

## Chapter 13

### NINEVEH'S REPENTANCE: ITS CAUSES

As we look at the repentance of Nineveh, we will follow the theme of Psalm 51 which is descriptive of King David's repentance over his fall into sin with Bathsheba and all the damage it did to his family, to his nation, and to his God. In the third chapter of Jonah, we not only see one person, but a whole city, being brought to cry out "**Create in me [us] a clean heart, O God, And renew a steadfast spirit within me [us].**" (Psalm 51:10).

Our text for this lesson is Jonah 3:5 and verses 9-10.

***So the people of Nineveh believed God, proclaimed a fast, and put on sackcloth, from the greatest to the least of them. . . . Who can tell if God will turn and relent, and turn away from His fierce anger, so that we may not perish? 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.***

This lesson is entitled, "Nineveh's Repentance, Its Causes." The next lesson we will look at "Nineveh's Repentance, Its Expressions" or how the repentance was manifested. In the last lesson, we looked at Jonah's preaching in Nineveh and saw his remarkable courage in the face of great odds. We observed that his method of preaching involved a direct confrontation between the sins of the Ninevites and the God who governs His creatures from heaven. It was a conflict which introduced to the Ninevites that they were under the authority of the laws of the God of heaven and earth, and that Jonah had come to charge them with breaking those laws. The content and theme of his preaching was the warning of impending judgment from God upon the city. This judgment would occur within forty days if no change took place in their conduct. We also learned from the words of Jesus in Luke 11:29-30 that Jonah's experience in the fish's belly was a sign to the Ninevites to confirm that Jonah was a true representative from God. This would impress upon the Ninevites the fact that if God would expose His own prophet to such peril and then deliver him from such destruction conditioned upon his repentance, then the Ninevites had better heed the warning and repent also.

Now in this lesson, we will examine the causes and origin of Nineveh's repentance. In doing so, we will seek to recapture the missing note in modern evangelism which is the doctrine of repentance. Repentance for all practical purposes has been laid aside in modern evangelistic preaching. First, we will look at Nineveh's repentance, its comprehended motive, that which is able for the human mind to comprehend and understand.

Nineveh's repentance was brought about and prompted by faith in God's threatened destruction. Look at verse 5, "**So the people of Nineveh believed God, and**

**proclaimed a fast."** We will look at the following verses containing everything the Ninevites went through in the next lesson. But I say again, that Nineveh's repentance was prompted because they believed God's word about coming destruction. They exercised faith in the revelation that God made known through Jonah. Their repentance originated in their faith. They heard the message of Jonah with surprise but not with indifference. They received Jonah as a messenger sent from the God of heaven to declare their impending or coming doom, and they believed his message. Faith is an energetic and an impulsive principle. It leads a person to work or to act upon what they are called upon to believe. Paul said in the book of Acts 27:25 this short sentence which I think is a definition of faith: **"I believe God that it will be just as it was told me."**

The Ninevites believed what Jonah said that God was going to do, and they were certain it was going to come pass. Therefore, out of their faith in the revealed word of God, they acted in repentance. Repentance will not take place until persons come to the point where they are ready to believe the testimony of God in His word. In general, faith acts upon that which one is called upon to believe. Faith may be motivated by fear. If that which is to be believed, is something that is dreadful and alarming, then faith works by the principle of fear. That is, faith acts upon the use of whatever means may be available to escape from the dreaded evil. Noah is a classical example of this. Look at Hebrews 11:7 where we have a good illustration of the motivating principle of fear operating from faith. **"By faith Noah, being divinely warned of things not yet seen, moved with godly fear, prepared an ark for the saving of his household."** In his Commentary on Jonah (*The Prophet Jonah*), Hugh Martin observes that:

What Noah believed was dreadful in its nature. He had no evidence of its truth, but the alone word of God. The **"things"** of which he (Noah) was warned were **"not seen as yet."** But he took the word of God for truth. And **"faith,"** or the word of God apprehended by faith, **"is the evidence of things not seen."** To Noah, therefore, as in every case, his faith was, as it were, a new sense; giving him an undoubting perception of things not otherwise perceptible; and accordingly, perceiving the advent of dreadful evil he was moved with fear; and being moved with the fear of evil, he took means to avert it. He built an ark. By faith Noah built an ark. It was his work of faith.

And precisely thus did faith work in the case of the men of Nineveh. They believed God, speaking to them by His messenger. That is, they were **"warned of God of things not seen as yet."**—of a destruction of which no sign nor symptom of any kind appeared—for which they had no evidence whatsoever, but simply the message of the prophet, which they received as the word of God—they believed God; and their faith wrought in a manner suitable to the position in which they now found themselves placed. **"They proclaimed a fast."** (Hugh Martin, *The Prophet Jonah*, pp. 263, 264).

So faith may sometimes be called upon to deal with fear, and can be motivated by fear. A preacher may preach on the wrath of God and motivate his hearers to come to God in faith based on the fear of impending judgment.

Also, faith can be motivated on the principle of grief. For example, if that which is to be believed is something which reveals our guilt and our sinfulness, then faith works by the principle of grief. Look at Zechariah 12:10, **"And I will pour on the house of David and on the inhabitants of Jerusalem the Spirit of grace and supplication; then they will look on Me whom they pierced. Yes, they will mourn for Him as one mourns for his only son, and grieve for Him as one grieves for a firstborn."** When faith looks at Christ on the tree bearing in His body the wrath which is justly ours to receive, then faith works by grief and godly sorrow over sin. Another time the minister may speak about our guilt and sinfulness, and what our sinfulness did to the Son of God in that it nailed him to the cross. This can appeal to grief as a motivation for believing and exercising faith.

On the other hand, when faith is called upon to look upon the grandeur of Christ's redeeming love for sinners, then faith works by the principle of love. Galatians 5:6 says, **"For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision avails anything, but faith working through love."** When we are called again to look upon the grandeur of the cross, as the song says, *"When I survey the wondrous cross,"* and we look at the redeeming love of Christ for us, then faith works by love. This results in the fact given to us in I John 4:19: **"We love Him because He first loved us."** So a preacher may preach another message on the love of Christ for sinners with the designed motivation to draw out of the hearers a love for the One who loved us and gave Himself for us. So you can see that there may be different motivations as to what we are being called upon to believe.

When faith is called upon to trust God, when the word of God is yet unclear, then faith obeys what IS clear, as it was in Abraham's case in Hebrews 11:8. Faith can be motivated by trust in God. **"By faith Abraham obeyed when he was called to go out to the place which he would receive as an inheritance. And he went out, not knowing where he was going."** In this case, Abraham must trust and believe God when God told him to leave his family and go to a place He would show him. When Abraham wondered, where are we going? God said, "I am not going to tell you now, just trust and follow Me." So the way is not yet clear, but what is clear is God's command to leave. In this case faith is being motivated by trust in God.

Now it should be noted by now that faith operates differently according to the matter called upon to be believed. The element of fear was the dominant element in the repentance of the Ninevites. This is seen in Jonah 3:9 where they ask the question, **"Who can tell if**

**God will turn and relent, and turn away from His fierce anger, so that we may not perish?"** In this question, did you note the fear of perishing due to the fierce anger of God operating in a powerful manner upon these Ninevites? While there are more noble elements to be found in true repentance such as grief, trust and love, nevertheless, fear should not be omitted in calling sinners to repentance. Our Lord made much use of fear in his preaching. We read in Matthew 10:28: **"And do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. But rather fear Him who is able to destroy both soul and body in hell."** That is our Lord's preaching. In Luke 13:3 he said: **". . . unless you repent you will all likewise perish."** Now while the element of fear may be rooted in self-preservation, it is a mistaken idea to hold that it is improper to motivate sinners with what is sometimes referred to as "hellfire and damnation" preaching. I have heard that stated quite frequently in certain circles and also in books that the preaching of hellfire and damnation is not a proper way to preach the gospel, in that it only operates upon the principle of self-preservation and it is not a noble enough motivation. But if you read your Bible, you will find that the use of God's threat of coming judgment is approved by usage in both the Old and New Testaments. The preaching about hell is not out of style. The preaching of the impending judgment of God is a proper motivation to urge people to repent. That is the teaching of the scriptures. That may not be the most noble motive for repenting, but it is still a Biblical motive that is justifiably used when the occasion calls for it.

We are not to suppose then however, that a fear of God's terrifying wrath was the only motive that impelled the great city of Nineveh to repent. Secondly, there was also the fact that their repentance was prompted by a hope in God's delight to show mercy. A warning of terror and a corresponding hope was imparted to them that there might be a possibility of God showing mercy to them. Look at chapter 3:9-10: **"Who can tell if God will turn and relent, and turn away from His fierce anger, so that we may not perish. He 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."** I believe that this is a very true statement. Men will not seek to repent if there is not hope of success with their repentance. If you do not have any hope of succeeding in your repentance, you will never repent, but you will be driven to despair. The absence of hope excludes the possibility of repentance. If you have wronged a person, who in turn has told you that he will never forgive you of that wrong. If you are absolutely assured of that, you will never go to that person and ask for forgiveness. This is because of the lack of hope. So if there is no hope given to sinners, there will be no repentance brought about. They must not only be given the message of the terrors of impending judgment, but they must have the offer of hope held out to them that mercy is available in God if they will repent and turn to the Lord.

If the Ninevites had viewed their doom as utterly sealed, they would either have been paralyzed in their duty, or infuriated toward God. I remember a similar situation that happened in my life as a young man in a revival meeting. In this experience at a country church, at age 12, I was encouraged by my grandmother to go the altar and seek God. When I did so, I did not know what in the world I was doing, but I was told to pray through. No one really explained what that meant. Then a lady knelt beside me and began to pray aloud these words, "God I thank you for the day that you saved me out in the barnyard, when the lightning hit the barn and gave me a glorious feeling. Now I want you to give Jimmy that same feeling." Well, I came to the conclusion that "praying through" meant that when I got through, the lightning would hit and I would have some kind of electrical shock. That would mean God had forgiven me and saved me. We prayed that night until twelve o'clock or so and no sparks hit. I went back to church the next night and my grandmother came again with the same plea. I went back to the altar again, and by twelve thirty or one o'clock that night nothing happened. After going through this process for about the fourth evening, my grandmother came to me and wanted me to go to the altar again. I said "Granny, I am not going." After the third time, I had left the church angry and mad at God. As a little twelve year old boy, when I went home that night, I said these words to God, "You must certainly not want me, and I certainly don't want You." I became a bitter young man in my teenage years into atheism denying the very existence of God. What was my problem? I was mad at God because He seemingly did not want to save me. It was due to a warped understanding that was prevalent at that time. I say that to illustrate this. Had the Ninevites merely been told by Jonah that they had forty days left, and that there was no hope whatsoever for them, those Ninevites would have become angry and bitter at God, because He was their enemy. But instead, they were given a ray of hope. "It may be that God may turn from His threat. Let us repent, let us turn from our evil ways." Some hope of being saved still remained in their thinking.

What was it that gave them this ray of hope of mercy from God? I suggest two things in the text. Number one, that the threats and warnings of God in the Bible are conditional in nature. They are uttered by God as a means to bring about moral change, so that they may not have to be executed or carried out if the desired change takes place. Had it been the fixed purpose of God to overwhelm the city with destruction, it would have been unnecessary to even give them any warning. The warning was given that the destruction might be avoided. Thus, there was mercy being extended to them in the very sending of the message of warning to them. You may recall that no such warning was given to Sodom and Gomorrah, for God had determined to destroy them unconditionally without a ray of hope given to its inhabitants. But in this case, there is a threatening warning being sent to Nineveh that destruction is coming in forty days. With that very warning, it is implied that if there is a change of conduct that takes place, then God will withdraw his

threat of destruction. So that in the preaching of the gospel, there must not only be a warning of the judgment to come, and the exhorting of hearers to flee from the wrath of God, but in connection with gospel preaching, there must be extended a ray of hope that there is mercy for sinners. The very fact that a sinner is hearing the gospel is an act of mercy in itself being shown by God to the sinner.

Therefore, a sinner can have hope that God may show mercy to him from the fact that He has sent him a gospel preacher. On that basis, the sinner may flee to God, repenting of his sin. In his book, *The Prophet Jonah*, Hugh Martin observes that,

The very mission, however, of Jonah to Nineveh carried in it some intimation on God's part of a lingering mercy towards them, a mercy that would warn them how soon justice must take its course. The Ninevites themselves seem to have judged thus. Reason taught them that if God abstained from suddenly and instantaneously pouring out His wrath upon them, and gave them forty days' notice, it must be because there was some space given for repentance, some room for hope. Thus under a dispensation of forbearance, threatenings are employed, not to shut the door of hope, but to awaken the insensible and compel them towards the gates of repentance. (Hugh Martin, *The Prophet Jonah*, pp. 268, 269).

You need to be very careful that when preachers proclaim the wrath of God, that they do not shut the door of hope to the people to whom they are preaching. The wrath of God must be preached, it must be a warning, it is a motivating incentive and principle to confront sinners with the wrath of God. But the same preaching must also extend the door of mercy, that individuals may come to that God who is wrathful, and who is angry with them, and find mercy in the person of the Lord Jesus Christ. Do you see the two must be brought together, terrors and mercy. These ingredients are found in balanced gospel preaching. Some preaching today emphasizes all mercy and no terror. On the other hand, in some church ages, preaching has emphasized all terror and no mercy. In this case, the sinner is driven to absolute despair of having to determine whether or not there is any mercy available for him if he should repent and turn to God.

The second thing that gave hope to the Ninevites was the personal historical experience of the prophet Jonah. In commenting again on the idea of Jonah being a sign to the Ninevites, Hugh Martin states:

Now it seems very clear from the sayings of our Lord that the respect in which Jonah was a sign, was in his being three days and three nights in the whale's belly; that in this respect he was sign to the Ninevites; and, therefore, that the Ninevites must have been made aware of his history--the history of his original commission, his disobedience, his flight, his pursuit,

his punishment, and forgiveness. Without their knowledge of his history, he could not have been to them in respect of that history, a sign. (*Ibid.* pp. 269).

Mr. Martin is saying that Jonah could not be a sign to the Ninevites unless the Ninevites knew what had happened to him. Reading on:

But the very story of what had befallen the very messenger whom God had sent them could not fail to impress them, not only with a deep sense of the terrors of God's wrath, but with a lively perception also of His mercy. The fact, also, that the Lord interposed to deliver His servant from the dreadful misery in which he was shut up, could hardly have been imparted to them without some intimation of the place which the prophet's lowly prayers held in the matter. And they could, therefore, scarcely avoid seeing that there is some influence which prayer and penitence exert in averting the threatened wrath of the Almighty. (*Ibid.* pp. 269, 270).

Beloved, prayer and repentance are instrumental means, not meritorious causes, of averting the wrath of God. If you would avert the wrath of God in hell upon you, you must in prayer ask the Lord to be merciful to you. Prayer does not save, but you are not saved apart from praying. Repentance does not save, but you are not saved apart from repentance. Prayer and repentance help to avert the threatening judgment of God Almighty. The Bible says, **"that whoever calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved."** (Acts 2:21) Saved from what? The wrath of God. Then the calling upon the name of the Lord saves us from the wrath of God to come. Call upon him today while he is near. Do you believe there is wrath ahead for sinners who have never repented? The Bible makes that very clear, and if you believe that, you will be brought to repentance. However, you will not repent if you do not believe that. It is just that simple.

Therefore, the combined principles of fear and hope lay the groundwork for the gospel messenger to exhort the sinner to return to his God, and for the sinner to repent and turn to God. These principles flow from faith. Saving faith produces fear of God's judgment, and hope in the mercy of God prevents despair from occurring. If both the terrors and the mercies of God are believed in, they will compel and constrain us to turn from our sins, that we may live and not die under the wrath of God. If one believes in both the terror of God and the mercy of God, these are two motivating ingredients to exhort us to turn to our God and live. God says, **"As I live,' says the Lord God, 'I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but that the wicked turn from his way and live. Turn, turn from your evil ways! For why should you die, O house of Israel?'"** (Ezekiel 33:11). God declares unto you that there is nothing but wrath ahead for impenitent sinners. How can you know that if you turn to God, that there is any hope for you? He says, "I delight to show mercy to returning sinners." There must be a balanced presentation of both the

terror of God and the mercy of God in the preaching of the gospel.

Secondly, let us look at it from another viewpoint. Let us look at the mysterious power in Nineveh's repentance. In the first half of the lesson, we looked at Nineveh's comprehended understanding in its repentance; that is, what can be understood through the revealed preaching of the word. However, there is another underlying cause at Nineveh's repentance that must go deeper than the preaching of the prophet Jonah, and that is the ministry of the Holy Spirit. The glory and honor of Nineveh's repentance is to be given to the power of God's spirit, and not to the ability of the human will. Ephesians 2:8-10:

***For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God-Not of works, lest any many should boast. For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them.***

A great and proud city of Nineveh has now been suddenly smitten into a state of profound humility from the king who sits on the throne to the lowest of its citizens. It has undergone a striking and thorough reformation. We read, "**God saw their works, that they turned from their evil way.**" Their pride was broken, their contempt of God was abandoned, their cruelty and violence were given up, and God approved of the change and the activities of the Ninevites. Who is to be given the honor of such a reformation? Is it to be given to the ability of the will of man? Shall we praise and pat the Ninevites on their backs and crown them with the glory of this marvelous reformation? Is it to be given to the ability of the Holy Spirit to change man's nature? Or maybe is it to be shared between the will of man and the will of God. Maybe we need two crowns. We will put one crown on the Ninevites and the other on the Spirit of God, and they can share the honor of this result. Is that what the Bible teaches us? No, the Bible's answer is that the cause of Nineveh's repentance is to be traced to God's power and God's power alone, and not to be given to the will of the Ninevites. Yes, the Ninevites' wills were changed but what changed their wills?

This answer that I have just given you will only be agreed upon when the nature of true repentance is confessed. A person will not agree with what I have stated unless they are in agreement with my definition of true repentance. Let me give it to you. True repentance is a change of mind, of heart, of disposition. It is the making of a new heart and a right spirit. It originates in regeneration, in our being born again, in our obtaining a new nature and becoming new creatures in Christ Jesus by the work of the Holy Spirit. It flows forth in an open manifestation, in a new course of conduct, in a reformed life aiming at new goals and desiring to attain and live by new ethical standards. Repentance,



springing from a true fear of God and a true view of sin, manifests itself in obedience to God's laws and a desire to abstain from sin. True repentance is not the mere shaking off the evil fruit from the tree and tying on fruit which has a better appearance. True repentance is the changing of the tree's very nature, and good fruit is then naturally brought forth and not artificially applied. This is what our Lord meant when he said in Matthew 12:33: **"Either make the tree good and its fruit good, or else make the tree bad and its fruit bad; for a tree is known by its fruit."** True repentance flows from a changed nature, and only God can change that nature. So if a person is brought to biblical repentance, he must trace the cause of it not to his own act of will, although he has acted, but he must go deeper and trace it to the transformation of his nature occurring in the new birth, wherein the will of man is altered and changed. Nineveh's reception of Jonah and his message can only be traced to the secret and powerful work of the Holy Spirit in their hearts whereby they became willing in the day of His power. (Psalm 110:3).

Think with me, and try to visualize as if you were Jonah. Who would have predicted or expected that Jonah would be received by such a huge, violent wicked city like Nineveh? I don't believe that even Jean Dixon, or whoever the latest prophet or soothsayer is, would have made that prediction. Who would have made such a prediction that Jonah would have been received by the city of Nineveh? How does one explain this? Surely God's Holy Spirit was with God's holy word working in their midst. Jonah was preaching the holy word. There was accompanying with that word a ministry of the Holy Spirit working in their midst. This ministry of the Holy Spirit takes place in secret unconscious area of man's being, whereby the person becomes conscious of a changed attitude toward God. It works within. *"I know not how the Spirit moves, convincing men of sin; revealing Jesus through the Word, creating faith in Him."* We don't understand how that works. It is a mystery, it is a secret thing, but men become conscious of it when it works. Jesus said, **"The wind blows where it wishes, and you hear the sound of it, but cannot tell where it comes from and where it goes. So is everyone who is born of the Spirit."** (John 3:8). It is impossible to account for the faith of the Ninevites without attributing that faith to the sovereign grace of God working faith in their hearts. The Apostle Paul describes it in this manner in I Thess. 1:5, **"For our gospel came not unto you in word only, but also in power and in the Holy Ghost and in much assurance."** That is how Paul explained people becoming Christian converts. It takes more than a preacher, it takes more than Jonah, and it takes more than Jonah's balanced preaching. It takes more than all of that to bring a sinner to repentance. The gospel came to the Ninevites in word and in power of the Holy Spirit, in much assurance, exhorting with the terrors, and exhorting with the mercies. The word of God must be accompanied by the powerful operation of the Holy Spirit of God changing man's nature as He did the Ninevites, and that transformed nature becomes willing when God's power operates and manifests itself. Apart from the Holy

Spirit, what kept the Ninevites from treating Jonah like a silly dreamer? What kept them from laughing Jonah to scorn? Here is a little old Hebrew prophet walking into the greatest city on earth and announcing that they had only forty days until it would be all over. What would have kept them from laughing him to scorn? What kept their laughter from turning to wrath and subjecting Jonah to a torturous death for which the Ninevites were so famous? Jesus said that the Jewish people killed their own prophets. (Matthew 23:31). He said they had opposed every prophet that was sent to them. What kept them from doing that to Jonah? What kept the Ninevites from getting fed up with this clown and ultimately saying, "let us get rid of this guy. He is insulting us." Do you recall how Lot was treated by his sons-in-law when he told them that God was going to destroy the city of Sodom? Why was Jonah not treated like Lot? In Genesis 19:14 we read there: **"So Lot went out and spoke to his sons-in-law, who had married his daughters, and said, 'Get up, get out of this place; for the Lord will destroy this city!' But to his sons-in-law he seemed to be joking."** Lot's sons-in-law regarded him as being "beside himself." They probably mocked Lot and said something like this: "Destroy this city? What is the likelihood of that? Lot, look up at the sky. It is peaceful. Look at the fields. They are rich, they are beautiful. Look at the river. It flows between its banks as it always has. Lot, look around. There is no army encamped around us, and yet you say this city will be destroyed tomorrow. Come on, Lot. You have lost your marbles." Is it not remarkable that the people of Nineveh did not regard Jonah as one who was mocking them? What made the Ninevites pay attention and believe the message of the prophet? The answer is that surely God's spirit was striving powerfully and successfully with the Ninevites in a way in which He was not working with the Sodomites.

Paul's question in I Corinthians 4:7 addresses this point: **"For who makes you differ from another? And what do you have that you did not receive? Now if you did indeed receive it, why do you boast as if you had not received it?"** What made the difference between the Ninevites and Sodom and Gomorrah? Why is one destroyed without any warning and the other one is brought to repentance? Why do the Ninevites set up and take notice? Who made the one city to differ from another? The explanation of the difference between the two cities is that it was God's purpose to work faith in the Ninevites and not in the Sodomites. Lets make a personal application. If you are a true believer, and you have an acquaintance who is not a believer, what has made the difference? It is not just because you exercised your will to believe in Jesus, but that the Spirit of God has given you the gift of faith. Wherever that gift of saving faith is imparted, repentance manifests itself along with it. You will repent when you are given true saving faith, and the Ninevites did that. The faith demonstrated by the Ninevites was not of themselves, it was the gift of God.

Some may think that I may be pressing the situation to an extreme, thinking, maybe this is just your judgment and the conclusion which you have reached. Let us look at an illustration in the Bible. If such an event as the conversion of Nineveh had occurred during the time of the Apostles in the New Testament, how would the Apostles have described it? Let us say Nineveh was in existence during the time of Paul and Peter, James and John in the book of Acts, and word is given to the Apostles that the greatest city in the world has repented and turned to God. How would the Apostles describe what had happened? You may think the Bible does not tell us, but I believe it does. In Acts 11:1 we read: **"Now the Apostles and brethren who were in Judea heard that the Gentiles had also received the word of God."** The Ninevites were Gentiles. In this eleventh chapter of Acts, the Apostles and the Christian brethren in Judea who were Jewish converts, had received news that Gentiles had also received the word of God. Look at verse Acts 11:18, and there we are given the Apostles' evaluation of the this activity on the part of the Gentiles. **"When they heard these things they became silent; and they glorified God, saying, 'Then God has also granted to the Gentiles repentance to life.'"** That is how they evaluated the conversions of the Gentiles to Christianity. If they were truly converted, the Apostles believed that it was because God had granted repentance unto them which led to life. I believe that is how we ought to describe the conversion of the great city of Nineveh. It is because God granted repentance unto them. Not only is faith a gift from God, but repentance is a gift from God. It is something that is bestowed or granted. Thus by a combination of the ministry of God's revealed word, accompanied by the secret work of the Holy Spirit, repentance and conversion of the great city of Nineveh is achieved. That which could be comprehended by the human understanding and that which is beyond human comprehension. When those two things are brought together, faith in the revealed message of the preacher is believed because God's Spirit has granted faith, and repentance becomes manifest.

**"For since, in the wisdom of God, the world through wisdom did not know God, it pleased God through the foolishness of the message preached to save those who believe."** (I Corinthians 1:21). Some believe that God doesn't need to use the preaching of the gospel. They believe that all that is needed or ordained is just the secret, mysterious work of the Holy Spirit in regeneration. Therefore, they claim that God works apart from the preaching of the word and just works directly upon human nature by regenerating grace. Some go so far as to believe that there will be many people who go through this life living wicked lives, never repenting and believing in Jesus Christ, who will die and wake up in glory, because they were regenerated at some point, even though they never heard the gospel. I do not believe that is a Biblical doctrine. **"It pleased God through the foolishness of the message preached to save those who believe."** God regenerates through the preaching of the word. That mysterious work of the Spirit

accompanies the preaching of the gospel when it is revealed to the soul of the sinner.

What is the lesson we can learn from this portion of the book of Jonah? Let me put it in the form of a question. What is the reason that careless sinners do not repent when they are threatened and warned about being cast into the fires of hell? How is it that a person can sit under a Biblical message, hear the threats of God, and yet not repent when they are exposed to the wrath of God? The answer is simply that they do not believe God and His Word. If they really believed, they would repent. Men do not believe what God says He will do to them. They do not believe that because of their sin, they are worthy of being assigned to flames of hell, and in spite of all the declarations of God to them through His word, they will not repent because they will not take God's word as truth.

In His word, God has threatened to cast impenitent sinners into the fires of hell prepared for the devil and his angels. Do you agree that is in the Bible? God has said that He will laugh at their calamity. That is also in the Bible. God has said that He will mock when their fear comes. In His word, God tells them that He will abandon them throughout all eternity to their own depraved desires and companionship of those who hate God. God has further warned careless sinners that this may occur at any moment without advance warning. If you are without the Lord Jesus Christ, you may die this very day and go to this place which I have just described. God has not given you forty days' warning. Today is the day of salvation. You may not have advanced warning. You may die today and if you die impenitent without Christ, you will perish in hell. Those warnings are very severe. It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of an angry God. Yet, in the face of all of this, careless sinners can eat, drink and be merry. They can come and sit under the ministry of hell fire preaching and go right out and act as if there is no danger whatsoever. They can buy and sell and make a profit in their business endeavors. They can pursue pleasures and world ambitions with unrestrained energy. It is amazing the energy people can put into certain things they like to do. They can hear a message on the wrath of God and the mercy of God, then leave that service, going right on with all their energy to pursue the pleasures of sin for a season. Why? Because they do not believe what God says in His word. Can it be said that these people who do such things, believed God? Absolutely not! How sad the conclusion is! It is obvious that the impenitent sinner is, for all practical purposes, an atheist and without God in this world. If you have been raised in Sunday School and been taught the Bible by your parents, and if you have listened to your preacher, but you still have not repented and believed in the Lord Jesus Christ, it is because you don't believe God. In practice, you are saying that there is no God, that you don't believe what He says about your sin or about hell. You are a practicing atheist because you don't believe the record that God has given us of his Son. Is that what I John says? **"He who believes in the Son of God has the witness in himself; he who does**

***not believe God has made Him a liar, because he has not believed the testimony that God has given of His Son.***" (I John 5:10) If you don't believe the record, it says you are making God a liar. In the record, God also says that the wicked shall be turned into hell, but you have not turned to God, because you do not believe that record, and you are calling God a boldface liar. You will never repent until you believe the record God gives of Himself and His word.

In conclusion, can anything more clearly prove that men are dead in trespasses and sins when they will treat the threats and mercies of the gospel as if they were useless and of no value. Why will they not come to Christ when they are warned? Mercy is extended, but they will not heed the message. Why? Because they don't believe the message. In Acts 27:25, Paul said, "***for I believe God, that it shall be even as it was told me.***" The impenitent will not repent because they will not believe. Does this not also prove the absolute necessity of the new birth to enable us to believe? I close with this sobering thought. May it not be said of any of us, that the Ninevites will rise in judgment against us because they believed God and repented at the preaching of Jonah. If you have heard the gospel and you reject the message which we have proclaimed to you, and you refuse to repent, pay heed to what Jesus said in Matthew 12:41 "***The men of Nineveh will rise up in the judgment with this generation and condemn it, because they repented at the preaching of Jonah; and indeed a greater than Jonah is here.***"