

A Study of Book of Jonah

Sermon # 5

The World's Greatest Revival

Jonah 3:3-10

We would agree with great American patriot who wrote. "We have been the recipients of the choicest bounties of heaven. We have been preserved, these many years, in peace and prosperity. We have grown in numbers, wealth and power, as no other nation has ever grown. But we have forgotten God. We have forgotten the gracious hand which preserved us in peace and multiplied and enriched and strengthened us; and we have vainly imagined, in the deceitfulness of our hearts that all these blessings were produced by some superior wisdom and virtue of our own. Intoxicated with unbroken success, we have become too self-sufficient to feel the necessity of redeeming and preserving grace, too proud to pray to God that made us It behooves us, then to humble ourselves before the offended Power, to confess our national sins, and to pray for clemency and forgiveness." And if they were true when Abraham Lincoln said them when he proclaimed a national day of fasting and prayer in April 1863 how much more true must they be today? Do we need a revival today? Of course we do. We probably have no idea how much!

Yet we often tempted to believe that it sad moral and spiritual state of our people that is the reason why we are not having revival. But I want you to consider the possibility that it is such conditions that are the cause of revival; not the prevention. That in fact every great revival was preceded by times of darkness, declension and depravity.

D.M. Panton wrote, "*It is a foolish blunder to suppose that any age can be too evil for revival.*" I do believe that revival is possible. Furthermore, I am convinced that our evil age is a case for revival and the reason we need revival.

The prophet Isaiah predicted a time when "*darkness shall cover the earth, and gross darkness the people*" (Isa. 60:2). When you study the subject of revival you will find that the days and times preceding any great revival that has occurred in history were days and times of "gross darkness."

R.B. Jones said, "Each revival comes in a time characterized by confusion, politically and morally; by the spread of sacerdotalism; by social lawlessness and chaotic homelife; by worldliness in the churches and skepticism in the pulpits."

Dr. A W. Tozer recommended the following formula for personal revival.

- Get thoroughly dissatisfied with yourself. Complacency is the deadly enemy of spiritual progress. The contented soul is a stagnant soul.
- Set your face like a flint toward sweeping transformation of your life. Timid experiments are tagged for failure before they start. We must throw our whole soul into our desire for God.

- Put yourself in the way of blessing. It's a mistake to expect God's help to come as a windfall apart from conditions known and met. To desire revival, and at the same time to neglect prayer and devotion, is to wish one way and walk another.
- Do a thorough job of repenting. Hasty repentance means a shallow spiritual experience. Let godly sorrow do her healing work. It is our wretched habit of tolerating sin that keeps us in our half-dead condition.

Make restitution whenever possible. If you owe a debt, pay it. If you have quarreled with anyone, go as far as you can to achieve reconciliation. As fully as possible, make the crooked straight.

- Bring your life into accord with the Sermon on the Mount and such other New Testament Scriptures as are designed to instruct in the way of righteousness. An honest man with an open Bible and a pad and pencil is sure to find out what's wrong with him quickly.
- Be serious-minded. There must be a radical change in your habits, or there will not be any permanent improvement in your interior life.
- Deliberately narrow your interests. Too many projects use up time and energy without bringing us nearer to God. The mansions of the heart will become larger when the doors are thrown open to Christ and closed against the world and sin.
- Begin to witness. Find something to do for God, and your fellow man. Make yourself available. Do anything you are asked to do. Learn to obey.

Have faith in God. Begin to expect. Look up toward the throne. All heaven is on your side. God will not disappoint you.

Revival is possible if the conditions are met. Revival is always costly. It requires much of us, but the results are well worth it. Let's look at this revival in Nineveh.

In verse three Jonah for the second time refers to the city of Nineveh as a "great" city (1:2, 3:2) "So Jonah arose and went to Nineveh, according to the word of the LORD. Now Nineveh was an exceedingly great city, a three-day journey in extent." Nineveh is a great city because of its size and its significance.

Nineveh was located in modern day Iraq, not very far from present day Bagdad. It was a city surrounded by massive walls 100 feet high and 50 feet thick. It stretched approximately 30 miles along the Tigris River having a breadth of 10 miles. The Biblical description of being "a three-day journey in extent" meant that it would take at least three days to walk and through and see the principal sights of the city. The combined population of the area must have been between 600,000 and a million people at the time Jonah arrived in Nineveh.

The remainder of chapter three is the record of the greatest revival in the history of the world. In verse four we read, "And Jonah began to enter the city on the first day's walk. Then he cried out and said, "Yet forty days, and Nineveh shall be overthrown!" As we said in the last lesson in the English Bible

Jonah's message is only eight words, and in the Hebrew it is even shorter only five. This seems hardly impressive. And yet as we will see it has tremendous results. Why is that?

Tonight I want us to notice the Four Steps To Revival

The First Step on the road to Revival -

There Must Be Faithful Preaching and Faithful Hearing of God's Word. According to verse four, "Jonah began to enter the city on the first day's walk. Then he cried out and said, "Yet forty days, and Nineveh shall be overthrown!" It was not a lengthy message!

It was not an intellectual message! It was not an eloquent message! BUT it was God's message!

The First Step on the road to Revival was the Faithful Preaching and Faithful Hearing of God's Word and ...

The Second Step on the Road to Revival is a *Belief In God* (v. 5)

"So the people of Nineveh believed God proclaimed a fast, and put on sackcloth, from the greatest to the least of them."

Notice that Jonah does say the people believed his preaching; he says they believed God. The word "believed" here is the same word used in Genesis 15:6 "[Abraham] believed in the Lord and He accounted it to him for righteousness". This isn't just believing what is said; it is trusting the God who has spoken. The people believed that Jonah's message was from God, and they took it seriously. Hebrews 11:6 says that "without faith it is impossible to please God."

So They believed God and they responded!

The Third Step on the Road to Revival In Nineveh was Action Upon That Belief (vv. 6-10)

"Then word came to the king of Nineveh; and he arose from his throne and laid aside his robe, covered himself with sackcloth and sat in ashes. (7) And he caused it to be proclaimed and published throughout Nineveh by the decree of the king and his nobles, saying, Let neither man nor beast, herd nor flock, taste anything; do not let them eat, or drink water."

This revival seems to have begun from the bottom up rather than being imposed from the top down. The people we are told believed in God. They called a fast and put on sackcloth (3:5). The response was unanimous from the lowest to the upper classes. By the time the word reached the King the city's repentance was already well under way. But because the King also believed he made very effort to see that there was complete compliance to the city-wide repentance.

The Fourth Step on the Road to Revival In Nineveh was a Turning Away From Know Sin.

There is some confusion as to what constitutes repentance. Some think that being sorry for their sin is repentance but it is not. That is remorse. Remorse can lead to repentance but is it not repentance. In the Bible the rich young ruler went away sorrowful but he did not repent. Others think that

repentance is the same as regret, wishing that our sin had never happened. Many more people regret their sin than ever really repent of it. Pontius Pilate regretted his decision concerning Jesus. But did he ever repent? Some think repentance is the same as resolve; they decide that they are going to do better in the future. And although that may lead to reform it is not repentance. Repentance is a change of mind which results in a change of heart which results in a change of action. What we plainly see in the life of the Ninevites.

In verse eight the King plainly stated "But let man and beast be covered with sackcloth, and cry mightily to God; yes, let every one turn from his evil way and from the violence that is in his hands."

It would seem that apparently there is no need to for the people to be told what their wicked ways were! I wonder if in our own nation if we received word of God impending judgment and believed it, it even unbelievers would have little difficulty determining what it is we are doing which is offensive to God, that is, that which is sin!

The king offers the possibility of hope and God's compassion in verse nine. "Who can tell if God will turn and relent, and turn away from His fierce anger, so that we may not perish?" He does not know for certain. He says, "Who can tell if perhaps God will turn relent" It is an expression of humility!

Verse ten gives us the conclusion of the matter, "Then God saw their works, that they turned from their evil way; and God relented from the disaster that He had said He would bring upon them, and He did not do it."

The repentance of Nineveh seems unbelievable. When in the history of the world has such a spontaneous, thorough and complete reversal of a violent and arrogant people ever been recorded? In fact Jonah himself finds their repentance not only unbelievable but extremely frustrating. The point however is not the greatness of the Nineveh's faith or of their repentance but of the extravagance of God's love that he would go to such lengths to save them.