

God's Great Mercy

The message of God to the world through His servants has not changed much since the days of Jonah. God stills considers the sinning, wicked people of this world with mercy, and send his servants with a message of repentance.

The message God has for us for world can be stated as concisely as Jonah's message for Nineveh. After being expelled from the gut of the great fish, bleached by stomach acids, head crowned with seaweed, smelling like rotting fish, Jonah heads into the city, walking for a full day before he stops and begins to preach. His message is all of eight words: *Yet forty days, and Nineveh shall be overcome.* Our message is just as succinct: *Just a few more days, and death is coming.*

Lots of folks recognize the miracle involved in Jonah being thrown overboard and surviving three days in the belly of a great fish. I think there is another miracle in Jonah's story worthy of awe. Jonah preached one eight word sermon and an entire city of more than 200,000 people, the most powerful and wicked people in the world at the time, from pauper to prince, from slave to king, repented and turned to God. One eight-word sermon that set a time limit for life and described an inevitable outcome, eight words that changed the lives of an entire people for a generation.

Jonah 3:6–10 ESV

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: 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 turn and relent and turn from his fierce anger, so that we may not perish."

When God saw what they did, how they turned from their evil way, God relented of the disaster that he had said he would do to them, and he did not do it.

God did not destroy Nineveh that day. He saw their repentance and He extended His mercy. And while their repentance was the grounds for God's mercy, Jonah's obedience was the occasion for their repentance.

As much as ever, in these days of pandemic, of social and personal confusion, of political and moral ambiguity, as much as ever this wicked world, the people of this world, our friends and neighbors, our families, our community, our nation, they all need to hear the eight word message God sends by His servants today: *Death is coming. God is merciful. Repent now!*

There are two times in the story of Jonah when he is said to rise up and take action. Both of those occasions follow instruction from God to go and preach to Nineveh. The first time God speaks, we are told that “Jonah rose to flee.” We all know how that turned out for Jonah. The second time, after the fish incident, God again affirms His message for Nineveh through Jonah and the text tells us, “Jonah arose and went to Nineveh.”

Run and hide or rise and preach. *Death is coming. God is merciful. Repent now!* Who knows, the destiny of an entire generation could balance on your obedience. What will you do now?

Until next time, there's something to think about.