

Evotional – 12 October 2014 – Jonah 3

Then the word of the Lord came to Jonah a second time: 'Go to the great city of Nineveh and proclaim to it the message I give you.' (Jonah 3: 1-2)

GOD IS GRACIOUS

God makes no reference to Jonah's previous failure, nor reminds him of his deliverance, nor claims Jonah's promise "what I have vowed I will make good" (2:9); there is no rebuke, threat or demand; God just repeats his command. God is giving him a second chance.

The Bible is full of people like Jonah. They mess up but God uses them anyway. They keep on messing up and God keeps on using them. God gives second and third (and hundredth) chances.

If we've done something wrong, or taken a wrong turning, or made a bad decision, we may hear a voice in our head saying – "God isn't interested in you any more; you're too bad; you've wandered too far off the path; you're not the right calibre or the right sort of material for God to use; you're too old now; you're too compromised now; you've blown it." That voice is not God! It may be the Devil, or your own insecurity, or maybe your own wishful thinking!

God is the one who called Jonah a second time.

Question 1: Can you think of any other examples of second chances in the Bible? Has this ever happened to you?

This is because God is gracious. Sure, God is also sometimes just (he gives us what we deserve) and merciful (he doesn't give us what we deserve), but above all he is gracious (he gives us what we don't deserve). He gives us second chances.

Wonderful grace, That gives what I don't deserve, Pays me what Christ has earned, And lets me go free.
Wonderful grace, That gives me the time to change, Washes away the stains That once covered me.
And all that I have I lay at the feet Of the Wonderful Saviour who loves me.

Question 2: How can you make sure you get a better understanding of God's grace?

GET UP AND GO

God's first word to Jonah was "go" (NIV) or more literally "get up" (it is the same word as Jesus spoke to the little girl in Mark 5:41). In Chapters 1 and 2 Jonah had been going down and down and down and down, and ended up in a puddle of whale sick. But God wants him to get up and go. He said it in 1:2 and repeats it in 3:2.

If there was one nation at that time that was certainly beyond the pale, it was Assyria. The Assyrians were brutal and merciless (v8), and Nineveh was their military centre. They showed no quarter in battle, torturing those they defeated in horrific ways and uprooting entire peoples in their fury for conquest. (Think ISIS.) They extinguished the Northern Kingdom of Israel. So Nineveh was no ordinary city; it stood as a symbol of evil. It was not surprising that Jonah went the other way. In fact, God's call for Jonah to get up and go to Nineveh was totally absurd and unreasonable!

Question 3: 'Jonah's problem was that he didn't really know God as well as he thought he did.' Do you agree? Is that ever your problem?

(Jesus could also be unreasonable. He told people to get up and put down their nets; to get up and to leave their tax collecting booths and their families and their communities and livelihoods and follow him; to get up and pick up their crosses and follow him; to get out of their boats and walk to him; to stop persecuting him and start proclaiming him.)

Unlike Jonah the first time round, the first thing the wicked heathen king did when he heard the message was to ... get up (v6)! The king and the people of Nineveh took Jonah's word to be true and they turned their backs on violence and wickedness.

Question 4: Is God calling you to get up? To do something new, unexpected, outrageous, frightening, unreasonable? Something you've never done before? Something you're not even convinced is appropriate based on your worldview or what you currently know about God or yourself?

The Ninevites also did something visual and symbolic. They put on sackcloth. This would probably not be a good idea in 2014, but sometimes it is a good idea to do something visual and symbolic when God speaks to us, to make it clear (to him, to others and to ourselves) that we are serious about getting up and going.

Question 5: What is the equivalent for you of putting on sackcloth today?