

JONAH-DEAD OR ALIVE

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LECTURE-4

A MAN FROM THE DEAD GIVES A MESSAGE TO A DOOMED CITY

“For as Jonas was a sign unto the Ninevites, so shall also the Son of man be to this generation (Luke 11:30).

The first verse of Chapter Three of Jonah has a most heartening statement for faltering and fumbling men. This word of encouragement is as follows: **“The word of the Lord came unto Jonah the second time.”** This verse presents to us the GOD of the second chance. The Standard Oil Company and General Motors, to mention only two, would probably discharge any employee who failed to follow the instructions given by those in authority.

Directors of any bank would rid themselves of a clerk who misappropriated funds and turn him over to the proper authorities, but GOD has a policy whereby He gives man a second chance. This approach with Jonah was not a new one but had been His custom in ages past and has been His custom since that time.

Five Examples of Man's Second Chance

1. Jacob failed again and again until he became a disgrace and a source of embarrassment to GOD, but GOD did not let go. At Peniel He tackled this man directly and brought him to the place of decision. After this, Jacob was different. Let us rejoice that GOD did not reject Jacob after the first mistake, and the second, and the third. **“He is faithful.”**
2. David committed an awful sin and men have wanted to stone him for it. But GOD never did give him up. He made David give up the sins. David wrote the 23rd, the 32nd and the 51st Psalms after his awful failure. Are you not happy that GOD did not reject David?
3. Peter stumbled and fell, getting himself dirty, but he got up and started out again. **He failed his LORD, but his LORD never failed him, and Peter was restored.**
4. John Mark failed on the missionary journey with Paul and Barnabas. Even Paul refused to take him on the next venture, but GOD never refused him, and we read that even the great Apostle Paul changed his mind regarding Mark, **“Take Mark and bring him with thee: for he is profitable to me for the ministry”** This appears in the "swan song" of the Apostle, his final letter to Timothy, his death-bed statement. **Mark made good. Paul admitted he was**

wrong - GOD was right.

5. For the fifth illustration of GOD's second chance to man, I should like to tell of a modern "Jonah." This series of messages was given in 1946 on Dr. Talbot's radio program which he was conducting then at nine o'clock every evening. After the writer had spoken of this heartening statement concerning the second chance given to Jonah, a medical doctor in Beverly Hills wrote me a very interesting letter, telling a story which has been repeated at least a thousand times: This doctor, like Jonah, had stumbled and fallen. He had occupied a prominent position in a large church, but was properly relieved of all offices and was unceremoniously excluded from fellowship in the church.

He was assured that he was finished, as far as his church was concerned, and no one made an attempt to restore him. The doctor accepted this ultimatum as the decision of the LORD; consequently, he became very bitter.

Even though he greatly desired to return to the LORD many times, he did not know how to do so. When I told of the prodigal son coming home in confession and that GOD's method for a sinning son to come home is found in I John 1:9 - **"If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness"** - he wrote that he fairly ran back into the arms of JESUS in confession, stating also that Jonah 3:1 had become the most important verse in the Bible for him.

If Jonah Had Refused to Go to Nineveh the Second Time, What Would Have Happened?

The question has been logically asked, "If Jonah had refused to go the second time, what would have happened?" The answer, we believe, is obvious. There would have been another experience within a fish. If Jonah had bought a second ticket to Tarshish there would have been another fish prepared to receive him. GOD would have seen to it that His servant did not go to Tarshish.

There is another element involved here. GOD's purpose of grace cannot be frustrated. If there were any possibility that Nineveh would turn to GOD, then GOD would see to it that Nineveh heard the message. If Jonah would not go, then another messenger would be raised up to go. If we in this present day, will not preach the Gospel to the ends of the earth, then GOD will raise up another instrument. GOD is not, and was not in Jonah's day, limited by the lack of vision or the hardness of heart on the part of His chosen messenger.

Nineveh, That Great City

In verse 2 of our chapter, we come again to this identifying mark of Nineveh, **"that great city"** This is the second time this expression has occurred in the Book of Jonah, the first being in verse 2 of Chapter I. In verse 3 of Chapter Three, this identifying mark is enlarged upon: **"Now Nineveh was an exceeding great city of three days' journey."**

There was a time when the scoffer ridiculed this statement as much as he did that concerning the fish, although the soft pedal was applied here and the major emphasis shifted to the fish. The reason for the ridicule of the critic is that cities of the ancient world were not noted for their breadth and size, the main objective being protection. Consequently, walls

were built to enclose as small a place as possible, all else being made subservient to this.

The critic accused Jonah of exercising poetic license in describing Nineveh as **“an exceeding great city”** But all of this has been changed by the facts of archaeology. The pick and shovel have been the headlights used to penetrate the darkness concerning ancient Nineveh.

Layard, the Frenchman, was the first to examine the ruins in 1845-46, he and George Smith excavating the ancient city of Nineveh. Nineveh proper was across the Tigris from the modern city of Mosul and was built in the shape of a trapezium which was about two and one-half miles in length and over a mile in breadth. As you can deduce, this does not meet the demands of the Book of Jonah.

But Nineveh which lies in a valley between the Tigris on the west and the Zereb River on the east and the Khazir River on the north. This plain was almost entirely surrounded by rivers and was easily fortified. There were several prominent cities in this natural enclosure: Khorsabad was northeast of Nineveh proper about eighteen miles; Calah, or ancient Nimrod, was over twenty miles southeast of Nineveh proper, near the juncture of the River Zab with the Tigris. Calah seems to have been the first city in importance, chronologically, then Khorsabad, and finally Nineveh proper.

The entire group of cities and the intervening territory are implied in the name, Nineveh, given in the Book of Jonah. An ancient writer by the name of Ctesias describes Nineveh as a city whose circuit is four hundred and eighty stadia, which means that it was 48,000 yards around the city. This would mean that it was over twenty-seven miles around the city. In this connection there is a remarkable statement in Genesis 10:11-12:

“Out of that land went forth Asshur, and builded Nineveh, and the city Rehoboth, and Calah, and Resen between Nineveh and Calah: the same is a great city.”

Southern California probably affords the best illustration of a striking comparison to Nineveh. Anyone going from Pasadena to Long Beach passes through numerous towns and cities, but is never conscious of going from one to the next. The same is true in going from Pomona to Santa Monica. It is difficult to separate one city from another, and it would be impossible, were it not for the markers. All of this section bears the name of the Los Angeles area. Similarly, the name of Nineveh was applied to that entire section, and it is a conservative statement to affirm that it was **“three days’ journey”** to cross it.

If a man by the name of Jones should begin preaching as he entered Pasadena and continue on down south until he came to Long Beach, stopping at every corner or where folk gathered, I wonder how long it would take him to make the journey? I wonder how long it actually took Jonah?

Almost forty days (verse 4)?

The Resurrection Message of Jonah to Nineveh

Jonah entered the city of Nineveh and began to give the startling news, **“Yet forty days, and Nineveh shall be over-thrown”** How did he reach the ears of the people? Why did the king

on the throne hear and obey the message? Evidently Jonah's strange personal appearance made his approach easy. This prophet of GOD had spent three days and three nights beyond the esophagus of a fish, and the gastric juices had poured profusely over this backsliding prophet as the fish attempted to "stomach" Jonah. The effect upon the epidermis of the prophet was terrific.

If you will turn back to Lecture Two to Dr. Harry Rimmer's account of the man whom he met in 1926 who had been swallowed by a shark and was recovered in forty-eight hours and lived to tell the tale, you will find there the effect on the outward appearance of the victim. This man's body was devoid of hair and there were patches of yellowish brown color all over his skin. Jonah must have been a strange sight. Possibly his hair was gone and his epidermis assumed some strange color which had not been seen on land or sea. Candidly, he was a "mess." When he stopped on the street corners in Nineveh, the crowds gathered with a query concerning his strange appearance.

After that, Jonah could launch into his message; he could truthfully say that he was a man who had come back from the dead to tell the doomed city of Nineveh what GOD wanted the people to know: namely, judgment was impending because of their sins.

The message which Nineveh heard was one of resurrection. GOD sent a man back from the grave to save a multitude of people. This is the story of the Gospel traced in shadowy outline, for GOD brought JESUS back from the dead to save those who would believe in Him. All that Nineveh had to do was to believe the message concerning resurrection in order to be saved. There is not much that we have to add to the message

Listen to Paul speaking of the LORD JESUS CHRIST: **"Who was delivered for our offences, and was raised again for our justification"** (Romans 4:25). Nineveh believed in a man who came back from the dead and the city

was delivered. Jonah went through the streets of Nineveh preaching a message from GOD, but he was likewise a message to the Ninevites.

Luke records the words of JESUS in this regard: **"For as Jonas was a sign unto the Ninevites, so shall also the Son of man be to this generation."** Jonah was a sign; he not only gave a message, he was the message. The sign was resurrection. He was the man who came back from the grave. He was the man who shouted, **"Yet hast thou brought up my life from corruption, O Lord my God."**

Let us continue with Luke's record in verse 32: **"For they (Nineveh) repented at the preaching of Jonas: and, behold a greater than Jonas is here."** The LORD JESUS said on another occasion, **"If ye believe not that I am he, ye shall perish in your sins."** Apparently Nineveh believed that Jonah had come back from the dead and that through his message, there was deliverance from impending judgment. **Surely this is the forecast of the Gospel.**

Nineveh's Response to the Message of Jonah

Another remarkable feature about the Book of Jonah which transcends the episode of Jonah

in the fish is the response of Nineveh to the message of Jonah. **“They repented at the preaching of Jonas”** is the incisive comment of CHRIST. The record of Jonah says, **“So the people of Nineveh believed God”** (3:5). Here is the record of the mightiest revival to date.

The word, revival, is used in its popular sense. It is a common colloquialism which refers to a deep conviction of sin and a turning to GOD. This turning to GOD reveals new creations of GOD with old things passed away. Revival in its restrictive sense can only apply to a spiritual movement among those who are already the people of GOD. But, adopting the idiom of the day, Nineveh had the greatest revival in history. There is no record of anything like it.

It might be well to note at this juncture that the greatest revival in history took place before the Church ever came into existence. Even the great Apostle Paul never experienced anything comparable to what Jonah saw. Paul never saw an entire city turned to GOD. In fact, he never expected to, if we are to accept his own estimation of his preaching, **“I am made all things to all men, that I might by all means save some”** Here is the place where he could have said that he would save all, for he used the word, all, three times in this short sentence. Nevertheless, he expected to save only some. There has been no place in which the Gospel has been preached where there were 100 per cent conversions.

The writer's personal viewpoint is that the greatest revival is yet in the future where literally millions will turn to GOD and be saved. This, we believe, will take place after the Church is removed. Nations are brought into the millennium, and many of these millions will be converted individually during the one thousand years. There evidently will be a great revival also during the Great Tribulation.

The thought of a revival in which the Church does not figure and is not relished by those who entertain the naïve notion that the Church has the contract for erecting the Kingdom of Heaven on earth. It is not palatable to those who have grandiose ideas of the purpose of the Church and its mission in terms of the mammoth and stupendous. The Church is not called of GOD to establish the millennium on earth, nor is it the instrument to produce and cultivate a redeemed society which is worldwide.

The Church needs to return to the humble role which the Savior marked out by His own example. He did not defy Caesar, nor did He seek to reform the Roman Empire. He died on a Roman cross and was buried on ground taxed by Rome. When His messengers walked in the simplicity of the Gospel with no ambition to supplant the Roman Empire, the message brought hope and life to multitudes and the messengers attended the funeral of the Roman Empire. **The power of the Church does not lie in world conquest but in world evangelization. The Church has not been called to be the architect of a new society, but to preach the Gospel to every creature. GOD will save some. This seems too trite for some and is hateful to those with the blueprints for a new world.**

Jonah had the experience of seeing an entire city repent and turn to GOD. No servant of GOD has yet been able to turn in such an optimistic report. The statistics of no evangelist have yet presented such a rosy hue. Nineveh was the center and capital of the world power of that day. Its prestige cannot be overestimated. The Assyrian empire was the fear and dread of the ancient world. The total conversion of this wicked and brutal city had

repercussions over the then-known world. Multitudes elsewhere must have heard the news and followed the lead of Nineveh. Let us not minimize the world-shaking message of Jonah. The effect upon Nineveh itself was startling enough. The city cried unto GOD, put on sack cloth and ashes and turned from their evil ways. This is breath-taking because it was a GOD-breathed time of heart-searching which brought about a turning to GOD which was total and entire in its compass and range.

GOD Spared Nineveh

There is one final word before we leave this chapter. In the last verse there is a reference to the strange actions of GOD. The record has it, **“and GOD repented of the evil, that he had said that he would do unto them; and he did it not.”** This is not the only reference where GOD is said to repent.

What is implied when it is recorded that GOD repented? Did GOD actually break down and shed tears about His decision to destroy Nineveh? Did He forego His original action because He found out it was wrong? Let us understand, first of all, that repentance in both the Old and New Testaments means primarily a change of mind. The word for repentance in this verse is in the Septuagint, "metenoesein," which simply denotes a change of mind. Nevertheless, it may be accompanied by a great emotional experience which expresses itself in weeping and other outward displays. It also affects the will of the person involved and leads to a reversal of action. There is a right about face in conduct. Repentance is produced by new information for the mind and a conviction of conscience which affects the total personality of the individual.

Now it is obvious that these human experiences cannot be ascribed to GOD. GOD gets no new information, nor does He experience a pricking of conscience. When repentance is imputed to GOD, it is ascribing to GOD characteristics which belong to humanity. GOD's actions are translated into terms of human experience in order that the human mind can comprehend them. There are many such expressions used which are labeled anthropomorphic terms.

It is recorded that GOD has eyes and arms. Actually none of us believes that GOD has eyes and arms as we do, for GOD is a Spirit, but the One who made the eye can see and the One who made the arm can do what the arm does, and when it is recorded that He has eyes, it simply means that He sees. This is the only method of getting the meaning into language that we can understand.

Now GOD does not repent as man does. GOD said He would destroy Nineveh for its sin, but He did not destroy Nineveh. It would seem that GOD changed His mind. What actually happened? If an individual, city or nation turns from sin to GOD, He always saves. This is as true of GOD as the statement that GOD would destroy Nineveh for its sin. If Nineveh had continued on its reckless career of sin, then GOD would have destroyed the city. The fact of the matter is that over a century later another prophet by the name of Nahum announced the doom of this city and GOD did destroy it. But on this occasion, Nineveh turned to GOD, and since GOD never actually changes or repents, but always saves those who turn unto Him, He saved Nineveh. It looked as if GOD had repented because He did not destroy Nineveh.

The fact of the matter is that GOD never changes, and that explains His seeming repentance concerning Nineveh. The immutability of GOD is the terror of the wicked. GOD punishes sin; hell is an awful reality. GOD does not follow the thought patterns of this modern day by relegating hell to the limbo of the dark ages. GOD has not changed relative to the punishment of sin in this modern day, and the thought of the future will not add anything to His information which will cause Him to repent.

Here is the precise language of Scripture, **“GOD is not a man, that he should lie; neither the son of man, that he should repent: hath he said, and shall he not do it? or hath he spoken, and shall he not make it good?”** (Numbers 23: 19). **“Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and cometh down from the Father of Lights, with whom is no variableness, neither shadow of turning”** (James 1:17). GOD said He was going to destroy Nineveh because He punishes sin. GOD spared Nineveh because Nineveh turned to GOD, for GOD spares any sinner who turns to Him. GOD had not changed; Nineveh had. Nineveh repented. It looked as if GOD had changed His mind, but He had not.

It is true today that the "wages of sin is death," but every sinner who turns to CHRIST does not receive death. He receives life. It may look as if GOD has repented. Actually the sinner has repented, for GOD always extends mercy to those who turn to CHRIST.

~ end of chapter 4 ~
