

## Introduction

*Is God just or is God merciful?* Scripture makes both claims. **God is just**, meaning a person receives the deserved punishment of a wrong. I am a sinner (I have done what is wrong); therefore, the right thing is for me to be condemned. **God is merciful**, meaning that a person does **not** receive the deserved punishment of a wrong. I am a sinner (I have done what is wrong); however, the merciful thing is for me to be forgiven. *Is God just or is God merciful?*

### Context

[Jonah 3](#) gives a picture of God's justice and mercy. Scripture teaches that He is both just and merciful.

In [Jonah 1](#), God instructed Jonah to go speak against Nineveh because of their wickedness. Jonah did not want to go to Nineveh. So, he ran from God's presence. He traveled to Joppa and took a ship to Tarshish. However, God is omnipresent; He is present at all places at all times. Jonah could not escape His presence. **No one is beyond God's presence.**

The Lord did not allow Jonah to remain outside of His will. He sent a storm to prevent Jonah's escape. The Lord is the Creator of all things; He has authority over all things and all people. The Lord had authority over the storm, the sea, the dry land, the sailors, and Jonah. **No one is beyond God's authority.**

Jonah was thrown overboard and the storm immediately calmed. Jonah, however, was sinking to his death in the sea. God appointed a fish to swallow Jonah to save him from drowning. The Lord saved Jonah from death although Jonah did not deserve salvation. **No one is beyond God's salvation.**

### Justice and Mercy in Nineveh

In chapter 3, Jonah goes to Nineveh. God is just; He does not allow Nineveh to continue in sin without consequence. Yet, God is merciful; He forgives Nineveh when they repent. The **main idea** of [Jonah 3](#) is that **no one is beyond God's mercy.**

## God's justice

First, we read of **God's justice**. The Lord sends Jonah to Nineveh with a warning. They are sinners; therefore, in His justice, God will destroy them.

## Jonah's second commission

*What was God's commission to Jonah?* [Jonah 3:1-2](#) “1 Then the word of the Lord came to Jonah the second time, saying, 2 “Arise, go to Nineveh, that great city, and call out against it the message that I tell you.”” The Lord sent Jonah to warn Nineveh of judgment.

Nineveh was a wicked city. [Jonah 1:2](#) “2 “Arise, go to Nineveh, that great city, and call out against it, for their evil has come up before me.”” In fact, as we continue to read in [Jonah 3](#), the citizens of Nineveh don't seem to question whether they **deserve** judgment. Jonah doesn't seem to point out any specific sin; nonetheless, they immediately know from what they should repent ([Jon 3:8](#)).

Scripture makes this point of all of us. It is easy to say that others are guilty. **We are all sinners** ([Rom 3:10, 23](#)). Therefore, we all need to read in Scripture God's warning against our sin.

## Jonah's obedience

*How did Jonah respond to God's word?* [Jonah 3:3](#) “3 So Jonah arose and went to Nineveh, according to the word of the Lord. Now Nineveh was an exceedingly great city, three days' journey in breadth.” This is much different than chapter 1. In chapter 1, Jonah responded by going in the opposite direction ([Jon 1:3](#)). Now, Jonah obeys God's word.

Nineveh was a great city. [Jonah 3:3](#) explains that it was “three days' journey in breadth.” Imagine how many people Jonah will speak against. *Church, are we willing to speak the word of God against a majority of people who call sin good?*

## Jonah's message

*What did Jonah preach to the people of Nineveh?* [Jonah 3:4](#) “4 Jonah began to go into the city, going a day's journey. And he called out, “Yet forty days, and Nineveh shall be overthrown!””

Jonah warned Nineveh of **destruction**. There is no indication of a call to repentance, encouragement toward faith in the Lord, or details about their sin. Jonah simply warns them of destruction. Scripture often points back to the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah as a warning to those who reject the Lord ([Isa 1:10](#); [Rev 11:8](#)). This is likely what Jonah had in mind - total destruction.

## Summary

God sent Jonah to preach to Nineveh to warn them of impending judgment. We have the same responsibility to warn friends, family, neighbors, and people around the world who we would never meet without seeking them out. *Why is missionary work so*

*important?* [Romans 10:14](#) “14 How then will they call on him in whom they have not believed? And how are they to believe in him of whom they have never heard? And how are they to hear without someone preaching?” No one believes without hearing the gospel. No one hears the gospel without you telling them. **Christian**, *how will your co-worker come to know God? Has God not placed **you** in your job so they would hear the gospel?* **Parent**, *how will your children come to know God? Has God not placed **you** over your family so they will hear the gospel?*

## Nineveh's Repentance

Next, we read about Nineveh's repentance. In response to Jonah's warning, they believed, fasted, prayed, and repented of their sin. This is the right biblical response to God's word.

### Nineveh's faith

*Why did Nineveh repent?* [Jonah 3:5](#) “5 And the people of Nineveh believed God. They called for a fast and put on sackcloth, from the greatest of them to the least of them.” Nineveh believed God. The same wording described Abraham in [Genesis 15:6](#) “6 And he [Abraham] believed the Lord, and he counted it to him as righteousness.” God considers the faith of ungodly people to be righteousness(cf. [Rom 4:3-5](#)).

If Nineveh fasted and prayed without faith, their response would have been unacceptable. [Hebrews 11:6](#) ... without faith it is **impossible** to please him [God] ...” An outward response alone to the gospel does not please God. An intellectual response alone to the gospel does not please God. God only forgives and makes a covenant relationship with those who have faith in Christ. **Unbeliever**, do not try to get right with God by fixing your life. Repent and believe in Jesus; let the Holy Spirit in you change your life.

### Nineveh's prayer

The Ninevites expressed their faith in two ways. First, they fasted and prayed. [Jonah 3:6-8](#) “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. 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...””

The city fasted and mourned. The king fasted and mourned. The king commanded that all people fasted and mourned. Their fasting and mourning is evidence of their faith in God's warning.

They also called out (prayed) to God. This chapter does not specify the content of their prayer, but verse 9 gives us insight into the intent of their prayer. [Jonah 3:9](#) “9 Who knows? God may turn and relent and turn from his fierce anger, so that we may not perish.” They prayed for God’s mercy. Their hope of salvation could rest only in the nature of God. He is merciful.

**Church**, we must be careful that we do not proclaim God’s justice without proclaiming God’s mercy. We should absolutely speak out against sin. We should also plead with people to seek God’s mercy. God’s mercy is displayed through Jesus alone. We must point people to Christ.

### Nineveh’s repentance

Second, Nineveh expressed faith through repentance. [Jonah 3:8](#) “... Let everyone turn from his evil way and from the violence that is in his hands.” Genuine faith is **always** expressed in repentance.

The Ninevites confessed their sin (evil ways and violence). [1 John 1:8–10](#) “8 If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. 9 If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. 10 If we say we have not sinned, we make him a liar, and his word is not in us.”

Repentance is evidence of our faith. If you deny that what God calls sin is actually sin, you are not repentant and you do not have faith. If you refuse to turn submit to God’s word, then you are unrepentant and do not have faith. **Repentance is evidence of our faith.**

### Summary

Jesus said that the Ninevite response of [Jonah 3](#) would condemn those who rejected Him. [Matthew 12:41](#) “41 The men of Nineveh will rise up at the judgment with this generation and condemn it, for they repented at the preaching of Jonah, and behold, something greater than Jonah is here.” *Who greater than Jonah preached to the Scribes and Pharisees?* Jonah was a prophet who spoke the word of God. Jesus **is** God; His word **is** the word of God ([Heb 2:1-4](#)).

The only way to be saved from God's judgment against our sin is faith in Jesus and repentance of sin. [Romans 10:9-10](#) "9 because, if you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. 10 For with the heart one believes and is justified, and with the mouth one confesses and is saved." **Unbeliever**, repent of your rejection of God and have faith in Jesus. Only in Him, can you know God's forgiveness. **Christian**, faith and repentance are not one-time events. We are saved by faith alone and we live by faith alone. Daily, we should confess our sins to the Lord and repent in complete faith in Christ.

## God's mercy

Lastly, we read of **God's mercy**. God promised judgment against Nineveh's sin. Nineveh had faith in God and repented. Although their guilt remained, the Lord was merciful.

### God relented

*How did God respond to Nineveh's faith and repentance?* [Jonah 3:10](#) "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 relented from destroying Nineveh.

God relented in response to their repentance. This does not mean that Nineveh was suddenly innocent. Nineveh still had a long history of sin against God **and** against other people. That guilt remained. God does not save us because we deserve saving. [Titus 3:5](#) "5 he saved us, not because of works done by us in righteousness, but according to his own mercy..." God's actions reflect His nature. God relented because God is merciful.

### God's immutability

*Does this passage imply that God changes?* God sent Jonah to preach against Nineveh. Jonah's message was, "Yet forty days and Nineveh shall be overthrown" ([Jon 3:4](#)). Now, [Jonah 3:10](#) says that God will **not** destroy Nineveh. *Does this imply that God changes?*

Scripture teaches that God is immutable, meaning that He does not change. [Malachi 3:6](#) "6 "For I the Lord do not change; therefore you, O children of Jacob, are not consumed." [James 1:17](#) "17 Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation or shadow due to change." Scripture teaches that God is immutable. Yet, [Jonah 3](#) begins with a warning that God will destroy the city in 40 days and concludes with God relenting from that destruction. *Did God change?*

God relenting from destroying Nineveh is not evidence that God changes. It is evidence of God's unchanging nature. God is **always** just; He carries out right judgment against sin. God is **always** merciful; He forgives those who believe and repent. God's promise of judgment against an **unrepentant** city perfectly aligns with His unchanging nature. God's forgiveness of a **repentant** city aligns perfectly with His unchanging nature. God's immutability is important because His faithfulness rests in His immutability. **Church**, we can have confidence in Him because He is always faithful ([Heb 10:23](#); [11:11](#)). [2 Timothy 2:13](#) "13 if we are faithless, he remains faithful— for he cannot deny himself."

## Justice and Mercy

*How do we reconcile God's justice and mercy?* God is **just**, which means that He **gives** the condemnation that we deserve. In truth, we all deserve condemnation. [James 2:10](#) "10 For whoever keeps the whole law but fails in one point has become accountable of all of it." God is **merciful**, which means that He does **not give** the condemnation that we deserve. *How do we reconcile God's justice and mercy?*

The reconciliation of God's mercy and justice is perfectly displayed in Christ. [Romans 3:23-26](#) "23 for all have **sinned** and fall short of the glory of God, 24 and are **justified** by his **grace** as a gift, through the **redemption** that is in Christ **Jesus**, 25 whom God put forward as a propitiation by his **blood**, to be received by **faith**. This was to show God's righteousness, because in his divine forbearance he had passed over former sins. 26 It was to show his righteousness at the present time, so that he might be **just** and the **justifier** of the one who has faith in Jesus."

God's mercy and justice are perfectly displayed in Jesus. **God is just**. Jesus bears the sin guilt of all who have faith in Him by His death. My sin is not overlooked; Jesus bears my condemnation in my place. **God is merciful**. As a result of Jesus's atoning death, God forgives my sin. This is why [Rom 3:26](#) says that through Jesus God is both just **and** the one who justifies the ungodly believer (cf. [Rom 4:5](#)).

Jesus's death was substitutionary; He died for the sins of others, not His own sins. [2 Corinthians 5:21](#) "21 For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God." God's mercy **only** comes through faith in Jesus. If you reject Jesus, you reject God's mercy.

# Conclusion

## Personal Reflection

Martin Luther wrote, “When I look at myself, I do not see how I can be saved; but when I look at Christ, I do not see how I can be lost” (*Lectures on Galatians*). God’s offers you mercy through Christ. The Ninevites were extremely blessed with a timeline. They had 40 days, yet they responded immediately. You do not have a timeline. *When has God given you to respond to Christ?* Only now. Anyone of us may have less days on earth than Nineveh. **Repent and believe in Jesus.**

**Church**, listen again to our call in [Romans 10:13-14, 17](#) “13 For “everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.” 14 How then will they call on him in whom they have not believed? And how are they to believe in him of whom they have never heard? And how are they to hear without someone preaching?” ... “17 So faith comes from hearing, and hearing through the word of Christ.” God called Jonah twice to go preach to Nineveh because he didn’t listen ([Jon 1:1-2; 3:1-2](#)). I pray that God would call families from this church to leave Bethlehem and take the gospel to places who have no church, and I pray that you will listen. Until that day, God has called you to proclaim the gospel in Faulkner County. You do not live here by accident. God has placed you here so that the people of Greenbrier will hear the gospel, and I pray that you will listen. No one believes in the word of Christ that they have never heard.

## Summary

[Jonah 3](#) displays God’s justice and mercy. The Ninevites were sinners; therefore, God would destroy them because He is just. Nineveh believed God and repented. God forgave Nineveh and relented from their destruction because He is merciful.

**No one is beyond God’s mercy.**