

'*Regrets, I've had a few But then again too few to mention*' a line in the famous anthem of self-reliant, autonomous human beings, I Did it My Way. The words no more than testimony to human blindness and appalling self-analysis. My song goes, '*Regrets I've had stacks. Too painful to mention.*' What song are you singing regarding personal regrets? My greatest regrets. Relationship damage I have caused. Regret compounded by the opportunity to make amends blocked by others. My regret in human relationships, nothing compared to depth of regret in my relationship with the living God. Countless times I have let him down, ignored him, failed to honour him or identify as a disciple. Hope and redemption in the good news of the book of Jonah. For me and you. The good news. Our God is a God of second chances. Evident in **Chapter 3**. Second chance for Jonah and the citizens of Nineveh. Let me remind you of the opening words of the book. '*The word of the LORD came to Jonah son of Amittai: "Go to the great city of Nineveh and preach against it, because its wickedness has come up before me."* **1:1-2** God commissioning Jonah to prepare the people of Nineveh for eternity. We know the story. Jonah resigns as a prophet. Refuses to take up God's commission. Purchases a ticket for a holiday in Spain. Ends up in low rental accommodation in the belly of a big fish. The story continues. At a point in time after Jonah's rescue. After his water logged, seaweed smelling body recovers. The opening words of **chapter 3** read like a copy and paste error. *Then the word of the LORD came to Jonah a second time: "Go to the great city of Nineveh and proclaim to it the message I give you."* **3:1-2** A more careful reading reveals small but significant differences. God spoke to Jonah '*a second time*'. Recommissioning Jonah. No obligation to do so. Graciously choosing to. In Paul's words, '*according to the plan of him who works out everything in conformity with the purpose of his will,*' **Ephesians 1:11** The God of second chances offering Jonah a second chance. Flowing from his character as the God who is gracious and compassionate, slow to anger and abounding in love. Jonah's description of God in the last chapter. Another small but significant difference between the two sets of verses. The God of second chances offering a second chance to the citizens of Nineveh. Jonah's original commission: preach against the Ninevites. Second commission: proclaim to the Ninevites. Subtle shift suggesting opportunity to turn from their wicked ways. Possibly absent from God's initial message for the Ninevites. In **v4**, God's proclamation through Jonah. "*Forty more days and Nineveh will be overthrown.*" **v4** A

window of opportunity for repentance before the wrath of God poured out on Nineveh. Second chances in Jonah consistent with the big picture story of the Bible. The story of God's rescue plan for the world. Undeserved rescue. A second chance to avoid the judgement of God. Resulting from universal rebellion began in the Garden of Eden. The patience of God toward his rebellious children part of the fabric of the Old Testament. The God of second chances writ large in the New Testament. In the moving parable of the prodigal son. Second chance offered to the runaway younger son and the stay at home older brother. Dramatic conversion of Saul of Tarsus. Restoration of Peter after his denial of Jesus. Conversion of the corrupt tax collector Zacchaeus. Restoration of the lady of dubious lifestyle who washed Jesus feet with her tears. Last minute rescue of the thief hanging on a cross beside Jesus. Brothers and sisters, through the death and resurrection of Jesus, the God of second chances invites us to return to him. The invitation issued many times throughout the Bible. Two beautiful examples. *'Seek the LORD while he may be found; call on him while he is near. Let the wicked forsake their ways and the unrighteous their thoughts. Let them turn to the LORD, and he will have mercy on them, and to our God, for he will freely pardon.'* **Isaiah 55:6-7** *'Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.'* **Acts 2:38** Every human being charged with the responsibility of responding. Jonah and the Ninevites model lifegiving response. **Verse 3** *'Jonah obeyed the word of the LORD and went to Nineveh.'* Fulfilling his original commission at his second opportunity. **Verse 5** *'The Ninevites believed God.'* Deep and spontaneous repentance. Described in similar terms as Abraham's response. *'Abram believed the LORD, and he credited it to him as righteousness.'* **Genesis 15:6** The Ninevites declared righteous in God's sight too. The reality of repentance evident. As the people of Nineveh do what their king, or local governor urges. *'But let people and animals be covered with sackcloth. Let everyone call urgently on God. Let them give up their evil ways and their violence.'* **v8 Verse 10** reveals the God of second chances forgives them. Strange goings on in the story. Animals included in national expression of repentance. The integrity of the story not compromised. The Greek historian Herodotus writes of cattle being included in times of national mourning in this part of the ancient world. Sisters and brothers, the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ is the God of second chances. The stacks of regrets I have. You have. Forgiven, redeemed by our gracious, compassionate loving God. As we rightly respond.

Three things from the teaching of today's reading I urge you to wrestle with. **One**, response. Whether you own it or not. Each of us have stuffed up our first chance with God. By our rebellion. How are you responding to your second chance? God's invitation to repentance and faith clear. What is written on your RSVP? The Bible message. Always a second chance with God. The grace and patience of God points to multiple chances. But do not presume on God by hanging on to your old life. In the belief that in the future the God of multiple chances will send another personal invitation to repent. Today is the day of salvation. **Two**, failures. Not too few to mention. So many we can't keep account of them all. Some failures so major the guilt of them weighs us down. Convincing us we unworthy of the love of God. Crippling our growth in Christ. The devil loves tormenting us about past sins and failures. But the God of second chances is the God who forgives and forgets. Evident in Jonah's failures. Note that God issues the same orders to Jonah twice. As if he has forgotten all Jonah did in between. *'I, even I, am he who blots out your transgressions, for my own sake, and remembers your sins no more.'* **Isaiah 43:25** Brothers and sisters, trust in these words. Extinguish the flaming arrows of the evil one. By covering them with God's promises. God releases you from the burden of guilt and failure. So you can get on with serving him. So, get on serving him. **Three**, lifestyle. Christians are to mirror the character of the God of second chances. How is that evident in your life? In the second chances you offer others. In gracious patience and love you extend to others. Who are the people God is holding before you, who will be blessed by your invitation to second, third, fourth chances? As ambassadors for Christ how are you playing your part in offering to others the gospel of grace? That tells the story of the God of second chances. As a man of many regrets I am so thankful for the God of second chances. Leading me to praise the God of second chances. Be thankful sisters and brothers for the God of second chances. Praise him daily as you live in the light of his gracious patience and love.