

Jonah's Mission (5): Jonah Sees Revival

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Date: 03 July 2022

Preacher: Colin Dow

[0 : 00] So let's turn to God's Word. We have, before I went off, so this was impossibly a long time ago, we were working our way through the book of Jonah, and of course you know that Jonah is the Old Testament manual of mission and evangelism, as will become more clear as our sermon proceeds this evening.

I want to get this series finished. Not that I've written all the sermons for it, you understand, but I want to get this series finished because it is that important, that I can't just leave it be after chapter 2 and the first part of chapter 3.

I wanted to get it right to the end because it's such an important book of the Bible. But also because the Free Church's strapline is, wonderful phrase, a healthy gospel church for every community in Scotland, and one of the main planks upon which that vision has been sown is that of evangelism and that of mission.

And we need to understand where the book of Jonah fits into this vision of a healthy gospel church for every community in Scotland. Because, you know, 200 years ago, if you think about it, virtually every church in Glasgow was filled with people.

Hundreds of thousands of people went to church in Glasgow. When I visit some of the older folk among us, they'll tell me that on a Sunday morning the streets were black with people walking to church on a Sunday in Glasgow.

[1 : 35] Tons of thousands of people sat under the ministry of the Word of God. Thousands of missionaries went from our city to proclaim the gospel of Christ to people all over the world.

Early in the 19th century, the town of Kulsyth, which is about 20 miles that away, North Lanarkshire, experienced a revival where tens of thousands of people came to a living faith in Jesus.

Sixty years before that, in the South Lanarkshire town of Cambysland, a place I know really well, 26,000 people worshipped together on the famous preaching braise.

The sound of their singing voices amplified by the steep banks. Every word the preacher George Whitefield spoke struck straight into people's hearts.

You can still go to the preaching braise today and stand where George Whitefield stood and preached. Here we are in the 21st century, and those Glasgow church buildings, which once were full, are now empty.

[2 : 45] They're not churches anymore. Carpet showrooms, climbing walls, apartment blocks, even the building beside us is now shut.

And those churches which remain are all too empty. There's so little gospel being preached.

There's so little songs being sung of God's glory. The English preacher Charles Spurgeon once spoke of these churches as being a ghastly crew.

The lights of Glasgow's churches are all but out on a Sunday evening. There's so little desire for Glasgow's Christians for a double helping of the word of God of the Lord's day.

Scotland has become one of, if not the most, secular nation on earth. Do you think we can ever hope to experience another Kulsyth or Kambaslang?

Do you think our churches can ever be full again? Most of us here have only ever lived in days of decline. Can we ever hope for better days than these?

[3 : 56] Can we? Can I? Can you? Can we? The message of this passage in Jonah is we can. We can hope and pray and work for God to revive us again to breathe new life into our church and into our nation.

You know, the events of these verses constitute the greatest revival in the history of mankind. But within the space of a few days, a city the size of Aberdeen turns away from idolatry and turns toward God in repentance and faith.

And the God who did these wonderful things in Nineveh of 800 BC can surely do the same in 2022 Glasgow. Jonah saw the belly of a big fish, but he saw something even more miraculous. He saw an entire city turning to God. Now, I want to see three things about this revival. Remembering that our constant approach is the survey of what the book of Jonah is telling us about mission and evangelism.

So, we're going to look at repentance, remorse, and reassurance from these verses. Jonah 3, verses 5 through 10. Repentance, remorse, and reassurance.

[5 : 26] Repentance, first of all. We tend, do we not, to associate revivals with strange phenomena, ecstatic utterances, ears splitting praise and all that.

The reality is very different. Most of you know I'm ethnic free church, so you'll hear a lot of free church comments coming from me. And, let me remind you that one of the most famous of the 19th century free churchmen was a man called Alexander Moody Stewart.

In fact, he was one of the last remaining free church ministers after the disruption. I think he lived until 1898. Having read his biography, I came across the following two portions.

The first describes, the free church minister Alexander Moody Stewart, the first describes a revival in the eastern fishing port of Montrose in November 1859. Let me quote.

These fishermen are a fine body of men and their relations to each other in their work and by intermarriage are so close that when one was affected others were also.

[6 : 34] Sounds a bit like Brora, if I'm being honest. He goes on, the awakening, especially among the men, was very deep and widespread and their sense of sin was often overwhelming.

This gave the character of thoroughness to the whole work and when it lent the light came, the people came out on the side of Christ brightly and boldly.

Now the second quote from Moody Stewart comes from a conversation he had with one of the Highland ministers of his day. We tend to think that in the 19th century church there was a huge divide between Highland ministers and Lowland ministers.

Nonsense there wasn't, there never was. One of the Highland ministers of his day told him, during our time of revival we felt like men walking on ice.

We had to be so watchful over every word and thought not to slip and so grieve the Holy Spirit who was working amongst us and resting over us in his love. That minister continues, if we pray for an awakening there must be the same care for the least sin may grieve the Holy Spirit and it may be very difficult to recover his presence again.

[7 : 51] Well, apart from both referring to revival using the word awakening which is a great word to use, the common thread running through these two quotes is the link between revival and repentance.

Those who experienced a spiritual awakening put a clear distance between themselves and sin. Forget phenomena, the true sign of spiritual revival is repentance first among God's people and then second among all those who come under the sound of the gospel.

And even though this word repent is not directly used in Jonah 3, 5 through 10 this is what the Ninevites did when they heard Jonah's message. They repented. A great spiritual awakening began and it was marked by repentance.

Evan read it for us in Luke chapter 11 verse 32. The men of Nineveh repented of the preaching of Jonah. If there will be revival among us, it will result not in tears of joy but in tears of repentance and in prayers of confession.

The spiritual awakening in Nineveh can briefly be described in three ways. In terms of it being urgent, complete, and sincere.

[9 : 13] It was urgent. See the text. Yet 40 more days in Nineveh will be overthrown. We might have suspected that Jonah's voice would fall on deaf ears but it did not.

For in verse 5 we read and the people of Nineveh believed God. They had 40 days in which to repent but they didn't need them.

For there and then with immediacy and urgency they believed Jonah's message and they repented. There was no procrastination. Let's wait until the last moment.

There was no delay. There was an immediate response. They decided for God. So picture with me a common man of Nineveh that day.

Hearing the message for the first time and I'm going to tell the story hopefully in his own words without the accent. He says, I didn't know who it was. They said his name was Jonah.

[10:14] He could see he was a Hebrew prophet by the way he spoke and the clothes he wore. And he stood up in a market stall so that everyone could see him and everyone could hear him.

And he called out to the top of his voice, Yet 40 more days and Nineveh shall be overthrown. I don't know what happened. It certainly wasn't his voice.

But I felt an immediate compulsion to believe him and to respond. In fact, as I remember it now, I can't explain it any other way than this.

I couldn't but repent of my sin and believe in Jonah's God. urgency and immediacy the message Jonah preached was acted upon straight away and without delay.

There's a mark of revival. When days and weeks of sober decision making are compressed down into the intensity of a moment and immediate decisions are made for Christ.

[11:31] The second aspect of Nineveh's repentance is that it was complete. It was complete. One of the reasons I think that would happen in Nineveh is the greatest revival in history is that it was not confined to one class of people or one group of people.

Earlier on we talked about a revival among the fisher folk of Montrose. in the early 20th century under the ministry of the famous Scottish evangelist Jock Troop.

Any of you heard of Jock Troop? Right? Jock Troop. My grandfather once met Jock Troop on a train going north and Jock Troop gave him an apple.

There's a solid kind of link between us and Jock Troop. Under Jock Troop there was another revival. This time among the herring women these were women who would follow the herring fishery boats all about the United Kingdom my granny among them.

But what happened in Nineveh was not confined to a particular group fisher folk or to well off or whatever it was complete. It wasn't confined to the lower class or the upper class.

[12:46] It wasn't confined to merchants or to agriculturalists but from the top to the bottom from the king to the beggar people from every stratum of society believed Jonah's message and they repented of their sin.

King and commoner they took off their normal clothes and they put on sackcloth instead. They confessed their sins and they fasted from fruit. To my knowledge there's never been such a revival as the whole of society being affected like this since.

The king was so humbled by Jonah's message that he proclaimed a national fast and he commanded everyone in his realm to turn from his evil ways and from the violence that's in his hands.

This is national repentance of the highest order. Not from the ground up, from the top down. Imagine we miss Sturgeon saying turn from your evil ways and from the violence that's in your hands.

It was complete and the entirety of Nineveh was impacted by this awakening. But then third, it was sincere.

[14:10] It was a sincere revival. A hundred years after these events described in Jonah 3, the prophet Nahum condemned Nineveh for its unrighteousness. And this fact makes some commentators conclude that the repentance of Nineveh was not genuine, that it was surface deep, it didn't last.

But we must remember that if nine years can be a generation in Scotland, a hundred years can be ten generations in Nineveh. Where life is short, there is every indication in this passage, that the repentance of Nineveh was sincere and was genuine.

It was most certainly directed toward God. We read the words of the king in verse nine, the words of a king. Who knows, God may turn and relent and turn from his fierce anger that we may not perish. change. This was no mere external religious exercise, what we're reading here is deep heart surgery, the kind that produces life change.

I remember spending a very precious afternoon with an impossibly old man in Stornoway, his name was Dolan Craft, Donald of the Bones. Donald had been converted in the 1930s revival on the western Lewis village of Carloway.

[15:35] Maybe some of you remember Dolan. There was an aura about him. I couldn't explain what it was, but I could feel it, the aura from this man.

What I encountered was a man who over the 70 years of his Christian experience since those early days in Carloway and the west coast of Lewis, had only become more joyful in Christ his savior.

The change in Dolan's life from the 1930s to the 2000s wasn't temporary. It was deep and sincere. It was permanent.

To go back to Moody Stewart's descriptions of these 19th century revivals he encountered, first among the fisherfolk of Montrose, he said, their sense of sin was often overwhelming, and then secondly, that Highland minister, we felt like men walking on ice.

We had to be so watchful over every word and thought not to slip and so grieve the Holy Spirit. Powerful, powerful awakenings, these awakenings in Scotland, but as minnows compared to the greatest of them all, the repentance of Nineveh.

[16:58] well, secondly, this evening, having seen the repentance aspect, we want to move on to remorse.

Remorse. I'm sure this is all very interesting for you all. If we wanted to study revival, perhaps we'd all decide to choose this passage. Perhaps we'd also include some Scottish Calvinist legalistic guilt into the equation, I've heard this often by berating ourselves mercilessly for not exhibiting the same marks of repentance as Nineveh did.

That message is law. It's not gospel. The preacher would say, if only we would humble ourselves like the Ninevites did, then God would send his blessing.

All the time forgetting what John Calvin, the Kenyan John Calvin, not the French John Calvin, famously said to us, religion is what man does for God, even if that means humbling himself. Jesus Christ is what God does for man. Neither of these applications are legitimate in this context. We need to understand Jonah 3 in the light of Jonah's mindset, the prophet's mindset and background, and also Jesus' unflinching analysis of this whole event.

[18:19] Remember, Jonah's a prophet from the northern kingdom of Israel. In fact, he came from a part of Israel that would later be known as Galilee. More on that in a few weeks' time.

And at that time, the king of Israel was an unfaithful man called Jeroboam II. Listen to the description of Jeroboam II we have in 2 Kings 14, 24.

Jeroboam did what was evil in the sight of the Lord. Now, remember, one of the reasons Jonah did not want to go to Nineveh was because the Ninevites are his enemies.

He wants to stay in Israel. Lo and behold, he goes finally to Nineveh, and when he gets there and preaches the word, the king of Assyria, and the people repent and turn to the God of Israel. at that very same time, back home in Israel, King Jeroboam is engaging what is evil, engaging in acts which are evil in the sight of the Lord.

[19:31] Do you see the irony here? The Israel from which Jonah came and which Jonah lived, even though it claimed to be the people of God, was engaged in evil.

Whereas the Ninevites, Jonah hated, even though it was polluted with idle worship, repented when confronted by the God of Israel.

Now, if Jonah was in his right mind, as we'll see in a couple of weeks' time, he'd be thinking to himself, why can't my king, Jeroboam II, back in Israel, respond to my preaching the same way the king of Nineveh does?

Why can't my society back home reflect the repentant society of Nineveh? Why can't our repentance in Israel be similarly so urgent, so complete, and so sincere?

The irony is dripping from this passage, you see. And then, of course, then we add the analysis of Jesus in Luke 11, 32. We read this together. The context in this passage, of course, is the crowds are surrounding Jesus, and they're commanding him to show them some great sign.

[20:40] Haven't you heard it in our own day? I have so often. If God will show me a great sign, then I will believe in him. That's the way the Israelites of Jesus day thought, and so they challenged Jesus, give us a sign, so that we may believe in you and in the gospel you preach.

And Jesus responds, the men of Nineveh will rise at the judgment with this generation and condemn it, for they repented at the preaching of Jonah, and behold, as Evan read so beautifully, something greater than Jonah is here.

Again, can you hear the irony dripping from Jesus' mouth? The Ninevites, they believed Jonah and repented. Jesus is so much greater than Jonah, but no matter what he says, the Jewish crowds will not repent.

What should the response of the Israel of Jonah's day be to the repentance of Nineveh? Jeroboam and the whole nation of Israel should have become remorseful of their own stubbornness and unfaithfulness and should have become jealous of God's blessing of Nineveh.

Jeroboam and the whole nation of Israel should also have repented and turned back to their God. What should the response of the Jews of Jesus' day have been to the repentance of Nineveh?

[22 : 15] They should every single one of them repent also and turn to God, but they don't. The repentance of Nineveh does not make them jealous.

God's blessing upon them. The God of Israel is pleased with the Ninevites, his enemies, people not his own. The God of Israel is displeased with the unfaithfulness of Israel, his own people.

The repentance of Nineveh should have made the Israel of Jonah's day jealous and caused them to turn back to God, but it did not. The preaching of Jesus should have brought these Jewish crowds to repentance, but it did not.

The positive response of Gentiles to God's message should have shamed the Jews into faith and repentance, but it did not and it does not.

Some time ago an acquaintance of Katharine and mine had an affair with a younger woman who was not his wife. For a while it was hidden and then it all came out in the open and his wife was devastated, rightly so.

[23 : 36] The thing is, she's a wonderful person. She is highly attractive, hope Katharine doesn't mind me saying that, she's deeply intelligent, she's a great mother and so much fun to be around.

Whenever I see her ex-husband in the West End as sometimes I do, I look at him and I wonder to myself, what exactly got into your head to give up your wonderful wife together with your children in favour of a younger woman who by all accounts, I hope I'm allowed to say these things without offending anyone, by all accounts is a bit of a floozy.

I rather think he's either mad or bad or probably both. He's most definitely a creep. Doesn't he know what he's done?

Doesn't he know? Doesn't Israel know what it's doing by giving up on the God to whom Nineveh is responding? Don't the Jews know what they're doing by rejecting the gospel Jesus preached? they're rejecting the gospel in favour of man-made laws and human religion and then they crucify their Messiah. None of us repenting should have made them jealous but it made them only mad.

[24 : 56] There is for us a very important application in this passage. In Scotland we have had the gospel in our own language for 500 years.

500 years it's deeply ingrained into our country's culture. In particular the Scottish Reformed Church has been strong. Our churches have been full.

One of Glasgow City's elders, Walter, I'll pick on Walter because it's him who told me this, he remembers as a little boy being present at a communion service in this church where there were so many people present.

He had to sit in one of the stairs upstairs. Remember that? He told me that. That was when the sanctuary was all the way back past this wall, far bigger than it is now.

He had to sit on the stairs because the sanctuary was so full. The same is true for many other free churches of Scotland. Our churches are empty.

[25 : 58] Others are experiencing blessing. Catherine and I were running in Canvass Lang and a few weeks ago we noticed that Canvass Lang Baptist Church didn't have its sign out beside its door anymore.

Canvass Lang Baptist Church is one of the only evangelical churches in the east side of the city of Glasgow. And I for one was devastated and I wondered what will happen next because the Church of Scotland recently sold one of their buildings in Canvass Lang to the Muslims.

Christians. And I hoped that it wouldn't become another Islamic mosque in Canvass Lang thereby outnumbering the number of Christian churches. You have no idea of my pleasure on Tuesday night even though I was pecking, I was running up the hill.

Pecking means to breathe heavily for our American friends. Running up the hill and I noticed a sign. The church had been bought by whom? the Romanian Pentecostal Church.

And I've got to tell you, seeing that sign gave me all the breath I needed in my lungs to get up the Greenlees Road which is pretty steep. And I thought to myself, isn't that wonderful?

[27 : 10] That church has been sold as the Romanian Pentecostal. I've never met a Romanian in Glasgow. And they have a Pentecostal Church in Canvass Lang with a three hour long morning service. Last time anyone complains about the minister being too long, go and see the notice board.

Service begins 10 o'clock, ends at 1 o'clock. How many free churches used to be on the east side of Glasgow? There are huge congregations in our city of which we know so little, which are not of a

reformed persuasion.

They are vibrant, energetic, and they are devoted to Christ and his gospel. What should our response be to that? Should it be to pour cold water on them because they do not believe exactly the same things we do to criticize them because they are not of our tribe or of our culture?

Or should it make us jealous to experience the same blessing we have? Rather than looking down on them, should we not seek to imitate them in their vibrancy, their energy, their devotion to Christ and his gospel?

after all, we do not want the sign of Jonah to hang over us, do we? Remorse. And then thirdly, and lastly, reassurance.

[28 : 22] Reassurance. This is an incredibly important passage in the Old Testament and the whole Bible. You see, it was never God's intention to limit his salvation blessings to one people group, the Jews.

It was his purpose that the Jewish people should be mediators of his grace to all the nations of the world, but through them salvation should come to all the peoples of the earth.

But Israel had become inward-looking, xenophobic. They ignored their responsibility to the nations. They were happy to see millions dying of starvation and thirst, while they themselves had the waters of salvation to drink.

The repentance of Nineveh, and this is actually key to understanding the whole Old Testament message. You need to listen up to me here. This is important. The repentance of Nineveh and the Jewish rejection of Jesus is the prelude to the great commission of Jesus in Matthew 28, where he commands his disciples saying, go and make disciples of all nations.

Go and make disciples to all nations. The repentance of Nineveh and the Jewish rejection of Jesus mandates and justifies mission to the Gentile world.

[29 : 41] Nineveh's repentance makes the mission of the church to the Gentiles necessary and inevitable. It is because of Israel's rejection of Jesus that through Jok Troop, God awakened thousands of traveling herring fishery women in the early 20th century.

It is because of the repentance of Nineveh, God sent revival to Kulsaithe and Cambuslang, and today God is awakening his church in South America, in sub-Saharan Africa, in the Middle East, in Southeast Asia, and among Romanian Pentecostals and the East side of our city.

See then the importance of Jonah 3, verses 5 through 10, and why this book is really the biblical manual of mission and evangelism? Do you see why I choose it as a description of a healthy church evangelizing and engaging in mission for the Lord and his gospel?

Well, one last thing, and then we're finished. Can God do another Nineveh in our day and in our generation?

Can he? Yes, he can. Because if he can take an entire city of idol worshippers and awaken them in a day, he can take a city of secularists like Glasgow and awaken us in an instant.

[31 : 19] Be assured to use oldy, worldly language. God's arm is not shortened, but it cannot save.

God's arm isn't shortened, but it cannot save. Look for the awakening. Pray for the awakening. Work for the awakening.

For the days of Glasgow's revivals, where Glasgow shall flourish by the preaching of the word and the praising of his name. May just be down the corner. What a day that will be.

Let's pray. Amen. Amen. Heavenly Father, what a privilege it is to preach your word.

Open your word. Share it with God's people. To understand it and experience it for ourselves. Enthusiasm.

[32 : 16] Of your Holy Spirit. As he inspired the writer of Jonah to record all these things. Lord, we long for days of revival power.

We don't long to get back to the days of Canvass, Lying and Cloth Scythe. Of Carlyway and Barbas and many other places where revival has been in our nation.

We long to go to days of deeper, fuller, and more complete revival. But a whole city like Glasgow is awakened in the twinkling of an eye.

And Lord, perhaps we won't be able to explain the transformation. Just like we can't really explain from demographics and from culture why it is that so many Romanians are turning to Christ on the east side of Glasgow.

We don't know why that is, but it just is because your spirit is being poured out upon them. Lord, we long for you to do this here. We long for these churches which now are carpet showrooms and

nightclubs and mosques to be reclaimed for Christ.

[33 : 29] May it start with us, O Lord, as it was with our forefathers who've used names like Alexander Moody Stewart and Jock Troop, men who gave up everything for you because they had such a desire for your glory.

May it start with us, Lord, we ask in Jesus' name. Amen. Amen.