book of Jonah and the warning that comes from the book of Jonah is that the gospel is for whosoever. The repentant people of Nineveh should have been a warning to Jonah and to the covenant people of Israel and to us that no matter how ungodly and rebellious people are, there's no one exempt from the message of the gospel.

[29 : 45] There's no one. The Lord's arm is not shortened that it cannot save. Neither is his ear heavy that he cannot hear. The call of the gospel is whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord, shall be saved. And so the gospel message is to go to whosoever, a message which proclaims the death of sin and the resurrection to new life through the promised Messiah, Jesus Christ. And as we're saying, that's what the book of Jonah is all about. The story of Jonah, it's not about this man who ran away from God and was swallowed by a big fish. The story of Jonah is all about Jesus and the preciousness of the gospel and that we have this precious gospel.

But as Paul says, if our gospel be hid, it is hid to them that are lost. We're not to hide the gospel. We've been recommissioned like Jonah to go and make disciples of all nations. And like Jonah, we're to preach through our character, our conduct and our conversation, and we're to preach the death of sin and the resurrection of new life through Jesus Christ.

Like Jonah, we're to see that salvation is of the Lord and pray that there would be a repentant people in our communities. And you know, my friend, when I read the last two verses of this chapter and what the King of Nineveh said, you know, there's this air of expectancy.

He says, who knows? Who knows? God may turn and relent and we turn from his fierce anger, so we may not perish. When God saw what they did, how they sin from their evil way, God relented of the disaster that he had said he would do to them and he did not do it. There was an air of expectancy.

Who knows? Who knows? Who knows what the gospel can do in the lives of those in our homes and in our families and in our community. But you know, what we should have as we go with the gospel, as we're recommissioned, as we seek to proclaim this Christ, what we should have is an air of expectancy waiting for people to respond to God in mercy, to seek the Lord while he may be found. We should have an air of expectancy because, you know, as Paul reminds us, the gospel alone is the power of God unto salvation. And we're not to be ashamed of the gospel.

[32 : 30] We're not to be ashamed of this glorious gospel. We're recommissioned to go because the story of Jonah, it's all about Jesus and the gospel. Jesus and the gospel. So a prophet recommissioned, a preacher resurrected and a people repentant. May the Lord bless these thoughts to us.

O Lord our gracious God, that Thou wouldst give to us even this evening a passion for the lost that we would realize that the Lord the God who has called us, called us from darkness unto Thine one marvellous light and that we have been called for a purpose to show forth the praises of him.

And Lord we pray that we would show forth thy praises, that we would do it in our lives by our character, our conduct and even our conversation, that we would live lives worthy of the gospel and that we would see that Jesus is one in whom we must speak of, that we must speak of him in season and out of season, that we must tell it to the generation following, that this God is our God and that he will be our guide even unto death. Lord give to us that vision, that passion, that longing because as Thy word reminds us that without vision the people perish. Lord help us then we pray to have a vision for the extension of God's kingdom in this community and Lord the name of Christ been exalted, that as Jesus promises that if I be lifted up I will draw all men to myself and Lord help us then in our daily witness and in our daily lives, in our daily conversations.

Lord help us to lift up Jesus, that when he is lifted up that those who are in darkness would be drawn, drawn to him to see him as the fairest among 10,000 and one who is altogether lovely.

All Lord bless us then we pray, bind us together, help us to ever look to Jesus, to know him and to love him as the author and the finisher of our faith. All cleanses then we ask, lead us and guide us by Thy Spirit for we ask it in Jesus' name and for his sake. Amen.