



BELIEVERS CHAPEL

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The Sermons of S. Lewis Johnson

Jonah 3:1-10

“The God of Another Chance”

TRANSCRIPT

The scripture reading for today is found in the third chapter of the little Book of Jonah. And this is our fourth study, and we hope, the Lord willing, to finish the prophecy next Sunday morning. But we're going to read now for our scripture reading Jonah chapter 3, the entire chapter of ten verses.

For you who may be visiting this morning, may I just bring you up to date very quickly. In the first chapter, God gave Jonah a call to go to the city of Nineveh and cry against it. Jonah rejected his commission and went west. And as he went west, he had the experience of being swallowed by the big fish. And as a result of the experience in that fish, Jonah is now before the city of Nineveh to resume his ministry.

In the second chapter he expressed his thanksgiving for his deliverance, and reached the climax in the 9th verse in which he said, “Salvation is of the LORD.” And when he spoke those words, the Bible says, the Lord spoke unto the fish and vomited Jonah out onto the dry land. And so now, Jonah has had the experience in the fish, and we pick up the story at that point.

“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. So Jonah

arose, and went unto Nineveh, according to the word of the LORD. Now Nineveh was an exceeding great city of three days' journey. And Jonah began to enter into the city a day's journey, and he cried, and said, 'Yet forty days, and Nineveh shall be overthrown.'

So the people of Nineveh believed God, and proclaimed a fast, and put on sackcloth, from the greatest of them even to the least of them. For word came unto the king of Nineveh, and he arose from his throne, and he laid his robe from him, and covered him with sackcloth, and sat in ashes. And he caused it to be proclaimed and published through Nineveh by the decree of the king and his nobles, saying,

'Let neither man nor beast, herd nor flock, taste any thing: let them not feed, nor drink water: But let man and beast be covered with sackcloth, and cry mightily unto God: yea, let them turn every one from his evil way, and from the violence that is in their hands. Who can tell if God will turn and repent, and turn away from his fierce anger, that we perish not?'

And God saw their works, that they turned from their evil way; and God repented of the evil, that he had said that he would do unto them; and he did it not.”

May God bless this reading of his inspired word. Let's bow together in a word of prayer.

[Prayer] Father, we thank Thee for the opportunity to hear again the ministry of the word of God. We thank Thee for its message to us. We pray that as we listen to its teaching that our hearts may be responsive to the things that we hear, and that the things that we hear may find their fruition in our daily life.

We thank Thee for bringing us to this place, and we recognize, Lord, that it is not an accident that we are here. We know that Thou art sovereign, and that Thou dost work all things according to the counsel of Thine own will. And so we are here, Father, to hear Thy word, and we thank Thee that Thou art here with us, and we pray that the ministry will accomplish Thy purpose whereunto Thou art sending it.

We thank Thee for this word and for its power, and we pray O God that those who are here may be responsive to it. We thank Thee for this great land in which we live, and we pray again for our President, and we pray that Thou wilt give him wisdom and guidance, and if it should please Thee, Lord, we pray that Thou would lay Thy hand upon men in his Cabinet and in his administration who may in truth turn to Thee, the only true God and Jesus Christ whom Thou has sent. We know that it is not beyond Thy power, and so we ask if should please Thee that Thou wilt bless the leadership of this land.

We pray that the doors of opportunity for the ministry of this gospel may continue to be opened. We thank Thee for everyone present and for all of the problems of life that are represented here. And Father, we remember that our Lord Jesus is a great shepherd of the sheep, and we pray that he may have his shepherding ministry in our lives, and for those who are troubled, we pray that he may speak peace to their hearts.

For those who are ill or who have loved ones who are ill, we pray that Thy hand may be upon them to the glorification of Thy name. For those who are perplexed, or for those who are seeking divine guidance, O God, may the Holy Spirit lead and direct us in a way that will bring glory to Thy name, and we do pray for the mothers who are here and ask Thy blessing upon them. And for the young people particularly, O Father, we pray that in their formative days of their lives that Jesus Christ may have his preeminent place in their lives, that they may confidently look to the future and know that their times are in their hands.

Now we commit this meeting to Thee, and we pray that it may honor and glorify Jesus Christ. For we ask it in his name. Amen.

[Message] The subject for today, as we continue our exposition of the Book of Jonah – this is the fourth of five messages; we may add a sixth in the next few weeks when we speak of the typology of this book, but we hope to finish the fourth chapter

next Sunday – the subject for today is “The God of Another Chance, or History’s Greatest Evangelistic Campaign.”

We have just studied one of the great miracles of the Bible: a minor prophet and a major fish, and today we are going to study a greater one, the conversion of Nineveh, the capital of Assyria. As far as the Bible is concerned, the greatest evangelistic campaign that shall ever be waged is still future. According to the seventh chapter of the Book of Revelation, a great multitude which no man can number shall come out of the Great Tribulation, having washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb. And they shall do this as a result of the ministry of 144,000 Apostle Pauls, according to the teaching of that chapter. That is undoubtedly the greatest evangelistic campaign in human history, and it has not yet taken place.

But, this that we are to read and study today is the greatest of the many evangelistic campaigns that have occurred in the past. It is greater than Peter’s campaigns which are described for us in the opening chapters of the Acts of the Holy Spirit through the Apostles. Remember, Peter was the instrumentality for the salvation of 2,000 people. As a result of his preaching, that number grew to 5,000 shortly, and still more as he ministered in the house of Cornelius.

Not only was Peter a great evangelist, but the Apostle Paul was also, and through his campaigns which he waged at Antioch, Iconium, Lystra, Derbe, Philippi, Corinth, Athens and other places, countless people came to know Christ as personal Savior. This campaign is greater than any of Paul’s; it is greater than any of Peter’s, apparently.

Luther was a great evangelist in that it was he who was responsible, humanly speaking, for the Protestant Reformation. God laid his hand upon that Augustinian monk, and through him many came to a personal relationship with Jesus Christ. And we are indebted to Martin Luther for his obedience to the call of the Holy Spirit that came to him. But the campaign of Jonah is apparently a more successful campaign than any of the great reformers, such as Luther or Calvin or Zwingli, or any of the others.

It is even greater than the campaigns of Wesley. It is even greater than the campaigns of Moody, of Finney, and of Billy Graham. Among many brilliant evangelists’ statistics, none is this brilliant: of 120,000 present, 100,000 decision cards. Plus, the king. Now can you do any better than that?

Jonah was a great evangelist and he had a great experience, and this is what happens when a man begins to run with God. He had run away from God, then he had run back to God, and now he is a man who is said Moody, “Can lead a man nearer to Jesus Christ than he is himself.” And so the experience that Jonah has in the third chapter is a result of the fact that he has been brought back to himself. And since he has been brought back to himself, he is now in the position that God is able to use him in this wonderful way, and God does use him in this way.

Now when we look at the third chapter of the Book of Jonah, we are immediately impressed with the doleful plight of the city of Nineveh. The king expresses it when he says, “Who can tell if God will turn and repent and turn away his fierce anger that we perish not.” It has come home to the king that their condition was anything but good before God. It has come home to him finally that the wickedness and immorality of the city of Nineveh – and I should add, because we often think that sin is only wickedness and immorality, their unbelief – that there is no hope for them. But this has come by the convicting work of the Holy Spirit. And so the king is brought to the place where he recognizes that they might be destroyed by the wrath of God by the preaching of the prophet of Gath-heifer in Galilee.

Now what would you have done if you had walked into the city of Nineveh and had taken a good look around, and you had been told that we would like for you to prepare for an evangelistic campaign in this city? What would you do? Well I have a hunch that what would happen would be this. You’d take a look over that city and you would decide that the first thing you need is a lot of money and a lot of help, or a lot of help and a lot of money. I don’t know which order to put those in.

I think you would probably decide that this great city which takes three days to go through, this great metropolitan area, needs an evangelistic campaign of an enormous size, and so what we need is some help. The first thing that we need to do is divide up the city into districts, and we should have an evangelist to go in each district. But of course, to have an evangelist means that we must have money. And since we have money, we must therefore organize. And so what we should do is organize a few mission boards. Perhaps, the Palestinian Society for the Evangelization of the State of Nineveh, or the City of Nineveh, or the Eastern Gospel Crusade to Assyria, and we should have a President, and a few helpers, and a staff in the city of Jerusalem, or in Joppa, or in some other place.

And then we should send out prayer letters to all of our friends, telling them that what we need is, we need money that we might reach the city of Nineveh for the gospel and the great country of Assyria, and so we organize a great big campaign. And we have a lot of helpers. And we stir up a lot of interest among the saints, and they’re all excited about what’s going to happen, because now we have a great campaign going, and we’re going to seize the city of Nineveh for God.

And it’s very striking that what God does is to lay his hand upon one man. And the least that you can say is, that’s a lot less expensive. [Laughter] And so he lays his hand upon one man, and this one man is used by God to shake the city of Nineveh – one man.

I’m not suggesting that all mission boards and all agencies are necessarily of the devil [laughter], I’m just trying to suggest to you that the way in which God does things is often contrary to human reasoning, and often, the things that he does often appear to be irrational to us, and certainly un-businesslike. But we certainly should not, because they appear to be irrational and un-businesslike, necessarily gather that they are not of God. As a matter of fact, if you read through the Bible, God is often irrational – that is, if we

judge by human reason. Not irrational by divine reasoning, but by human reasoning.

And so God is going to lay his hand upon one man.

Jonah is now on his way to Nineveh, and the word of the Lord has come to him a second time. And it has said, “Arise, go unto Nineveh, that great city, and preach unto it the preaching that I bid thee.” Now that of course is extremely important. In the 20th century, we often like to doctor up the word of God. We often like to substitute for the word of God the word of man. And those of us who are evangelicals, we often think that the word of God is not able to really come home with force to the hearts of men if we do not make it sweet and palatable. And so we must take it and sweeten it.

Jonah is told to preach the preaching that I bid thee – it is the word of God. And I firmly believe, and I always have believed and I will always believe, even if when I die there are only three people listening to what I say, the word of God is the important thing for men to hear.

Louis XVI had to listen to one of his court preachers. And he commented when the court preacher was through, “If the good abbey had said a few things about religion, I believe he would have mentioned everything.” And often, the preaching of the 20th century is like that. It’s about everything but the word of God. Preach the preaching that I bid thee.

Ruskin said, “The Bible is not only the book of God, but the God of the books.” And that is true. It is the God of the books. It is the most important book. It is the greatest book. And, Jonah’s commission to preach the word of God lays a great deal of stress upon that.

Now I am impressed as I think of this mission of Jonah by two things. First, the size of the task. A great city, some have said of 600,000 people. If, in the 11th verse of the 4th chapter the 120,000 that cannot discern between their right hand and their left hand are children, then there were perhaps 600,000 people in the city. But my experience is that the adults more often qualify for this description than the children if we’re speaking

of spiritual things, and so I am inclined to think that the city contained only 120,000 people that could not discern between their right hand and their left hand, and that is a reference to the adults, or all of the people are included there. But this is a great task. One man to go into this great heathen city whose kings were noted for their cruelty and brutality, and to bring to them a message not of sweetness and of love, but a message of divine judgment, and so this is an enormous task that Jonah is to carry out.

The second thing I’m impressed about is the simplicity of the message that Jonah is to bring. I do not know the language in which Jonah preached his message. In the Hebrew text, it is a very simple little message. It’s simply this: *'arba`iym youm Niyneveh haphak*. That’s all, and so up and down the streets of Nineveh he went, *'arba`iym youm Niyneveh haphak*. Now you know what that means. [Laughter] It means, “Yet forty days and Nineveh shall be destroyed.” Now you know a little Hebrew. Practice it on your friends. *'Arba`iym youm Niyneveh haphak*. Can you remember it?

Now notice this. So far as we know from this text – I’m not saying that that was not the title of his message. I really do not know. But so far as the text is concerned, that is what is proclaimed. We have a preacher at the seminary who is known for his homiletics, and the message whereby he teaches his students. And he is very strong on the big idea. Well, as far as I can tell, all this sermon contained was one idea, and it was a great big idea, and as Jonah went up and down those streets saying, “Yet forty days and Nineveh shall be destroyed.” I am sure they got the message. It was a very impressive idea. Nineveh, you’re done for. You’re going to be wiped out in forty days; poof, and you’re gone! And that apparently is about what he said, and I presume something of the spirit in which he said it. Though I may be presuming now on the prophet.

You’ll notice he didn’t three points with an introduction and a conclusion [laughter]. I head of the old [black] preacher who explained his preaching to somebody before in this way. He said, “First, I reads my text. Then I’splains it. Then I sprankles

out a little so as to mystify. Then I brings in the rousements.” Jonah didn’t follow that method either.

Dr. Hawkins used to say to us that he didn’t have any theory of preaching. It was simply, “Start low, rise higher, strike fire, then retire” [laughter]. *’Arba`iym yowm Ninyveh bapbak* – yet forty days and Nineveh shall be destroyed. And I’m sure that as Jonah went up and down the streets of Nineveh, he received a very impressive response. Apparently, the work of the Holy Spirit accompanied Jonah in a very remarkable way, and no one will ever be able to preach anything with any success if the Holy Spirit does not work, for it is he who brings a man to Jesus Christ.

And the Holy Spirit with God’s prophet was working, and as he went from street corner to street corner and preached his message, crowds were gathered. So many were gathered that finally the whole city turned to God: 120,000 people plus a king, by a little man from Galilee from the little village of Gath-heifer.

How can you explain something like this? Well, outwardly, he was a man of God who had had a great experience. I do not know how true this is. Some of my friends have said that the fish-god was very popular in the East, and a man who had had an experience like this might have immediately attracted attention from people who worshiped fish-gods, because after all, the man who had been deposited on the seashore of the Mediterranean by a great fish, if you worshiped a fish-god, you can easily see that this made a tremendous impression upon the people. I have not been able to verify that, so I do not really think that is the explanation.

But I do know this. Our Lord Jesus said that Jonah was assigned to the Ninevites, and so that indicated that they understood something about his experience. So I would presume that when Jonah was deposited on the seashore by the great fish, that there must have been some people about, some fishermen, and they saw what had happened, and they were able to verify the experience of Jonah. And the word went before him as he went into the city of Nineveh.

And if the experience of James Bartley inside the big fish is an evidence of what might have happened to Jonah, his skin showed the marks of that experience. And when he came into the city, he must’ve looked quite a sight. His clothes, no doubt, were tattered and worn. And his skin had been turned a dark brown color by the juices inside the big fish’s belly. And he had had this tremendous experience, and he had walked a long way. Dr. McGee says, candidly, “He was a mess when he came into this city.” But he had this tremendous experience, and people knew about it, and it was the authentication of the message that he gave. Well that’s outwardly the explanation.

But after all, a man may have a tremendous experience like that but not be a power for God. So the real reason for the conversion of the city of Nineveh was the Holy Spirit’s conviction. And he convinced the people of that city of three things. He convinced them, first of all, of their great sin. He convinced them of the shortness of the time that they had. And that was a great convincing. Listen, if you had gone inside the great city of Nineveh with its giant buildings and its solid buildings and its great walls, and if you had said to the people of Nineveh without the convincing ministry of the Holy Spirit, “in forty days all of this is going to be leveled,” it would have taken quite a bit of faith to take a message like that. And so I would gather that Jonah would not have had any success at all if the Holy Spirit had not been with him. And he convinced them of the shortness of their time, and he convinced them of the certainty of their solemn judgment.

Those words that Jonah uses, “Nineveh shall be destroyed” – that word “destroyed” is the very word that is used in the Old Testament of the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah. It’s a very emphatic word, and Jonah’s expression was a very emphatic expression. And so he has brought home by the Holy Spirit to the hearts of the Ninevites the fact that they have sinned against God, the fact that they do not have much time, and the fact that their judgment is soon to come, and it is certain to come, and ultimately they shall be destroyed. And that is the work of the Holy Spirit.

If I may stop for just a moment, may I remind you of the fact that we stand in a similar condition today. I am not going to speak about the United States of America. It should be obvious to anyone that if God were to destroy us tomorrow, we should have no excuse. It should be obvious to us that we have so sinned as a nation against God that he does not have to extend any mercy or any grace to us as a nation. It should be obvious to us.

But I want to speak about you personally. You know it is just possible that you do not have even forty days. It’s just possible that you do not even have four days. It’s just possible that you do not even have four hours.

Through the years in the ministry of the word, I have occasionally made statements like this. Sometimes they have come true to my own sadness. It is very possible – you may consider it incredible – that you should not be here next Sunday or able to be here next Sunday. You may think it the hardest thing in the world that you may not be here four days from now. But it is very possible.

You may think it impossible that I should not be here, but it is very possible. Yet forty days. Well that was a wonderful time of grace for the city of Nineveh. Now Jonah’s work is described in the fifth verse as, “So the people of Nineveh believed God.” The Hebrew text is a little stronger. It is not so much “believed God” as if they believed his testimony was true. But they believed in God. That is, they committed themselves to the God who had given themselves this message through the prophet Jonah. They believed in him.

Have you noticed that Jonah’s name is not mentioned throughout the rest of the chapter? Who cares about the prophet when the prophet has delivered his message? The important thing is to deliver his message about God, and Jonah’s name fades from the story until we come to the fourth chapter. It is now the work of God with the Ninevites. He has brought the people of Nineveh into contact with Jehovah. That’s the work of any preacher. It is not my work to attach you to me; it is my work to attach you to Jesus

Christ. That is my work. And when that happens, then I may fade out of the picture because the contact that means life has been made. From that time on, the important person in your life is not the one who brought you to Christ; it is our Lord himself.

Well, the conversion of the city of Nineveh produced consequences that reached to the palace. We are not told the precise order of events. Let us just assume for a moment, as is often the case, that things happened among the people which the rulers have no knowledge of for a long time. That often happens, you know. Things often happen around Dallas Theological Seminary that the faculty eventually discover. Things are happening in our universities that eventually the faculty and administration discover. And finally, even our country might discover what’s happened. Often, those in authority are the last to learn.

Let’s just presume that the movement has begun, and it is sweeping like wildfire over the city, and news finally reaches the palace. And the king calls in some of his nobles who are associated with him. They’re going to have a little council. His name, by the way, is most likely Adad-nirari. He was a man who was noted for his monotheism. He worshiped one god, the god Nebo. I think that was not an accident. Here is a man who at least is a monotheist, and so he is prepared for the reception of the truth from the great prophet who has come.

And so at the king’s council table they sit around and the king says, “Well what are we going to do?” And one of them speaks up and says, “Well, I don’t know. That Jonah who has come from Galilee is a prophet of Jehovah. And he’s a very stern man. Why, that man preaches the most earnest message of judgment without a tear in his eye. It looks to me as if there’s no hope for us, according to his message.”

And the king, a man in whom the Holy Spirit has been working, “Who can tell if God will turn and repent, and turn away from his fierce anger, that we perish not?”

Another one of the nobles speaks up and says, “O but Jonah’s God is a terrible God. He has told us about how he led the children of Israel out of the land of Egypt, and

he has told us about he has brought Israel through the great sea, and how he swallowed up Pharoah and his armies, and how by a supernatural miracle he caused great death and destruction in Egypt. He is a terrible God. He told us of how he went into the Promised Land, and how Gideon and the others were raised up, and how the Midianites were routed, and how the Philistines were routed under King David. He’s a terrible God.”

And the king says, “Who can tell if God will turn and repent, and turn away from his fierce anger, that we perish not?”

And one of them says, “Oh, but Jonah has been talking about how holy this God is. He is a holy God who punishes sin. And furthermore, Jonah has told us that that God must be satisfied. And if he is not satisfied in his righteousness, then there is no hope. We have heard something about sacrifices, and we have our own sacrifices, but Jonah’s God will not respond to our sacrifices. Jonah’s God is a God who needs to be propitiated. He needs to be satisfied. His justice must be satisfied before he may express himself to us in his great love freely.”

And the king replies, “Who can tell if God will turn and repent, and turn away from his fierce anger, that we perish not?” And deep down in his heart, the Holy Spirit is working and is giving him a sense of hope. And the king speaks up, for apparently he was a very wise man. And he said to the nobles, “Listen, if God did not intend to give us an opportunity, why did he say, ‘yet forty days’? Why he could have just come in and he could have just wiped us out without any day at all. But he has said, ‘yet forty days.’ Does that not seem to imply that there is hope?”

Furthermore, this God could have come in. He could have wiped us out without sending us any prophet. The very fact that he has sent us a prophet and the prophet has said, ‘yet forty days’ indicates to me that this God is willing to receive those who are willing to come his way.” And so the great king bows his heart before God, repents and turns, and the God of whom Jonah has spoken *does* turn and *does* repent of the evil, and he did it not.

Who can tell? Who can tell?

Now we live 25 hundred years at least after the time of Jonah. And the question, if it goes forth today, who can tell if God will turn and repent, and turn away from his fierce anger, that we perish not? That question has an answer that is settled forever; it was settled in the cross of Jesus Christ. For there, through that cross and through that blood we can tell, we can know that God will forgive those who come to him through that cross. We know because the blood has been shed, that the man who comes to God through Jesus Christ finds acceptance. We know because we have experienced this ourselves.

And so I say to you in this auditorium this morning. If you’re here and you have never believed in the Lord Jesus Christ, come. Come while there’s still time. Come while our forty days is still open. This God will turn. He will receive you on the basis of the finished work of the Lord Jesus Christ. Do not worry whether you’re one of the elect. Come. And when you come, you know the blessed joy of being one of the elect, those upon whom God has put his hand, in whose heart he has worked, and whom he has brought to Jesus Christ.

And as I so often say, if in your heart you object to the thought of being the elect, then your very object indicates that your heart is not right before God. So come. Come. Come!

Now as a result of the king and the city, the 10th verse states something that’s really remarkable. “And God saw their works, that they turned from their evil way; and God repented of the evil, that he had said that he would do unto them; and he did it not.” God’s repentance is as difficult to explain as Nineveh’s repentance. How may God repent?

Well this is phenomenal language. It’s the language of phenomena. It’s anthropomorphic. I’m sure that clarified the preceding statement [laughter]. It’s language according to the thought of men. God is immutable. He does not change. We talked

about that a couple of weeks ago. We don’t get up in the morning and say, God how are you? That’s nutty. [Laughter] God does not change, but he may appear to change to us. We are not given a seat at the throne room of the blessed Trinity. We only see what God does. We see the evidence of it.

God does not change, but men change, and as a result of the changes that occur in men, often God appears to change. He hasn’t changed at all. He knew exactly what would happen in Nineveh. He knew not how many would turn to God, to him, but he knew the precise name and number and every one of them. He wasn’t surprised a bit. He didn’t in heaven, say, as they turned in their hearts to him, “Oh goody, goody! [Johnson claps] I didn’t know that John would turn. I didn’t know that Adad would come. O goody goody!” No he did not. He knew. He did not increase in knowledge as a result of what happened in Nineveh. He is the omniscient God. He knows the end from the beginning, and he waited in all of the wonderful joy and bliss of the leisure of eternity for each one as they came. And he was glorified, and he was pleased as they came in response to his activity.

He doesn’t change. But you see, he had ordained that the elect come by specified means by which he has determined himself. And he had determined that they should come, all 120,000 of them, by means which he himself had in eternity decided upon the preaching of Jonah. And so they came. And so God was glorified in the mercy he exercised to them. He doesn’t change.

The king of Nineveh was right. He interpreted the forty days as containing a conditional element: “yet forty days.” And he was absolutely right. God did not change. Nineveh changed. And when Nineveh changed, God’s program moved on to its completion.

If I may illustrate. Everyone of us a thermometer, I presume. The one thing about a thermometer, especially in Texas, is that it’s never the same. One day it’s 85 (pew), yesterday. What shall it be? 74? I hope. 90? It may be. 45 tonight? It’s never the same.

It’s always changing, you might say. A thermometer is a very mutable instrument. It’s very changeable.

But there is a sense in which a thermometer is immutable. It always operates according to a fixed principle. And the mercury rises or falls in accordance with the heat or the cold. It is a mutable instrument apparently, but within it is an immutable instrument. We see the effects of its immutability in the mutability of the response that he gives to that mercury. And so God, he is immutable, but to us, he may appear to be very mutable. And so we read, “And God saw their works, that they turned from their evil way; and God repented of the evil, that he had said that he would do unto them; and he did it not.”

May I in the few moments that we have to conclude the message set before you two or three lessons? The first lesson is the lesson that the saint always has another chance. The word of God came unto Jonah the second time. That’s a grand lesson in grace. If you study the lives of the men of the Old Testament, you will discover that Jacob knew what it was to have another chance. Elijah knew what it was to have another chance. Peter, oh Peter, knew how much, how blessed it was, how often he had to appeal to God for this second, third and other chances. David had another chance.

These men who were known sometimes as much for their sins as much as for their righteousnesses knew what it is to have a God who offers another chance. And he does. And if you’re in this audience in this morning, and you feel you have so wrecked your life as a Christian that God can never respond to you again, let me assure you that our God is a God who offers you another chance. Always offers you another chance. And furthermore, so far as I can tell, offers you to rise in your next opportunity to a level which you would have never attained of had never attained before.

One of my teachers was Dr. Lewis Sperry Chafer. Every time I think of him, I think, thank you Lord, for such a great man of God who loved the word and who taught it. Dr. Chafer was a man who had had a great deal of experience with Dr. C. I. Scofield.

And he used to love to tell the story of the connection with 1 John 1:9, of an experience he had with Dr. Scofield in a hotel room.

Dr Scofield had been carrying on a little bit of debate with a Christian friend over whether a Christian who had fallen out of fellowship with God was able to rise again to the same level of life. And his friend had quoted the hymn which had the stanza in it, “the bird with the broken pinon never soared so high again.”

And Dr. Chafer was in the hotel with Mr. Scofield when he opened up a letter from his friend. He read the letter and he stood up out of his chair and he began to pace back and forth across the hotel room. Dr. Chafer used to tell us, “He paced back and forth in a rage, a doctrinal rage.” You know, we’ve lost that. We don’t have any doctrinal rages any more. But we ought to have. We ought to have some real doctrinal rages. That is, when we depart from the word of God, it’s not something sweet. It’s not something nice. It’s not something that we should placate, for we are departing from God’s word. It is very important that we stay under God’s word.

And I’ll tell you, I long to see a young person grow up who has some conviction about the truth of God and wants to study the word of God and find out exactly what it says and is upset when men in the family of God are not straight in their doctrine. That’s important.

And I know what you’re going to say. It’s more important to be straight in your life than straight in your doctrine. Let me say that’s an impossibility. It’s impossible for us to be straight in our lives if we are not straight in the word. Everything [Johnson taps on pulpit] that we believe in the word of God has its effect in our lives. Whether we believe it or not. It does. That is why it is important.

It is possible to be straight in your doctrine and very hard and cold and unloving – then you’re not straight in your doctrine. You’re wrong. Because the one who is straight in his doctrine has the inflexibility of a Paul, but at the same time the love that a shepherd like Paul had, for the truth is really in that man.

Dr. Scofield was pacing back and forth, and finally he threw the letter back over to Dr. Chafer and said, “You know that hymn that says the bird with the broken wing shall never fly so high again ought to read, ‘The bird with the broken pinion shall higher soar again.’” Dr James M. Gray referred to this later and said, it all depends on who mends the wing. And when God mends the bird’s wing it shall higher soar again.

So, if you’ve been out of fellowship with God, the way back is through confession. And when you have confessed your sins, you need not feel that God does not receive you. 100% -- he receives you 100%. And like the bird of the hymn revised, it may higher soar again.

There’s another lesson here. It’s the methodology of salvation. Did you notice it? It’s very simple. It begins with the word, the word of God. That’s where salvation begins. Jonah, I want you to go to Nineveh, and I want you to preach the preaching that I give to you. So Jonah came – he did not add any words of his own – he came into that city with the word of God, and he proclaimed the word of God. That’s the first step to salvation.

Today we do not come into a city and say, yet forty days and Dallas shall be destroyed. The word of God has so been enlarged by the contributions of the apostles and the prophets that we have now the full revelation of the ministry of the Lord Jesus. But our message is still the same: to preach the word of God.

And we point men off to the Christ who died upon the cross. I determined not to know anything among you save Jesus Christ and him crucified, Paul said, and that is what we preach. That our sins have been by the grace of God taken by the Savior, the Son of God, and we may have everlasting life. No matter who you are the door is open. Come, come and receive everlasting life. And we preach Christ as the answer to our needs.

James Denney said no man ought to preach, no can he really preach who cannot make great assertions about Jesus Christ, and that is what we have tried to do. Make

great assertions about Jesus Christ, because it is he who saves, and oh what a wonderful salvation he provides.

And then the final thing. You’ll notice our salvation begins with the word. It comes by faith. The word has come and then by the grace of God and the ministry of the Spirit, we come in faith to that word. That’s the second step. And the final step is that it is proved by the works of our lives. The Ninevites, when they responded to the word of God, proclaimed a fast, put on sackcloth and sat down in ashes. Salvation is by the word. It is received through faith. It inevitably and necessarily produces good works, for faith without works is dead.

And so as the clock reaches twelve, I say to you again, come. Come. Who can tell? I can tell. I can tell because of what God has done through Jesus Christ. He will turn. The will receive you. The God who seemed so opposed to you waits to welcome you if you come to him. Who can tell? We can tell. We can tell from the word of God, and we can tell from our own experience. God is glorified in his justice as he was glorified in the preaching of Jonah. But he is even more glorified in the mercy and grace which he longs to express to any who will come out of a sense of need.

And so if you are a young person sitting in this audience, do not know what it means to be a Christian, do not know what it means to have a hope that will sustain you through all of the experiences of life, who do not know what it is to have meaning in life, to not know what it is to be attached to God through Christ and all that that means, I invite you to come to Jesus Christ.

And you who are adults in this audience, who may have lived many a year, wandered about in the no-man’s land of lostness, I remind you that the cross of Jesus Christ stands as the way back, and invite you to come to him. And when you come to him, you’ll find him who to know is life eternal. You do not need me to come. You do not need this church to come. You do not need your good works. Leave them where they are. Come as you are. Come in your sin. Come straight to Jesus Christ who loves

you and has given himself for you. We invite you to come, and God will be glorified in the exercise of his grace and mercy in saving you, and you can become his.

We’re going to be quiet for just a moment, and if God the Holy Spirit has spoken to you, why don’t you respond by simply saying, “Thank you, Lord, for giving Jesus Christ to die for me. I take him as my personal Savior.” That’s all that’s necessary. Let’s bow in prayer.

[Prayer] Father, we thank Thee for the ministry of the Holy Spirit, and we thank Thee that though we do not have Jonah, we still have the word. And we thank Thee Lord that Thou art able to work in the 20th century in the 8th Before Christ.

And we thank Thee Lord for the assurance that when we come to Thee, we know him whom to know is life eternal. And O Father, we pray, if it should please Thee and be within Thy will, lay Thy hand upon everyone in this auditorium outside of Christ, and as the Great Shepherd, bring them into the fold.

And now may grace, mercy and peace be and abide with all who know him in sincerity until he comes again. We ask in his name. Amen.