

JONAH: RUNAWAY PROPHET
MESSAGE OF WRATH

Tuesday, July 7

Reading: Jonah 3:3-5

Jonah 3:5 *The Ninevites believed God. A fast was proclaimed, and all of them, from the greatest to the least, put on sackcloth.*

After his long journey, Jonah finally reaches “the great city of Nineveh.” Archaeology confirms that the ancient city of Nineveh stretched in a roughly 60-mile circumference, including the magnificent city-proper and the homes of citizens that surrounded it. It is no wonder that this would be a three-day journey, so Jonah wastes no time in proclaiming God’s message. “Forty more days and Nineveh will be overthrown.

The message of Nineveh’s destruction was a new addition to Jonah’s message. Forty was a common number indicting judgment. It rained for 40 days to flood the earth in the days of Noah. The children of Israel wandered in the wilderness for 40 years because of their disobedience. But 40 days had another implication as well. It implied a time of waiting, giving the people a chance to repent!

Though it is not stated, the people of Nineveh had hope that they could be forgiven. God had prepared them for this warning. Historians tell us that around the time of Jonah, the Assyrian empire was in turmoil. They had suffered through political struggles, a succession of famines, plagues, and eclipses which would be seen as omens of more disaster to come. Jonah’s appearance himself may have added to the warning. After his time in the belly of a fish, he very well could have looked like “death warmed over.” From the very start of his preaching (a day’s journey) the people believed the message and repented.

It is interesting that God’s message through Jonah was one of judgment! Too many churches today will not talk about God’s wrath on sin. They instead preach a watered-down message that avoids anything negative that might make people uncomfortable. But the gospel begins with the fact that we are all sinners deserving God’s judgment. The truth about sin and God’s wrath are essentials to understand the good news of salvation. When we ignore this truth, people get a superficial gospel that gives them a false sense of security. Without an acknowledgement of sin and our inability to remedy the problem, they believe they can be a Christian without changing how they live, act, and think. Jesus is no more than a “get out of hell free” card! As Jerry Bridges has said:

“Jesus did not die just to give us peace and a purpose in life;
He died to save us from the wrath of God.”¹

Why is the truth of God’s wrath against sin so important? Because Jesus spoke more about hell than about heaven. The New Testament letters often speak of God’s wrath right alongside God’s love. If the Lord spent so much time on the subject, it should be important to us as well. How would you describe the gospel to an unsaved friend? Where would you begin?

“It is amazing that we hesitate to talk about the wrath of God, for fear of making sinners feel fearful. The fear they feel this side of the grave will be nothing compared to the fear they feel when they stand before Almighty God.”

¹ Jerry Bidges, The Practice of Godliness, p. 22

² Ray Comfort @ https://www.azquotes.com/author/3159-Ray_Comfort