

Have you ever struggled to discern God's will or plan for your life? Sometimes the right answer is not obvious and we pray wondering what God wants us to do. Sometimes that inability to discern God's will can lead to anxiety. I remember terrified that I would marry the wrong person. I remember worrying about which school I would go to. I remember being so obsessed with following God's will that I began to pray about everything. I would pray about where I should park. What time should I go to school? What should I eat for breakfast?

Maybe you haven't ever been as extreme as me. But the question often remains for us, how can we follow God's plan for our lives? And what happens when we get off track? What if we go the wrong direction or do exactly the wrong thing. If that is you this morning then I want to offer you some comfort.

This morning in Jonah 3 we will see that God's plan is inescapable. No matter what we choose for breakfast or how far away we run. God will be glorified and His plan will be accomplished.

Point 1: You can't stop God's plan (v. 1-5).

This is one of the biggest lessons you see in the entire book.

Jonah does everything that He can to thwart God,

but none of it works.

He runs away.

He dives into the ocean.

But all along the way, God pursues.

And unbelievers continually repent of their sins.

This chapter is our climax.

Jonah has finally come to the city of Ninevah.

He tried not to come, but you cannot stop God's plan.

Verse 1, **"Then the word of the Lord came to Jonah the second time, saying,"**

This verse is almost a word for word repeat of 1:1

except for **"the second time."**

Jonah gets a second chance to try and obey.

Verse 2, **"Arise, go to Nineveh, that great city, and call out against it the message that I tell you."**

The command is almost exactly the same.

He is to arise up and go to Nineveh, the great city.

And he is to give it a message from God as prophet.

The main difference in this verse is the end.

Before in 1:2 it was **"call out against it."**

Here it is **"call out against it the message that I tell you."**

Jonah does not get to preach whatever he wants.

Because Prophets of God are not supposed to speak extemporaneously.

They don't get to choose their sermons.

They are supposed to say exactly what God tells them.

They repeat His words word for word.

So, God makes it clear that Jonah should preach what God tells him.

Verse 3, **"So Jonah arose and went to Nineveh, according to the word of the Lord."**

Finally, Jonah does it.

Before he arose and went down to Joppa.

This time Jonah arises and goes to Nineveh.

He goes according to the word of the Lord.

This is what he should have done before.

But he has finally obeyed and done what is right.

"Now Nineveh was an exceedingly great city, three days' journey in breadth."

Now why does it say this?

Nineveh is a great big city.

It not just great in its size, but it is great in God's eyes.

But what does it mean that it is a three days journey?

Some think it could mean that it would take you three days to walk through the whole city.

If you started at one end and walked to the other.

Others say maybe it's the distance that I would take to walk all the way around the city that that would take you three days.

That certainly could be it.

But it's unlikely that the city was so large that it would take days to get from one end to the other.

More than likely.

Or what I think it means is that it should have taken Jonah three days to Proclaim this message to the entire city.

Because he shouldn't have just been walking from one end to the other as fast as he could.

He should have been traveling through all of the neighborhoods and all of the major areas and all the places where people lived proclaiming God's message to them.

So, if you imagine that kind of journey would have taken 3 days to get through the whole city.

Just like it might only take you a few hours to drive around Oklahoma City. But if you want to explore all of the city that would take many days. I think this is the best explanation for verse four as well.

Verse 4, **"Jonah began to go into the city, going a day's journey."**

Jonah starts going into the city.

But he only goes a day.

He should be spending three days going into the city and through the city

But he only goes one day's Journey.

So whatever you think this 3 days mean it is clear that John only does one.

He doesn't go as far as he's supposed to.

Just can't seem to help himself, can he?

Even after he repents.

Even after all he experienced in the whale.

Even after being commissioned and given a second chance and obeying he just can't quite get all the way there.

Maybe you can see yourself in Jonah's obedience.
Even when he tries he doesn't quite do it.

And what we need to understand is that Jonah is still even now not following God's plan fully.
He is not giving it his all he seems to be doing the bare minimum.
Let's look at the message.
Let us hear the sermon he preaches.

"And he called out, "Yet forty days, and Nineveh shall be overthrown!"

That's it.

That seems to be his sermon.

Now some say this couldn't have been Jonah's only sermon.

It's too short it's too small.

Surely he would have had a lot more to say than that.

And so this is just a summary of his sermon.

Now if you can summarize the sermon with that. It is not very good.

I don't think this is just a summary.

I think this is all that he preaches.

After all, the same verse tells us that he doesn't travel throughout the whole city.

He only goes one day's Journey.

And this entire book he has spent not doing everything that God has told him to do.

So why would that change now?

I think this is all Jonah preaches.

I don't think he says anything else other than this.

Jonah is preaching the worst sermon in the whole Bible.

That's one of the worst sermons ever preached.

Now I've preached some bad sermons in my life.

Unfortunately, some of you might have heard a few of them.

I think my first sermon was my worst one.
In my arrogance, I barely prepared and thought my ability would carry me.
It didn't. It was so bad I begged my dad to preach the second service because I couldn't go through that again.
My dad didn't let me. And he told me to spend the time between services praying and repenting.
But even that sermon is better than Jonah's.

Jonah's sermon doesn't say anything about God.
It doesn't say anything about the scriptures.
It doesn't teach any kind of theology whatsoever.
It's not like he's preaching on something obscure that nobody cares about even that would be better than this.
He doesn't say a word about grace or redemption.
There is no altar call or call to repentance.
He doesn't even really preach about sin.
It's a fire and brimstone sermon with no hell.
This isn't Jonah trying to scare them into repentance or into faith in God.

All that he does is walk around saying in 40 days Nineveh is going to be overthrown.
40 days you're going to die.
He doesn't even give a cause.
He doesn't even say that Yahweh the god of Isaac Abraham and Jacob in 40 days will kill you.
He doesn't tell him anyway to avoid it.
He didn't tell them about any escape there any way they can stop their impending doom.
It's the worst sermon ever preached by one of the worst Prophets.

I think better sermons have been preached by Street Preachers.
Those people on the side of the road that hold up signs saying "you're going to hell" or just "repent"

I don't think those are good sermons I don't think that is generally a good idea.

But many of those sermons are better than what Jonah has done
And yet, you cannot stop God's plan.

Verse 5, **"And the people of Nineveh believed God."**

I don't think that I can overstate how miraculous this is.

Jonah is probably lazily walking through the city.

He is half-heartedly preaching this terrible sermon of 40 days y'all are dead.

He might even be muttering it half under his breath.

And after a few hours on one day he decides that's good enough.

And what is the response to this?

"The people of Nineveh believed God."

They believed.

This evil wicked empire is filled with the worst people that you can imagine
are believing in God.

The most unexpected people hear the worst sermon and believe.

Because you can't stop God's plan.

Then what happens?

"They called for a fast and put on sackcloth, from the greatest of them to the least of them."

It seems like revival breaks out.

They call for a fast and putting on sackcloth.

This is what people do to express their repentance.

It is more than just a oh sorry God I won't do it again.

They are now fasting and praying and covering themselves with sacks to
beg God for mercy.

This revival seems to spread out.

It doesn't just hit a few people in the city.

It is not just the people who happen to be around Jonah when he first started his half-hearted preaching.

The influence of Jonah's preaching goes throughout the entire city.

It affects the greatest among them and the least.

The poor and the forgotten are fasting.

And so are the rich and the influential.

All of this is happening despite Jonah's best efforts to prevent it from happening.

All of this is happening despite Jonah's mediocre efforts to make it happen.

Because you can't stop God's plan.

And this should bring us comfort today.

The doctrine of God sovereignty.

The idea that God is a control of everything.

This is not meant to be an abstract theological idea that creates philosophical problems.

It is not meant to be something that we sit around and debate over well how does this impact Free Will and my decisions.

Although you can do that if you want.

What it is supposed to do it is meant to bring us comfort.

God's control over the universe should help us sleep at night.

It should bring us comfort that we can't mess up God's plan.

Or something God's plan for the world and for your life can't be sabotaged.

It cannot be opposed by the enemy.

And it means that you can't stop it from happening either.

Story of Jonah shows us that our sin can't mess it up.

He tried to run away but Nineveh still got saved.

Jonah tried to go through the motions and yet Revival seems to break out.

This means that in our lives.

Our sins, our half-hearted obedience, our mistakes, and our stumbling, none of that can hinder God's plan for your life.

You cannot mess it up.

You could spend 70 years running away from God doing everything that you possibly can to avoid him.

But you can't stop God's plan.

Some of you may feel like God doesn't have anything for you.

Or you feel yourself filled with anxiety wondering if you've made the huge mistake.

You can't stop God's plan.

God will use all of the enemy's efforts all of your own efforts to bring about what He wants to bring about.

So rest easy.

You cannot stop God's plan.

Even if you tried.

Point 2: You can't force God's plan (v. 6-10).

We should be comforted that we can't stop God's plan from happening.

But we also need to be challenged.

We also need to recognize that we can't force God's hand.

We cannot make God do something.

We cannot change God's timing.

And we cannot manufacture God's blessing.

We cannot force God to do what we want.

We cannot manipulate Him.

God's plan will always be accomplished, but not in our time nor in our way.

Verse 6, **"The word reached the king of Nineveh, and he arose from his throne, removed his robe, covered himself with sackcloth, and sat in ashes."**

The king arises and obeys.

He takes off his royal clothes,

He steps down from the royal throne.

And instead he humbles himself to mourn.

He puts on sackcloth and sits in ashes.

Can you imagine any world leader humbling himself in this way?

But this king does.

The revival that has been spreading throughout the entire city now reaches all the way up to its chief ruler.

And even that person is moved to repentance.

Verse 7, **"And he issued a proclamation and published through Nineveh, "By the decree of the king and his nobles: Let neither man nor beast, herd nor flock, taste anything. Let them not feed or drink water, 8 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. 9 Who knows? God may turn and relent and turn from his fierce anger, so that we may not perish."**

Look at this proclamation that goes out to the city.

He calls for a citywide fast.

Not just a fast from food.

They are all to fast from water as well.

This is a serious and dangerous fast.

And it is not just the people in the city, but the animals are to fast as well.

No living thing is to eat or drink.

And everyone is to cover themselves with sackcloth.

They are to take off their clothes of sin and put on clothes of repentance.

Taking off their clothes of sin and putting on cloths of righteousness.

Then the whole city is to call out to God.

They are to pray **"mightily."**

What kind of pray do you think is a mightily prayer.

Probably not something quick and quiet.

These would be loud and desperate prayers.

And it is not just meant to be empty words and prayers.

They are to back up their prayers with actions.

Verse 8, **"Let everyone turn from his evil way and from the violence that is in his hands."**

Specifically the king is calling them to put aside violence.

The violence that they is a people are known for.

The violence that they commit against the other nations and against each other.

The violence that defines the Assyrian Empire they say put it aside.

Turn from it repent.

Turn from their collective violence and their individual acts of violence.

Verse 10, **"When God saw what they did, how they turned from their evil way, God relented of the disaster that He had said He would do to them, and He did not do it."**

God sees their repentance.

He sees that they have turned from their sin and their violence.

And so God shows them mercy.

God seems to change His mind.

But this is not God's plan being changed.

It isn't like God rethinks something after getting more information.

It is not God going back on His word either.

This is actually the normal pattern of what God says.

This is actually God following the plan.

Especially when you understand that the word for overturn is actually slightly ambiguous.

It is two meanings.

One of the meanings describes the way that God overthrows cities is used to describe the overturning of Sodom and Gomorrah.

Another way that an overturning can be interpreted is repentance.

A turning away from your sin and towards God.

So Jonah went around preaching that in 40 days the city will be overturned.

And so it was.

But instead of being overturned in judgment it was overturned in repentance.

Jeremiah 18:7-10 **"If at any time I declare concerning a nation or a kingdom, that I will pluck up and break down and destroy it, 8 and if that nation, concerning which I have spoken, turns from its evil, I will relent of the disaster that I intended to do to it. 9 And if at any time I declare concerning a nation or a kingdom that I will build and plant it, 10 and if it does evil in my sight, not listening to my voice, then I will relent of the good that I had intended to do to it."**

If God tells a nation that He is going to destroy them, He will.

But if they repent, then God will not destroy them.

And the reverse is true.

If God promises to bless a nation, then He will.

But if that nation sins against God, then He will not bless them.

This is why Jonah ran away.

He knew that telling Ninevah God would destroy them was giving them a chance to repent.

There are some who believe that they can manipulate God.

They think that they can force God's hand.

They treat God as if He was a vending machine.
If you just pray a certain way, then you can guarantee a response.

Now one thing you might notice about this Proclamation.
The proclamation comes after the Revival has happened.
The king didn't send the proclamation and then the city tears it's clothes
and puts on sackcloth and begins to fast.
Because I don't care what kind of government structure you have.
I don't care if it's Democratic or a monarchy or communist or a dictatorship
you cannot enact spiritual change through proclamations.

After all I bet if even tomorrow the Congress and Senate and the president
all unanimously voted and passed a proclamation just like this that every
man and animal shouldn't eat or drink anything we should all wear
sackcloth call out to God turn from our sins and maybe God will save us.

They would do that and then thousands of churches across the country
they would still be people grumbling and complaining.
Even Christians would think well I just don't think the government should
tell me that I'm supposed to repent.
Well how dare they tell me that I have to fast I was going to fast but now
I'm not.

Okay you can't force this kind of change.
The reason this Proclamation has any power because the people are
already in the process of doing this.

But sometimes we try to reverse the order.
Sometimes we try to force God's hand.
And we can do this a number of ways.
One of the ways that we try to do this is that we can try to recreate the
Revival that Jonah saw.

Every Christian should want to see their cities and nation and people repent and turn from their sins and come to Jesus.

And so we can study revivals as if we are looking for Clues to make God bring one.

As if we prayed in a certain way then God would be forced to act.

Or that if we could just preach in a certain way.

If I could just tone my skills and learn the right rhetorical tricks and things to use then these doors will be filled with thousands of people desperate to hear God's word.

You had some revivalists during the first and second great Awakenings who thought this.

Charles Finney was one of the most famous ones.

He believed that if you just did the right things and learn the right techniques you could bring Revival wherever you went.

I'm not really sure what Finney thought about Jonah.

Or sometimes we think that we can force God's hand in other ways.

I personally see this a lot in the political Realm or even just in the way that churches run and are organized.

We can see a good or a Biblical goal and so in order to achieve it maybe we need to sin a little bit.

Maybe we need to bend the rules in order to bring about the kingdom of God.

Maybe we need to make a couple sinful decisions in order that God's kingdom can come.

Listen you can't force God's plan.

He doesn't need you to.

Now just because God can use the Renegade sinful prophet Jonah to bring about Revival does not mean that we should become Renegade sinful prophets in order to bring about Revival.

You cannot force God to act how you want him to.

Point 3: Embrace God's plan by being faithful.

God's plan will be accomplished.

It can either happen in spite of us or it can happen with us participating.

I would rather participate gladly.

And the primary way we can participate in God's plan for the world is by being faithful.

Jonah ended up in Ninevah.

But he went there kicking and screaming after several wrong turns.

God just told him to arise and go to Ninevah.

God did not specify the exact route he needed to take.

The point was that he should obey and head that direction.

Often it is the same with us.

God gives us clear directions.

Love your enemies

Bless those who curse you.

Do not forsake the gathering of the church.

Meditate on God's Word.

Make disciples and baptize them.

I don't know about you, but those commands have plenty to keep me busy.

You can spend your life dedicated to just understanding and obeying those.

And there is plenty of leeway on the rest.

Sometimes we spent far too long worrying about how to follow God's plan in the future when you are not following it right now.

The reality is that we just need to be faithful.

We need to obey what God has asked us to do today.

Today has enough worries of its own.

Today has enough commands of its own.

Do what God has asked you today and God will do what He wills.

This should be freeing and joyful.

It means that the pressure of making this happen does not rely on us.

We do not have to force God's hand in our world.

We can just obey and trust God to handle the rest.

The revival of the world or our community does not rest on your shoulders.

Some of you might feel like I have been crushed by worrying that you might not be following God's plan.

You might worry that your mistakes are your sins.

Your divorce your addiction or you're bad decision has made an impossible for God to be able to use you.

To you I want to say take a deep breath.

Don't worry about the indecision don't worry about doing exactly the right thing tomorrow.

Do what you know how to do.

Embrace God's plan by being faithful and what you know that he has called you to like not forsaking the Gathering of God's people or meditating on his word.

For obedient and faithful in those things and then God will show you the rest of the path.

Worry about following Jesus in the obvious things before you worry about finding his will in the things that are more difficult.

And some of you are very much like Jonah and you have been running from God's plan.

You have turned your back on him and you have sprinted the other direction.

If that's you I want you to know that it's not too late.

If there is breath in your lungs then you still have time to turn around and to be faithful.

You also haven't messed up God's plan and you can Embrace his plan by being faithful today.

And I would highly recommend doing it before God has to send a storm in a whale to get your attention.

But even if he does you have time to follow his plan and to be faithful to him with whatever time you have left.

Others of you for those who are tempted to try to change God's plan and make it happen on your terms.

Whether you're trying to manipulate him or force him or scream at the sky in your prayers.

If that is you then you need to recognize that you cannot for God's plan.

And his plan is not up to you.

It is not in your hands it's in his.

And I know you might think that you have a better idea but God has got it.

All you need to do is to be faithful and let God handle the rest.

Wherever you are, all of us as followers of Jesus need to embrace God's plan for our life by being faithful.

If you are not a believer, it is not too late.

You are not too far from God.

You haven't stopped His plan.

He is waiting for you.

And if you turn from your sins like Nineveh did,

You will find salvation and grace through the blood of Jesus.

And you will be resurrected to new life.

You can't stop God's plan, you can't force it, but you can embrace it.

Embrace God's plan by embracing faith in Jesus and a faithful life.