

JONAH STARTS PREACHING IN NINEVEH

TEXT: JONAH 3

Introduction:

1. Back in Jonah 1:1, 2 the LORD told Jonah to go to Nineveh. Jonah finally arrives in Nineveh in chapter 3.
2. In this chapter, we are reminded that God is a God of second chances.
3. Also, we see the power of preaching the Word of God. Nineveh was a very wicked city, and yet the people of Nineveh repented in response to Jonah's preaching.
4. Our Lord said in Matthew 12:41, "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."

I. THE GOD OF THE SECOND CHANCE

II. JONAH FINALLY ARRIVES IN NINEVEH

III. THE GREAT REVIVAL IN NINEVEH

I. THE GOD OF THE SECOND CHANCE (JONAH 3:1, 2)

1. Our God is the God of the second chance. God is longsuffering and patient (cf. 4:2).
2. There are many examples of this in the Bible. Consider Peter. He denied Christ three times.
3. Luke 22:61, 62 says, "And the Lord turned, and looked upon Peter. And Peter remembered the word of the Lord, how he had said unto him, Before the cock crow, thou shalt deny me thrice. And Peter went out, and wept bitterly."
4. Then on the day of Pentecost we see Peter preaching boldly, and Acts 2:41 says, "Then they that gladly received his word were baptized: and the same day there were added unto them about three thousand souls."
5. Peter dominates the first half of the book of Acts. Peter wrote two of the NT epistles. The same cowardly preacher who denied Christ three times was transformed into a mighty man of God, because God is the God of the second chance.
6. Think about John Mark (Acts 13:13; 15:36-41; II Tim. 4:11). John Mark went on to write the Gospel of Mark.
7. I have mentioned that in many ways, Jonah is like the Prodigal Son. The Prodigal Son was given a second chance.

8. Jonah was the Prodigal Prophet in chapter 1. In chapter 2 he was the Praying Prophet. Here in chapter 3 he is the Preaching Prophet (3:1-4).

II. JONAH FINALLY ARRIVES IN NINEVEH (JONAH 3:3).

1. God was not only gracious to backslidden and disobedient Jonah; He was also gracious to the wicked city of Nineveh.
2. Nineveh was a “great city” (3:2; cf. 1:1:2). It certainly was “great” in wickedness (1:2). It was also great in size.
3. Genesis 10:12 refers to Nineveh as “a great city.”
4. Nineveh was located on the famous Tigris River, referred to in Genesis 2:14 as “Hiddekel.” In Daniel 10:4, the Tigris River (called “Hiddekel”) is referred to as “the great river.”
5. “Now Nineveh was an exceeding great city of three days’ journey” (Jonah 3:3). And Jonah walked for one day before he began preaching (3:4).
6. Archeologists say that that Nineveh included several settlements and all under one king (cf. Genesis 10:11, 12). The population was so great that it contained “sixscore thousand persons that cannot discern between their right hand and their left hand; and also much cattle” (4:11). The cattle indicates that the city contained pasture land and suburbs, in addition to the city proper. This explains why it was a three days’ journey.
7. Some skeptics have mocked the “three days’ journey” (3:3). I wonder how long it would take them to walk from the Bronx to Staten Island. Since there were cattle and pasture lands, it may have covered an even greater area than that.
8. Jonah 3:3 says, “So Jonah arose, and went unto Nineveh, according to the word of the LORD.”
9. When the LORD first told Jonah to go to Nineveh, he was not behaving according to the word of the LORD. In fact, he was disobeying the word of the LORD.
10. In Jonah 1:3 we saw that Jonah “rose up to flee unto Tarshish from the presence of the LORD, and went down to Joppa; and he found a ship going to Tarshish.”
11. That was not according to the word of the LORD. It is sad but many Christians do things that are not according to the word of the LORD.

III. THE GREAT REVIVAL IN NINEVEH (JONAH 3:4-10).

1. The revival in Nineveh makes the day of Pentecost seem small in comparison. Three thousand souls were saved on the day of Pentecost, but there were a lot more saved in Nineveh.
2. Jonah 4:11 says there were “more then sixscore thousand persons” in Nineveh. Perhaps 120,000 were saved in Nineveh.

3. Jonah 3:5 says, “So the people of Nineveh believed God, and proclaimed a fast, and put on sackcloth, from the greatest of them even to the least of them.”
4. Jonah 3:6 tells us that the king of Nineveh arose from his throne and covered himself with sackcloth, and sat in ashes.
5. In Luke 11:30, our Lord said, “Jonas was a sign unto the Ninevites.” This means they knew what had happened to Jonah. The conversion of all those wicked Ninevites (including the king) was a greater miracle than Jonah being swallowed by the great fish.
6. “Yet forty days, and Nineveh shall be overthrown” (3:4). The 40 day “grace period” implies God was giving them time to repent.
7. Evangelist John R Rice wrote, “The revival at Nineveh was one of the greatest in the history of the world. And it is a good example to prove to us that in any circumstance of wickedness, of idolatry, of false religion, of the impending doom and wrath of God, revivals are possible if only God can have workers who will pay God’s price for revival...The trouble is not with the harvest, it is with the labourers! God’s trouble about revival is not with the world, but with the church. And His trouble is not with the sinners, but with the saints. Anywhere God can get Christians who will pay God’s price, God can have a revival. And so God could have and did have a mighty revival in Nineveh, as soon as He could get Jonah ready for it.
8. Our Lord said in Matthew 9:37, “The harvest truly is plenteous, but the labourers are few.” The harvest was ready in Nineveh. All Jonah had to do was obey God.
9. Our Lord said in John 4:35, “Lift up your eyes, and look on the fields; for they are white already to harvest.”
10. Notice the message God gave Jonah to preach (3:2, 4). God used that message to bring revival. This reminds us that if men are willing to preach as God tells them to preach – preach against sin, warn sinners of the judgment of God, eternal damnation in hell, etc. – souls will be saved (3:4-10).
11. But preachers today are not preaching like Jonah. They are preaching shallow, syrupy, positive, uplifting messages that are all fluff with no substance and precious little Bible.
12. Recently Paige Patterson, the president of Southern Baptist Theological Seminary in Fort Worth, Texas wrote, “The shallow state of preaching has exacerbated the lethargy of the church and left the lost with no real Word from God.”
13. In this article in the Baptist Press, he said, “Anemic pulpits create anemic churches.” He was referring specifically to the steady decline in Southern Baptist baptisms and membership.

14. “Since the release last month of the latest data on membership and baptisms, both of which declined, Southern Baptists have speculated why the largest Protestant denomination in the country has been seeing lower numbers. ‘Well, the time has come to identify the real problems,’ said Patterson.
15. Paige Patterson was talking about the Southern Baptists but this weak, watered-down, “don’t offend anybody” type of preaching has been in big problem in all the denominations, including the independent Baptists.
16. “But cultural relevance has led many churches to lose the holiness of God and a thirst to be like God, Patterson noted.”
17. Jonah was not concerned about “cultural relevance” when he preached in Nineveh. He preached the message God gave him and the entire city of Nineveh got right with God.

CONCLUSION:

1. Before we finish up, I would like to say something about Jonah 3:10, where it says, “God repented.”
2. To repent means to change one’s mind, and yet we know God never changes.
3. Malachi 3:6 says, “For I am the LORD, I change not.”
4. Hebrews 13:8 says, “Jesus Christ the same yesterday, and to day, and for ever.”
5. The Bible uses what are referred to as “anthropomorphic terms,” i.e., there are certain attributes of man, which are ascribed to God.
6. Second Chronicles 16:9 says, “For the eyes of the LORD run to and fro throughout the whole earth.” God is a spirit. God does not have eyes. But God sees everything, and the Bible uses language that men can understand.
7. The Bible speaks of God’s arm and God’s hand, etc.
8. “When applied to God the word is used phenomenally according to OT custom. God seems to change His mind. The phenomena are such as, in the case of man, would indicate a change of mind” (*Scofield Study Bible*).
9. In other words, from man’s perspective, it looked like God changed His mind (“repented”). Charles Feinberg calls this “the language of appearance; the language of accommodation” (*The Minor Prophets*).
10. God responded to the people’s repentance. Because they repented, God did not destroy Nineveh (cf. 3:4b).
11. Their repentance necessitated that God alter His plan. Abraham said to the LORD in Genesis 18:25, “Shall not the Judge of all the earth do right?”
12. The LORD said in Jeremiah 18:8, “If that nation, against whom I have pronounced, turn from their evil, I will repent of the evil that I thought to do unto them.”
13. That is precisely what happened in Nineveh.

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