

David Macleod: Jonah: The Men of Nineveh

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Preacher: Guest Preacher

[0 : 00] Well, if you could have Jonah chapter 3 open before you and also a finger in the passages that we read from Luke chapter 11, that would be helpful.

Conscious, we may be jumping around a wee bit in terms of sequence as this morning we thought more about Jonah chapter 4.

This evening we're thinking more so about Jonah chapter 3 and how that is viewed in light of the teaching and the challenge and the encouragement of Christ as he highlights the sign of Jonah. The first thing to say just in terms of a preamble to this is the account of Jonah's history. Some of you have heard me saying that already over the course of the weekend.

There are a fair few faces here that I don't recognise from either service yesterday. Let me just say from the outset here the account of Jonah's history.

[1 : 25] There are some people who love to dispute that. I can remember being taken to task at the door of a church by a sweet little old lady who was mortified that I would suggest that this is history and not mythology, but this is history.

It's narrated as history. And Jesus as he speaks about Jonah and the sign of the teaching of Jonah, he speaks about Jonah and Nineveh as historical figures, as historical places.

And Jesus as he spoke about Jonah and this account of Jonah's ministry, he used it as a teaching illustration.

He used it in order that those whom he ministered to in this world, in the days when he walked in this world and who he continues to minister to today through the word by the Spirit, he did it in order that we will learn from this and we will respond.

Again let's listen to the words of Jesus in Luke chapter 11, just a couple of verses.

[2 : 46] Jesus in Luke chapter 11, when the crowds were increasing, he began to say this generation is an evil generation.

It seeks for a sign, but no sign will be given to it except the sign of Jonah. For as Jonah became a sign to the people of Nineveh, so will the Son of Man be to this generation.

The Queen of the South will rise up at a judgment with the men of this generation and will condemn them for she came from the ends of the earth to hear the wisdom of Solomon and behold something greater than Solomon is here.

And I notice these verses in particular. We hear so little of Jonah and of Nineveh in scripture but we have this here.

The men of Nineveh will rise up at the judgment with this generation and condemn it for they repented at the preaching of Jonah and behold something greater than Jonah is here.

[4 : 07] Despite the message that the Lord I believe has laid on my heart, it's a sobering message. It's not an easy message to preach in many ways because it concerns something that perhaps we don't talk about enough today as preachers and I look first at myself.

That's judgment. I know in years gone by there was a caricature how accurate it was I don't know where people's perception was that all preachers ever said was hell and damnation and judgment. There was nothing of the love and the grace of God. The danger is in reaction to that we swing to the other extreme and we speak all about the love and the grace of God and we say nothing about judgment, nothing about wrath, nothing about the hell that we are saved from.

And so tonight I want to consider something of these things and I want to begin from that point that there is going to be judgment.

Hebrews 9 and verse 27 says it is appointed unto men once to die, but after this the judgment.

[5 : 35] So it's very clear across the whole breadth of scripture that we are not unaccountable. We are not unaccountable in our lives.

We may live as if we were, but the Bible teaches us that we are not. Each of us will give an account of what we have done with our lives and each of us will give an account of what we have done with God's Son, Jesus.

And Jesus himself teaches us that part of the company that will be ready to condemn us if we do not repent and believe in Jesus will be strangely the men of Nunnaby.

Sometimes when we meet at Presbytery and we are dealing with a sensitive situation that involves people and there could be potential embarrassment we take it in private session.

Judgment is not going to be a private session. Various texts that we could go to you can note them we are not going there just now.

[6 : 50] Daniel 7.22, Matthew 19.28, 1 Corinthians 6.2, Revelation 15, verse 3 and 4, Revelation 20 verse 4.

All these texts make it clear to us that judgment will not be a private session. God's children will participate in the final judgment and Jesus teaches here that the men of Nunnaby will have a role to play on that day.

I think it was Martin Luther that said that he only had two dates in his diary. First day meaning the day that God gives us and that day meaning the great day of the Lord.

Now sometimes when we think about our own diaries and we have a date that's marked we are living in anticipation of that date.

Sometimes we have a scheduled meeting to spend time with a long lost brother or sister. We wonder how it's going to go.

[8 : 07] How will the relationship be now? Perhaps we have a date to meet the consultant who operated on us five years ago. We wonder how that's going to go.

What are they going to find? Do we get a request to go and meet with the boss, the employer who is overarching us?

We wonder what is this meeting for and how will it go when we sit at the table? How will it be when we reach that date? Tonight I would like us to consider with God's help how will it be when we meet with God on the day of judgment?

How will it be for us when we come face to face with the living God? Every one of us will. And how will it be when we come face to face with the men of Nineveh?

And specifically what I would like us to consider this evening is how much more privileged we are today than the men of Nineveh were on that day when Jonah preached to them.

[9 : 21] And consequently how much more ready you and I should be to repent and believe and be saved today than the people of Nineveh perhaps were back on that day when Jonah walked and when Jonah preached.

Three points this evening and they are by way of contrast between Nineveh then and us now.

The first point to note is that Nineveh heard one sermon before they repented. The second point is that Nineveh heard through a great example of an imperfect servant, a petulant preacher-prophet and yet they repented.

The third point to note is that Nineveh heard only judgment and yet they repented. So that is the map for the evening.

First point then. Nineveh heard only one sermon. Think about this for a moment as I have done.

[10 : 44] How many sermons do you think you have heard in your life so far? If you did the calculation, how many sermons do you think you have had?

How many opportunities do you think you have had in hearing the Gospel so far in your life? I am in my 42nd year now. So I did a way crude calculation just in preparation here.

I think I have been taken to church much like the way ones I see here from the very latest age five.

And so from age five to the present tense, that is about 37 years times two sermons a week times 52 weeks a year.

That equates to 3848 sermons as far as my maths goes. And then I think I have been going to the prayer meeting for around about 30 years. That is another 1560 sermons and that takes us to a running total of 5408 sermons.

And then there were Sunday school lessons, many of them. There were YF talks that built up over the years. There was times in Christian Union and University. There were sermons I have listened to on CDs.

[12:00] There was Christian conferences and so on. The point is in my life I have heard many, many sermons.

So what about you? You can do your own sums. But here is the actual crucial question.

How many sermons did it take before you repented? Was it one?

In fact have you repented yet? Nineveh heard one sermon and they repented.

Verse 5 makes clear that the Ninevites believed God after one sermon, one opportunity.

[13:04] How about you? How do we compare with that? You know that every time we hear the Gospel message and I know you hear it here every week, every time we hear Christ crucified preached and yet reject the message or delay and procrastinate, we harden our hearts and we become more and more and more guilty.

We become more guilty than the men of Nineveh who heard one sermon and they believed.

To what do they teach us? Will they give us a living example of what the Saviour pleads in Psalm 95 and verse 7 and 8?

Today if you hear His voice, do not harden your heart.

Today if you hear His voice, do not harden your heart. Today if you have the privilege of hearing the Word of God, today if the Word of the Lord is coming to you as it came to Jonah, as it came to Nineveh, if God is giving you ears to hear, if the Gospel message makes sense, if we see the cross and we see our need to be saved, if God is giving us eyes to see, then the men of Nineveh call us to respond now and be saved.

[15:06] That was the proclamation of the King. Did you notice that in chapter 3? The urgency, that sense of urgency in the voice of the King, in the actions of the King.

Verse 6 of chapter 3, Jonah is preaching around the place, the Word is starting to spread around the area of this preacher who is preaching judgment and impending destruction.

And there is the King on his throne. How would he react? The King likely a tyrant of this violent evil city.

What would he do? Verse 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.

And he issued a proclamation and published through Nineveh by the decree of the King and his nobles.

[16:12] 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 and let them call out mightily to God.

Let everyone turn from his evil way and from the violence that is in his hands. Who knows? God may yet turn and relent and may and turn from his fierce anger so that we may not perish.

What urgency? What seriousness in the response? What's he saying? What is the King over this land saying to his subjects? He's saying seek first God's kingdom.

Seek first salvation. Never mind your food, never mind your drink, never mind your work, never mind your cattle just now. Never mind the responsibilities that press upon you day by day.

They will wait. But today, now seek salvation, seek mercy.

[17:28] Let everyone in the kingdom call urgently. Maybe God will save us.

Don't you think we need to regain that sense of urgency? Both in response to the call to salvation and in response to Jesus' great commission, the we who are God's people will reach out to a world that so much needs to hear the salvation.

None of you heard one sermon and they repented.

What about you? How many sermons is he going to take?

We thought repentance yesterday. We thought about repentance this morning. Have we repented yet and find salvation?

[18:39] None of you heard this proclamation, this invitation through a very imperfect servant.

One of the things I love about scripture is just the honesty, the stark honesty of scripture. If we step through the gospels and we look at the disciples, they are far from the finished article, they are so human, they are so often failing.

And yet we are giving them their true colors and we see the same here. I was speaking to someone this afternoon and they were saying that they, their hobby is photography and sometimes on Facebook you see all these pictures of wonderful landscapes and Lewis and Harris and beaches and there'll be this amazing landscape and it's posted up for all to see and just in a wee sentence or wee tag underneath it'll say adjacent to the photograph no filters used.

Just to demonstrate there's been no meddling, there's been no photo shopping, there's been no enhancements, this is what we see, this was the actual picture.

Well for the story of Jonah, if you're Jonah and you want to come out with the other end of this book looking good there's going to be a fair few filters required but thankfully none are used.

[20 : 14] Jonah is portrayed in this book in his true colors. Jonah is portrayed in all his sinful failings. Jonah enables us to see into his own sinful heart and what we see is this preacher that did not want to preach to the people and the reason that he didn't want to preach as we thought about this morning was for fear that the people might hear and be saved.

That's why he didn't want to go in response to God's call and Jonah chapter one and that's why we find him in a rage on the side of the hill in chapter four.

Yes he did go to Nineveh, he did preach the message that God gave him but he went with a grumbling reluctance, not because he was filled with love for these people and you would think that when Jonah rolled up in Nineveh with his bags and his sermon notes and he began to preach this message, one would think in this evil city when they are met with this prophet and his cold eyes and his aloof moody tones perhaps, when they see this not happy to be here preacher, you would think they were just dismissing and chasing them out of town and say leave, we want none of your judgment and yet that's not what happened.

On the first day Jonah started into the city verse four he proclaimed 40 more days and Nineveh will be overturned. When Ninevites believed God they declared a fast and all of them from the greatest to the least put on sackcloth and all that speaks of repentance, turning away from sin, turning to God. Jonah preached yes but the people heard God.

[22 : 18] When through this prophet with such a bad attitude they heard God and they repented after one sermon.

That's their context, what about yours and mine? You and I are here, we're not Nineveh and in this place I know that you hear the gospel week by week by week and you hear the gospel from someone who is unlike Jonah in the sense that the one who preaches the gospel to you, he doesn't well for you to be lost, his desire, his prayer is that you will be saved and sanctified.

That was a blessing Nineveh never had as they heard the message through Jonah.

Today we don't just have this singular line in terms of a sermon from Jonah, we have the whole New Testament.

Nineveh didn't have that. Today we are encouraged to follow the sign of Jonah and as we follow the sign of Jonah we see one who is far greater than Jonah.

[23 : 57] We see Jesus. Today we have the words of Jesus. Today we see the open arms of the crucified and risen Savior.

We hear the words of Jesus saying, come unto me and rest. Today we can go to 1 John chapter 4. We can reflect on these words, this is how God showed His love among us. He sent His one and only Son into the world that we might live through Him. This is love, not that we loved God but that He loved us and sent His Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins.

We can meditate upon these words, they didn't have that. We can meditate upon the love of God which is vast as the ocean.

That's a love that the people of Nineveh did not see in Jonah. That's a love that the people of Nineveh did not hear from Jonah.

[25 : 07] That's a love that they did not have the privilege of seeing in the Savior. And yet they repented and they were not condemned.

Let me ask again, have you repented yet? Have you looked to?

Have you listened to? Are you responding to the call of Christ? The final point is that Nineveh heard judgment.

That was the message that was given to Jonah to pass on. Chapter 1 and verse 1, Jonah is told to go to Nineveh and to preach against it.

In chapter 3 and verse 4, the message that Jonah is given that he proclaims is yet 40 days and Nineveh shall be overthrown.

[26 : 21] It's not exactly a seeker-friendly, warm and cuddly sermon. It's one point and the point is judgment is coming.

And that point still stands. You must acknowledge that. I know many will who, boo and hiss and scorn at such a message when it's out there in the world today, but it's a true message.

God is giving it and he is not withdrawn it. Judgment is coming. 40 more days and Nineveh will be overturned, said Jonah.

40 is the number of testing in the Bible. And these 40 days were given to Nineveh by God. It was a testing time. It was a time of opportunity.

And the Lord was looking in on Nineveh to see the response we have been given today.

[27 : 37] And yes, there is judgment coming. And yes, we need to be prepared for that day of judgment.

We have all that in common with Nineveh. But how much more have we been given that encourages us to turn and repent and believe and be saved?

We have heard what Nineveh did not hear. We have heard about grace, not just judgment. We have heard about Jesus.

We have heard what he has done for sinners. That's us. We thought about it this morning. We saw it this morning.

We have heard about the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ. And we have heard that all who turn to Him, all who will call upon the name of Jesus will unquestionably be saved.

[28 : 46] And I don't miss this point. Nineveh had no such assurance. They didn't have that privilege. And yet even in the darkness, they cried out in repentance.

Maybe they said, maybe, who knows, God may yet relent and with compassion turn from his fierce anger so that we will not perish. They have no assurance.

They have no reason to have assurance. But still there is this cry of faith in the dark that maybe they will not perish.

Contrast that with what we have been told. We have heard that God so loved the world that he gave his one and only son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish, but shall have eternal life.

For God did not send a son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him. Whoever believes in him is not condemned.

[30 : 05] But whoever does not believe stands condemned already because he is not believed in the name of God's one and only son.

Nineveh heard judgment. We have had grace preached to us.

We have the assurance that all who will call upon the name of the Lord will be saved, will be saved, not might be saved, will be saved.

Tifer Nineveh, and we conclude with this, the odds were stacked against him. Such a wicked city so opposed to God and God's people, so far gone in terms of people's view of them in light of the things of God.

And then along comes this less than winsome prophet with a message of judgment and so many obstacles and just one man in a city of a million people, so little opportunity.

[31 : 26] And yet the whole city repented and found salvation. Let me ask it again, have you?

We are a privileged people. We have had the gospel for so long. We have Bibles aplenty on our shelves and every translation that we could look for, we have so many witnesses who have loved us and who have shared the gospel with us and who have prayed for us.

Have we repented? Have we found salvation? If not, why not now?

You can do it before you walk out that door. Find salvation. The writer to the Hebrews says, how shall we escape if we neglect such great salvation?

The answer to that question is we will not. But if we believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, if we will receive the grace that He so dearly procured through His broken body and His shed blood, we will be saved.

[33 : 08] Then have they heard and they believed God? Can I plead with you to believe God?

Believe Him when He says that judgment for sin is coming. Believe Him when He says that salvation is freely offered.

Turn from sin, turn in faith to Him and be saved.

It's that simple. It's what none of you did. And when God saw verse 10, what they did and how they turned from their evil ways, He had compassion and did not bring upon them the destruction He had threatened.

And so we come to the end of our short study. It's an account of a city that begins with the bad news of their sin rising up before God condemning them and it comes to a conclusion with the good news of how God sees their repentance and shows them His mercy and His grace.

[34 : 43] That's Nineveh's story. What's going to be yours and mine? What does God see in us today and on the day of judgment when we take the stand?

What will the men of Nineveh see and what will they say when they look at you condemned or saved in and through Jesus?

These are serious questions that have eternal consequences. Let us as we hear God not harden our hearts but receive His salvation.

Amen.