

## August 21, 2016: Jonah's Message

It's been a wonderful though *peculiar* story so far with this prophet *Jonah*. He fled his God and Sender, but was caught in open sea by His God. He put him in a life prison: the belly of a *great fish*. He kept him there for three days and nights and brought him to repentance and conversion. Jonah came to know his sins and misery, not only in the storm and the waves but also in God's judgment unto a certain death. Hence he was able to make a *song* about his misery and salvation, confessing that his salvation was from the LORD! Then the LORD heard Jonah's prayer and supplication and ordered the fish to vomit him onto dry land! Then the word of the LORD came to Jonah *a second time*, we read in chapter 3:1. This time, then, Jonah does go! The former deserter now becomes an obedient servant; Jonah goes to *Nineveh* and proclaims God's Word!

*Nineveh* was a large city; or a very important city. Indeed, the LORD is God of the whole earth, to whom it is important what's happening in the world, in every city! And as I mentioned before, *Nineveh's wickedness* had come up before the LORD; it brought the stench of sin and death into God's nostrils, the way it had in Sodom and Gomorrah. We also read about *Nineveh*: a visit required three days. Jonah would need *three days* in order to get to the most important points in the city. Jonah, however, didn't just come there as a private person; Jonah was more than that. Jonah comes *officially*, on behalf of the LORD God, and his *message* may say, "Thus says the LORD!" "Jonah obeyed the word of the LORD," we read, "and so goes to *Nineveh* as ambassador of the Great King of heaven and earth!" Jonah's *message* is an *ultimatum* from the God of gods, the Almighty Creator of heaven and earth!

It's an impressive and incisive *message* Jonah is bringing, dear listeners, "Forty more days and *Nineveh* will be overturned." And yet, Jonah's message was a *prophecy*, not a prediction; the LORD's Word is *conditional* upon faith and repentance. That's always the case, of course, also the *promises* He has given us in Jesus Christ; here, however, we must note God's *grace* even in this proclamation of *judgment*! Then *Nineveh's response* beats all expectations! Yes, you can fairly say that a formidable *miracle* occurred there! The Word of God truly is the power of God for the *salvation* of everyone, even if that's only the brief version of the declaration of *judgment* as Jonah proclaimed it. One thing is for certain: Jonah's message struck like a bomb! The Word is like a fire that sets the hearts on fire; it's like a hammer that crushes rocks. God does with it what pleases Him!

Immediately, dear listeners, the king and his cabinet issued a *decree*, commanding to the Greater *Nineveh Area* days of *fasting and mourning*. The *king* himself, who in the eyes of the people was usually viewed as a son of the gods, humbles himself as well, taking off his royal robes. No longer does he sit *on* his throne but *in front of it* on the floor, in the *dust*. No longer does he wear the signs of royalty and glamour, he covered himself with *sackcloth*, just like the rest of the people. Small and great, and even the animals, are *fasting* upon the king's decree for concrete repentance and the call to humbleness and prayer! The people *cry out* to God, loudly and urgently, and the children and animals *cry out* for thirst, for water and feed. No, this wasn't just an

outward show of mourning and fasting; it was the expression of heartfelt dismay and consternation! The Ninevites believed God! The message was: God's patience with your sins is up and after another 40 days your city will be overturned! That's the Word they believed, nothing more and nothing less either!

You see, dear listeners, then you will also realize why it was so powerful for the *Lord Jesus* to hold up these men of Nineveh to the people of *His* time. They had Moses and the prophets, and they had the Word fulfilled and incarnate in the Lord Jesus Christ. When the people of *Nineveh* believed, it was a formidable miracle, as I said, but then what about the people of *Israel*: would they then not listen to *Jesus*, who is the *greater* of Jonah; would *they* then not take the Word of judgment and grace seriously, coming as it did from the Son of God? Yes, then I will leave the answer to the question to *you* as well, dear listeners, asking *yourselves*: what then may the LORD expect from us *today*, from you and me, when we know about Christ's suffering and death and resurrection?! They will be there, though, those *Ninevites* who listened and believed in God's Word, and they will be standing up in judgment over those who haven't listened!

Jonah prophesied in Nineveh, dear listeners, "Forty more days and Nineveh will be overturned." Well there was a turn-about alright but a totally different one: in the hearts and deeds of the people of *Nineveh*! That's when the *LORD* turned around as well and *relented* from what He had threatened! No, that doesn't mean that God regretted what He had said, or that He was wrong in retrospect about what He intended. No, this is *how* the LORD deals with people; this is *how* you get to know the LORD in His dealings with His children too. In the book of Jonah you see the LORD's compassion for this world. The LORD shows how seriously He takes the sins of men, and how terribly displeased His with our original and actual sins. The LORD, however, is the God who *saves*; He does not want the *death* of the sinner but that he repents and *lives*! Jonah himself was the living example of that! Then we don't see God change but the people!

As I already said, dear listeners, Jonah's message was not a *prediction* but a *prophecy*. He came with an *ultimatum* in order that the people of Nineveh would *repent* indeed! That's God's intention always when the Word is proclaimed, *also* via this medium of "The Voice of the Church!" This Word may come across as tough, as stern, or as against you: yet, that is, so that it may be met with repentance and faith! Why? Well, as the prophet Isaiah puts it in chapter 30:18, "The LORD longs to be *gracious* to you; He rises to show you compassion. For the LORD is a God of justice. Blessed are all who wait for Him." Yes, and then Isaiah may add this *promise*: "How *gracious* He will be when you cry for help! As soon as He hears, He will answer you!" He is the *same*, yesterday, today, and for ever! The LORD still wants you to repent and believe His Word and *live*! That's the message Jonah confessed when he was saved, "Salvation comes from the LORD." That's what the LORD reveals here too: he is the *Saviour*, and He loves to save! Just look at Nineveh: He did not bring upon them the destruction He had threatened!

How much more then *today*, dear listeners! If the LORD spared Nineveh when they repented, how much more will he show His compassion *today* when we cry to Him, when we repent and believe in the Lord Jesus Christ?! How merciful is our God! The resurrection of Christ and His subsequent commission says, "God so loved the world

that He gave His only Son, that whosoever will believe in Him will not perish but have everlasting life!" He who did not spare His own Son, will He not spare you even more, no matter what your record of running from God or of your violence toward man?! You will find *mercy* and *compassion* with Him, when you seek your life and salvation outside of yourself in Jesus Christ, God's only Son!