

Subject: *When a City Turned to God*

Scripture: *Jonah 3:1-10*

When you think of the story of Jonah, you think of a man who was swallowed by the whale. Actually that is just a small part of the story. Instead of Jonah and the fish we ought to think of Jonah and the revival that took place in Nineveh. Chapter 3 records the greatest spiritual awakening in human history. The entire city of Nineveh repented and turned to God after hearing one sermon from Jonah on the subject of God's judgment. There was no invitation or altar call given, but the power of God fell and everybody turned to the Lord. The greatest miracle was not Jonah being swallowed by a fish but a whole city turning to God. Let's see what happened.

AN UNWILLING MISSIONARY

The Bible says (3:1) that the word of the Lord came to Jonah the second time. What about the first time? We know what happened the first time in chapter 1. God told Jonah to go to Nineveh and Jonah said, "No." He got onboard a ship and headed in the opposite direction. As the story unfolds we see that God had more trouble with Jonah the preacher than He did with the city of Nineveh. God turned Jonah around and gave him a second chance.

You would think Jonah had learned his lesson and his heart was right with God when he went to Nineveh and preached. Think again. Look at Jonah 4:1-3. Can you believe that? In chapter 1, Jonah protests. In chapter 2, he prays. In chapter 3, he preaches, and in chapter 4, he pouts. Jonah was angry when the city of Nineveh turned to God. He wanted God to punish them, not forgive them. It's amazing what God can do with an unwilling preacher. Just think of what He can do with a preacher whose heart is right.

AN UNGODLY MISSION FIELD

Nineveh was a great city (3:2, 3). It may have been the world's largest city at that time. "Three days journey" doesn't mean it took three days to get there, but it took at least three days to walk 60 miles around Nineveh. This city had 1,200 towers at least 200 feet high. Nineveh was not only great in size, but it was great in sin. Nineveh was called "the robber city" because it robbed other cities to enrich itself. It was known for its brutality of prisoners and enemies. If God could forgive Nineveh, He could forgive any people. A Presbyterian missionary named John Geddie went to minister to lost people on a remote island in the South Seas. These words are found in a church that he started: "When John Geddie landed in 1848 there were no Christians. When he left in 1872 there were no heathen."

Nineveh is a picture of the world without God, without hope, materialistic, and violent. It deserved God's judgment. It was an ungodly mission field, an unlikely place for God to bless and to work. Don't give up on people. Keep on praying, keep on believing, keep on witnessing, keep on expecting God to do the impossible. Is anything too hard for the Lord?

AN UNPLEASANT MESSAGE

When Jonah arrived at Nineveh, he started preaching. This is an example of street preaching or open-air preaching. God told Jonah what to preach (3:2) and verse 4 records his message. It was a short message, only 8 words in English. It was a solemn message. Judgment is coming. It was the message they needed to hear. It was a shocking message. It would have

seemed impossible for Nineveh to be destroyed because it was the capital of the impressive Assyrian Empire. It was a sure message (“Nineveh shall be overthrown”).

Billy Graham offered this advice to preachers: “Preach with authority, with simplicity, and with urgency.” Jonah did all three. He spoke with authority, simplicity, and urgency. This was no time for a “feel good” message. Jonah never said a word about their sins. He didn’t have to. These people knew they were sinners. All people have a conscience that tells them when they do wrong.

AN UNUSUAL MIRACLE

The whole city, even the king, turned to the Lord. Stephen Olford said: “Revival is divine intervention in the normal course of spiritual things.” Notice the king’s actions (vs. 6) and his announcement (vs. 7), his appeal (vs. 8) and his attitude (vs. 9). This is real repentance.

When the people of Nineveh had a change of heart and repented of their sins, God had a change of heart and changed His course of action. God would rather pardon sin than punish sin. He would rather save people than send them to hell. He delights in mercy, not in judgment. **Ezekiel 18:23** *Have I any pleasure at all that the wicked should die? saith the Lord GOD: and not that he should return from his ways, and live?*

What is the key to this miracle? What is the determining factor in revival or spiritual awakening? Is it the place? Is it the preacher? Is it the preaching? Is it the people and how they receive the message? Yes, that’s the key. And it is always the key.

- **Matthew 12:38-41** ³⁸ *Then certain of the scribes and of the Pharisees answered, saying, Master, we would see a sign from thee.* ³⁹ *But he answered and said unto them, An evil and adulterous generation seeketh after a sign; and there shall no sign be given to it, but the sign of the prophet Jonas:* ⁴⁰ *For as Jonas was three days and three nights in the whale's belly; so shall the Son of man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth.* ⁴¹ *The men of Nineveh shall rise in judgment with this generation, and shall condemn it: because they repented at the preaching of Jonas; and, behold, a greater than Jonas is here.* The people of Nineveh heard the message and they repented. They heard one message from one man and got right with God. What a rebuke to the people who heard Jesus many times and yet refused to repent.
- **James 1:22-24** ²² *But be ye doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving your own selves.* ²³ *For if any be a hearer of the word, and not a doer, he is like unto a man beholding his natural face in a glass:* ²⁴ *For he beholdeth himself, and goeth his way, and straightway forgetteth what manner of man he was.* God’s Word is like a mirror or more like an x-ray or an MRI, to reveal our spiritual condition. A man wanted to buy some perfume for his wife, so he asked the clerk for help. She pointed to a bottle, “Sir, this is a nice fragrance for \$100.” The man asked, “Do you have something less expensive?” The woman found another bottle and said, “This one is \$50.” The man shook his head saying, “Got anything cheaper?” With great patience she presented another bottle for \$25. Once again the man said, “No. Please show me something really cheap.” The clerk reached under the counter and handed him a mirror.
- **Ezekiel 33:31-33** ³¹ *And they come unto thee as the people cometh, and they sit before thee as my people, and they hear thy words, but they will not do them: for with their*

mouth they shew much love, but their heart goeth after their covetousness. ³² And, lo, thou art unto them as a very lovely song of one that hath a pleasant voice, and can play well on an instrument: for they hear thy words, but they do them not. ³³ And when this cometh to pass, (lo, it will come,) then shall they know that a prophet hath been among them.

We must pray for our hearts to be open and ready to obey. God's Word is preached, but what will we do with it?

You may be like Jonah and God is giving you another chance to obey Him and serve Him. He has told you what to do, but you've been running from that assignment. You may be like the people of Nineveh and God is giving you another chance to turn from your sin and be saved.