

God Does His Gracious Work.

Do they deserve another chance? Well, that depends. Is it an athlete who stormed out of practice rather than follow the coach's directions and later regrets it? Is it some sin, betrayal, or failure in a relationship? Maybe it's some sin from a person's youth. Do they deserve another chance? No. Most often – no. But what does it depend on? More often than not it depends on the person who holds the power, the person who has been offended or is in the right. Today, God shows us a little bit about ourselves, and a lot about himself. Whether we rejoice or protest, **God Does His Gracious Work.**

“And the word of the LORD came to Jonah a second time saying, “Go to the great city of Nineveh and proclaim to it the message I give you.” Did you catch that? - “a second time.” What happened the first time? Jonah, the prophet of the LORD, who delivered a message to King Jeroboam II of Israel about better times for Israel - expanding borders, was tasked by God with a very different mission. God told him to go to the Ninevites and preach repentance to them just like John the Baptist would do in Israel and the Messiah, Jesus, would later do. Giving a message to sinful Israel was one thing, but going all the way to the land of their enemies, their oppressors, and preaching God's message to their city was beyond what Jonah was willing to do. Jonah knew what God's will was and the power of God's Word. He went southwest instead of northeast. He paid a fare, must have been expensive, to go to the far side of the Mediterranean Sea, to Tarshish. He tried to flee from the LORD. Why? The Ninevites were so awful and vile and violent. Jonah thought they didn't deserve it.

Who do you despise? Who do you hold a grudge against? Is it an individual? Is it a group? Is it a people? A race? A gender? Truth is there are often plenty of people we hold grudges against whether we realize it or not and there is no question we would probably act like Jonah if God asked us to go give his Word to them. I don't know how long you've held your grudge and I might agree with you that it's deserved if I knew what you know, but that's not who our God is. Jonah in his hatred for the Ninevites showed himself undeserving of God's love. God says vengeance belongs to him. What was God's to decide and repay, Jonah was taking into his own hands by his refusal to obey God's command. Vengeance, rage, and thoughts of revenge in our heart is just us trying to play god, and we are poor, petty, foolish gods. Jonah didn't get far. He put himself and the whole ship's crew and passengers in danger. God sent a wind that threatened to break up the ship. The crew ditched their precious cargo to try to save everyone's life, even Jonah's, while Jonah was on a mission to make sure a whole city was destroyed and lost. The crew reluctantly threw Jonah overboard at Jonah's insistence. Jonah probably thought he was going to die. He sank down to the depths, would have died, but God provided a huge fish to swallow Jonah. A miracle. A fact. Jonah was in the belly of the fish three days and nights. He prayed and thanked God for saving him. The fish vomited him onto dry land. Jonah experienced miracle after miracle. God spared his life.

God called him again to go, an act of mercy upon mercy to a grudge-holding, foolish prophet. Do we need to be thrown overboard for the grudges we hold or the hate we have for certain people? It doesn't take long to find out that we hold grudges. It shows on your face when someone says something nice about them, and you can't stand it. It festers in your heart as you mull over the memories and can't wait for them to get theirs. I'm not saying they don't deserve God's wrath and punishment for what they've done to you or someone you love. What I am saying is that this type of hatred and grudge will only harm your soul, will only ruin your

life, and rob you of joy and peace. Jonah held a grudge and when God gave Jonah a job to do, he ran the other way and caused a bunch of problems. He needed to repent. And so do we. God's mercy to a person does not mean they deserve it. It is who our God is, and it is his gracious work. His love for the underserving sinner is the reason we are in his family, the reason we are Christians, the reason we have forgiveness, hope and love. Christ Jesus came into this world to save sinners – of whom we are the worst. The cross doesn't just empty us of our sins, it shakes us and empties us out of our pride, our self-righteousness, our hatred, our grudges, our anger. And it fills us with God's peace, joy, and comfort and confidence in God's will and his way, even if it is hard for us to understand.

“Jonah obeyed the word of the LORD and went to Nineveh. Now Nineveh was a very large city; it took three days to go through it. Jonah began by going a day's journey into the city, proclaiming, “Forty more days and Nineveh will be overthrown.” The Ninevites believed God. A fast was proclaimed, and all of them, from the greatest to the least, put on sackcloth” (NIV 2011). When God tells us to go and do, he blesses. What an intimidating city, a hostile city for most Jewish people, yet God's Word works, even in the mouth of a self-righteous, judgmental, petty prophet. *“Forty days”* was a time of grace for the Ninevites. They needed to hear the Law from a gracious God. God loves us enough to stop us in our tracks sometimes because we're headed away from him and to complete destruction of our souls, and we're leading others astray. God had to show them where it leads – God would overthrow them if they continued in their wickedness. Just like a good parent is consistent with their discipline so that the children know the boundaries and what will happen, so God uses his law to show us what will happen if we transgress his ways. God had been patient with them, but the patience would run out according to his justice.

The Word worked. It works for you the grudge holder. It works for those who you have grudges against. Jonah finally went and preached. God brought the Ninevites to their knees by the law and made them hold on to the good news that this was a merciful and forgiving God that Jonah represented. God in his mercy works the same way with you and me. We need to hear the law to convict our sinful ways and ideas, to shake from our hands the grudges we hold so tightly to like the little child holding onto some gross gum they picked up from the sidewalk and they don't want to let go. God uses Jonah's example to pry open our chubby little fists and pull back the fingers of our pride, self-righteousness, and vengeance and grab from our hands the sinful gum grudges our little souls would choke on, and places our hands in his. God uses the example of his prophet Jonah and the Ninevites to change hearts – the offended's and the offender's. His Law and Gospel work.

“When God saw what they did and how they turned from their evil ways, he relented and did not bring on them the destruction he had threatened.” God doesn't change, but in his love he changes us. He is love. He is just. He changed hearts and withheld the destruction he had threatened. That is how God works.

God is just, make no mistake. All their sins, all our sins he placed upon Jesus Christ, and God took out his vengeance not on us, but on Jesus. Out of love for us sinners, God struck his own Son with the punishment our sins deserved. After 3 days dead in the tomb, Jesus, similarly to Jonah staying in the fish 3 days and nights, rose to life and came out alive and well to prove God's love and promises do not change. All this he did for us, for Jonah, for the Ninevites, for all. So today, be offended by the grudges you hold and let them go, not because the people don't deserve your hatred, but because God has been gracious to you. And pray for the gracious repentance God has worked in you to be worked in them that they, like you, might turn from their sins and with repentant joy see that our **God does His Gracious Work**. Amen.