

3 The word of the LORD came to Jonah a second time: <sup>2</sup>“Get up! Go to the great city of Nineveh and preach the message that I tell you.” <sup>3</sup>Jonah got up and went to Nineveh according to the LORD’s command.

Now Nineveh was an extremely great city,<sup>[a]</sup> a three-day walk. <sup>4</sup>Jonah set out on the first day of his walk in the city and proclaimed, “In forty days Nineveh will be demolished!” <sup>5</sup>Then the people of Nineveh believed God. They proclaimed a fast and dressed in sackcloth—from the greatest of them to the least.

<sup>10</sup> God saw their actions—that they had turned from their evil ways—so God relented from the disaster he had threatened them with. And he did not do it.

### God works through those he calls

Before my wife and I were married and after I returned from Brazil, I had six months to pack, prepare for a wedding, and find work. This was in 2008 after the housing bubble burst and economic downturn, my usual work at a cabinet shop wasn’t there. So I turned in applications everywhere I went, trying to stay close to home. I found work at a rental yard. I had just graduated from college (this was the first time and location I got to put that on an application. I had experience with front end loaders, tractors, and fork lifts. I put everything down on my application. During the interview and owner said, “You’re overqualified.” And I thought, “Finally my degree is paying off.”

Maybe you’ve had a similar experience or maybe you too have heard the opposite, “You’re not qualified. You need experience” Maybe you’ve even thought, “I can’t talk about Jesus, I’m not qualified for that?” The good news is that God calls and qualifies Christians. He also works through the call.

I wonder if Jonah felt qualified for the work God gave him. The story of Jonah is well known but when you think Jonah you’re probably thinking of a whale. Immediately Jonah is written off as a children’s story because it’s hard to believe he spent three days in the belly of a fish before going on to be one of the most successful missionaries of all time. Jesus speaks of this as a factual event and I take this historically whether you believe this is historical or mythical listen as our God calls the unqualified.

So again is Jonah unqualified for his call? Not only unqualified but unworthy of the call. But Jonah believes Nineveh is unqualified. They don’t even come close to the standards he’s set. In this book of Jonah we see a story set in 760 BC. Jonah is a prophet from the Northern tribes of Israel. Nineveh was not the nicest neighbor to the north. They ruled with terror and brutality. They were Israel’s sworn enemies. They make ISIS look like sissies. In fact in about twenty years the Assyrians would carry off ten tribes of Israel. According to Jonah they are unqualified from the start, no application or interview necessary.

God wanted Jonah to go and preach against them, but Jonah bought a one way ticket to Tarshish (the opposite direction as far west as one could travel). Nothing would have pleased Jonah more than to nuke Nineveh but instead of that he flees his calling. He has no desire to reach out to them. He wants them to burn in hell. He hates them with all of his heart. He would rather die than see God’s mercy on these people.

He has a negative attitude. In fact his attitude was so bitter that a fish couldn’t stomach him. But God comes to him again and says the same thing, “Go to Nineveh.” God gives Jonah a second chance, another opportunity, after he’s demonstrated how unqualified he is. This is like hiring an executioner to head the hospital. Jonah doesn’t want the job. He doesn’t care for the people. He preaches the shortest sermon on record (just five words and he probably preached with a smile). He looks like the least likely candidate for the call.

This is not the only time we see God call the unqualified just look at the long list of kings, prophets, and leaders. Look at the Apostle Paul. You can almost imagine the interview process in heaven. Who should lead the New Testament church and reach out to the Gentiles? There’s this guy named Saul. He’s killing Christians and

trying to get them to blaspheme so he can kill them. He really hates Jesus. Sounds like the one. These people aren't just unqualified, they're unworthy.

Jonah thought the Assyrians weren't qualified by his standards. Are there others in your life or those around you that you considered unqualified? Are there others around you that just don't seem to meet with the standards that you've set for them? Maybe there are even some people that you wish would burn in hell? An ex, politicians, terrorists. How do you deal with the Ninevites in your life? They may be sworn enemies of the church and unqualified from the start and yet I'm saying, "God calls them"? As difficult as that is to wrap your head around that's what the Bible teaches.

Like Jonah we have a tendency to take God's mercy on us for granted. At times we think we are qualified saints and therefore better people. At times we believe that we are more qualified to receive God's grace than others. If we think it is because of who we are or what we've done then we credit ourselves and take God's glory. But if we call ourselves unqualified then there is no chance of confusing God's work with our own.

God had called you to be his son or daughter. He's called you to the full time ministry. You are full time Christians. The Reformation eliminated the distinction between pastor and people by affirming that God calls everyone. The word for this call is "Vocation." It refers to the particular station in life in which God has assigned to each individual. That does not mean you should sell everything, buy a passport, and go on mission in Africa because not everyone has the same calling. Not everyone has the same gifts and abilities. A Christian father, mother, farmer, or doctor has been called by God to his or her station of life is no less called than I am. Each of you, wherever God places you, can serve him. He may even open doors for you to make disciples among your Ninevites.

How often have we failed to share God's mercy with others? How often like Jonah have fled from our calling? How often have we judged others as unqualified to receive God's grace? We too like Jonah are guilty of falling into the trap of the Pharisee, by setting standards, thinking we're better, and writing off sinners as unqualified, but God continues to call the unqualified.

Why would God send Jonah to Nineveh? Why would God want to deliver them? Why Nineveh? Why Jonah for that matter?

If we jump ahead to Jonah 4:2 – Jonah gives us the answer. *"Isn't this what I said, LORD, when I was still at home? That is what I tried to stall by fleeing to Tarshish. I knew that you are a gracious and compassionate God, slow to anger and abounding in love..."* (Jonah 4:2). Jonah is quoting God's description of himself from Exodus 34, but he uses it as an accusation: You, God, are gracious and merciful. Instead of rejoicing over those who repent he laments, "I knew this would happen."

The Ninevites repent, but Jonah? This book is not about a great fish. Jonah is about a God who calls the unqualified. God reaches out to his rebellious prophet. Why? Because, *"He is a gracious and compassionate God, slow to anger and abounding in love."* He loves the lost. He seeks and saves the lost. That was the gift given to Jonah. God called Jonah. God sent the wind. God sent a fish. God returned Jonah to land. God called to Jonah again. God worked through his word. God calls the unqualified. God works through the call.

Look at his powerful word at work. An entire city repented and believed the promise. Paul formerly known as Saul dedicated his life even to death for one he formerly persecuted. And then Jesus came to fishermen and the Holy Spirit working through his Word led them to follow him. Why? God's Word works. In it we see what God has done for his us.

Maybe you are amazed at his grace to you. You can be amazed at his grace to others as well. We cannot pick and choose to whom God should show mercy. God forbids us from pulling weeds in his kingdom. Instead we are to bring in and build up. His mercy is for the unqualified, the cranky neighbor, red blooded American, and the

Jonah 3:1-5,10

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undocumented immigrant. He doesn't care about skin color, language, or political preference. He is a gracious and compassionate God. Even when you show how unqualified you are in your thoughts or actions God qualifies you. The cross qualifies you.

He doesn't care where you've been or what you've done. Like Jonah if you run 2,000 miles away from God he still calls for you. He didn't give up on Jonah and he won't give up on you. God wants you to see how unqualified you are. He wants you to see your mistakes. He doesn't want you comfortable with your "small" sin. He wants you standing in awe as he calls you to work in his kingdom. He gives us different gifts and abilities and he says, "Go. Work. You're qualified for this."

Jesus is greater than Jonah. Jesus willingly went to the unqualified. He actively lived the life we should have. He then gives us his perfect qualified life in exchange for everything that disqualifies us. Jesus qualifies the called at the cross. We then go out, wherever we are, with whatever gifts he's given us, and work.

We don't know what happened to Jonah whether he repented or rebelled. The book of Jonah leaves us sitting on the edge wondering and asking questions. The book reminds us where God found him. It reminds us that God doesn't give up so easily. That's the same message we have for others. You're qualified and considered fit, forgiven, and when you fail, you follow a God who qualifies you. Your calling, your station in life, is to tell others where God found you, what he has done for you.

"You're overqualified." I've only ever heard those words once. I was hired and the work was fun. I lasted for six weeks before business picked up and I was able to return to the woodshop but I'm not sure I should have left. The owner wasn't surprised to see me go. Everywhere I've worked has left me questioning, "Am I qualified for this?" And then I'm reminded of God's call. None of us are qualified but our calling as Christians is the greatest gift we'll ever have. We will let him down. But that is what is great about our God. He calls the unqualified and then he qualifies the called. Amen