

## **Week 4 – God Reboots; Jonah Yields – Jonah 3:1-4**

### **Scripture Reading: Psalm 103:6-14**

#### **Introduction**

Have you ever felt like such a failure that you doubted not only your ability to carry on but even your worth?

Let me tell you about the man who history knows as “Wrong Way Riegels”:

On New Year's Day, 1929, Georgia Tech played University of California in the Rose Bowl. In that game a man named Roy Riegels recovered a fumble for California. Somehow, he became confused and started running 65 yards in the wrong direction. One of his teammates, Benny Lom, outdistanced him and downed him just before he scored for the opposing team. When California attempted to punt, Tech blocked the kick and scored a safety which was the ultimate margin of victory.

That strange play came in the first half, and everyone who was watching the game was asking the same question: "What will Coach Nibbs Price do with Roy Riegels in the second half?" The men filed off the field and went into the dressing room. They sat down on the benches and on the floor, all but Riegels. He put his blanket around his shoulders, sat down in a corner, put his face in his hands, and cried like a baby.

If you have played football, you know that a coach usually has a great deal to say to his team during half time. That day Coach Price was quiet. No doubt he was trying to decide what to do with Riegels. Then the timekeeper came in and announced that there were three minutes before playing time.

Coach Price looked at the team and said simply, "Men the same team that played the first half will start the second." The players got up and started out, all but Riegels. He did not budge. The coach looked back and called to him again; still he didn't move. Coach Price went over to where Riegels sat and said, "Roy, didn't you hear me? The same team that played the first half will start the second."

Then Roy Riegels looked up and his cheeks were wet with a strong man's tears. "Coach," he said, "I can't do it to save my life. I've ruined you, I've ruined the University of California, I've ruined myself... I couldn't face that crowd in the stadium to save my life."

Then Coach Price reached out and put his hand on Riegels' shoulder and said to him: "Roy, get up and go on back; the game is only half over." And Roy Riegels went back, and those Tech men will tell you that they have never seen a man play football the way Roy Riegels played that second half.

Roy Riegels thought that he had blundered so badly that his life was over

And even though Roy didn't really think he wanted it at the time, Coach Price gave him the opportunity to redeem himself – and when given a second chance; Roy Riegels made the most of it

Roy Riegels went on to be named to the All-American Football team that year, graduated a couple of years later, led a very successful life, and died peacefully in his sleep 64 years later in 1993

I'd be willing to bet that he loved and appreciated Coach Price for the rest of his days for the opportunity to try to make up for his mistake

In the case of Jonah we see someone else who ran the wrong way

And we know all too well that we are just like Jonah; prone to head in the wrong direction

And like Roy Riegels our failures can make us so ashamed we don't even want to try again

We are tempted to just give up as we believe that our failure is so egregious that surely God has given up on us too and there is no way he could ever use us in his service

But God is not only in the rescue business as we saw last week; God is also in the “second chance” business

If you would, join me in your Bible as we consider **Jonah 3:1-4** and how we see God come to Jonah as Coach Price came to Roy Riegels and told him in essence, “Get up and get back out there; the game isn't over yet.”

**God graciously gives second chances as long as people are open to accepting them**

If you're taking notes our first main point is: **We Shouldn't Feel Despair**

## **I. We Shouldn't Feel Despair**

### **The God of Second Chances**

**Jonah 3:1** reads: *Then the word of the Lord came to Jonah the second time...*

We know that we are made in the image of God – **Genesis 1:26** tells us that

But in the area of holding grudges and giving second chances we are far removed from God

Although we all want to receive them, people as a whole don't tend to be big on giving second chances to others

In fact, I kept coming across an expression as I studied this week that sums up our typical attitude toward giving second chances. It says:

*"Giving someone a second chance is like giving them another bullet for their gun after they've shot at you and missed"*

Generally speaking we tend to evaluate ourselves according to our intentions and others by their actions and we forget that we often fail just as badly, if not worse, than others who we judge more strictly

We're good at rushing to condemn and we tend to be very stingy with second chances

Many a politician or other public figure has learned about the reality of a life-altering mistake when a single failure cost them everything

And you don't have to be a news-junkie these days to know that lately people seem to be falling like dominoes as past indiscretions come to light

The reality is, when we're dealing with other people, there are any number of occasions where a person only gets one chance to mess up

### **Thankfully, as Jonah's situation shows us, it's not that way with God**

Think back to what we've seen concerning Jonah thus far in chapters 1 and 2

- Jonah was rebellious and ran the other way when God told him to go to Nineveh
- Jonah was comfortable enough in his rebellion that he was able to fall sound asleep on the ship as he likely convinced himself that, since everything was going smoothly, all was well
- Then Jonah was defiant in the face of God trying to get his attention with the violent storm and he instructed the sailors to throw him overboard rather than repent and do what God had instructed
- As Jonah sank to the bottom of the sea he had a change of heart and decided he didn't want to die after all so he finally prayed for God to spare his life and God sent a great fish to act as a lifeboat for Jonah
- Jonah then sat in the belly of the fish for three days before he finally gave in and agreed to do what God had said but even then he only agreed out of a sense of self-preservation and not because of a true heart change

It's hard to imagine anyone more in need of a second chance than Jonah and, as we see today, God gave him one

### **And Jonah isn't the exception to the way God works; he's the example of the way God works**

We talk about God being the God of second chances but God is really the God of "another" chance because most people benefit from numerous *second* chances

In golf we refer to a second chance to hit an errant shot as a "*mulligan*" and when you watch kids playing you will often hear someone call out for a "*do-over*" when they mess up

In both of those cases the slate is wiped clean; there's no penalty because the flub isn't counted against the person

They just get the opportunity to do better on their next attempt

And we see here in **verse 1** that that's the way God treats Jonah's rebellion – God gives Jonah a do-over and simply repeats the same command in virtually identical words as he first gave it in **Jonah 1:2**

## ***Stuck on failure***

Unfortunately, there are those – and perhaps there are some here this morning, who believe that it’s somehow different for them – that their failure is final

Like Roy Riegels in that half-time locker room all they can do is sit in despair and relive their failure and beat themselves up believing that their usefulness to God – if they ever had any – is a thing of the past

**But in order to profit from the second chances that God offers we need to learn to accept the forgiveness God offers which often means first learning to forgive ourselves**

A person can’t move forward while holding onto the past

The apostle Paul had much that he could have continued to lament over in his past history as a Pharisee and he knew that he still wasn’t what he hoped to be

But look at what he wrote in **Philippians 3:13b-14** –

*...forgetting what lies behind and straining forward to what lies ahead, I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.*

And then he writes that this should be the pattern for the mature Christian in **verse 15** –*Let those of us who are mature think this way*

**As long as we insist on clinging to our past failures all we can do is relive the past – there can be no moving forward**

The truth is; we have all failed God at some point and we will likely do so again before too long

The only thing that is in doubt is what we will do when we fail

As Winston Churchill is credited with saying:

*“Success consists of going from failure to failure without loss of enthusiasm.”*

I’m sure we could sit for hours swapping stories of our past failures and how God has given us second chances

Because God doesn’t want to see us fail; he delights in giving second chances

Look with me at **Psalms 37:23-24** –

*The steps of a man are established by the Lord, when he delights in his way; though he fall, he shall not be cast headlong, for the Lord upholds his hand.*

*“...though he fall he shall not be cast headlong, for the Lord upholds his hand” –*

Isn’t that a great promise for those who love the Lord?

## ***Nineveh***

But God was also giving Nineveh a second chance by sending Jonah to preach to them regarding their destruction

Look back at **Jonah 3:2** where God gives Jonah his marching orders –

*“Arise, go to Nineveh, that great city, and call out against it the message that I tell you.”*

And in **verse 4** we see the message that the Lord gave Jonah was –

*“Yet forty days, and Nineveh shall be overthrown!”*

When we began this series we saw how wicked the Assyrians were and we talked about their cruelty as they engaged in killing, conquering, and subduing all the people around them

And while we marvel at God’s patience toward Jonah we can at least reason that Jonah had been a faithful prophet

So it seems reasonable for God to give Jonah a second chance when he balked at carrying out God’s orders this time

But that can hardly be said of Nineveh – there was nothing redeeming about Nineveh that would warrant God giving them a second chance

## **So why did God send Jonah to give them a warning and with it the chance to repent?**

Look how God describes Nineveh in **verse 2** – *“Arise, go to Nineveh, **that great city...**”*

As we seek to discover why God gave Nineveh a second chance it helps to understand how Nineveh was “great”

Without a doubt, Nineveh was **great in size**

**Verse 3** says it was *“three days’ journey in breadth”*

Archeologists have discovered the walls of ancient Nineveh and they encompass a rectangular area of right at 60 miles in circumference and that was just the walled portion of the city and not including the surrounding populated area which would have been extensive – Nineveh was no small hamlet

As the capital city of Assyria, Nineveh was also **great in power and prestige**

Remember even though Assyria was about 50 years shy of the pinnacle of dominance it would ultimately achieve, it was still the mightiest player on the world stage at this time

Nineveh was also **great in its sin**

The people of Nineveh were beyond wicked

They were polytheistic pagans whose chief god was Ashur, the god of war

So they were a people known for military conquest

And they are still known to this day for the completely unnecessary torture and cruelty they inflicted on those they conquered – seemingly for nothing more than sport before they killed them

But most importantly, Nineveh was great to God **because of the huge number of lost souls who lived there**

**John 3:16** tells us of God’s love for the lost and God wanted to show mercy to any in Nineveh who would hear his message and turn to him

The people of Nineveh were like all of us before God gets ahold of us

They were greatly in need of God’s mercy but ignorant of that need and God was abundant in mercy toward them

## **II. We Shouldn't Feel Entitled**

### **Second Chances are Matters of Grace**

Nineveh didn't deserve God's mercy and God didn't owe them a second chance

Unquestionably, God would have been justified if he had simply wiped Nineveh off the map – they certainly deserved it  
I think we would all agree to that

And when we consider how rebellious, defiant, and stubborn Jonah has been in the account recorded for us we would even understand if God had allowed him to drown when the sailors threw him into the sea

Or if after three days riding in his fishy lifeboat stubbornly and refusing to give in, God had simply walked away and left Jonah to serve as a snack for the great fish

Neither Jonah nor the people of Nineveh were entitled to a second chance

But here's the thing; neither are we

**It's only according to God's graciousness that anyone receives a second chance – because no one is entitled to one**

### ***Definitions***

I think it would be well to define two terms that come into play concerning second chances

The first is **Mercy** which is the withholding of deserved punishment – the compassionate treatment of an offender

The second is **Grace** which is the bestowal of an underserved gift – it is the receipt of an unearned favor

So, to put it another way, mercy is when you don't receive the punishment you deserve and grace is when you receive a reward you don't deserve

I read a story this week that helps to illustrate the difference between mercy and grace and how God demonstrates both in giving us a second chance:

A father told his small son to do something or other and, rather uncharacteristically, the boy looked him in the eye and said, "No, I'm not going to." The father was taken aback and asked him again to do as he was told but the little fellow wouldn't budge so the father told the boy to go to his room and wait for him.

When he walked into the room the father knew what he had to do but he wasn't prepared for what happened next. His son looked at him with tears in his eyes and began begging for his father not to discipline him. He didn't want what he knew he deserved. After all, he knew he had dishonored and disobeyed his father and he knew he should be punished. But he asked for mercy.

The father was moved by his son's repentance and so he didn't give him what he deserved – that's mercy. And when his son confessed he knew what he had done was wrong and asked for forgiveness, the father gladly forgave him.

But the father was so overjoyed by his son's change of heart and attitude that he did something totally unexpected. He invited his son to go with him to the ice cream parlor and treated him to an ice cream cone he didn't deserve – that's grace.

**And that's what God does every time he gives someone a second chance**

The little boy knew he had no reason to expect either mercy or grace

When it comes to our human relationships we understand that

We instinctively know that it's unseemly for someone to demand a second chance from someone else as if they were entitled to one – all we can do is put ourselves in the hands of the person we've wronged and ask for mercy

But God loves to give second chances as long as we are open to doing well and he does so regularly even when we fail repeatedly because he *is* merciful and gracious by nature

God knows how he made us and he knows we are fallible and prone to failure so he is patient with us when we fail as the psalmist writes in **Psalm 103:14**

### **III. We Shouldn't Be Presumptuous**

#### **Grace is Not Limitless**

But we also need to recognize that God isn't a pushover

In **Jonah 3:4** we see what is going to happen to Nineveh if they turn down God's second chance –

*"Yet forty days, and Nineveh shall be overthrown!"*

God was exercising patience with Nineveh but his patience had a time limit

In 40 days one of two things was going to happen; the people would have turned to God or God would turn on them

I remember sitting in a courtroom when someone I know was sentenced for a crime they had committed

While the crime could have resulted in time spent in prison, the judge handed down what was in every sense of the word a merciful sentence by giving the person probation

The sentencing was in December and I remember the judge looking at the person being sentenced and telling them, "You need to understand that I'm giving you a gift by giving you a chance at proving yourself while on probation but I'm not Santa Claus. I am giving you a chance but if I see you before me again; rest assured you won't get another."

God is gracious and he delights in showing mercy but God isn't Santa Claus or some doting grandpa and we dare not presume that his patience is without limits

God's Word tells us there may well come a time when God decides to stop giving a person second chances and turns them over to their own devices if they continue to disobey and disregard him

It's referred to in Scripture as a "hardened heart" and it means that a person becomes insensitive to spiritual matters

And anyone's heart can harden – even the heart of a previously faithful Christian

Last week we saw how Jonah was less than fully repentant before God but that he expressed a willingness to go to Nineveh as God had said and how God took Jonah where he was and caused the fish to deliver him to dry ground

Jonah made enough of a turn that God was willing to continue to work with Jonah to try to turn him the rest of the way

And God will do the same for anyone who possesses a sensitive, teachable, and leadable spirit

#### **But unrepentant, ongoing sin can lead to a hard heart and disobeying God in anything is sin**

So if a person, even a believer, continually says, "No," to God there may well come a time when God's patience runs out and he stops giving the person opportunities to obey

#### **The most frightening state I can imagine is being lost and having God give up on saving you; the second is being a believer and having God give up on correcting you**

I imagine it would be something like Samson who had the Spirit depart from him due to his own repeated foolishness but he was unaware that it had happened and that the believer would live out the remainder of their life and receive heaven when they died but be of no use to God while they lived

Still, God is patient with us and not quick to "pull the plug" on us as it were as Peter writes in **2Peter 3:9**

And the good news is, if you are concerned that God might have given up on you, he hasn't

Because the fact that you are concerned shows that your conscience is not yet seared and God hasn't turned you over to follow your own path just yet because if he does you will be insensitive to his leading

But still, not knowing when the next "No" to God might be the last "No" it's unwise to prevail upon his grace and mercy and to presume that God will always give us another chance

**God is gracious and he loves to show mercy but his grace and mercy are not without limits and in his love he will give us the true desires of our hearts even if that means allowing us to go our own way**

## **Conclusion**

Everyone needs a second chance at some point in their lives – some of us more often than others

And when we know we've failed and truly desire to do better, a second chance is one of the best gifts we can receive because with it comes a shot at redemption as we get to see our failure erased and replaced by a do-over

**Thankfully, our God is the God of second chances and we need not despair over our failures as long as we remain committed to being reachable and teachable**

If God were going to give up on anyone he might well have given up on Jonah –

But he didn't because, even though Jonah was still flawed in his thinking, Jonah yielded to what God wanted him to do

What is it that God has been telling you to do that you are resisting or even running from?

Is there someone God wants you to talk with or to develop a relationship with for the sake of the gospel?

Is there some ministry he's urging you to become involved with or perhaps even to start?

Is there some area of your life that God has been urging you to turn over more fully to him?

Is God telling you to surrender a greater portion of your time, talent, treasure, or truth to his kingdom purposes?

I don't know where or in what way you might have been resisting or even outright disobeying God's call on your life

But I do know that no matter what you might have done or what you might have failed to do God wants to give you the opportunity to get back on track

Far too often our natural tendency is to remain stuck in our regrets over having failed when the best thing we can do is turn the past over to God, learn what we can from our failures, and get busy doing what God wants us to do now

**Spending too much time in sorrow over the lost opportunities of the past only robs us of the chance to capitalize on the opportunities of the present**

**God loves you and wants to see you succeed and you can count on his faithfulness to give you another chance as long as you are willing to accept it and put it to use**

Let's pray