

Call to Obedience #276
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Jonah Yet Speaketh

By Reimar Schultze

There are Ninevehs for all of us.

I would like to share with you from the remarkable book of Jonah. Before I get into the details of this message, let me give you my general observation concerning God's message through Jonah.

Through this book, we learn that God has more trouble in getting his people to obey than in getting the world to be saved. God's biggest heartache is not the world, it is not Hollywood, nor is it the liquor industry. God's biggest heartache is his own people who are called by his own name. Now let me begin the story.

"Now the word of the LORD came unto Jonah the son of Amittai, saying, Arise, go to Nineveh, that great city, and cry against it; for their wickedness is come up before me" (Jonah 1:1–2).

Notice, first, that God is moved and touched and driven to righteous indignation when wickedness reaches a certain level. We see this first in the days of Noah. The wickedness of the world became so great—the idolatry, the adultery, the fornication, the evil imaginations—that God decided and decreed to destroy all of mankind except for the righteous man, Noah, and his family.

The second time that ungodliness reached an unbearable level for God was when the wickedness of Sodom and Gomorrah and the surrounding cities came before the Lord, and he was stirred again to righteous indignation to destroy those cities.

In the book of Jonah, we have the third case in the Bible where the wickedness of a particular city had reached such a level that God could not allow it to continue. However, observe that in all three instances cited, God made an effort at redemption before he would pour out his holy wrath.

In the case of Noah, God anointed this ship builder to preach for 120 years to save the world from the flood. In the case of Sodom, he shared his plan with Abraham and allowed Abraham to intercede for these cities to avert his angry judgment. In the case of Nineveh, he sent Jonah in order that God's mighty arm of divine retribution would be withheld. God does not want to destroy the people he created for his own glory—not a single one; not you nor me, no matter how wicked we have been. God loathes to unfurl his fury, to lose one single soul to the devil for ever and ever.

This is God's dilemma: his holiness demands retribution, his love cries for mercy. This all happens in the heart of God and, metaphorically speaking, it rips the heart of God apart. And your heart will be as the heart of God as you follow Jesus.

So then, rather than bringing destruction upon the city of Nineveh, God's first plan was to offer redemption to her people. This is God's standard procedure. God's love always precedes God's wrath; and when God's love is properly received, God's wrath will be averted.

Therefore, in the condition of a torn heart, God finds himself a man. He finds himself a prophet. He finds himself one of his chosen men, one of his called-out, ordained men of Israel, and he gives him the message to arise and go to Nineveh and preach to the people there that they might repent of their great evil and turn to the Lord.

Observe that in Jonah, we have a man who apparently, in the past, was willing to do everything that God told him to do. Otherwise, he would not have been called of God to be a prophet. Jonah had a record of obedience, of hearing and heeding. He was the kind of man who was willing to do everything that God told him to do—up to now. But with God's call for him to preach repentance to the people of Nineveh, God hit a brick wall in the heart of Jonah.

You are a servant of Jesus, a called one. You are a priest and a king in his glorious kingdom. Hallelujah! You have a record of obedience. But has God ever brought you to a brick wall, wanting you to break it down, but you absolutely refused? Have you ever told a friend or said to yourself: I am willing to do whatever God says except for this one thing? For example:

I cannot and will never forgive my father who abused me... I shall never sell my dream home and move away from it and all of my grandchildren to be part of some little fellowship church a thousand miles away... I shall never go into the ministry or the mission field... I shall never be part of a prayer meeting or usher or teach a Sunday school class or be a youth counselor... I shall never give up...

Well, think what it is that you love most—next to Jesus—that gives you the most pleasure? Are you willing to give it up? Indeed, if you are not willing to forsake it, it is proof that this one thing competes with your love to Jesus, and any further advance in your spiritual life will be frozen.

Go to Nineveh! Is there a Nineveh in your life that you are not willing to deal with? Oh, how many Ninevehs are there?

I firmly believe that God is calling his true servants from one Nineveh to another. This is the cross Jesus asked us to bear to be his disciples, and if we bear it, we shall receive a crown and sit with him in his throne (Rev. 3:21). Yes, if you go to the Ninevehs God sends you to, Jesus will share his throne with you. You will be a joint-heir to all he possesses from the whole universe to the streets of gold.

Oh, what a time God had getting Jonah to Nineveh!

Consider what stood on the other side of this brick wall: Go to Nineveh. On the other side of that brick wall stood hundreds of thousands of people ready to repent before God if Jonah would only crucify his flesh and break through that wall, and let God be God in his life.

What is there on the other side of the cross that Jesus is asking you to take up? Can it be told? Is it significant? Is it temporal or eternal? Go thou to Nineveh!

I am talking today to Jonahs, to people with a record of obedience and love for Jesus, who are facing a new call from heaven and, perhaps for the first time, they look for a ship that takes them to Tarshish rather than Nineveh.

Jonah's first mistake was to buy a ticket to Tarshish. The Bible says that "Jonah rose up to flee unto Tarshish from the presence of the LORD" (Jonah 1:3).

The moment we say "no" to God in any one area, we are in spiritual darkness, all the light we had before suddenly goes out. Don't ever, ever say "no" to God. The moment you do, you become one of the greatest fools on earth. Jonah rose up to flee from the Lord. The day before God called him, he knew that he could not flee from God. But now he did!

God said, "If I ascend up into heaven, thou art there: if I make my bed in hell, behold, thou art there. If I take the wings of the morning, and dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea; Even there shall thy hand lead me, and thy right hand shall hold me. If I say, Surely the darkness shall cover me; even the night shall be light about me. Yea, the darkness hideth not from thee; but the night shineth as the day: the darkness and the light are both alike to thee" (Ps. 139:8–12).

Jonah was a prophet; he knew the Psalms. He knew God—until now. But the moment he refused to go to Nineveh, he ceased knowing God. Ah, should people like this teach Sunday school classes or stand behind the pulpit or preach on radio or television?

Now, Jonah thought that he could flee from God's call and presence, that he could outrun God! He thought that if he left Israel, he would leave God's territory. Yet, it says that "The earth is the LORD's and the fulness thereof" (Ps. 24:1).

But as Jonah got into a ship for Tarshish, God sent a mighty tempest so that the ship was likely to be broken apart. When we don't obey God, when we don't go to our Ninevehs, we immediately become so blind that we cannot see that our disobedience puts dozens, hundreds, or thousands of people in jeopardy. The tempest brought distress, fear, and loss to all the sailors on board so that they began to pray to their god. This left only one man who was not praying—the prophet of God.

When we refuse to go to Nineveh, we stop praying, we lose our burden for prayer and prayer meetings. And if we do pray, our prayers will reach no further than the prayers of the Pharisees.

Whenever we don't obey God, we get into Pharisaical darkness where we become totally unaware what hurt, what agony, what distress, what disappointment we bring upon the church universal and to the heart of Jesus.

Can you see that, more often than not, saving the lost, even the most wicked people in the world, as the Ninevites were, is a much easier task for God than getting his own precious people to take up the cross and to keep taking it up?

Oh, my friend, behold the love and longsuffering of God for all people. Suddenly, God not only had wickedness and rebellion and spiritual darkness in Nineveh as his burden, but he found the same spirit of the Ninevites in the heart of his own servant, Jonah.

So, who is better? The men and women of God who refuse to go to Nineveh or the raw sinner who never heard a sermon on repentance but repents immediately when he hears the truth? What all does God have to do to get us where he wants us to go?

God had to send a storm.

God had to prepare a great fish.

God had to have that fish swallow a servant of God.

God had to bleach him and nearly drown him for three days before he could convince him to go to Nineveh.

Hallelujah! The Ninevites repented at the end of the first short sermon and became new creatures before God. But sad, sad, sad—Jonah goes down in history as a man who did not truly repent, and his diary closes with these terrifying words, "I do well to be angry, even unto death" (Jonah 4:9).

So, my friend, our greatest problem is not Hollywood or the liquor industry or the pornography industry or the liberals who control most of the news media. God's greatest problem is the people who are called by his own name, who have the stubbornness of a Jonah. Therefore, the key to revival is never anything other than this:

"If my people, which are called by my name, shall 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 Chron. 7:14).

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