

Call to Obedience #330
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www.schultze.org

Would the lot fall on you?

THE CHURCH AND THE WORLD

By Pastor Reimar A. C. Schultze

**“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.**

God has more trouble with the church than He does with the world. God's biggest heartache is not the world, it is not Hollywood, the liquor industry, gambling or pornography. God's biggest heartache is His own people who are called by His own name.

Notice first that God is moved, touched and driven to righteous indignation when wickedness reaches a certain level. There is a time when the cup of iniquity becomes full. This was the case with Noah's generation, with Sodom in Abraham's time, and with Nineveh in the days of Jonah. We can safely assume that Nineveh was more wicked at that time than any city in the world, because God felt impelled to take action. Nineveh must have exceeded every other place in violence, perversion, adultery, homosexuality, lying, stealing, and idol worship. However, observe that rather than bringing destruction upon this city, God's first plan was to offer redemption to Nineveh. God was going to give her one more chance. God's love always precedes God's wrath, and when God's love is properly received, His wrath is averted.

So God found a man. He found Himself a prophet: one of His chosen, called and ordained men of Israel. He told this man to go preach a message of repentance. We can assume Jonah had a record of faithfulness; otherwise God would not have given him this new assignment. But when God told him to go preach repentance to the people of Nineveh, Jonah found something in his heart that he did not know was there.

Have you ever felt that you were getting along pretty well in your walk with God and all of a sudden God asks you to do something different, unexpected or difficult, and you discover that there is an area of stubbornness in your heart that puts on the brakes? My friend, every so often God will send you to a Nineveh, and you say, “Tarshish.” If God would send you a new minister and he would say let us start a Saturday night prayer meeting, would you say Tarshish or Nineveh? Or at a revival meeting the Lord might convict you to ask forgiveness of someone you have resented for years will you say, “No, I will not go to Nineveh”.

Dear friend, what was in Jonah the prophet is in all of us, unless we have died out and remained in self-denial on a consistent basis. Because we have too many Jonahs, we don't have revival. Many Christians I know will take a ship to Tarshish instead of to Nineveh. Indeed, it is stubbornness that has prevented many of them from ever getting to Nineveh. Oh, dear one, God has to slay this “Tarshish spirit” out of us, to bring us to the point where we are willing to do everything and go everywhere. Are you investing in Tarshish or in Nineveh? What does your ticket say?

So Jonah bought a ticket to go to Tarshish rather than to Nineveh. When Jonah got onto the ship, he thought he was getting out of the presence of the Lord. After all, he left the Holy Land, the land of Israel. He was now on the Mediterranean, and he thought he was safe. But the Bible says the Lord sent a great wind and there was a mighty tempest in the sea so the ship was likely to be broken. Do you know that all ships to Tarshish are headed for a storm.

Now keep in mind that God was trying to save the most wicked city in the world, yet His biggest heartache was not in getting the people of this city to repent, but in getting the man of God to do exactly what He told him to do. His biggest problem is not the world, but the church. Jonah represents the professing church. The church is in a storm. There is no question that the disobedience of just one man put the lives and cargoes of hundreds of ships in the Mediterranean in danger. My friend if you don't obey God in everything, you create a storm wherever you are; in your home, at work, in your church and even on your vacation. **It is a serious thing for any of God's people not to do exactly what God tells them to do.**

The storm was raging; the mariners were afraid and cried out to their various gods. Everyone on this particular ship began to pray, everyone except Jonah, who was sound asleep. Sometimes unbelievers pray more than believers. The world is hurting because the believers are asleep. Here the unbelievers had to wake up the believer to tell him to pray! Somehow the sailors knew from their weathermen and astronomers, that this storm was not the result of any natural phenomenon, but that this storm was a special storm. They sensed that it was the result of someone on the Eastern Mediterranean Sea having done the wrong thing. They sensed that the gods were angry.

The poor sailors cast lots trying to find out who was causing their problem. God directed the lot to fall on Jonah. God was trying to save a great city, and He is trying to save your city. It is also hell-bound. **Are you sleeping or praying?** If the lot were cast to see why your city is a mess, why your church does not have revival, would the lot fall on you?

God prepared a great fish, so that as the mariners cast Jonah overboard, not only did the sea cease from raging, but this fish was in the exact place with his mouth wide open to swallow Jonah. I tell you, God works with pinpoint accuracy! The fish swallowed Jonah and he spent three days in the belly of that fish, going up and down, up and down. As he was taken to the depths of the sea, the seaweed was wrapped around his head. It took Jonah THREE DAYS of being bleached in the fish's stomach acid before he came to the point of partial repentance; before he began to pray.

Dear ones, this reflects the stubbornness of many a churchgoer toward really doing what God is telling him or her to do. Again, **God's biggest problem is NOT getting America saved, but is getting the church out of its stubbornness, out of its sleep, into genuine revival.**

Now after Jonah prayed, the Lord God ordered the fish to spit him out, and guess where he landed? In the vicinity of Nineveh! This was exactly where God wanted him. How many times does God have to spit somebody out where he needs to be?

"And the word of the Lord came unto Jonah the second time, saying, 'Arise, go unto Nineveh, that great city, and preach unto it the preaching that I bid thee' (3:1-2). Jonah, given a second chance, went to this great city, estimated at over a million people, and gave the call to repentance. It appears that each one who heard the message immediately believed, began to fast, repent and put on sackcloth, from the greatest even to the least. All the people prayed, crying mightily to God. God heard their repentant prayers and saved them from His fierce wrath.

Look at the different reactions of the people in this story. For God to save the most wicked people of that time in the world, each one of them had to hear the message of God only once before they believed, repented and were saved. But, for God to get His servant to obey and do His will, He had to send a storm to overtake him. He had to send a fish to swallow him, He had to bleach him for three days, until he went where God wanted him to go, and he finally said what God wanted him to say.

I repeat: **Our greatest problem in America is not Hollywood, it is not liquor, it is not pornography, and it is not the liberals who pass ungodly laws; but God's greatest heart-ache and problem in America is His own people who will not do exactly what He tells them to do, day after day.** This is the greatest thing that prevents revival in our nation, as well as in any nation in the world.

"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 Chr. 7:14). The Lord says that judgment must begin at the house of God.

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