

INTRODUCTION

It has been my honor to fill this pulpit, or should I say this stool on dozens of occasions. But this is the first time I've ever been given an assignment. Most of you know that our pastor has been preaching through a series of messages in the Minor Prophets and he has asked me to continue the series with a message from the book of Jonah.

A third grade teacher was teaching her class about the fish kingdom. She told her class that it's not possible for a fish to be large enough for someone to live inside it. Johnny raised his hand and said, "Oh, yes ma'am. What about Jonah? He lived in the body of a great fish for three days and three nights." The teacher said, "Well Johnny, I'm sorry. That's not true. That's just a myth. It's a fairy tale. It didn't really happen." And Johnny boldly said, "Oh, yes it did! And when I get to heaven I'll ask Jonah." His teacher said, "Well, what if Jonah didn't go to heaven?" Johnny said, "Well then, you ask him."

Perhaps you can relate to the Sunday school teacher telling her students about the story of Jonah and afterwards she said, "Now boys and girls, what did we learn from the story of Jonah?" A little girl raised her hands and said, "We learned that people make whales sick." another little boy raised his hand and said, "We learned that you can't keep a good man down." All those things are true but the story of Jonah is so much more than a fish story.

The story of Jonah is a true account of how God used a single man to spark a national revival. In Jonah chapter one, we read how the word of the Lord instructs Jonah to go to Nineveh and proclaim God's word to the city. Nineveh was the capital of the Assyrian Empire, a wicked and godless city ruled by a wicked and godless king. Jonah did not want to go to Nineveh. He didn't even *like* those Ninevites. Instead, Jonah boarded a ship going in the opposite direction to flee the presence of the Lord. Just in case you've ever tried that, Psalm 139 says there's nowhere we can go to flee from his presence. So God caused a great storm to rise up on the sea and all of the sailors cried out to their gods, with a little "g." Meanwhile, Jonah was asleep in the hull of the boat, ignorant of the crisis around him. The sailors cast lots to see who was responsible for the calamity and the lot fell on Jonah. To save the ship and the sailors, Jonah was thrown into the sea and the sea instantly became calm. God caused a great fish to swallow Jonah.

There is nothing in scripture that says it was a whale but it wasn't a crappie, that's for sure. Do I really believe it happened? Yes I do, because if I can't believe what Jonah chapter one tells me, I can't believe what John 3:16 tells me.

Jonah lived in the body of the whale for three days and three nights. And there, covered in seaweed and kelp, chapter one tells us Jonah repented of his sin. He repented of his negligence and commits to obey God. And with that, God performed a divine Heimlich maneuver on the fish and it spat Jonah out on dry ground which brings us to chapter three, the very heart of the message.

Jonah 3:1-10. "Then the word of the Lord came to Jonah a second time: 'Go to the great city of Nineveh and proclaim to it the message I give you.' Jonah obeyed the word of the Lord and went to Nineveh. Now Nineveh was a very important city—a visit required

three days. [Another translation says it took three days to walk across it] On the first day, Jonah started into the city. He proclaimed: 'Forty more days and Nineveh will be overturned.' The Ninevites believed God. They declared a fast, and all of them, from the greatest to the least, put on sackcloth. When the news 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. Then he issued a proclamation in Nineveh:

'By the decree of the king and his nobles: Do not let any man or beast, herd or flock, taste anything; do not let them eat or drink. But let man and beast be covered with sackcloth. Let everyone call urgently on God. Let them give up their evil ways and their violence. Who knows? God may yet relent and with compassion turn from his fierce anger so that we will not perish.'

When God saw what they did and how they turned from their evil ways he had compassion and did not bring upon them the destruction he had threatened."

The title of the message today is "High Noon at Nineveh: The Spark of Revival." Conservative theologians from Swindoll to Scofield say the revival in Nineveh was one of the greatest revivals in world history. Imagine that—a wicked, pagan land poised to experience God's judgment and they repent from the greatest to the least, from the king to the peasant, from the CEO to the janitor. And God showed his mercy and his loving kindness.

Our pastor has been saying that what God said through the Minor Prophets he says not only to individuals but also to nations. And we are looking to see how these things apply to America in principle. Why did that revival occur? Because one man of God who was going in the wrong direction turned around and got on God's agenda.

David Jeremiah wrote a great book entitled, *I Never Thought I'd See the Day*. Did you ever think you'd see the day in America when sin was so elevated, righteousness so ridiculed, that Jesus and the Word of God was so scoffed at? Did you ever think you'd see the day when marriage and the family were in such crises? Did you ever think you'd see the day when every kind of thought and every kind of behavior is tolerated except Christian thought and behavior? And many of you would say today that what we need in our personal lives, in our home, in our church and in our country is a God filled spiritual awakening, a God sent revival. If it happened in Jonah's day can it happen today?

There's nothing like a good message with three points and believe me, this is nothing like one. I want to share with you four things today that we see from the story of Jonah about how revival comes.

I. GOD'S PEOPLE MUST BE RESPONSIVE

What was delaying revival in Nineveh? Was it the actions of the king? Was it the culture all around them? Revival was delayed because it was waiting for the obedience of Jonah. There are two things that were called to that we must be responsive to.

A. The command to pray

“If my people, who are called by my name, will humble themselves and pray and seek my face and turn from their wicked ways, then will I hear from heaven and will forgive their sin and will heal their land.” (2 Chronicles 7:14). Revival is not dependent on what’s going on in Washington. Revival is not dependent upon Hollywood or the liberal media. Revival is not dependent on what’s going on in the education system or the corporate world. Don’t point your fingers at the world; the world is just acting like itself.

Three men were discussing the proper position for prayer. One man said, “I think the proper position is prostrate on the ground before God.” Another man said, “I disagree, I think the proper position is hands extended toward heaven as an adoring child.” The third man said, “Well I don’t know about either of those things. I’ve done my best praying stuck upside down in a well.” Have you ever noticed that desperate times require desperate measures? The great preacher of a generation ago, Vance Havner, said, “The problem is the situation is desperate but God’s people are not.” As long as we are content to live without revival we will. But God has called us to pray, he’s called us to humble ourselves and cry out to God.

Have you ever wondered what could possibly amaze God? What captures his attention and causes him to do a double-take? The book of Isaiah tells us. Would you look at it on the overhead please? Isaiah says this, “The Lord looked and was displeased that there was no justice. He saw that there was no one, he was appalled that there was no one to intervene.” (Isaiah 59:15-16). Imagine a nation like Judah crumbling in moral decay, in spiritual poverty, with no one crying out to God. God was astonished.

Most of you recall the occasion when Jesus drove the money changers from the temple. We think it was because of what was happening there. And that’s true. I think it was equally because of what was not happening there. Jesus said, “My house will be called a house of prayer.” (Mark 11:17). Jesus elevated prayer to its utmost position among the people of God. Have we forgotten that the church was born at Pentecost? Not when someone was preaching but when someone was praying. And the mission movement began in Acts 13, not as a result of a business meeting, but a prayer meeting. We dare not neglect it.

Many of you have seen the “Prayer: America’s only hope” signs around Tyler. That’s just partially true. All world religions pray. I think the correct statement is “Jesus is America’s only hope.” It is through Christ alone that we can come confidently to the throne of grace and ask what we will. We are commanded to pray. God’s people must be responsive. Before there can be revival in America there must be revival of prayer in the church. Are you ready?

B. A call to proclaim

Not only are we commanded to pray but we are called to proclaim. There would have been no revival in Nineveh without the proclamation of Jonah. Likewise, we are called to speak the truth in love. “Let your conversation be always full of grace, seasoned with salt, so that you may know how to answer everyone.” (Colossians 4:6). I’m not a professional preacher. I work for Morton Salt. Did you know if there are more uses for salt than any substance on earth beside water? Salt

is used in every facet of life, from the chemical industry to the pharmaceutical industry, but it's best known as a flavor enhancer. When something has salt in it, you know it. God says that's how our speech is to be in a culture that's lost its way. Our land has lost its moral compass and someone has to speak the truth. My son Isaac's favorite verse has become one of mine. "But if I say, 'I will not mention him or speak any more in his name,' his word is in my heart like a fire, a fire shut up in my bones. I am weary of holding it in; indeed, I cannot." (Jeremiah 20:9). For a land that's lost its moral compass for the people of God, the word of God should be like a volcano erupting up in and through us. We are called to proclaim and to speak the truth in love.

Many of you know the Chick-fil-a corporation and Dan Cathy were persecuted and publicly ostracized for taking a moral stand on marriage and the sanctity of marriage. In response, Franklin Graham said, "We're not in a cultural war, it's a spiritual battle and the church of Jesus Christ within America must wake up out of its slumber and stand up and contend for biblical truth within our society that is increasingly turning its back on God's truth." Persecution is coming. Christians in America are slowly being silenced for their faith in Jesus. We dare not be silent. For revival to come to American like it did in Nineveh, God's people must be responsive. We're commanded to pray. We're called to proclaim.

II. GOD'S PLAN REQUIRES REPENTANCE

Bill Graham recalled the occasion when he preached his very first sermon. It was on a Sunday night at a church in Florida. Young Billy Graham had four, 30-minute sermons in his repertoire. He had them all memorized perfectly. That night when he got up to preach his selected sermon, his knees were shaking, kind of like mine do. His heart was beating. Sweat was breaking out on his brow. He launched into his chosen message and it seemed to be over just as quickly as it began. So he moved right over to sermon number two. It seemed to be over quickly too. He moved into sermon number three and then sermon number four. He preached all four sermons in his repertoire. He sat down and looked at his watch; eight minutes had passed. Billy said to himself, "Is this what great preachers are made of?"

Jonah repented of a sin; he obeyed God's call. He went to Nineveh and delivered a one-line message: "In 40 days and Nineveh will be overthrown." In the Hebrew language it's only five words but the results were historic. God's spirit fell, a revival swept across the land and people repented from the greatest to the least. Their repentance was so great, the king sent out a decree. "I want everybody to put on sackcloth and ashes." Sackcloth was an outward symbol of an inner repentance. He even said, "I want you to put sackcloth and ashes on your animals." The cows, the mules, the camels, the pet dog Fido—everything had sackcloth and ashes on. It was to touch every area of their lives.

Another great revival occurred on the island of Wales. It was called the Welch Revival of 1904. It swept the island because the church was committed to pray. A man named Evan Roberts was committed to proclaim. The economy and the power of Wales was driven by coal. The coal was moved by mule train. The mules had been trained to respond to four letter vulgar words. So instead of "Giddy Up" or "Whoa!" whether than, giddy up and whoa, they responded to four letter language. During the revival the mule skinnners got saved and their language got saved.

And the coal industry in Wales shut down because the mules didn't know how to respond until they could get trained to a new language. In a sense, the mules put on sackcloth and ashes.

Aren't you eager, desperate, to see revival that touches every area of our lives? From the church house to the White House it requires repentance, turning from our sin, confessing our sin and it begins with the house of God.

In the 1970s, a Latter Day prophet named Leonard Ravenhill wrote these words in his book, *America is Too Young to Die*, "At the moment we are a broken nation. Broken financially, morally and spiritually. If we were half as spiritual as we think we are, we would be going to the house of the Lord in sackcloth, with a hand full of furnace ashes to anoint our unworthy heads." As long as we're content to live without revival we will. It begins with repentance. Repentance is the prerequisite for revival.

In the book of Acts we find these words. "Repent, then, and turn to God, so that your sins may be wiped out, that times of refreshing may come from the Lord." (Acts 3:19). Don't you long for those times of refreshing sweeping across our land, beginning with the church? It begins with repentance. In Nineveh, God's people must be responsive. In Nineveh, God's plan requires repentance.

III. GOD'S PASSION IS FOR RESTORATION

As Paul Harvey used to say, "And that's the rest of the story." You can read it in chapter four at your convenience. After this great revival in Nineveh, Jonah went outside the city limits, sat down and had a one-man pity party. Jonah really didn't want Nineveh to repent. He didn't like them anyway. That's why he fled in the opposite direction. Jonah wanted Nineveh to experience God's judgment, not God's mercy. He wanted them to experience God's wrath, not his forgiveness. And so he sat down and whined about it. So God decided to have a teachable moment to get Jonah's attention.

It was a hot, miserable day in Nineveh. Jonah was hot, so God caused a plant to grow, a huge plant to create shade over Jonah's head. Now, don't find that unusual—if God can raise up a storm, raise up a giant fish, he can raise up a plant. Jonah was happy about the shade. But then God raised up a worm, because if he can raise up a storm, raise up a great fish, and raise up a plant, he can raise up a worm. He caused the worm to crawl up that plant, and eat it until the plant died. And Jonah was very sad about that. God said, "Jonah, you sure are fickle. You have compassion for this plant but you have no compassion for this great city that doesn't know its right hand from its left."

God's passion is for restoration. I confess, sometimes I'm just like Jonah. I see the scoffers of Jesus. I see the enemies of the cross. I see those that elevate evil over good and I say, sometimes in my spirit, "Sic 'em, Jesus! Sic 'em!" But Peter tells us, "The Lord is not slow in keeping his promise, as some understand slowness. Instead, he is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance." (2 Peter 3:9).

God's passion is not judgment, his passion is restoration and right now he's longing to restore a people and a land to himself. Let me explain it this way. Most of you are familiar with our Presidential seal. It is the emblem on the President's podium when he speaks. It's on Air Force One when he travels. The Presidential seal, like most of our national emblems, is filled with symbolism. The bald eagle, the symbol of our country, holds an olive branch in one talon and 13 arrows representing the 13 colonies in the other. Notice the face of the eagle is turned towards the olive branch, representing peace. Our desire, our heart, our longing is for peace. But did you know that prior to and during World War II the seal was different? Prior to and before World War II, the eagle was facing the arrows, representing war. Our passion is for peace but we must be ready for either. Let me make the biblical analogy. I don't think I'm wrong in saying that God has two seats in heaven. He has what the Bible calls the Mercy Seat. According to the Old Testament, the Mercy Seat covered the Ark of the Covenant and that's where the blood of the sacrificial lamb was sprinkled, representing the atoning blood of Jesus for our sin.

Regarding the Mercy Seat, God said, "I'll meet you there." His heart is for restoration. His heart is for forgiveness and mercy. But there's another seat in heaven called the Judgment Seat. And God's Word says we must all stand before the judgment seat of Christ. (2 Corinthians 5:10). And the day is coming, I think soon, when God will rise up from the Mercy Seat and he'll go over and sit on the Judgment Seat and then folks, it's high noon. It's all over. Right now, he's longing for none to perish but all to come to repentance. His passion is for restoration and we must pray for God's mercy before, as a country, we get God's judgment.

IV. GOD'S POWER INVOLVES A RESURRECTION

Suppose you are walking along the Mediterranean Sea and a whale floats up and spat Jonah out on the dry ground right in front of you. He's covered in seaweed and kelp. And he begins to proclaim, "40 days and Nineveh will be overthrown." He's like one alive from the dead. He's like one that's come back to life. Pretty soon, crowds gather and hear his message. The media gathers and hears his message. Before long, the king comes and hears his message. The more peculiar the messenger, the more powerful the message.

Several hundred years pass and Jesus says these words, "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. The men on Nineveh will stand up at the judgment with this generation and condemn it; for they repented at the preaching of Jonah, and now one greater than Jonah is here." (Matthew 12:40-41). Jonah was looking forward. He was not a resurrection but he was pointing toward a resurrection when Jesus was three days and three nights in the belly of the earth.

You know what the hope is for America today? It is a redeemed people filled with resurrection power. That's what the hope is for America today. "And if the spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead is living in you, he who raised Christ from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through his Spirit, who lives in you." (Romans 8:11). And if you're here this morning and you're saved and you're redeemed and you're born again, you have resurrection power in you.

Conservative estimates tell us there are a hundred million people today professing to be born again, evangelical Christians. Where's our impact? Imagine a hundred million Jonahs walking around in a culture, in the marketplace, in the government, in the schools, in the health clubs, in the neighborhoods. A hundred million people filled with resurrection power as though alive from the dead. That's what the world is waiting to see and that's the hope for America today.

CONCLUSION

The story is told of an occasion when John Wesley was very depressed from the burdens of the ministry. One morning, he came down to breakfast with a forlorn look on his face. Mrs. Wesley looked at him and excused herself from the breakfast table. She went upstairs and put on the black dress she reserved for funerals. She came back down and John Wesley said, "Who died?" Mrs. Wesley says, "Well, God did. Didn't you hear?" Wesley said, "You're speaking like a foolish woman." And Mrs. Wesley said, "Well, I see no evidence in you today that he's alive." Could that be true of you and true in me?

At the preaching of Jonah, four things had to happen. God's people had to be responsive, God's plan requires repentance, God's passion is for restoration and God's power involves a resurrection and God did a powerful work in Nineveh. The question is, can God do that in America today? Of course he can, but the question is will He? That depends on you and me.

Most of you know that prior to December 17, 1941, America was a bystander in a great World War. We were sitting on the sidelines until the Japanese imperial navy attacked our fleet in Pearl Harbor. History tells us the Japanese attack was orchestrated and led by Admiral Yamamoto, whom after the attack, said, "I fear all we have done is awaken a sleeping giant and it will cost us greatly. We have filled him with terrible resolve."

Remember how Jonah was asleep in the belly of the ship while the crisis was looming about him and God had to stir him from his slumber? I pray that God stirs us to pray and proclaim Jesus says, "On this rock I will build my church, and the gates of Hades will not overcome it." (Matthew 16:18) Are you ready for that? I am. I'm recalling that chorus from that old hymn that says, "Lord, send a revival. Lord, send a revival. Lord, send a revival and let it begin with me."

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For the Joy...
Pastor David Dykes