

- This morning we continue through the Book of Jonah in chapter 2 in a series we are calling “Rediscovering God”, why? Because Jonah is a prophet in ancient Israel who was raised with the knowledge of God, but who turns out to have created a god of his own making. He needed to be retaught and reshaped as he rediscovered the true and living God.
- And this morning we will see how his transformation lead to the transformation of an entire city. And as we do, there are crucial lessons about this idea of revival; what it is and how it works.

Jonah 3 NIV Then the word of the Lord came to Jonah a second time:² “Go to the great city of Nineveh and proclaim to it the message I give you.”

³ Jonah obeyed the word of the Lord and went to Nineveh. Now Nineveh was a very large city; it took three days to go through it.⁴ Jonah began by going a day’s journey into the city, proclaiming, “Forty more days and Nineveh will be overthrown.”⁵ The Ninevites believed God. A fast was proclaimed, and all of them, from the greatest to the least, put on sackcloth.

⁶ When Jonah’s warning reached the king of Nineveh, he rose from his throne, took off his royal robes, covered himself with sackcloth and sat down in the dust. ⁷ This is the proclamation he issued in Nineveh: “By the decree of the king and his nobles:

Do not let people or animals, herds or flocks, taste anything; do not let them eat or drink. ⁸ 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. ⁹ Who knows? God may yet relent and with compassion turn from his fierce anger so that we will not perish.”

¹⁰ When God saw what they did and how they turned from their evil ways, he relented and did not bring on them the destruction he had threatened.

- In 1857, a revival began over a cup of tea. In Ireland, a young man named James McQuilkin's family was visited for tea by some Christian women who spoke earnestly about the gospel. Struck by what he overheard, this young man's life was changed. But the change did not remain with him. As a brand-new Christian, he felt burdened to pray for others in the community and invited three newly converted friends to join him. Once a week, they gathered together in a schoolhouse to pray for the people in their city by name. They were praying for lives to be changed. But for a long time, they did not see any. The temptation to give up was great. Was prayer even working? Was it worth it?
- Meanwhile, however, unknown to them, other Christians experienced that same burden and similar groups began to gather and pray throughout Ireland. It was then that everything changed.
- Within 2 years, cities were transformed, crime went down so much that the jails were empty, churches began to pack, prayer meetings started, generosity abounded, the influence spread to the UK and by 1859, 100,000 people were saved. It is now known as the great Ulster revival. It began with simple conversation over a cup of tea.
- Now, if you are *not* a Christian, stories like this might make you curious, or maybe skeptical. After all, the church may appear to you to be a bit of a mess. Unlikely to be a source of change.
- If you are a Christian, stories of revival may fill you with a mix of inspiration but also doubt. After all, have you looked at our world, right? There is no way that could happen now.
- We are living in a great cultural moment of uncertainty... You cannot reflect on this year without the overwhelming sense of tension Political, economic, relational, moral, ethical tension which has left many people confused, divided, fearful, ... One writer put it:

Jonathan Sacks "The results lie all around us: the collapse of marriage, the fracturing of the family, the fraying of the social bond, the partisanship of politics at a time when national interest demands something larger, the loss of trust in public institutions, the buildup of debt whose burden will fall on future generations, and the failure of a shared morality to lift us out of the morass of individualism, hedonism, consumerism, and relativism. We know these things, yet we seem collectively powerless to move beyond them."

- As for the possibility of peace, justice, joy, love, forgiveness and new life, all the odds seem to be against them all. But know this; the power of God changes the odds.
- And the ancient city of Nineveh is our example. Jonah, as we have learned, is a prophet in ancient Israel. His role was to represent God to his people. But when God called him to deliver a message of mercy to his enemies, he ran from God. He boarded a traveling ship in the opposite direction. It took a violent storm to stop him. Upon

recognizing the storm on the sea was a consequence of the sin in his heart, he took responsibility and asked the sailors to throw him overboard. But God is a God of second chances. He appointed a great fish to save Jonah from death. 3 days he survived until finally being spewed out on land. He has a second chance to deliver this message. But it was no easy task.

- If you think our times are bad, think about the Assyrian Empire and its capitol city, Nineveh. A wealthy, stable and thriving home of art, culture, medicine and education. But, if you asked their neighbors, they might tell you that Nineveh's moral compass was a little off.

James Bruckner "Records (of Nineveh) brag of live dismemberment, often leaving one hand attached so they could shake it before the person died. They made parades of heads, requiring friends of the deceased to carry them on elevated poles. They boasted of their practice of stretching live prisoners with ropes so they could be skinned alive. The human skins were then displayed on city walls and on poles. . . . They commissioned pictures of their post-battle tortures where piles of heads, hands and feet, and heads impaled on poles—eight to a stake—were displayed. They pulled out the tongues and burned the young alive."

- The foundation of their success was violence, oppression, immorality
- And yet... we find in Jonah 3; the whole city was transformed. How?
- The answer to that question is revival. Revival is a word used to describe a supernatural and revolutionary awakening on such a scale that the best explanation is God. And knowing the marks of revival will not only help us to identify one, but to pray for it and live in expectancy of it. And its work starts with you. So, what happens when revival comes? Please note 3 marks.

1. **Where Revival Begins (verses 1-4)**

a. Revival begins with believers.

- b. And as we see here it began with Jonah, After all, he needed it. Jonah was a terrible advertisement for faith! As a prophet, his role was to represent God to his people and the watching world. But he did the opposite. He played the hypocrite. He ran from, separated himself from the mission and misrepresented God altogether. But notice what God does NOT do. He does NOT finish with Jonah. But neither does he lower his standard. See, God could have either written Jonah off for his disobedience! Or lowered his standard and allowed Jonah to stay jaded and go about the mission however he wanted.
- c. Of course, it would have been an easy choice to be done with Jonah, in the same way that it would be easy for God to be done with the church today. After all, it's often a mess. But instead, he pursues the church. But in doing so, he does not lower his standard. We see in Jonah, that

d. In Revival, God restores his people to faithfulness

- e. One of the most common accusations against the church is hypocrisy. Many of you have experienced it. And perhaps this has caused you to become jaded about God himself. Or you jump from church to church! Stop reading your bible...
- f. And so, a text like this reminds us that the people of God may very well be a mess. Perhaps, like Jonah, even hypocritical.
- g. **But... the hypocrisy of believers should not be a reason to disregard God but listen more closely to him.** Why? **God is hypocrisy's fiercest critic.** He never turns a blind eye to the wrongs of his people, but in patience and grace pursues his people and calls them back to a restored obedience.
- h. **God is hypocrisy's fiercest critic. But he is also the hypocrites only hope.** His word both challenges us with truth, as it was with Jonah. But he also grants us the grace to respond and restores us to a new obedience.
- i. This is what happened with Jonah. In revival, faithfulness is restored, and mission is relaunched.
- j. God speaks once again to Jonah, and this time, he listens
- k. In some ways, this is a repeat of what God already said to Jonah in chapter 1. But there is a subtle difference.

Jonah 3:1-2 Then the word of the Lord came to Jonah a second time:² "Go to the great city of Nineveh and proclaim to it the message I give you."

- a. It is worth noting the power of the statement in another translation, "whatever I tell you"
- b. Indeed, is the only kind of obedience there is!
 - i. We do not cherry-pick! Which is so often the reason the people of God lack effective witness to the world.
- c. This restoration to obedience is the result of God's reviving work in his people. Listen to the word of God... and do it.

Jonah 3:3 Jonah obeyed the word of the Lord and went to Nineveh. Now Nineveh was a very large city; it took three days to go through it.⁴ Jonah began by going a day's journey into the city, proclaiming, "Forty more days and Nineveh will be overthrown."

- l. Where is it that God is speaking to us... again? Where is it that God is wanting to restore you and I to faithful obedience?
- m. If we want to see change around us, it must begin within us.
- n. God speaks *to* Jonah that he might speak *through* Jonah, and so it is for the church. Which leads to the second point.

2. What Revival Brings (verse 5-8)

- a. Of course, there is a specific nature to Jonah's restoration, which is a restoration to preach the word of God.
- b. And this preaching has incredible impact! It spreads throughout the city and even reaching the ears of the king! With remarkable impact! And that is what revival brings:

c. An unusual effectiveness in the witness of God's people

- d. And please note these evidences of revived preaching
- e. Great Clarity – No muddying of the waters with vague hints, embellishment or addition. It is straight forward, and it is clear
- f. Great Simplicity – There is no mark of extraordinary eloquence or genius required, though some might be gifted communicators. That is not where the power lies.
- g. Great Authority – There is no softening of the message here. Indeed, we are not free to do this! The living truths of God are not to be presented as mere suggestions.
- h. We see this here, we see it throughout scripture, and throughout the revivals of history that in revival, there is renewed clarity, simplicity and authority in the preaching of God's word! May it be so!
- i. Now, the brevity of Jonah's message to the city of Nineveh might surprise us. And raises a question: Is this *ALL* that Jonah said? Or is it a *summary* of what Jonah said?
- j. Commentators are disagreed but I believe it is a summary. And if it's a summary, it may be that this is the part of the message resonated most with the great and wicked city of Nineveh.

k. A true awakening in the hearts of the lost

- l. It would seem that the message... gripped their souls
- m. And how could that be? How could such a response occur in a city so wicked, a culture so dark and society so powerful?
- n. And how could it be that our county, our world be gripped by such a message when it seems that all the odds are against it?
- o. Well, the simple answer is this: The city of Nineveh understood that the message of Jonah was actually a message from God.

Jonah 3:5 ⁵The Ninevites believed God. A fast was proclaimed, and all of them, from the greatest to the least, put on sackcloth.

- p. It does not say "They believed Jonah". They *believed God*.
- q. And notice how specific the phrasing is! It doesn't say they believed *In* God; it says *they believed God!*
- r. That's what happens when God's word hits the heart in a transformative way, it's not simply an intellectual affirmation of the existence of God, there is a personal trust in God.
- s. And, there is another side to the same coin. Turning to God is also a turning from sin. Even among the highest power in the la

Jonah 3:6-8 ⁶When Jonah's warning reached the king of Nineveh, he rose from his throne, took off his royal robes, covered himself with sackcloth and sat down in the dust. ⁷This is the proclamation he issued in Nineveh: "By the decree of the king and his nobles: Do not let people or animals, herds or flocks, taste anything; do not let them eat or drink. ⁸But let people and animals be covered with sackcloth. Let everyone call urgently on God. Let them give up their evil ways and their violence

- t. Notice in this decree that there is a very clear and real awareness of evil and wrong. It's both individual and corporate
 - i. The fasting and sackcloth was to be a public declaration which evidenced sorrow over their wrongdoing. Just as their violence was public, so their repentance was to be public. So, public that even the cows were told to participate! Some find this comical or even extravagant, but it certainly displays the eagerness, from the top down and from the greatest to the least, to recognize the evil of their ways and turn to God in the hope of redemption.
- u. It is noted that in the ritual of fasting and sackcloth, the Ninevites have symbolically touched death, which they now realize their wickedness deserves. And it is in acknowledging the possibility of death, that they Ninevites pray for mercy.
 - i. Notice the impact on society! We want to see injustice addressed, oppression and violence cease. This happens when hearts turn towards God.
 - ii. That is why, in true revival, there is often such a societal impact. Because, the changing of hearts inevitably changes the culture from the inside out.
 - iii. This is one of the most remarkable turnarounds in history, that such lost people could be redeemed.
- v. This is what we need. This is what we must pray for. For it is not in the natural ability of the church and its preachers, it is the supernatural work of God's Spirit through his people.
 - i. When God is working powerfully as his message goes forth, there is a very real sense that God is dealing with a person! The truth about sin becomes real to their hearts!
- w. And this is why, in longing to see such a work in our time, we absolutely must pray! We must pray for the Holy Spirit to do His work and anoint and empower the message as it goes out.
- x. We cannot manufacture this, nor should we try! Jonah's preaching was probably not very good, there was no show, indeed there were no miracles done in Nineveh! And yet, the people responded. Because God was at work in the hearts of the lost, to redeem them. This is what we should pray for!

Martyn Lloyd-Jones "Conservatives would rather work to reform church theology and practice. Intellectuals doubt supernatural intervention. Rationalists dismiss emotional enthusiasm. All convene committees and organize campaigns. But few will plead for revival"

- a. ***Where is our confidence?*** When I first Joined Reality...
 - a. Intentional efforts to emphasize our need for God's spirit
- b. Friends let us commit to PLEAD for a move of God's spirit!

- c. Ask God to become more effective! After all, this kind of transformation can only be explained by God's power.
- d. Which should make us both humble and bold!
- e. "But I don't feel comfortable" I'm not good with confrontation. I don't have what it takes! ... RIGHT! But by the Spirit...
- f. As we ask God to restore us to obedience, may we also ask for renewed confidence in his word and in the Spirit's power to do the impossible work of changing hearts. And it is his work! 3rd.

3. Why Revival Happens (verses 9-10)

- a. Is it all because of the efforts of believers? The character of Nineveh? The strategy? Is God obligated?

b. Our hope for revival is in the sovereign compassion of God

- c. There is humility even in the king of Nineveh, for his royal proclamation does not presume on God's decision. Instead, it rests on the hope on divine compassion with a dramatic

Jonah 3:9 Who knows? God may yet relent and with compassion turn from his fierce anger so that we will not perish."

- d. And his hope is well-placed, for the same God who is just, and right, and who hates oppression, evil and wicked, and will hold it all accountable with justice... is also a God of mercy and compassion. In verse 10, God responds

Jonah 3:10 When God saw what they did and how they turned from their evil ways, he relented and did not bring on them the destruction he had threatened.

- e. Now, it is not as though God was in two minds about being compassionate towards wicked people. He was waiting patiently, as a Just, but also merciful God who desires that none should perish but that all should come to repentance.
- f. After all, whose idea was it to tell Nineveh that they had a second chance? It was certainly not Jonah's idea. It was God's.
- g. And so the king's question is answered: God will respond with compassion and *not* give them what their sin deserves.
- h. When revival comes, God reveals both justice and compassion.
- i. So, it is in hearing the word of the restored prophet, that they see the seriousness of sin and turn to the God who sent him for mercy. Without divine mercy, we will certainly perish. But with divine mercy, we will truly live. There is nowhere else to go.
- j. Well, what about us? And what about our world today?
- k. Well, the faint hope held by the pagan king is not only echoed in the rest of the OT, but also made absolutely certain in the NT
- l. Hundreds of years later, Jesus uses this narrative to point to himself. In speaking to his contemporaries who were asking Jesus for more miraculous signs to prove his deity Jesus said

Matthew 12:39 NIV He answered, "A wicked and adulterous generation asks for a sign! But none will be given it except the sign of the prophet Jonah."

- m. How is Jesus the sign of Jonah brought to fulfillment? He, like Jonah, goes down underneath the judgement of God, is swallowed up in death and then is raised up by the power of God to new life.

Matthew 12:40-41 NIV For as Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of a huge fish, so the Son of Man will be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth. ⁴¹ The men of Nineveh will stand up at the judgment with this generation and condemn it; for they repented at the preaching of Jonah, and now something greater than Jonah is here.

- n. And so, what is held in faint hope is now an absolute certainty. In fact, it is so certain that if we reject, even the Ninevites would be shocked! For one great than Jonah has arrived.
- o. Jesus, the crucified, and risen savior, the ultimate prophet speaks his word to us, and we can know beyond the shadow of a doubt, that as we trust in him, he will show compassion and restore his people to obedience and redeem lost people from death. How do we know this? Because he already made provision for it through his death and resurrection
- p. **So, if you've never believed**, you can know that the punishment your sin deserves can be forgiven, and you can be redeemed!
- q. **If you are a believer, it may be that you have fallen from obedience. Today, you can be restored.**
 - i. It may be that you, like Jonah, need to hear God's word a *second* time. Perhaps, you have just minimized what it is that God is saying and has been saying.
 - ii. He convicts you. Not to shame you, but to restore you!
 - iii. The way to blessing is the way of obedience!
- r. **It may be that we have grown weary**, not believing that God could revive his church, or redeem such a lost world. Today, we can ask for renewed confidence in the power of God's Word
 - i. In fact, this may be a season where we needed to be reminded of the power of God's Spirit so that we learn to seek him and depend on him more than we ever have!
- s. God! Anoint your word so that we see you for who you are! May your spirit move so that we do what you have called us to do! He did this reviving work for Jonah in answer to prayer. And he often does it among his people in answer to prayer.
- t. The story of Jonah is not over yet. But here in chapter 3, he is revived, restored, anointed with God's power and an entire city is redeemed.
- u. And it is all because the word of the Lord came a second time.
 - i. It may that God is bringing his word to you a second time.
- v. Today, may we all respond by saying "I will do whatever you say" to the one who did everything necessary to save you.