

## NINEVEH'S RESPONSE TO THE MESSAGE OF JUDGMENT: Jonah 3:6-10

### 1. Salvation Begins With Humility Toward God

- a. "the word reached the king"
  - i. how will they believe unless they hear?
- b. "he arose"
  - i. The king here is a literary foil to Jonah
  - ii. what Jonah did not do, the king did
- c. he responded by laying down his power
  - i. Note the progression
    1. Down from his throne
      - a. The throne was a place of power and authority, of rights and of rule
      - b. To step down is to remove oneself from the place of power, to place oneself in a weaker position, a lower position, from the king to a serf
    2. Removed his robe
      - a. Not only removing himself from the position of power, but also from the "identity" (think uniform) of having that power
      - b. The robe signifies royal right, thus to take off the robe signifies the removal and lack of dependence upon the royal right
        - i. It may have even meant more in Assyrian rule, for many Assyrian kings considered themselves deity by royal right
        - ii. This power was not merely political, but spiritual and cosmic
    3. Put on clothing of poor – sackcloth, the cheapest roughest cloth
    4. Sat in ashes – indicating sorrow and grief (see Job)
    5. Note also how like Jesus this is!
      - a. True humility lays down one's own power and steps down
  - ii. this is incredible repentance, genuine humility
    1. Jonah responded to God's warning (the storm) with despair and hardness of heart (throw me overboard) instead of crying out for mercy
    2. The king here responds with a cry for mercy, deep humility, and yet hope of salvation
- d. God is teaching Jonah, and Israel, something about Himself
  - i. God is not impressed with your pedigree, nor does He desire your lineage, He is no respecter of men
  - ii. What God desires is a dependent, humble, and contrite heart that responds to Him with faith (they believed God and humbled themselves, something Israel was not doing)

### 2. Humble Repentance: Turning Away from Sin

- a. The first half of genuine humility/repentance is acknowledging that we have sinned
  - i. The king doesn't make excuses!
  - ii. "We have sinned against God through our evil and violence"
- b. Command to cease from evil
  - i. Repentance always includes a desire for actions to actually change, a shift in direction, no mere words
  - ii. Laying down of self-power and a taking up of great need with a recognition of the necessity of change
- c. Command to cease from violence
  - i. What we know, we act in accordance with
  - ii. The Ninevites didn't know all of God's revelation like Israel did, but they knew that violence and their "evil" was out of line with God's righteousness
  - iii. In the same way, we ought not demand perfection from people who are coming to the LORD, but there should be changes of that which is known

- iv. The process of discipleship post-conversion will deal with the developing sense of sin and the growth of awareness of what dishonors God
- d. Turning toward the God of Heaven with pleas of mercy

### 3. Humble Repentance Responds with Hope in the Mercy of God

- a. The second half of genuine humility/repentance is the realization that God is our only hope, not only for forgiveness but for change
- b. Faith = Dependence
  - i. The king had ceased to depend upon his own gods, his own strength, his own royalty (which Assyrian kings often considered as deity)
  - ii. And he depended solely upon the mercy of God
    - 1. Thus, he cried out in hope of the mercy of God
- c. There is a kind of counterfeit repentance which expresses grief and remorse, but depends upon its own strength and not upon the complete mercy of the Lord
  - i. "I'm sorry. I won't do that again!" (trusting my future strength)
  - ii. "I'm sorry. Let me help you." (trusting my present strength)
  - iii. "I'm sorry. I'm just really tired today." (remember my past strength, not present failure)

## GOD'S RESPONSE TO NINEVAH'S REPENTANCE:

### 1. God Sees and Responds to Repentant Faith

- a. God "saw" their repentance
  - i. true response does not imply a lack of foreknowledge
    - 1. A response can be genuine, faithful, and unchanging when the circumstances change
    - 2. for example, the Ninevites changed and God ALWAYS responds to repentance with mercy...always
    - 3. God's warning was genuine: if you don't repent I will destroy (remember the implicit condition of repentance, hence the warning, Sodom didn't receive a warning)
    - 4. However, they repented and God responded with mercy
  - ii. What it does imply is that God is actively and deeply involved in the life of mankind...of you! He sees and knows, moves and acts, works and wills for His own good pleasure in you
- b. So, what does it mean that "God relented?"
  - i. First, the NIV "changed his mind" is inadequate b/c it misses the entire point
  - ii. The word means, "moved with compassion" or "took pity" (nacham)
    - 1. What is interesting about the word "nacham" is that it includes a major emphasis on emotive response, on deep comfort or grief (Gen 24:67; 50:21)
      - a. When man "repents" the word "shuv" is used, "to turn"
      - b. The word "nacham" indicates a much deeper emotive response, coming from the root "to breathe deeply" (comfort, sorrow, etc., see Psalm 106:40-48)
      - c. This is what is amazing about Scripture! God shows us that He deeply connects with mankind's plight, that He "takes a deep breath" in the moment when we turn away from sin and cry out to Him
    - 2. simply because God knows the beginning from the end does not imply passivity or lack of passion in God
      - a. God does feel, genuinely, yet He is not ruled by His passions like we are
      - b. His emotions are always in perfect cohesion with His entire character
    - 3. He responds with anger, scorn, mercy, compassion, longing, love, etc. in His relationships with humanity
      - a. And these responses of God are genuine in the moment because our works and attitudes are in the moment

- b. His foreknowledge of future events does not seem to indicate a passivity or lessening of God's emotive responses to us in the real moment
      - i. To think otherwise is simply philosophical speculation that is detached from biblical revelation
      - ii. God "nachams" when people truly repent and cry out to Him in hope of mercy
  - c. It wasn't that God changed due to new information (something He did now know or foresee), but rather because the hearts and attitudes of the Ninevites changed from unrepentant to repentant, from proud to humble, to self-righteous to crying out for mercy
    - i. The real issue is the understanding of language
      - 1. Often we want to interpret the language regarding God as identical to that which relates to man, univocally
        - a. Thus God's relenting would be identical in meaning to our relenting
        - b. This does not take into account, however, the vast difference between the infinite and holy God and finite and sin-struck man
      - 2. The language of Scripture is intended by God to communicate *something* about Himself, though it cannot reveal Him *comprehensively*
        - a. in relationship to God and man, this communication through words is better understood as *analogical*, that is: there are *similarities* to be drawn, but not *precision* or *sameness* between God and man
        - b. We call this type of communication *anthropomorphisms* (images that reveal God in man-like terms, such as having arms or eyes or a nose, walking or riding a horse, etc.) and *anthropopathism* (images that reveal God having feelings, emotions, like a man)
          - i. These images of anthropomorphism and anthropopathism are limited in their ability to fully reveal God
          - ii. They reveal by similarity, but not by sameness
        - c. We have similarities to God, so though He is infinite and holy, God does reveal something that we can relate to, but they do not reveal in sameness as if God were just like us
          - i. There is a danger of imaging God in man-likeness to a fault
          - ii. Thus, open theism assumes that if God changes direction, it must be for the same reason that we would change direction: new information that was previously unknown
    - ii. The warning of impending judgment accomplished its purpose: to bring repentance and thus salvation by God's mercy to the pagan enemies of Israel

## 2. God Responds to Humble Faith With Mercy

- a. "God is opposed to the proud but gives grace to the humble"
  - i. This is always true
  - ii. So, what is humility?
    - 1. Humility is not the same as weak or suffering or pitiful.
    - 2. Humility is the acknowledgement of our own brokenness and sin, the willing laying down of our own strength and power and submitting fully to the righteousness, wisdom, and Word of God, and relying fully on the mercy of God for forgiveness and change.
      - a. Thus, humility moves towards God in repentance and away from self-centeredness and self-righteousness crying out for a Savior
      - b. JESUS!!!
- b. God's greatest mercy has been shown to us in His Son, Jesus
  - i. Ephesians 2:1-10
  - ii. Therefore, Christians have the greatest reason to "rejoice to repent" for God has brought us salvation that we can see in the death and resurrected life of Jesus.

1. This is why Jonah's life was a sign to the Ninevites (Luke 11:30): resurrection, salvation, new life from death, hope of mercy in the midst of the warning of judgment (and why humble Ninevah would judge self-righteous Israel!)
  2. The LORD God is a compassionate God who saves those who call out to Him (Zech 13:9; Rom 10:8-15)
- c. There is hope in the mercy of God for ANY who close to Him in humble faith!
- i. This is the point of the book of Jonah (4:10-11)

### Conclusion:

So, what does this have to do with our missions month? (First of all, our traditions are never determinative of God's truth!) Think of it like this: Romans 10:8-15

If God is a God who shows compassionate mercy to all who humbly call upon Him as their only hope, and God deeply feels this compassion for those whose hearts are humble, and if there is no distinction between Jew and Gentile in regards to this, then..."how are they to call on Him in whom they have not believed? How will they believe on Him whom they have not heard? How will they hear without a herald? How are they to herald unless they are sent?" Beautiful feet, indeed, are the ones who bring good news.