

The Great Recommission

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[0 : 00] Well, if we could, for a short while this evening, 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 we just read again from the beginning. 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. Have you ever had déjà vu?

You know, that strange feeling where you think that you've seen it all before, like you're somewhere and it just hits you. And it's one of the strangest feelings to experience, to experience déjà vu, that you feel you've seen all this happen before you.

In fact, that's what the phrase déjà vu means. Apparently, it's a French phrase which literally means already seen. So déjà vu is already seen.

[1 : 15] And you know, in a sense, when you come to chapter 3 of Jonah, that's what we're confronted with. We're confronted with déjà vu, are we not? Because, well, we've already seen this.

We've already seen the Lord commissioning Jonah to go to Nineveh. We've seen Jonah hearing the word of the Lord, Arise, go to Nineveh, that great city, and call out against it.

But in this chapter, the Lord is recommissioning Jonah to go to Nineveh. The Lord is 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 a message of repentance.

And I just want us to consider this passage, a very short passage of only ten verses. I want us to consider this passage under three headings this evening. I want us to see a prophet recommissioned, a preacher resurrected, and a people repentant.

A prophet recommissioned, a preacher resurrected, and a people repentant. So we'll look first of all at a prophet recommissioned.

[2 : 28] A prophet recommissioned. We're told in verses 1 and 2, 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.

Now I'm sure that we're all aware of the great commission. We've all heard of the great commission. We all know that it's found at the close of Matthew's gospel.

In Matthew 28, prior to Jesus ascending up to heaven, Jesus gives this great commission to his disciples. Jesus reminds his disciples, All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations. Baptising them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you.

And behold, I am with you always, even to the end of the world. Jesus issued the great commission. And he issued it to his disciples. His disciples not only in the first century, but also to us, his disciples, in the 21st century.

[3 : 38] And the great commission is to go and, well, to go with the gospel. To go with this good news. And make disciples. Not just converts.

But make disciples of all nations. And the great commission, as you know, it's as relevant today as when Jesus first said it to the 11 apostles.

But, you know, as we consider Jonah's recommission, his recommission to go to Nineveh, I want to suggest to you this evening 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, when you go back to that moment when the Lord called Abraham, he called him out of

the idolatrous land of out of the Chaldees.

The Lord promised Abraham, Genesis 12, through your seed, all the nations of the earth will be blessed. And when the Lord called the children of Israel, who were the seed of Abraham, when the Lord called them as it was out of Egypt, the Lord brought them up out of the land of Egypt.

[4 : 57] And he saved them. And we're told that he made a people for himself. I will be your God. You will be my people. And the Lord called the Israelites, as he did in Exodus 19, he called them a peculiar people.

He called them a treasured possession. And as his people, as the children of Israel, the Israelites, the Lord commissioned them. He commissioned them to be a light to the nations.

And they were to be a light to the nations in order to draw all the nations to come and worship the Lord. But the sad thing about the Israelites was that instead of being a light to the nations, the Israelites hid their light.

They veiled their light. They kept the light of their 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 saw themselves as a cut above the rest.

They were better than all the surrounding nations. But the sad thing was, they had forgotten that salvation was all of grace. And that salvation was all of the Lord. And because of that, they became a proud people, and even an insular people.

[6 : 11] One commentator describes the people of Israel as those who just put mirrors all around themselves. All they wanted to do was look at self. They didn't want to look beyond the boundaries of their own nation.

And so instead of being outward looking to other nations, they became inward looking. Instead of being open minded and willing to fulfill the commission that the Lord had given them, they became narrow minded.

In fact, that's why Jonah didn't want to go to Nineveh in the first place. Jonah didn't think the people of Nineveh were worthy of salvation. They weren't Israelites.

They weren't descendants of Abraham. They weren't the children of Israel. And with that, Jonah didn't believe that the ungodly people of Nineveh deserved the Lord's salvation.

Jonah didn't believe that the people of Nineveh were worthy of the light of the gospel to go into their experience and into their lives and have salvation preached to them.

[7 : 13] Which is the real reason why Jonah ran away and went to Tarshish. Jonah didn't think that what the Lord was doing was right. Jonah didn't believe that salvation is of the Lord.

Jonah believed that salvation was all because of the fact that you were a Jew. Jonah 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 that can be saved. which as you know, my friend, is not true. But you know, we can often, I 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 looking at them, making a judgment and then putting them into a box thinking that, well, it's probably impossible for them to be converted because of their background or their upbringing or their addictions or the problems that are going on in their life.

And you know, it's so sad because even, I speak to so many Christians and we have, we say that, or we have the excuse, we excuse ourselves from our great weak emission because we say that our villages are full of incomers.

[8 : 35] We say that the island is full of people who don't want the gospel. They don't care about church. They don't understand our culture. But as it was for the early church, these things were never an obstacle.

They were always an opportunity. They were never an obstacle. They were always an opportunity because if salvation is of the Lord, then they're able to be saved like anyone else.

Therefore, I look at myself and I think, well, I need to repent of my sin and present the gospel to them. And maybe you need to do the same because that's what Jonah did.

Jonah was brought to the point where he was confessing his sin, bellowing in the belly of the whale. And he realized that salvation is of the Lord. And when he was vomited out onto dry land, the Lord recommissioned Jonah not to do another job.

No, no, go back to Nineveh. Go to where I've sent you. Preach the gospel to them. And that's what we see in the opening verses of this chapter. The prophet Jonah, he's recommissioned.

[9 : 45] And you know, when you read verses one and two in chapter three, you can see that they're almost identical to verses one and two in chapter one. It's, as I said, it was, it's just like *deja vu*.

Chapter one reads, now the word of the Lord came to Jonah, son of Amittai saying, arise, go to Nineveh, that great city and call out against it for their evil has come up before me.

Then you go to chapter three. 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. Arise, go to Nineveh, that great city and call out against it.

In chapter one, Jonah was commissioned to go to Nineveh. And as we said before, when the Lord gave that commission, arise and go, the Lord expected an immediate response.

But Jonah, as we know, he arose not to follow the Lord's commission, but to flee from the Lord's commission. But now in chapter three, having been corrected by the Lord, having repented of his sin, Jonah is recommissioned with the same commission.

[10 : 57] Arise, go to Nineveh, that great city and call out against it. Now, the reason I emphasize Jonah's recommission is because, as we said before, the story of Jonah is much more than a prophet who just ran away from the Lord and was swallowed by a big fish.

The story of Jonah is 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 was written for a purpose.

The purpose was to challenge the Israelites. Because, at the time of writing this book, the Israelites, they had the mirrors all around them. The mirrors were up.

They were failing to be obedient to the great commission. They were failing to be a light to the nations. They were a proud nation. They were hiding the light. They were keeping it to themselves. But what the story of Jonah actually presents to us is that because Jonah was recommissioned to go to Nineveh, so too will the Lord's people be recommissioned to go to all the nations.

[12 : 11] You know, that's what the story of Jonah's about. And that's even what we see in the New Testament. Because, as Paul reminds us, as the church of Jesus Christ, we are the new Israel.

We are the new Israel, which means that we're meant to be a light to all the nations. And that's why Jesus says in the Sermon on the Mount, you are the light of the world. 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 like the Israelites did. But they put it on a stand so that it gives light to the whole house. 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.

And you know, my friend, the story of Jonah should make us realise the preciousness of the Gospel. And that we, as God's covenant people, as the new Israel, we're not to be proud, we're not to be narrow-minded, we're not to be inward-looking, we're not to put up our mirrors all around ourselves.

Why? 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, regardless of who they are.

[13 : 34] And so that's the first thing we see, a prophet recommissioned. A prophet recommissioned. But secondly, we see a preacher resurrected. A preacher resurrected.

We're told in verse 3, So Jonah arose and went to Nineveh, according to the word of the Lord. Now Nineveh was an exceedingly great city, three days' journey in breadth.

Jonah began to go into the city, going a day's journey, and he called out, Yet forty days, and Nineveh shall be overthrown. So when Jonah was recommissioned to go to Nineveh, we're told that Jonah arose and went to Nineveh, according to the word of the Lord.

It took a little bit of time, but Jonah eventually did as he was commanded, and he obeyed the word of the Lord. And you know, we could gloss over those words, but you know, I look at myself and I think, well I can be so like Jonah sometimes, we can be so like him, so stubborn, so disobedient, when the Lord is commissioning to go and serve him, in whatever it may be.

But you know, it's the Lord who always brings us round, to his way. It's the Lord who brings us round, and he shapes us, and he redirects us, and he does it according to the word of the Lord.

[15:00] And so we're told that Jonah, he followed the Lord's commission, and he heads east. He heads east out towards Nineveh. And as we've said before, the city of Nineveh, it was 500 miles east of Israel.

It was situated where the modern city of Mosul is today, in northern Iraq. Nineveh was this large and wealthy city, it was this mighty fortress, it was a key city in the ever expanding Assyrian empire. But as we've said before, Nineveh wasn't just renowned for its strength and power. Nineveh was renowned for its sin, because the people of Nineveh, they were known for hating God. They hated God's people, and their hatred of others, in doing that, they exploited people, they were merciless with people, they were idolatrous, they committed prostitution, they performed witchcraft, proud people, proud of all their achievements, proud of their strength, and even proud of their sin, and their sin angered the Lord, which is why the Lord is recommissioning Jonah to go and preach against it.

But what's interesting about verse 3 is that we're told that Nineveh was an exceedingly great city. And you see in the footnote if you're using the ESV Bible, it says Hebrew, a great city to God.

[16:24] That's what it literally translates as Nineveh was an exceedingly great city to God. Nineveh was an exceedingly great city to God. And what's implied is not Nineveh's structure, or even Nineveh's sin, but that Nineveh was special to God.

Nineveh was special to God. Nineveh was a city that was important in God's sight. God cared for the city of Nineveh. God loved the people in the city of Nineveh.

And of course Jonah, he couldn't understand why God would love the ungodly people of Nineveh. But what Jonah still needed to rediscover, and what we often need to be reminded of, is why God would love any of us.

Nineveh was an exceedingly great city to God. Nineveh was an exceedingly great city to God. But you know, when you look at other parts of the Bible, so was Corinth.

Corinth, the Greek city of Corinth, was just like Nineveh. It was a very ungodly and worldly city, and so was the church. The church there was ungodly and worldly.

[17:36] The church in Corinth was full of idolatry, full of division, full of sexual immorality, full of homosexuality, pride, and abuse of spiritual gifts.

And yet, when Paul preached in Corinth, we're told in Acts chapter 18 that many of the Corinthians, they believed and they were baptized. So many were being converted that the Lord said to Paul one night in a vision, the Lord 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.

Why? 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, we're told that Paul stayed a year and a half in the city of Corinth, and he continued to preach the gospel.

And he preached the gospel all because Corinth was a great city to God. And the Lord said, I have many in this city who are my people.

And you know, I often think about that verse in relation to our community. And you think about the people in our community. And the lost people of our community.

[18:51] The people in our homes and our families. And you know, I hope and pray that the Lord will affirm to us and say, I have many people in this community who are my people.

I have many in this community who are my people. And I long for the day that many in this community, that they will be known as the Lord's people. And they will gather with us like we gather here this evening.

Nineveh was an exceedingly great city to the Lord. And we're told in verse 4, Jonah began to go into the city going a day's journey.

And he called out, he had forty days and Nineveh shall be overthrown. when Jonah travelled that five hundred miles to Nineveh, we're told that Jonah went into the city a day's journey.

And it's often caused confusion because we're told that at the end of verse 3, the city of Nineveh was three days' journey in breadth. And then we're told in verse 4 that Jonah went a day's journey into the city.

[19:57] But this doesn't mean, what we must not get confused about is that Nineveh wasn't so big that it took Jonah three days to walk through it. Rather, when Jonah arrived in Nineveh, he preached God's message throughout the city for three days.

And we're told in verse 4 that on the first day of entering the city, Jonah preached to the people saying, forty days and Nineveh will be overthrown. Forty days and Nineveh will be overthrown. Jonah's message was a message of God's imminent judgment. Forty days, you have forty days and your city will be overthrown. But you know, we have to question if that's all Jonah said. Is that all Jonah would have said those three days? Forty days and Nineveh will be overthrown. Surely Jonah said more to the people of Nineveh than that. Surely Jonah said more than just forty days and Nineveh will be overthrown.

Surely there was more to his message than that. Now, although there's nothing from the book itself to confirm this, I want to suggest that it's Jesus who affirms that Jonah said a lot more than just these few words of judgment.

[21 : 18] Because when Jesus addressed the people of his day in the first century, Jesus 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. So the question is, what was the sign of Jonah to the people of Nineveh?

What was the sign of Jonah to the people of Nineveh? And as we've said throughout our study in this book, we've said that the story of Jonah is actually about Jesus. And the preciousness of the gospel.

And we've said time and time again that Jonah should be always seen as a type of Christ. Because the sign of Jonah is in the death of sin and resurrection of new life.

The sign of Jonah is in the death of sin and in the resurrection of new life. Because, as we said before, the direction of Jesus and Jonah, they both move in the same direction when you read this book.

[22 : 27] Jonah's movement in chapter 1 was down, down, down. He was down, down, down until he was in the belly of the whale. That was the same movement as Jesus.

Jesus' movement was down, down, down, from glory to Golgotha to the grave. Jesus was down, down, down. And, as we've said before, Jesus compared his death and burial to Jonah. when 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.

But it was after three days and three nights that Jonah was delivered from the belly of Sheol, as he describes it, the belly of the grave. Jonah was vomited up out of the belly of the whale.

He was resurrected, you could say, from the grave, brought from death to life. And the story of Jonah is just the story of the gospel. Because Jesus, he went down, down, down into the depths of the earth, from glory to Golgotha to the grave.

[23 : 35] But on the first Lord's Day morning, Jesus went up, up, up. He was resurrected from the grave. He was brought from death to life, defeating death and conquering the grave.

And so therefore the sign of Jonah, is the death of sin and the resurrection of new life. The sign of Jonah is the death of sin and the resurrection bringing new life.

And so when Jonah was recommissioned, you could say that he preached the gospel to the people of Nineveh. And he preached to them by preaching his own experience.

Jonah preached about the fact that he went down, down, down into the grave and that he came up, up, up. Jonah preached about the death of sin and the resurrection of new life.

And he preached about the death of sin and the resurrection of new life with the hope of the promised Messiah. You know, my friend, when Jonah was recommissioned, you could say that he preached Christ.

[24 : 44] He preached Christ. And needless to say, when Jesus issued the great recommission in Matthew 28, that's what he told us to do.

He told us to go and tell our evil generation about the sign of Jonah. Jesus told us to go and preach about the death of sin and the resurrection that comes through new life.

And we're to preach that it comes to us through the promised Messiah. You know, my friend, as a people, we have been recommissioned. We have received a great recommission and we are recommissioned to preach Christ through our character, our conduct, and our conversation.

We're to tell it to the generation following that the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ, our Lord.

we're to preach about the death of sin and the resurrection that comes through new life in Jesus Christ. Because, you know, the result of preaching about the death of sin and the resurrection of new life, the result will be a people who are repentant.

[26 : 05] That's the result of preaching Christ, a people repentant. That's what we see lastly and briefly. a prophet recommissioned, a preacher resurrected, and a people repentant.

A people repentant. Look at verse 5. 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 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 of new life, when he preached about this promised Messiah, we're told that they believed God.

They had faith in the promised death and resurrection of the Messiah. But more than that, we're told that they responded in repentance. They responded to the gospel in repentance.

They proclaimed a fast, we're told, they put on sackcloth and ashes. That was a symbol of mourning. They were mourning over their sin. They were mourning over their disobedience against God.

[27 : 18] They were mourning over the fact that they were an ungodly people. But you know, this repentance, it didn't just affect a few people in Nineveh.

It affected all the classes of people in every part of the city. It affected everyone, we're told, from the least to the greatest. It even affected the king of Nineveh. Because we're told that when Jonah preached the death of sin and the resurrection through new life, we're told in verse 6, the word reached the king of Nineveh.

He arose from his throne, removed his robe, covered himself with sackcloth and sat in ashes. The king, he repented. The king repented.

He bowed his knee to the king of kings, seeking forgiveness. He humbled himself in repentance.

But more than that, the king called the people of Nineveh to be a people who are repentant.

He called the whole people to be a people repentant. He says in verse, we're told in verse 7, and he issued a proclamation and published through Nineveh by the decree of the king and his mobiles, let neither man nor beast, herd nor flock, taste anything.

[28 : 34] 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 way and from the violence that is in his hands.

When the people of Nineveh repented at the preaching of Jonah, you could say there was a mass revival in the city. Everyone was in sackcloth and ashes.

Even the animals had to get involved. The whole city was repenting. There was this mass revival as the Lord was converting these ungodly people.

But you know, it was because of the inward-looking, narrow-minded, self-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, my friend, the repentant people of Nineveh, they should have been a warning to Jonah.

[29 : 46] When Jonah saw these people sitting in sackcloth and ashes, people whom he thought would never be saved, it should have been a warning to him, it should have been a warning to the covenant people of Israel, it should have been a warning to them that the gospel is for whosoever.

It's not to be restricted. 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 except from the message of the gospel.

There's no one except God. From this gospel message. A message that proclaims the death of sin and the resurrection of new life through the promised Messiah.

There's no one except. And you know, that's what the book of Jonah is all about. When we come to the book of Jonah, we have to see that the book of Jonah, it isn't just about a man who ran away from God and was swallowed by a big fish.

the book of Jonah is all about Jesus and the preciousness of the gospel. And that like Jonah, we've been recommissioned to make disciples of all nations.

[31 : 02] Like Jonah were to preach about the death of sin through the death of Christ. Like Jonah were to preach about the resurrection of Jesus and the new life that he brings. Like Jonah were to preach that this Jesus is for whosoever.

And like Jonah were to see that salvation, it's all of the Lord. And we're to pray that there would be a repentant people in our community.

That should be our longing. That there will be a repentant people in our community. And you know, when I read the last two verses of this chapter and what the king of Nineveh said, the way he speaks, there's almost this air of expectancy.

And that's what we should have. We should have an air of expectancy, waiting for the Lord to respond in mercy. Waiting that as we preach Christ that people will respond in mercy.

Because the king says, who knows? God may turn and relent and turn from his fierce anger so that we may not perish. And then we're told when God saw what they did, how they turned from their evil way, God relented of the disaster.

[32 : 16] That he said that he would do to them. And he did not do it. You know, you could say that in wrath, the Lord remembered mercy. In wrath, the Lord remembered mercy.

The people had this air of expectancy waiting for the Lord to respond in mercy to those who were hearing the message of the gospel. And that's what the book of Jonah is reminding us about. It's what the book of Jonah is actually calling us to pray for. It's calling us to pray that people would hear the gospel and respond to the gospel and come to know this great God that we have come to know ourselves.

The story of Jonah, it's a wonderful story, and it's all about Jesus and the gospel. It's all about Jesus and the gospel. So we've seen this evening a prophet recommissioned, a preacher resurrected, and a people repentant.

May the Lord bless these thoughts to us. Let us pray. O Lord, our gracious God, forgive us this evening whenever we hinder the gospel.

[33 : 34] Forgive us, Lord, when we hide our light under a bushel. forgive us, Lord, when we stay silent, when we should speak. Forgive us, Lord, for not always being ready to give an answer for the reason for the hope that is within us.

And Lord, we pray that we would hear that call to be recommissioned, that we would go and make disciples of all nations, that we would not hinder the gospel in any way, but realize that salvation is of the Lord, that the Lord of God who is able to save to the uttermost, that thine arm is not shortened, that it cannot save.

Neither is thine ear heavy, that it cannot hear. And Lord, give to us then a prayerful heart. Give to us, Lord, a compassion and a care for lost souls.

And help us, Lord, we pray, all to speak about the death of sin and the resurrection that brings new life through this promised Messiah, Jesus. All that Jesus would be on our lips, that he would be in our heart, that he would be in our conversations, that he would be the one who is at the forefront of our lives, leading us and guiding us, and that we would give him the glory, that he would have all the preeminence, and that we as a community, all that we would experience blessing, blessing, Lord, not because we deserve it, but solely because the Lord, one who is gracious.

Hear us then, we pray, mould us into thine own image, and conform us, Lord, day by day. Keep us, we ask, for we ask it in Jesus' name, and for his sake.

[35 : 10] Amen. We're going to bring our time together to a conclusion. We're going to sing in Psalm 48, in the Sing Sam's version, on page 63.

Psalm 48. Sing Sam's version on page 63. We're singing from verse 9 down to the end of the psalm.

The psalm, especially these closing verses, were told to walk about Zion, to go around the city of Zion, and to consider how great it is as a city, but always to remember that it reflects the greatness of God.

And that's how the psalmist describes it. He describes the greatness of God, and in comparison to Zion, he says in verse 9, we contemplate your steadfast love within your house, O God.

For like your name, your praise extends through all the earth abroad. All that you do is righteous, Lord. Mount Zion's joy is great, and Judah's towns rejoice as they your judgments celebrate.

[36 : 23] Round Zion walk and count her towers, view every citadel, so that to children yet unborn her story you may tell. For God the Lord, who is our God, forever will abide.

He is our God forevermore, and to the end our guide. These verses of Psalm 48, to God's praise.
we contemplate your steadfast love within your hearts, O God.

Lord, who is our God, and to the end our guide. For like your name, your grace extends through all
the earth abroad.

all that you do is righteous for, but Zion's joy is great.

on Judah's times, rejoice as they your judgments celebrate.

[37 : 57] round Zion walk and count her towers, view every citadel, so that to children yet unborn,
our story you may tell.

O God the Lord, who is our God, for God the Lord, who is our God, for God the Lord, who forever
will abide.

He is our God, forevermore, and to the end our guide.

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God the Father, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit
be with you all, now and forevermore. Amen. Amen.