

Are We Living in a Nineveh Moment?

Note: This is the first of a three-part series.

Are we living in a “Nineveh Moment”? Is the church a reluctant Jonah? These are questions I’ve been pondering over the last few months.

During the month of August I was a guest minister at a church in Woodlands, Texas, during their midweek services. The first evening I began the message by asking, “Could it be we are living in a Nineveh Moment as a nation? Is the church like Jonah, reluctant to present the truth?” I posed the question again during a recent conference call I helped moderate with thousands of pastors across America.

Jonah was reluctant to speak the Word of the Lord to a sinful and rebellious people of Nineveh. Yet, when Jonah did obey, by the prodding of the Lord and after being in the belly of a whale, Nineveh repented and God relented from judging them for another 100 years. Sadly, Jonah became angry because, in God’s great grace and mercy, He chose not to judge Nineveh after they had repented. What would happen if righteous voices would speak the truth in love, seasoned in holiness and grace, and address the condition of America today?

God called Jonah to go to Nineveh with a warning of impending judgment due to their wicked and perverse ways. But Jonah resisted. He did not want to leave his comfort zone or deliver an unpopular message. As He did with Jonah, God is calling the church today to bring a message of consecration, holiness and truth to a society that doesn’t want to hear it.

This prophetic statement by Methodist preacher and Salvation Army Founder William Booth is sobering and reflective of the reality of where we are today:

"I consider that the chief dangers which confront the coming century will be religion without the Holy Ghost, Christianity without Christ, forgiveness without repentance, salvation without regeneration, politics without God and heaven without hell."—William Booth

We can look at the news every day and agree we're at a critical juncture. Many people say there's no hope. Some believe our nation is doomed, our infrastructure and economy will implode and America will never be the same. These types of judgments may come. But throughout Scripture, God always provides a scarlet thread of redemption. He always has a different plan if His people will listen and heed His Word.

In July of 2012, Billy Graham wrote an article in which he stated:

"My heart aches for America and its deceived people. The wonderful news is that our Lord is a God of mercy, and He responds to repentance. In Jonah's day, Nineveh was the lone world superpower—wealthy, unconcerned and self-centered. When the Prophet Jonah finally traveled to Nineveh and proclaimed God's warning, people heard and repented. I believe the same thing can happen once again, this time in our nation."

There is no doubt there is a battle for the soul of our nation. Will the church readily and willingly obey God and speak at a critical time in our nation and in our generation, so that—as with Nineveh—He would show His great mercy and grace?

Striking Parallels

In 2004, I published an article in which I stated there were three major things that can hinder God's blessing from a nation:

1. *Ritual or temple prostitution*

2. The shedding of innocent blood

3. Licentiousness or moral looseness

We see all three of these in our nation today.

In our institutional Christianity, we have prostituted ourselves by choosing to live by preference rather than by conviction. We have allowed life in the womb to be attacked mercilessly, with innocent blood being shed on the altars of profit and convenience. And now our Supreme Court has rewritten God's definition of marriage in their June 26, 2015 ruling. This abandonment of our morals has opened the doors even wider for an attack on the American church, as we find ourselves fighting like never before to defend our religious liberties. We must counter these attacks but at the same time display God's love to those who oppose us.

Much like America today, Nineveh was also racing down a path of self-destruction. If the Ninevites did not change their ways and repent of their sin, God had determined to destroy them. In Jonah 1:1, the Lord tells Jonah, "Go to the great city of Nineveh and preach against it, because its wickedness has come up before me." Jonah was tasked with an important objective: Warn the city of Nineveh to repent or face God's wrath. Unfortunately, Jonah fell prey to two very human desires—the desire to remain in his comfortable circumstances and the desire to be liked by everyone.

It's quite easy to draw parallels between Jonah's story and what's happening in our nation and churches today. Nineveh closely resembles America, a land of people unaware of and indifferent to God's Word. Jonah represents the complacency that has taken hold of the church. Christians have created comfortable surroundings in which we are liked and respected by those we know, where we don't often come in contact with people who believe differently.

But the time for complacency is over. America's actions demand

that the Christians speak up and lead it back to the Lord. If the church decides to flee the spiritual battle it now faces, America will continue down its current path and undoubtedly draw the ire of the Lord.

The Spirit of Truth

I have recently been teaching a series on the characteristics of the Holy Spirit—specifically His characteristics of *truth*, *holiness* and *grace*—and it ties in profoundly with this Nineveh Moment we are experiencing.

In 2 Thessalonians 2:8-10, we read: “Then the lawless one will be revealed, whom the Lord will consume with the breath of His mouth, and destroy with the brightness of His presence, even him, whose coming is in accordance with the working of Satan with all power and signs and false wonders, and with all deception of unrighteousness among those who perish, because they did not receive the love for the truth that they might be saved.”

Scripture is telling us here that people perish because they have no *love of truth*. We see this once again in Romans 1:24-25, where the Bible speaks of those who “turned the truth of God into a lie and worshipped and served the creature rather than the Creator, who is blessed forever. Amen.”

As the church, we must be lovers of truth. We cannot preach to others what we don’t believe and cherish. But we must deliver God’s Truth in love, seasoned with grace. If we bring a message of hope and salvation but deliver it with contempt, anger and judgment, people will not listen.

Too many Christians in the church today compromise truth or choose silence for fear of being labeled “politically incorrect.” Covering up or ignoring destructive issues of the heart only allows them to fester and wreak more havoc.

After Jonah’s time in the whale, he dutifully went to Nineveh

and warned the people to repent and give up their evil ways. When the Ninevites heard Jonah's message, they "believed God, and proclaimed a fast. And everyone, great and small, put on sackcloth" (Jonah 3:5). Jonah helped save a great city by following the Lord's command and speaking honestly to the people of the city, delivering God's truth without compromise. By listening to the Word of God, taking it to heart and repenting, the Ninevites were saved.

God is calling for courageous voices in the church to speak once again to our nation. He is calling for people who care more about others than they care about themselves. Rather than running *away* from what God is saying in this Nineveh Moment, we must run *toward* what He is saying and be the examples He is calling us to be. Will we speak the truth in holiness and grace so we can see God relent? Or will we turn the other direction?

Note: Stay tuned Thursday for part 2.

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