

Jonah: The Reluctant Prophet - 15

Introduction: In **verses 5-9** of chapter 3 we see Nineveh's response to the proclaiming of God's Word.

Text: Jonah 3:5-9

III. Jonah's Preaching: God's Proclamation - Chapter 3

A. Jonah's Obedience v1-4

1. The Repetition of the Command. v1,2
2. The Obedience to the Command. v3,4

B. The People's _____ v5-9

The Bible states in **verse 5** "*So the people of Nineveh believed God, and proclaimed a fast, and put on sackcloth, from the greatest of them even to the least of them.*"

1. The _____ of the situation. v5

We see their faith in the first part of verse 5. "...the people of Nineveh believed God..."

And because of this real living faith, **we see the action of the people** following their faith. And this always is to be the case, that **our beliefs determine our behavior**. The Bible says, [they] "...proclaimed a fast..." [they] "...put on sackcloth..."

In Gower's *Manners and Customs of the Bible* it is explained, "*Goat's hair cloth garments [sackcloth] were worn so as to cause discomfort; the breast beaten (Luke 23:48) and clothes were torn to demonstrate how grief-stricken people were.*"

Freeman's book on customs of the Bible states, "*Sackcloth was a rough cloth made of camel's hair, goat hair, hemp, cotton or flax... Garments made of sackcloth, which were often loosely weaved like burlap, were worn as a sign of mourning or penitence. The garments were sometimes worn in place of regular clothing, or were loose-fitting sacks put over the shoulders, or simply a loin cloth... In Nineveh, the king commanded that both "man and beast be covered with sackcloth (Jonah 3:8) as a sign of national repentance.*"

We see the scope of this faith and these actions.

Notice the Bible says, "...from the **greatest of them** even to **the least of them.**"

John Philips testifies of an example in his own life, "*Several times during the dark days of World War II when Britain stood alone with her back against the wall, I can remember the king calling for a national day of prayer. But he never called for the kind of repentance that the king of Nineveh decreed.*"

This ought to encourage us, that at the preaching of the Gospel people can be saved.

Illustration: *"What would you say if a lone preacher from one of the spiritually decadent countries of the so-called Christian West were to preach the gospel for three days in Moscow and witness a mass revival of the Holy Spirit, then this issued in the conversion and baptism of the Politburo and a directive from the Kremlin that abolished state atheism in favour of complete freedom for the worship of God and the preaching of Christ? Do you believe such things could happen? You already have difficulty believing that your own church, far less your community, could come alive for the gospel! An entire city? In an atheistic state like the Soviet Union? 'What a fairy-tale!' you might think, even as you piously remind yourself that with God nothing is impossible. Yet this is precisely the level of significance in the ancient world of what happened in Nineveh because of the preaching of Jonah! Nineveh repented and believed in the living God. And this astounding event was a mighty act of God which, according to the testimony of the Lord Jesus Christ, is to stand throughout human history as a sign and witness against both the poverty of our obedience to the Lord and our low expectations for the success of the gospel in our own time."*

Our struggle reckons on, I believe, the state of man and not the insufficiency of God. Nonetheless, let this be a stark reminder that you and **I do not know what tomorrow holds outside the explanation of God's Word on these matters.**

But we do know this, that (1) **the God we serve is Almighty God. (Genesis 17:1, Revelation 1:8)**

We do know that the God we serve, the One True Living God, (2) **does save to the uttermost and is still saving souls today. (Hebrews 7:25)**

We do know that (3) **His Holy Word is powerful. (Hebrews 4:12)**

And we do know (4) that **His Spirit is at work in this world at this present moment. (John 16:8-11)**

2. The _____ of the situation v6-8

The Bible says in **verse 6**, *“For word came unto the king of Nineveh, and he arose from his throne, and he laid his robe from him, and covered him with sackcloth, and sat in ashes.”*

Albert Barnes - *“The whole account,”* namely, how this stranger, in strange austere attire, had come, what had happened to him before he came, how he preached, how the people had believed him, what they had done, as had just been related, *“came to the king...People are slow to carry to sovereigns matters of distress, in which they cannot help. This was no matter of peril from man, in which the counsel or energy of the king could be of use.”*

However, it came to be, it was so serious that *“word came unto the king...”*

We have before us at this local church a time set aside to hold what we call “revival” meetings. We set aside this time to seek the Lord’s face desiring to be renewed; to give ourselves wholly to our Lord and Savior.

- To re-examine our spiritual poverty.
- To turn our eyes upon our Lord once again.
- To give up the ways of selfishness and pride.
- To see His work, go forth first in our hearts and then outward into the world.

This king (1) arose from his throne, he (2) laid his robe from him, he (3) covered himself in sackcloth and removed himself from his royal cushion into a heap of ashes.

Verse 7 shows us the reaction of the king and his nobles. The Bible says, *“...he caused it to be proclaimed and published through Nineveh...”*

And this was the proclamation, *“Let neither man nor beast, herd nor flock, taste anything: let them not feed, nor drink water: But let man and beast be covered with sackcloth, and cry mightily unto God...”*

Can you imagine the wailing not just from the people, but the animals as they are deprived of food, as they are deprived of water?

“The moanings and lowings of the animals, their voices of distress, pierce man’s heart too, and must have added to his sense of the common misery.”

To add to the subjection of humility they covered themselves with irritable garments that were fit for inanimate objects with no senses. Notice the second part of this decree, which I did not read at this first. *“...yea, let them turn everyone from his evil way, and from the violence that is in their hands...”*

I wonder this morning as we close in the middle of this section, how serious are we concerning the state of our own lives, of our local church, of our nation?

How serious is it for us all that is taking place?