



Meditation

Rev. Dennis Lee, pastor of Bethel Protestant Reformed Church in Roselle, Illinois

God's word to Jonah... the second time

“And the word of the LORD came unto Jonah the second time, saying, Arise, go unto Nineveh, that great city, and preach unto it the preaching that I bid thee.”

Jonah 3:1-2

The second time! God's word came to Jonah the second time! Do we realize the wonder of that? The wonder of the amazing grace of God? For in these verses we see that God not only recovered His errant, run-away servant in the way of working repentance within him and forgiving him for what he had done, but also that He restored him to the office of prophet and recommissioned him to do His precious work of bringing His gospel message to Nineveh.

“The second time”—all by itself, that was a gracious fact for Jonah. For recall and consider what he had done. When God's word had come to Jonah the first time, Jonah did the *exact opposite* of what God told him to do. Instead of going to Nineveh, Jonah, without delay, traveled to Joppa and went on board a ship manned by pagan sailors heading in the opposite direction, to Tarshish. In so doing, we were told that he fled from the presence of the LORD.

But God did not let go of His wayward child and servant. The LORD sent out a great storm into the sea where the ship Jonah was traveling on sailed. God used the pagan sailors to rebuke Jonah. God sovereignly worked it out so that the casting of lots exposed Jonah as the cause of the trouble the pagan sailors were experiencing on the sea. He even prepared a great fish to swallow Jonah up in safety when he finally had to be thrown into the sea to secure the safety of the ship! And in the belly of that fish, God worked within the heart of Jonah, so that he prayed a beautiful prayer of repentance to God. Finally, after having spent three days and three nights in the belly of the fish, Jonah was spat out by the fish upon dry land.

It is at this point in the life of Jonah that we would have expected God to say to Jonah, “Now my child, you are forgiven. You may now go home. Go and sin no

more.” And that would have been sufficiently gracious on the part of God to do just that! For the knowledge of forgiveness of sin lived once again in the heart and mind of a repentant Jonah, and Jonah was now renewed and ready to live once more a new and godly life, only in a new and different vocation!

But God did so much more than that! He restored Jonah to the office of prophet, and recommissioned him for the work of bringing His gospel to Nineveh! What a wonder of grace!

In order to appreciate that, we need to think about this and ask ourselves, would *we* have done what God did? What follows is by no means a perfect example, but in order to help us think things through, suppose you were a small business owner, and that you had given a very important assignment to your employee to work on. You had trained him for years to do just this assignment and he has been doing very well on all his jobs you have assigned him. You are thoroughly invested in this assignment because your customer, whom you truly care about, is dependent on it for his own business to grow. You have set aside half of your personal savings to purchase the materials for this work. Soon the job is ready to begin, and you give the money to purchase those materials to your highly esteemed and trusted employee. But he took all of that money and squandered it and did not report that to you. Your customer is furious and there are many repercussions for what has taken place. There is loss of reputation, loss of trust, and half of all your savings is gone! You have been deeply hurt by your once-trusted employee. But now, to your complete surprise, he returns to you weeping and says that he is sorry for what he had done. You determine that his apology is genuine, and after deep struggles within you, you forgive him. But that important assignment remains: *Would you do the job yourself, or would you rehire him and, in addition, reassign him to that job?*

The simple fact here with Jonah is that he had disqualified himself from the office of prophet! He did so by his defiant and rather public sin of disobedience. And so, when God stretched forth His arm in so many

wonderful ways to pursue and recover him, and amazingly worked repentance in his heart and assured him of His forgiveness, would we not have thought that God would have stopped there with Jonah and commissioned *another* prophet to bring His gospel to Nineveh? *That, all by itself, would have been so gracious of God!*

But God did not stop there. We are told that the word of God came to Jonah *the second time!* Dear reader, is this not a great, great wonder of grace shown unto Jonah? Indeed it is!

But we should also know that this is not the only time that God displayed His wondrous, amazing grace to His sinful but repentant servants! Did not God's word come to Abraham a second time at Haran when Abraham tarried there halfway on his God-assigned sojourn to Canaan? Did not God's word come to Moses a second time on the occasion of the burning bush and after Moses had taken matters into his own hands when he killed an Egyptian? And did not Jesus also restore a sinful but repentant Peter to office after he had denied his Lord *not once, nor twice, but three times?*

Dear reader, has God not also been so gracious to you and to me? Has not God's word come to us the second time? Have we never stopped halfway at our own personal Harans? Have we never taken matters into our own hands to do the work of the LORD in our own way instead of His? Have we never denied our Lord with our silence when we should have spoken up and stood up for Him?

We should understand that God has been and is amazingly gracious to us!

Without being flippant and teaching that we should sin that grace might abound (cf. Rom. 6:1-2), has not God's word come to us the second time, the third time, the fourth time...in fact as many times as is necessary in our own hearts and lives?

If that is our confession and experience, ought we not also be ready to display some measure of the graciousness of God to those who have so offended and hurt us? Has your spouse hurt you so grievously? Has he abused you? Or is it your parent, your child, or someone in your extended family, or your fellow brother or sister in Christ at church, or anyone for that matter, even a total stranger, who has hurt you? The hurt inflicted on us has been undeniably great, but the proper way to respond to hurt is not the way of hatred, anger, bitterness, or resolve never to forgive. The only proper way to respond, as believers who know and have been saved by the amazing grace of God, is to respond with something of the grace that our gracious God has shown to us. Has not God forgiven *us* of our own sins and trespasses, which are far, far worse than the hurt we have suffered? May God graciously cause us to behold the cross of His dear Son and our Savior, and to remember the amazing grace shown to Jonah when God's word came to him the second time!