

Henry Ford said, *"Failure is the opportunity to begin again more intelligently."* Bible Teacher Warren Wiersbe comments *"The mistakes we make embarrass us, especially those mistakes that are caused by our running ahead of the Lord and not seeking his will. But we need to remember no mistake is final for the dedicated Christian. God can use even our blunders to accomplish his purposes."* Our God is the God of the second, third, fourth...thousandth chance!!

He's gone down in football history as *Wrong Way Riegels*. The year was 1929, New Year's Day and it was the Rose Bowl. Georgia Tech was playing the University of California. In that game a University of California player by the name of Roy Riegels recovered a fumble for California. Somehow though he became confused and started running the wrong way, and he ran 65 yards in the wrong direction. It was the most embarrassing wrong run in college football history. 65 yards the wrong way. Teammate Benny Lom, a very fast halfback, chased Riegels half the length of the field, shouting "Stop! Stop! Turn back, Roy...You're going the wrong way!" Thinking the speedier Lom was pleading for the ball to out-race the pursuing Georgia Tech players, Riegels yelled back, "Giddoutta here, Benny! This is my ball!" It wasn't until he had almost crossed the goal line, with Lom pulling at him, that Riegels understood and tried to reverse direction. But it was too late. The Georgia Tech team tackled him at the one-yard line. When California attempted to punt, Georgia Tech blocked the kick and scored a safety which was the ultimate margin of victory and won the Yellow Jackets the national championship.

But that strange play came in the first half. 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've 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 Roy Riegels. He didn't budge. Coach Price looked back and called to him again. Roy Riegels still didn't move. Coach Price went over to where Roy 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, 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 Roy Riegel's shoulder and said to him: "Roy, get up and go on back; the game is only half over." And Roy Riegels went back. The Georgia Tech players said later than they had never seen a man play football as Roy Riegels played that second half.

We hear a story like that and we think, "What a coach!!" But as I look at my life and you look at your life and how God responds to us, we have to say, "What a God!!" We take

the ball and run in the wrong direction. We stumble and fall and are so ashamed of ourselves that we never want to try again. And our Heavenly Father comes to us, bends over us in the person of His Son and says, "Get up and go on back; the game is only half over."

My friend, that's the gospel of the grace of God. It's the gospel of a second chance, a third chance, of the hundredth chance. And that's the Book of Jonah. It's **More than just a second chance**. My Bible is open to Jonah 3:1-4 (p. 655), What a wonderful example of God's patience and tenderness with one of His children. Our God is the God of the second chance. As we'll see this morning, **More than just a second chance**. Our failures can leave us feeling that God could never use us, that He could never bless us again, and that we are useless in God's work and to His plan. Jonah 3 is wonderful proof that God gives second chances and it's not just for Jonah. If you're taking notes...

**1. God gave Jonah a second chance.** *"Then the word of the LORD came to Jonah a second time"* (Jonah 3:1) Isn't it great to know that God's not like us? He doesn't hold grudges. Spurgeon said that *"God is more willing to forgive than we are to sin."* Wow!! Yet we human beings tend to not be "second chance" people. Every politician knows the high price of one fatal mistake. There are a number of situations in this life, that for the most part, we have only one chance to get right. Can you think of some? How about borrowing a chunk of money from a friend and never paying it back? Do you think that your "friend" will lend you some more down the road? I doubt it.

How about in major sports? Say that you're a walk-on at a major university's sport's program, but you're cut. It doesn't matter how much you might say, "I can do better, Coach." You're gone. It's a one chance shot.

How about tight rope walking over the Grand Canyon? Can you imagine? "I'll do better nexxt tiiiiime!" There is no next time!

Invite all your friends to a party at your house, then when everyone shows up say, "I decided I didn't feel like a party tonight, come back another time." Do you think that there will be a next time?

Or how about this one? When I finish preaching today, say that it's real obvious that I've laid an egg. Will I be able to get away with a "Wait, folks, I think I can do that better. Will you stay an extra half an hour or so and let me get this right?" For my own ego's sake, I won't ask for a show of hands. It wouldn't be pretty. My wife and I came in separate cars. Jane might even leave to.

But it's true isn't it? There are many situations in life in which we have only one chance to get it right, even if you desperately need a second chance. The good news is, that with God, it works differently. With Him, we get a second chance. With Him it's usually **more than just a second chance**. We don't deserve one, but we get one. And there is no-one in the Bible in need of a second chance more than the guy we are studying today, Jonah. And God gave him one. But Jonah is not the exception. *Second chance theology is God's normal pattern*. While we must not be presumptuous. Our God is the God of the second chance.

The problem is that many of you are here this morning and you've given up because you don't know this. You erroneously believe that failure is final. Maybe your marriage is falling apart? Maybe you're divorced or your second marriage is dying? Maybe you've

failed as a parent? Maybe you're an addict (drugs, sex, pornography, shop-aholic, gambling)? You've fallen off the wagon again...and you think that it's too late. Maybe you keep losing jobs or you can't handle your money? Maybe you have a temper or struggle with anxiety or depression...and you've succumbed again? Maybe you're a gossip or a chronic complainer? Whatever it is that you deal with, please do not become discouraged. Please do not throw in the towel. Get up, get going again. Our God is the God of the second chance!

One of my very, very favorite verses is Proverbs 24:16 *"For though a righteous man falls seven times, he rises again"* (p. 466). He goes down seven but he gets up eight. Jonah found out that God gives second chances. While we never get back the time we've wasted in sin and there are still often consequences for our rebellion. But through God's grace, when we repent we get a chance to start over...to begin again. That's good news for all of us isn't it?! Because each of us at one time or another has wished that we could have another shot. We have made sinful mistakes in our finances, our careers, our parenting, our marriages...which lead us to wish we could have one more chance. One time or other we have all longed for the opportunity to begin again. One of my favorite old bits of prose is a poem called, *The Land of Begin Again*, by Louisa Tarkington. It goes like this: *"I wish that there were some wonderful place called The Land of Begin Again, Where all our mistakes and all our heartaches and all our poor selfish grief... Could be dropped like a shabby old coat at the door and never be put on again I wish that there were some wonderful place called The Land of Begin Again."* Jonah's experience reminds us that there is such a place! When we humbly admit our sin like Jonah did, God helps us start over. Throughout the Bible we see God doing this over and over again. He's the God of the second chance. Take some time and study the life of Abraham, Jacob, Moses, King David, Peter, John Mark. Each of these great Bible characters failed in one way or another, but they repented and asked God for another shot and He gave them one! Our God is the God of the 2nd chance. He wants very much to forgive us and help us start anew. As John Ortberg says, *"If there is one way that human beings consistently underestimate God's love, it is perhaps in His loving longing to forgive."*

Remember? God's love for us—His desire to help us start anew—is why He sent His only Son to die for us in the first place. He knew that this was the only way we could have our sins washed away and start clean. So when you see the folly of your sin and yearn for God's forgiveness and a second chance, surrender to that yearning. Ask God to forgive you and help you start over!

Warren Bennis once wrote of a promising junior executive at IBM who was involved in a risky venture for the company and ended up losing ten million dollars in the gamble. He was called into the office of Tom Watson Sr., the founder and leader of IBM for 40 years...a business legend. The junior exec, overwhelmed with guilt and fear, blurted out, *"I guess you've called me in for my resignation. Here it is. I resign."* Watson replied, *"You must be joking. I just invested ten million dollars educating you; I can't afford your resignation."*

I think this illustrates why God longs for us to repent: so He can forgive, so He can be faithful and just to cleanse us from unrighteousness, so He can cast our sins as far as the east is from the west and remember them no more, because He has invested the life of His only Son to make it possible for us to begin again. Again, as Ortberg

says, *“Redeeming is what God is into. He is the finder of directionally-challenged sheep, the searcher of missing coins, the embracer of foolish prodigal sons. His favorite department is ‘Lost and Found.’”*

If there was ever a place where we need a second chance, it's with the Gospel. The Gospel begins with a “go.” Jonah didn't want to go. Most of us fail at this same point. Is there a friend, a co-worker, a neighbor that you need to “go” to – to share the Gospel with, to invite to church, to begin building a bridge of redemption to?

Perhaps you're here and God has called you to serve in a ministry. Maybe He's called you into full time service. It's not too late. The only retirement plan that God has is out of this world. Young people, no doubt God has been speaking to some of you about serving Him in full time service, perhaps on a foreign field. Don't be a Jonah! But if you have been a Jonah, it's not too late.

James Montgomery Boice tells of a young girl in Philadelphia who felt the call of God to Christian service a number of years ago. But she married an unbeliever, who shortly afterwards abandoned her. But the experience brought the girl back to desiring God's will. But what was she to do? Should she divorce him? But she decided rightly to leave the matter entirely in the Lord's hands. After having confessed her sin to God, she let her separated husband know that she was open to reconciliation if he desired it. When he declined, she let the matter rest. Within a few months her husband was suddenly killed in a car accident, and the Lord led her to apply to Wycliffe Bible Translators for missionary work. The word of the Lord clearly came to her a second time, and she went on to serve Him as a translator in South America. **God gave Jonah a second chance.** And He'll do the same with you.

The problem with most of us is that erroneously think that God works like we do. For example, in some workplaces, if an employee fails on the job, he/she is written up. That write up is kept in a permanent file and affects future salary and chances for promotion in the future. When the supervisor is looking at potential people to promote, he looks and sees that issue in the past and takes it into consideration. But God doesn't do that. When a person returns to God, He doesn't hold back on them because of their past failure. Failure is never final with God.

**2. God gave Nineveh a second chance.** *“Go to the great city of Nineveh and proclaim to it the message I give you’ Jonah obeyed the word of the LORD and went to Nineveh. Now Nineveh was a very important city--a visit required three days. On the first day, Jonah started into the city. He proclaimed: ‘Forty more days and Nineveh will be overturned”*(vss. 2-4). We think of God as the God of the second chance. But He is really the God of the thousandth chance plus.

Nineveh is a “*great city.*” It was great in size. It was great politically. It was great in evil. But most importantly, it was literally “*a city great to God.*” Some have estimated that Nineveh would be comparable to modern day Singapore. This was not a small vassal kingdom. It was the leading government and empire of its day. It was the super power. But it was not its power and prestige that made it great to God. It was the vast amount of souls who lived there. Nineveh was important to a merciful God even if it wasn't important to Jonah.

Some have questioned the three days required. Most likely it would take Jonah three days to get through the main public squares of Nineveh to proclaim God's message of

judgment.

We've already discussed in another session the brutality and wickedness of Nineveh. God would have been just if He had disposed of them, like yesterday. But He gives them 40 more days. It's another chance even for this vile city and empire. These forty days suggest God's abundant mercy that has been displayed so vividly throughout the book of Jonah. Nineveh deserved immediate destruction, but in mercy God gives forty more days in which to repent. Here was a final opportunity for an idolatrous and sinful people to turn to God with the alternative of judgment.

In essence, Jonah's message is the same as the gospel we preach. In mercy, God declares, *"Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved"* (Rom. 10:13). In the Lord's sight, all people are as guilty of sin as the citizens of Nineveh. Every one of us deserves eternal death, but it was the mercy of God that sent Christ to die on the cross to pay the eternal price for sin, that we might have an escape and be eternally saved. For those who turn a deaf ear to the plea of mercy, there remains nothing but judgment: *"The soul who sins will die"* (Eze. 18:20). Though God's mercy appears to be endless, yet judgment must ultimately come if mercy is refused.

The Lord gave the people of Nineveh forty days. If you have never come to Christ, there is no promise that you will have even forty days. We never know. God may give you forty years. On the other hand, He may give you only forty hours...or even less. This we do know. The same Bible that teaches mercy, teaches judgment. If you die without the Lord Jesus, there is no second chance.

Friend, possibly the Lord has been speaking to you for months, or even years. You have been hardening your heart against God. Let me urge you to hear His voice today, the voice of mercy, pleading with you to come to Him. Do not resist our wonderful Lord. Let Him show you and prove to you what a joy it is to follow Him.

Nineveh vividly demonstrates the fallacy of pluralism. Many today say, "It doesn't matter what you believe, as long as you believe." The Ninevites believed. They were religious. They had faith. All roads do not lead to heaven. Jesus said, *"I am the way, the truth and the life."* There is only one truth and Jesus Christ is it. Friend, don't you think that there were some good and ethical people in Nineveh? But being good isn't good enough. Jesus Christ is the only way into heaven! All the other ways are the road to Hell. God gave Nineveh 40 days. You don't know for sure that you have that. My friend, come to Christ today.

**3. God's message has not changed: Turn or Burn!** The prophet Jonah has held the record for the world's shortest sermon for some twenty seven centuries! His message to the Ninevehites was a mere eight words in English, depending on which translation of the Bible you use. And when he preached it, he did so in Aramaic...which means his sermon was originally a mere five words! How would you like it if my messages were only 5-8 words long each Sunday?! NO ONE ANSWER THAT QUESTION!!!

Some years ago we had a lady who visited our church for several weeks. She told me that she was looking for a church that made her feel good. Folks, there are a lot churches that you can go to that will make you feel good. We might dub that the power of positive preaching. But that's not the message of Scripture. The message that Jonah preached is the same message that we today are to share with a lost world: *Come to Christ or you will go into a Christless eternity!*

If I go to the doctor and I have cancer, he could make me feel good but he wouldn't be a very good doctor. All of us have a cancer of the soul. It's called sin. And the only medicine is Jesus. He's the only cure. Jonah, though, pre-cross, preached the same message, *"Forty more days and Nineveh will be overturned"* (3:4).

The word *overturned* has a double-meaning. It can mean either "turn over" as in judged or "turn around" as in repent. Nineveh had a choice. They could turn to God or God would turn on them. We have the same choice. But, please mark it down. If we reject the message, if we reject God's mercy and grace, it's not what God wants! 1 Timothy 2:3-4 says, *"This is good, and pleases God our Savior, who wants all men to be saved and to come to a knowledge of the truth."* Friend, if you go to Hell, it is not because God wants to send you there. It's because you chose to go there by rejecting His mercy and forgiveness. It's turn or burn – which one will it be for you? Today may be your last chance! Please don't blow it!!

**Conclusion:** In the movie, *City Slickers*, Billy Crystal plays a radio-advertising salesman going through a mid-life crisis. He realizes that there has to be more to life. He and his friends deal with the predictability and emptiness of their lives by going on a cattle drive. At the end of the movie as they prepare to return to New York and the familiar routine, Billy Crystal explains the concept of a "do-over" to one of his friends: *"Do you remember when you used to play ball as a kid? Sometimes when you fouled things up, you would get a 'do-over.' It was a second chance to swing at the ball. That's what is happening to you now. You're getting a "do-over" in life."*

My friend, God wants to give you a "do over." He wants to give you another chance. Wouldn't it be great to be able to have a second chance? Some of you might want to do 2005 over again. Some of you may wish that you could do your life over again.

I have great news for you this morning. You can have a "do-over", a fresh start, a new beginning through Christ. As George Sweeting, the former president of Moody Bible Institute, used to say all the time, *"The Christian life is a series of new beginnings."* 2 Corinthians 5:17 puts it this way, *"Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come."*

He's the God of **More than just a second chance**. And He wants to fix your mess, He wants to give you a new start today. You matter to God more than you can ever know. He cares deeply for you -- no matter what you've said, what you've thought, or what you've done. You and I can count on His consistent faithfulness. He'll forgive you. He'll give you a new start but my friend, you have to let Him.