

JONAH-DEAD OR ALIVE?

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LECTURE-5

FROM NINEVEH TO THE HEART OF GOD

The Motive of a True Missionary

"I speak not this to condemn you: for I have said before, that ye are in our hearts to die and live with you" (II Corinthians 7:3).

After the remarkable response attending the message of Jonah, it is reasonable to expect him to rejoice in the success of his mission. Surely most of us would have been inclined to go down to Western Union and send a telegram back to the home town so that the family might rejoice with us in the mighty movement of GOD. With pardonable pride we would have related the effectiveness of the message. Surely we would have looked up the last official census of the city and given that figure as the total number of conversions. Strangely enough, the statistics here would have been accurate, but Jonah did not follow this pattern. Contrariwise, he did not go down to Western Union, but went out of the city to the east side.

Jonah's Strange Conduct

In the fourth chapter of the Book of Jonah we are confronted again with the strange conduct of this man. **But it displeased Jonah exceedingly, and he was very angry** (vs. 1). He was still out of harmony with GOD. This man was not ignorant of GOD and His ways. He did not run away from GOD at first because he did not know GOD, but he ran away because he did know Him. Listen to this man after he had delivered his message:

"And he prayed unto the Lord, and said, I pray thee, O Lord, was not this my saying, when I was yet in my country? Therefore I fled before unto Tarshish: for I knew that thou art a gracious God, and merciful, slow to anger, and of great kindness, and repentest thee of the evil?" (vs. 2).

GOD had more trouble with Jonah than He had with Nineveh. Nineveh is in closer harmony with GOD at this point than Jonah. It is now obvious that Jonah did not love Nineveh. His speedy departure for Tarshish is understandable on the basis that he knew GOD and His grace because he recognized that in case Nineveh did turn to GOD because of his preaching, GOD would be inclined to extend mercy and not go through with the program of judgment.

Jonah wanted Nineveh destroyed, and, therefore, he was not willing to give the people a message which would have a way of escape. Actually, Jonah became a petulant child who wanted to "end it all." He despaired of his life and, like Elijah, wanted to die, but GOD had something better for both of his servants. Elijah did not die under a juniper tree and Jonah did not die under the gourd vine. There was a chariot of fire waiting to take Elijah to the throne of GOD, and there was a lesson for Jonah which evidently brought him to the heart of GOD.

Jonah went out of Nineveh and secured a place which might correspond to the modern trailer court. There he made himself a booth, a temporary dwelling place. He possessed a faint hope that GOD would yet destroy the city, for the justice of GOD was perfectly clear to Jonah. Nineveh was a wicked city and deserved the judgment of GOD. The justice of GOD is more logical than the mercy of GOD. Hell is logical and reasonable. Heaven is illogical and unreasonable. Prisons and jails are the evident tokens of a just state, but paroles and pardons are sometimes the work of a corrupt state. Too many pardons lead to lawlessness and corruption.

Jonah could see that GOD should punish Nineveh, but it seemed highly inconsistent that GOD would extend mercy to the city. There was a hope beyond hope that judgment would fall upon the city, and he took up a good spot for observation, desiring to see the city destroyed.

This appears callous, but recall the suggestion we gave in the first chapter relative to the possible experience of Jonah with the brutal army of Assyria. He probably saw some of his loved ones massacred before his very eyes by the cruel warlords of Nineveh. Consequently, he harbored a hatred for Nineveh and wanted to see the city destroyed. In this frame of mind he took up his post outside the city of Nineveh.

You can readily see that this prophet needed to be brought into sympathy with GOD. He needed to get his heart in tune with GOD. This posits the greatest problem in the Book of Jonah. It is neither the fish, nor the repentance of Nineveh, but the repentance of Jonah which is the major problem for GOD.

GOD had more difficulty with Jonah than with any other feature of the book. The method of GOD reveals this. He had only to prepare a fish to detour Jonah around to Nineveh; He had only to get the message to Nineveh to bring about the greatest mass evangelistic thrust, but he had to have three prepared things to influence Jonah.

There are four prepared things in the book of Jonah. One is the fish. The other three are used in connection with getting Jonah to the heart of GOD. There is the prepared gourd, a prepared worm and a prepared vehement east wind.

God's Use of Three Prepared Things in Changing Jonah

First of all, GOD put a question to Jonah: "**Then said the Lord, Doest thou well to be angry?**" Dr. Young translates verse 4, "Is doing good displeasing to thee?" The fact that GOD had spared Nineveh was "doing good," and Jonah was displeased. Surely no man could be more out of harmony with GOD than Jonah. Nevertheless, he took up his station outside the city and waited, perhaps impatiently. The prepared gourd began to grow and made a shadow over his head. Jonah became attached to this living thing very much as

many people become attached to an animal. The gourd furnished him shade from the hot sun, and Jonah probably became a tender husbandman of the vine. Late every afternoon he doubtless made a trip to the spring and brought a bucket of water to irrigate this vine. In the course of time the prepared worm appeared and destroyed the vine. Without any shelter from the rays of the sun - the prepared east wind removing every vestige of covering for Jonah - he became a victim of the merciless sun's rays. In this sickened condition he despaired of his life and wanted to die. Frankly, he was attached to the gourd, and his only interest in life was gone after it was destroyed.

The Object's of GOD's Concern: The Children and the Cattle

GOD moved in upon this prophet with His most impressive lesson for Jonah. Jonah had expended his sympathy upon the gourd, which was merely a plant with no eternal value, being only a passing thing **"like the grass and the flower of it."**

It was temporary, and yet Jonah had lavished his affections upon that which by its nature was temporary and had no permanent place. GOD made the gourd and destroyed it, but He was not moved because of it. GOD also was the Creator of the people of Nineveh. They possessed eternal souls, and GOD did love them and was moved when their sins separated them from Himself, necessitating the day of doom.

Jonah was unmoved by Nineveh, but GOD's great heart of compassion was stirred, and it is evidenced in the fact that there were **"six score thousand persons that could not discern between their right hand and their left hand; and also much cattle"**(vs. 11). This obviously refers to little children. GOD always takes note of the little children who suffer for the sins of the fathers. One of the excuses turned in by the children of Israel at Kadesh-barnea for not entering the land was, **"And wherefore hath the Lord brought us unto this land, to fall by the sword, that our wives and our children should be a prey? were it not better for us to return into Egypt?"**(Numbers 14:3). The insinuation was that GOD was not concerned about their children. GOD was concerned and He gave the answer to them. **"But your little ones, which ye said should be a prey, them I will bring in, and they shall know the land which ye have despised."** (Numbers 14:31).

It was to the children that the LORD JESUS CHRIST, when He was on earth, gave an unconditional invitation, **"Suffer little children, and forbid them not, to come unto me: for of such is the Kingdom of Heaven"**(Matthew 19:14). GOD's great heart of compassion went out to Nineveh and especially to the little children.

Even the cattle were a concern to GOD. The animal world and the plant world are all under the curse of man's sin. They are innocent sufferers because creation is under the blight of original transgression. **"For we know that the whole creation groaneth and travaileth in pain together until now"** (Romans 8:22). GOD had a concern for the **"much cattle"** in Nineveh which would suffer.

Surely GOD is not presented here as a cruel and vindictive deity who insists on His "pound of flesh." He is not "a big bully," but a GOD of mercy and compassion. The Book of Jonah does not specifically state that Jonah came to GOD's position and that he saw the city as an object of the love and mercy of GOD, but surely we have every reason to infer this. Jonah was the

author of the book, and he makes this impressive point. We can surely conclude that he did not miss the point, nor did he fail to see Nineveh as GOD saw it.

GOD has not promised to give you a love before you take the Gospel to folk. That is getting the cart before the horse. He has said to go and then He would give you a real love for the people to whom you go. Many are standing on the sideline and sitting on the fringe of GOD's great commission, waiting until their hearts are moved. Like the poor man sitting at the pool of Bethesda, "**waiting for the moving of the water,**" they are destined to disappointment. **Start going and you will start loving. GOD says "GO."**

It is not too radical a conclusion to draw that Jonah finally loved Nineveh. When he did, he found himself in step with GOD. Then, and only then, he became a true missionary and messenger of GOD.

The True Motive for Missions

Herein is the true motive for missions. GOD never asked us to take the Gospel to every creature because we love them. We are to take the Gospel to every creature because He loves them. If we go in obedience to Him, He will give us His heart of love for those to whom we minister.

The writer has checked this with several successful missionaries. He has asked the direct question, "Did you love the people to whom you went before you reached your station?" The answer has been invariably, "No." Then he has asked the question, "Do you love them now?" The answer has invariably been, "Yes."

The writer's testimony as a pastor is that he has never gone to a church because he loved the people, but he went because he felt GOD called him. He never has left a church yet but that he did not love the people. After you share the experiences of people, both joy and sorrow, you learn to love them. After standing at the grave side with some, and after marrying the sons and daughters of others, you find that you love them.

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