

# **“Revival and the God of Grace” - Jonah Part 7**

## **Jonah 3:1-10**

~ Delivered at Central Baptist Church on November 5, 2017 by Pastor Barton Priebe

### **INTRODUCTION**

- **(SHOW SLIDE 1)** Please open your Bibles to Jonah 3.
- When revival comes individuals are transformed. When revival comes society is transformed. In everyday life the word “revival” simply means new life where there was little or no life. It is new vigor and health.
  - In Christian terms, a revival happens when God, by His Holy Spirit, brings new spiritual life to his people and to society. Where we were once just going through motions or ignoring him, there is new vigor and life.
    - To paraphrase one definition I’ve heard: Revival is sleeping Christians waking up. It is religious people getting truly converted. And it is hardcore skeptics coming to Christ. One thing is clear: nothing is the same. People and society are transformed.
- In the early 1900’s God raised up many men to preach the Bible throughout the nations of Wales. A tremendous revival broke out. One fifth of all the country was converted. Thousands of churches were built.
  - During those times there were tremendous problems going on with the miners. For instance, every mine had a shed where the tools were kept. But for years the workers had been stealing from the sheds. When revival broke out the managers started to sponsor Bible studies and times of prayer for their workers. They did this on company time. Thousands of labourers became Christians. And do you know what happened?
    - Most mines had to build five new sheds to store all the tools that the workers were bringing back.
- When revival comes individuals are transformed. When revival comes society is transformed. One of the greatest revivals in the history of the world took place in Nineveh, the capital of Assyria.
  - The Jewish author Hayyim Lewis describes what these people were like before revival came: ***“The Assyrians were the Nazi storm-troopers of the ancient world. They were the pitiless power-crazed foe. They showed no quarter in battle, uprooting entire peoples in their fury for conquest. They extinguished the Northern Kingdom of Israel...For Jonah, Nineveh, then, was no ordinary city; it carried doom-laden, tragic memories, it stood as a symbol of evil incarnate.”***<sup>1</sup>
    - And then suddenly, in a few weeks this entire society was transformed. We read that from the greatest to the least they all turned away from their evil ways and violence.
- On this Remembrance Day week we are thinking of our nation. Oh how I long for our nation to experience this. I long to see God move in Victoria in powerful ways. I long to see us as a church awakened. On a personal level, do you not yearn for this?
  - Don’t you ever think that there must be more? Don’t you ever grow weary of your own heart – how cold it can be, how dry your prayer life is, how easily you love movies, sports, recreation, family, work and yet how little you love God? Do you not see a need for revival in your own heart?
- Well, how do we get it? How can we know personal revival? How can we know citywide revival? Only the Holy Spirit can bring life but from our side there is one thing that we are called to do: repent.
  - If there was ever an old fashioned religious word that has fallen out of modern use, it is this word “repentance”.
    - No one talks about repentance anymore. Could this be why we know so little personal and corporate revival? I think so.

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<sup>1</sup> Cited in Rose-Mary Nixon, *The Message of Jonah*, 63.

- So in order that we might experience revival on a personal level, church level, city-wide and national level, let's develop this message by asking three questions about repentance.
  - First, why should we repent? Second, how do we repent? Third, how does God respond to our repentance?

## WHY SHOULD WE REPENT?

- **(SHOW SLIDE 2)** First then, why should we repent?
  - The simple answer is that **(SHOW SLIDE 3)** we must repent because it is the only way to find freedom from the guilt of our sin.
- Is this not the entire picture of Nineveh here? Look at verse 4. **READ 4b** – *Jonah began to go into the city, going a day's journey. And he called out, "Yet forty days, and Nineveh shall be overthrown!"* Why was God coming to overturn this city? God tells us back in chapter 1:2. **READ 2** – *go to Nineveh, that great city, and call out against it, for their evil has come up before me.*
  - And notice that no one in Nineveh is trying to justify themselves or deny they are guilty. They all admit it. The king admits it. In verse 3:8 he says, *"Let everyone turn from his evil way and from the violence that is in his hands."*
    - The Ninevites saw clearly that if they kept going in their sin it would lead to judgement. The only way to find freedom was to repent.
- It is the same with us. If you want to know revival and the life and freedom that comes with it, you have to deal with your guilt through repentance. But this is precisely what people do not want to do. I think the primary reason no one talks about repentance anymore is because it assumes that we are guilty of something. And we don't like this concept of guilt anymore.
  - Some people will say, *"There is no such thing as guilt. We don't sin. We make mistakes. All this talk of guilt is unhealthy. It fills people with negativity and self-hatred."*
    - Other people say, *"This is precisely why I don't want anything to do with religion. I don't want to feel all this false guilt."*
- But friends, think this through for a few moments. It is impossible to get rid of the concept of guilt.
  - If you want to say there is no such thing as guilt then you have to be willing to say that no one does anything wrong. Do you really want to say there is no such thing as right and wrong? Of course not. We all believe certain things are wrong.
    - But as soon as you say that there is such thing as right and wrong then by necessity you are saying that we are at times guilty of that which is wrong.
- Once you admit that there is such thing as guilt then obviously the next thing is to clearly distinguish between false guilt and true guilt.
  - It is, of course, very possible to feel false guilt, like a child who feels like it is their fault that their parents got divorced.
    - The way to deal with that is to lovingly show them that this it is not their fault and they should not feel guilty.
- But is that how we deal with true guilt? Not at all. Suppose your friend comes to you and says, *"I just have to get this off my chest and tell you that I stole a significant amount of money from my work."* Do you then say, *"Stop all this negative self-hating talk?"* Do you say, *"You don't need to feel guilty for that because guilt is an medieval religious way of thinking?"* No. You say, *"Your guilt is real. Unless you fess up to this, your guilt will eat you alive. The only way you will ever know peace and fullness of life again is to confess your guilt."*
  - So you see, Christianity is very realistic. It says there is such thing as guilt, though not all guilt is true. It says that if you deny your guilt and refuse to repent of it, your sins will bring destruction on you.
    - And so the Bible says that if you want to know personal revival, if you want to know freedom and joy, then you there is one absolute prerequisite – you must repent.
- When Jesus began to preach about the coming kingdom of God – how God's rule and reign are breaking

in on this world – what was Jesus’ message? Mark says all his preaching could be distilled to this one phrase: **“repent, for the kingdom of heaven is near.”**

- When Jesus ascended back to heaven he commanded his disciples saying that, **“repentance and forgiveness of sins will be preached in his name to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem.”**
- When the crowds heard Peter on the day of Pentecost tell about how God had raised Jesus from the dead and made him Lord over all things the people were cut to the heart and said, **“What should we do?”** Peter answered: Repent.
  - When Paul stood before the white collared intellectuals of Athens he spoke of how people have always turned away from God to worship idols. He then said, **“In the past God overlooked such ignorance, but now he commands all people everywhere to repent.”**
- Oh yes, repentance is old fashioned. It is old fashioned like the law of gravity. From the beginning, the Bible says that until you repent God has nothing to say to you. Until you repent, you will never find freedom, peace, or comfort. Until you stop justifying your sin or denying that you have guilt, you can never know revival.
  - So we must repent because it is the only way to find freedom from the guilt of our sin.

## HOW TO REPENT

- Assuming now that like the Ninevites you see your need to repent, we need to turn now to ask the second question: **(SHOW SLIDE 4)** how do we repent?
  - Let’s come back to the story of Jonah. There is some serious tension in this story. Knowing how violent the Ninevites were, how powerful they were, and how much they hated Jews, what will happen to Jonah when he preaches this message of destruction to them?
- Will a riot start like when Paul preached in Lystra and Ephesus? Will they try to throw Jonah off a cliff like they did when Jesus preached in his hometown? Will they stone Jonah to death like the Jewish leaders did to Stephen when he preached God’s message in Jerusalem?
  - Their response is shocking. Look at verse 5. **READ 5a** – **“The people of Nineveh believed God.”** It is then that we have a classic instance of corporate repentance.
    - We can see here three marks of true repentance. Learn from these three things how you can repent in order that you might know personal revival.

## TRUE REPENTANCE GRIEVES OVER SIN

- **(SHOW SLIDE 5)** First, true repentance is expressed in grieving over sin. Look at verse 5. **READ 5** – **They called for a fast and put on sackcloth, from the greatest of them to the least of them.** In II Cor 7:9 Paul writes of two types of sorrow – one being godly and the other being worldly.
  - Worldly sorrow is when you are grieved over the *consequences* of your sin but not over the *fact* of your sin. How many times when I was a kid did I cry because I got caught doing something wrong and got disciplined? But more often than naught my tears were over the *consequences* of my sin, not over the *fact* of my sin.
    - Judas mourned greatly over his betrayal of Christ to the point that he committed suicide. But he was not repentant. Pharaoh was greatly troubled over the plagues but had no concern for his sin.
- True repentance feels sorrow primarily because sin offends God. Even if there was no such thing as hell, or a bad conscience, or bad consequences, true repentance grieves because you have betrayed God.
  - We can see all of this in the Ninevites.
- First, they called for a fast. In the Bible one of the purposes of fasting is to express penitence. Interestingly they even deny all the animals food.
  - Look at verse 7. **READ 7-8a** – **And he issued a proclamation and published through Nineveh, “By the decree of the king and his nobles: Let neither man nor beast, herd nor flock, taste anything. Let them not feed or drink water, but let man and beast be covered with sackcloth...**
    - It seems that they want to express absolute contrition. No one is allowed to enjoy

themselves.

- Second, they wore sackcloth.
  - **READ 5** – *They called for a fast and put on sackcloth, from the greatest of them to the least of them.* Sackcloth was coarse or rough clothing, like a burlap sack. Only the poorest of people would wear them. This also expressed humility, lament, and grief.
- Third, the king himself set an example by sitting in ashes. **READ 6** – *The word reached the king of Nineveh, and he arose from his throne, removed his robe, covered himself with sackcloth, and sat in ashes.*
  - So should we do this today? Perhaps. When nations have been threatened by war and destruction they have done things like this. The point however, is that true repentance expresses itself in sorrow over sin.
    - If you want to know true revival it would be good to take a day and fast, to search your heart and confess your sins. Write them out on a piece of paper. Be specific.
      - So true repentance first of all shows itself in grieving over sin.

## TRUE REPENTANCE TURNS AWAY FROM SIN

- **(SHOW SLIDE 6)** Second, true repentance is expressed in turning from sin. J.I. Packer writes, *“Repentance is a change of mind issuing in a change of life.”*
  - Look at verse 8. **READ 8** – *Let everyone turn from his evil way and from the violence that is in his hands.* Everyone knew about the Ninevite’s evil ways and violence.
    - The king does not justify it but calls people to turn away from such behaviours.
- Again, this is how you can tell if repentance is true. Plenty of people in a desperate moment will say, *“God if you get me out of this I will stop doing this sin and that sin.”* But then they go back to normal life forgetting their resolution. The puritan Thomas Watson says it so well: **(SHOW SLIDE 7)** *“Trust not to a passionate resolution; it is raised in a storm and will die in a calm.”*<sup>2</sup>
  - True repentance turns away from sin. This does not mean you never struggle with it again but it means you turn your back on it. As Isaiah 55:7 says, *“Let the wicked forsake his way and the evil man his thoughts.”*
    - How can you know if there is true repentance in your life? Answer: you are not the same. You have taken drastic actions. If a person had walked into Nineveh 45 days later they would have found a completely different city.
- So what actions do you need to take to turn your back on sin? Are there people you need to get right with? Are you right with your spouse? Are their hidden sins that need to be put away? Are there wrongs that you need to make right?
  - Things that you have stolen that you need to make restitution for? Lies that you have kept that need to be made truthful?
    - True repentance is expressed in actual turning from sin. What action do you need to take?

## TRUE REPENTANCE TURNS TOWARD GOD

- **(SHOW SLIDE 8)** Third and finally, true repentance culminates in a turning toward God.
  - It is not enough to just turn away from sin. Repentance is turning away from sin to God seeking his forgiveness and grace. Look again at the king’s decree in verse 8. **READ 8** – *“let them call out mightily to God.”*
    - Perhaps the best description of this comes from I Thes 4. Paul describes the Thessalonians this way. He says, *“you turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God.”* The prodigal son did not just leave his sinful lifestyle; he turned back home to his father. In the same way true repentance turns away from sin toward Jesus, seeking

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<sup>2</sup> Thomas Watson, *The Doctrine of Repentance*, 16.

the grace that He offers.

- So true repentance grieves over sin, turns away from sin, and turns toward God.

## HOW DOES GOD RESPOND TO OUR REPENTANCE

- So now we have seen why we need to repent and we have learned how to repent. But now we come to the third question: **(SHOW SLIDE 9)** how does God respond to our repentance?
  - What we see is that **(SHOW SLIDE 10)** God's heart is moved to show grace when we truly repent. Look at verse 10. **READ 10** – *When God saw what they did, how they turned from their evil way, God relented of the disaster that he had said he would do to them, and he did not do it.*
    - Surely the Ninevites had hoped that God would respond this way or they would not have humbled themselves. That is why the king muses in verse 9, ***“Who knows? God may turn and relent and turn from his fierce anger, so that we may not perish.”***
- The mere fact that God had not wiped them out but had issued a warning before destroying them was enough for them to hope for grace.
  - When BC Hydro sends you a letter that says your power is being turned off unless you pay your bill, that warning implies that if you pay the bill the threat will not be carried out.
    - In the same way the Ninevites saw a glimpse of hope in God's warning to them.
- And friends, how can we not also repent when we know so much more than they do about the grace of God. Their knowledge was so limited and yet they repented. We know far better than they do that the God of heaven and earth is a God of grace for he has given us His Son, Jesus Christ.
  - The fact that God would send Jesus into the world means He is seeking us out. That Jesus would teach us and warn us and explain to us the way to be saved continues to show how gracious God is. And then we know how gracious God is because Jesus voluntarily went to the cross where he died for our sins.

## CONCLUSION

- Do you want revival in your life? Then repent. But how do you know you will find a God who will receive you? Because Jesus, the true and better Jonah was God's sign to us that He is indeed a God of grace.
  - When the prostitute Mary Magdalene came and wept tears of repentance at Jesus' feet she found her sins forgiven.
  - To the thief on the cross who repented of his sins and sought Jesus' favour he heard the words, ***“Today you will be with me in paradise.”***
  - When the prodigal son turned away from his sins and in repentance said to his father, ***“I have sinned against heaven and against you”*** he barely finished his sentence before the Father grabbed him in a giant bear hug, kissed his face and called for a gigantic party to be thrown in honour of his son.
    - This is the God we serve. The God who says, ***“If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.”***
- Do you want revival in your life? Are you tired of the complete lack of greatness in your life? Do you want to know him more? Then repent before him. Take some time this week. Get a pen and paper. Ask the Holy Spirit to reveal to you where sin is blocking you. And then come in repentance before the God of grace.

## Prayer of Confession During Communion

- **(SHOW SLIDE 11)** Almighty God, we acknowledge and confess that we have sinned against you in thought, word, and deed; we have not loved you with all of our heart, soul, mind, and strength; we have not loved our neighbour as ourselves. Deepen within us our sorrow for the wrong we have done, and the good we have left undone. Lord, you are full of compassion and gracious, slow to anger, and plenteous in mercy; there is always forgiveness with you! Restore to us the joy of your salvation; bind up that which is broken, give light to our minds, strength to our wills, and rest to our souls. Speak to each of us, and let your word abide with us until it has wrought in us your holy will. Amen.