

SO THE PEOPLE OF NINEVEH BELIEVED GOD

TEXT: JONAH 1:1-17

INTRODUCTION:

1. If you want a greater understanding of the sovereignty of God and the providence of God, study the little book of Jonah.
2. These are very important subjects but this morning I want to preach on revival.
3. During the great revival on the island of Lewis, off the coast of Scotland, a pastor felt led by the Lord to go down to the local dance hall and witness to the worldly young people who were gathered there.
4. It was about 3:30 in the morning, and when he walked into the dance hall the music immediately stopped. He asked that they all sing a verse from Psalm 139. (It was the custom of the Scottish people to sing the Psalms.) Several people joined him in singing.
5. The preacher then started to pray, and followed that with a few words of exhortation. Suddenly the power of God swept through the dance hall. Opposition broke down under conviction of sin and distress of soul. Lost sinners started crying out to God for mercy.
6. The dance was over. God broke it up.
7. There are many great revivals recorded in the Bible. For example, we think of the great revival that took place under King Hezekiah.
8. And there are great revivals recorded in the book of Acts.
9. Many people believe that the greatest revival took place in the great city of Nineveh, under the preaching of Jonah the prophet.
10. Jonah was an unlikely preacher for such a great revival. In fact, at first he disobeyed God and tried to flee from the presence of God (1:1-3).
11. The book of Jonah reminds us it is impossible to flee from the presence of God.
12. Jonah tried to run from God, but God changed Jonah's plans. We read here in verse 4 that "the LORD sent out a great wind into the sea" (1:4-16).
13. But that was still not enough to straighten out this disobedient prophet, so the Bible says "the Lord had prepared a great fish to swallow up Jonah" (1:17).
14. "Then Jonah prayed..." (2:1). When Christians get things right with God and start praying (really praying), then things start to happen. I want to preach today on the great revival in Nineveh.
15. Jonah 3:5 says, "So the people of Nineveh believed God..."

I. THIS REVIVAL STARTED WITH GOD.

1. God told Jonah, "Arise, go to Nineveh, that great city, and cry against it; for their wickedness is come up before me" (1:1, 2).
2. Anytime you hear about a real revival, you will notice that it starts with God. Some may say, "But doesn't it start with Christians praying?" Yes, but who gives them this burden to pray?
3. Jonah did not pray till God put him in the belly of a great fish (1:17; 2:1).
4. We do not see Jonah praying at all in chapter 1. We see the heathen mariners praying, but not Jonah (1:14).
5. It is God that convicts us of our sin and prayerlessness.
6. A few years ago, I received an e-mail (forwarded to me by David Cloud). It was written by a youth pastor in Ohio. He said that for six years he has been working with the teenagers in his church and he was quite frustrated. They were all worldly. None of them was going to Christian colleges. None of them was winning souls. None of them was actively serving in the church. None of them was going on to serve as preachers or missionaries or Christian school teachers. They were all going off into the world when they got old enough to leave home.
7. Then the Lord convicted him. He was not praying for them like he should have been. He started praying fervently for them. And God changed his preaching and teaching. He realized most of them were not truly saved. That's why they were so worldly and so cold! They started getting saved, one by one. They started serving in the Sunday School and in the church. They got on fire for God. They started going off to Christian colleges. They surrendered for full-time Christian service.
8. All because a youth pastor started praying like he ought to. Acts 6:4 says, "But we will give

ourselves continually to prayer, and to the ministry of the word."

9. Samuel the prophet said, "Moreover as for me, God forbid that I should sin against the LORD in ceasing to pray for you" (I Sam. 12:23).
10. The great revival came after Jonah got right with God. The great revival came after Jonah prayed.
11. The great revival came after Jonah obeyed God and went to Nineveh (3:1-4).
12. Jonah finally obeyed, and he arrived in Nineveh all smelly and full of fish vomit (2:10; 3:1-4).
13. When God tells us what to do, let's not disobey. Let us obey Him immediately!
14. I have been reading the memoirs of Ulysses S. Grant, and I noticed that during the Civil War, all of the military officers ended their letters with the words, "Your obedient servant."
15. Not "Yours truly" or "Sincerely," but always, "Your obedient servant."
16. Are you an obedient servant of God? Most people today are not obedient, and they do not want to serve anybody but themselves.
17. Like that nurse who was working with Ebola patients in Sierra Leone, and now refuses to be quarantined.
18. When Jonah finally obeyed God, things started to happen. The great revival came after Jonah prayed.
19. A man named David Matthews wrote a book called "I Saw The Welsh Revival." He wrote these words about Evan Roberts: "His soul seemed to be saturated through and through with the spirit of prayer."
20. A pastor on the island of Lewis, off the coast of Scotland, had been praying with some of his men for several months, asking for an outpouring of the Spirit of God And then God came down and revival broke out.
21. There was great revival that started down on Fulton Street, right here in NYC back in 1857 when a soulwinning layman got burdened to pray.

Others joined him and God moved in a remarkable way.

22. In Jonah chapter 1, Jonah is the Prodigal Prophet.

But now in chapter 2, he is the Praying Prophet.

God cannot do much with a prodigal prophet, but

He can use a praying prophet (2:1-10).

23. Jonah was in the belly of the whale. He realized his situation was desperate. The problem with most church people today is they do not realize their situation is desperate. Parents are losing their children to the devil. Don't you think it's time to get serious with God?

24. "Then Jonah prayed..." (2:1). He got serious with God.

II. THE REVIVAL CAME WHEN THEY HEARD GOD'S WARNING

1. God told Jonah, "Preach unto it the preaching that I bid thee" (3:2). Jonah was the Prodigal Prophet (chap. 1), and then he was the Praying Prophet (chap. 2), and in chapter 3 he is the Preaching Prophet.
2. Jonah was to preach the message God gave him. If more preachers were doing that today our country would not be such a mess.
3. Most preachers are not preaching against sin any more. The revival came when they heard God's warning. The warning was clear -- "Yet forty days, and Nineveh shall be overthrown" (3:4b).
4. The forty day "grace period" implies God was giving them time to repent.
5. There are many warnings in the Bible. We have a responsibility to tell sinners about them.
6. Psalm 9:17 says, "The wicked shall be turned into hell, and all the nations that forget God."
7. Amos 4:12 says, "Prepare to meet thy God."
8. Hebrews 9:27 says, "And as it is appointed unto men once to die, but after this the judgment."
9. Preachers (and all soulwinning Christians) must warn sinners to flee from the wrath to come.
10. Jonah preached the judgment of God (Jonah 3:4). Our Lord said, "The men of Nineveh...repented at the preaching of Jonah" (Matt. 12:41).
11. There will be no repentance without strong preaching.
12. The apostle Paul told Timothy, "Preach the Word; be instant in season, out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort with all longsuffering

- and doctrine. For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine; but after their own lusts shall they heap to themselves teachers, having itching ears" (II Tim. 4:2, 3).
13. Isaiah 58:1 says, "Cry aloud, spare not, lift up thy voice like a trumpet, and shew my people their transgression, and the house of Jacob their sins."
 14. There is preaching that gets the right results and there is preaching that gets the wrong results.
 15. A few years ago, the president of a 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."
 16. In an article in the Baptist Press, Paige Patterson said, "Anemic pulpits create anemic churches." He was referring specifically to the steady decline in Southern Baptist baptisms and membership.
 17. Patterson said, "Cultural relevance has led many churches to lose the holiness of God and a thirst to be like God."
 18. 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.

III. THE REVIVAL CAME WHEN THEY BELIEVED GOD (3:5).

1. The key word here is "believed" (3:5). The people of Nineveh "believed God." Sadly, most of the people in America do not believe God.
2. Consider the ten commandments. The third commandment is, "Thou shalt not take the name of the LORD thy God in vain; for the LORD will not hold him guiltless that taketh his name in vain" (Exodus 20:7).
3. Yet everywhere you go you hear people taking God's name in vain, using it as a curse-word, and dragging it through the dirt. One of our members told me she corrected a coworker for taking God's name in vain, and the coworker defended herself by saying, "That's the Old Testament."
4. It is in the New Testament where we read that our Lord taught His disciples to pray He said, "After this manner therefore pray ye: Our Father which art in heaven, Hallowed be thy name" (Matt. 6:9). Psalm 111:9 says, "Holy and reverend is His name."

5. Most people today do not believe God. Our Lord said, "But I say unto you, That every idle word that men shall speak, they shall give account thereof in the day of judgment" (Matthew 12:36).
6. And yet all we hear are idle words, foolish words, vulgar words, dirty words, deceitful words, etc.
7. People sit like zombies in front of their televisions and computer screens listening and watching foolishness and wickedness.
8. What about the seventh commandment? "Thou shalt not commit adultery" (Exodus 20:14). Hebrews 13:4 says, "Marriage is honourable in all, and the bed undefiled: but whoremongers and adulterers God will judge."
9. God will judge all whoremongers and adulterers and fornicators and homosexuals and pornographers and all lewd and filthy sinners.
10. We are a nation full of adulterers. It is difficult to get accurate statistics on adultery because adulterers are liars. However, the statistics on couples living together without being married, illegitimate births, abortion, and divorce are very high.
11. The prophet Jeremiah said, "They were as fed horses in the morning: every one neighed after his neighbour's wife. Shall I not visit for these things? saith the LORD: and shall not my soul be avenged on such a nation as this?" (Jeremiah 5:8, 9).
12. The Bible has many warnings about immorality, lying, and stealing, and many other wicked sins, but most people ignore the Word of God.
13. Most people do not believe God.
14. One of my favorite verses is Acts 27:25. The apostle Paul told the men on the ship, "Wherefore, sirs, be of good cheer: for I believe God, that it shall be even as it was told me."
15. Most people do not believe what God says about heaven and hell, salvation, and damnation. Sadly, they find out too late that God's Word is true.
16. The king of Nineveh believed God, and he told the people to "cry mightily unto God: yea, let them turn every one from his evil way" (3:8).
17. "Who can tell if God will turn and repent, and turn away from his fierce anger, that we perish not?" (3:9).

CONCLUSION:

1. I believe it will soon be all over for America unless God sends revival. Some people say America is too wicked for revival. They say sin is too rampant and the apostasy is too deep.

2. I understand why they say that, but I do not believe that.
Remember the city of Nineveh was a very wicked city (Jonah 1:2; 3:8).
3. We are at a crossroads today, and God has given us a choice.
Beloved, it is either revival or ruin. The choice is ours (Jonah 3:9, 10).