

How Revival Comes: The Sovereignty of God

by Ronald Glass

Revival comes through the sovereignty of God, not through human effort.

Duration: 57:35

Scripture: Isaiah 46:9, Jonah 2:9, Jonah 3, Matthew 6:33

Topics: "Revival"

Description

In this sermon, the preacher discusses the story of Jonah and the lessons it teaches about God's sovereignty and salvation. The sermon begins by highlighting the need for spiritual revival in Israel and how Moses interceded for the people after their sin of worshiping a golden calf. The focus then shifts to Jonah, who is sent by God to deliver a message of destruction to the city of Nineveh. Despite his initial reluctance, Jonah obeys and delivers a brief message of impending destruction. However, the people of Nineveh respond with repentance, and God shows mercy by sparing the city. The sermon emphasizes that salvation is from the Lord and that spiritual awakening is a sovereign work of God.

Transcript

Turn with me now in your Bibles, if you would, please, to the book of Jonah. To the book of Jonah, and we're going to be looking at the third chapter in this familiar story of the prophet Jonah. We are in the midst of an extended series of sermons on the subject of revival, biblical revival.

And we've been looking at sort of a general overview for the last ten sermons. We have looked at what biblical revival is, and we're going to shift the focus a little bit now as we look the next three weeks into the subject of how revival comes. So would you follow as I read, beginning in the third chapter of Jonah, the first verse.

Now the word of the Lord came to Jonah the second time, saying, Arise, go to Nineveh, the great city, and proclaim to it the proclamation which I am going to tell you. So Jonah arose and went to Nineveh according to the word of the Lord. Now Nineveh was an exceedingly great city, a three days walk.

Then Jonah began to go through the city one day's walk, and he cried out and said, Yet forty days, and Nineveh will be overthrown. Then the people of Nineveh believed in God, and they called a fast and put on sackcloth from the greatest to the least of them. When the word reached the king of Nineveh, he arose from his throne, laid aside his robe from him, covered himself with sackcloth, and sat on the ashes.

He issued a proclamation and it said, In Nineveh, by the decree of the king and his nobles, do not let man, beast, herd, or flock taste a thing. Do not let them eat or drink water. But both man and beast must be covered with sackcloth, and let men call on God earnestly that each may turn from his wicked way and from the violence which is in his hands.

Who knows? God may turn and relent and withdraw his burning anger so that we will not perish. When God saw their deeds, that they turned from their wicked way, then God relented concerning the calamity which he had declared he would bring upon them, and he did not do it. You may be familiar with the name Charles G. Finney.

Perhaps some of you have heard of him, others of you. Perhaps it's a new name in church history. But Charles Finney has been known as the greatest revivalist in American history.

A native of Connecticut, he lived from 1792 until 1875. Although he was trained as a teacher and as a lawyer, he is remembered as the early president of Oberlin College in Ohio, also as an evangelist and a revival preacher, particularly up in the area around Rochester, New York, and also known as the pastor of the Broadway Tabernacle in New York City. Perhaps today he's best known for a book he wrote, a famous book entitled Revival Lectures, which contains 22 chapters of detailed, sometimes excruciatingly and overwhelmingly detailed explanation on how to have a revival.

One chapter says it all from Finney's perspective, how to promote a revival. He places the lion's share of the responsibility for the presence or the absence of revival on the shoulders of Christian preachers and congregations. Now when you read the book, you have to admit that there are some things in there that are absolutely true.

But there is also a great deal of error in what Finney has written. Fundamental to Finney's mistakes is his emphasis upon human activity as the determining factor in whether we experience revival or not. The sovereignty of God is largely discounted in Finney's thinking.

Now let me share some words with you from that book called the Lectures on Revival. This is from the chapter, the first chapter, called What a Revival of Religion Is. Listen to these words.

Finney writes, a revival is not a miracle, not dependent on a miracle in any sense. It is a purely philosophical result of the right use of the constituted means, as much so as any other produced by the application of means. Now what he means by the right use of means, he illustrates later, a farmer puts seed in the ground and a plant comes up.

You don't expect the plant to come up unless seed was planted first. Well that's what he's saying revival is. So he says, I said that revival is the result of the right use of appropriate means.

The means which God has enjoined for the production of a revival doubtless have a natural tendency to produce a revival. So if you do the right things, then you get a revival. A revival, he says, is as naturally a result of the use of the appropriate means as a crop is of the use of the appropriate means.

I wish this idea to be impressed on your minds, for there has long been an idea prevalent that promoting religion has something very peculiar in it, not to be judged of by the ordinary rules of cause and effect. In short, that there is no connection of the means with the result and no tendency in the means to produce the effect. Now that sounds very much like a philosopher, but he's basically saying that if you want revival you've got to plant the seeds of it, you've got to do the right things first.

Well you ask, where in the world is God in all of this? Where is the sovereignty of God? Well here's what he says about that. A few pages later he writes, revivals have been greatly hindered by mistaken notions concerning the sovereignty of God. Many people have supposed God's sovereignty to be something very different from what it is.

They have supposed it to be of such an arbitrary disposal of events, and particularly of the gift of his spirit, as precluded a rational employment of means for promoting a revival. But there is no evidence from the Bible that God exercises any such sovereignty. Now I thoroughly disagree with Finney on this point, and I want to show you why in one of the greatest illustrations that we have from Scripture, which is the events that took place in the ancient city of Nineveh under the preaching of the prophet Jonah.

It's a strange history, Nineveh was the capital of the Assyrian Empire at that time. Now the king at this point was a man named Shalmaneser I, and the kingdom was just coming to a point where it was beginning to grow into the greatest of all the preeminent world power of that day. Now we first have mention of Nineveh back in Genesis chapter 10 verse 11 where we find that it was founded by the same guy Nimrod, a notoriously evil man following the flood, the same man who founded the city of Babylon.

We know of course that Nineveh is located in the territory that today is northern Iraq. In fact you have heard throughout the Iraq war, many times you have heard news reports about and from the city of Mosul in northern Iraq. Mosul is on the site just right next to the site of the ancient ruins of Nineveh.

In fact that area, that province of Iraq is still called the Nineveh province. The years between 783 and 773, the reign of Shalmaneser IV, Assyria was just beginning this rise to world prominence. During the reign of King Ezra Haddon and his successor Asher Banipal, the two of them together their reigns lasted from 681 to 633 BC.

That was the time of Nineveh's greatest prominence and greatest power. We know that the city of Nineveh and the empire of Nineveh, the Assyrian empire was notoriously evil. We pick that up for example from the prophet Nahum writing in the third chapter verse one, woe to the bloody city, completely full of lies and pillage.

And then the very last statement of the book of Nahum, for on whom has not your evil passed continually. Eventually this great city of Nineveh, capital of the Assyrian empire, was destroyed by a coalition of Babylonian and Median armies. That was the year 612 BC.

Now it's to Nineveh that the Lord sends a prophet, an extremely ardent Israelite patriot, who seems to have been an advisor in the court of King Jeroboam II of Israel. Jeroboam II had a long reign from about 793 through 753 BC, 40 year reign. We have a record just briefly stated of his reign in 2 Kings chapter 14.

I want to go back there for just a moment because Jonah appears here. 2 Kings 14 verse 23. Here's what it says, In the fifteenth year of Amaziah the son of Joash king of Judah, Jeroboam the son of Joash king of Israel became king in Samaria and he reigned 41 years.

He did evil in the sight of the Lord. He did not depart from all the sins of Jeroboam, the son of Nebat, which he made Israel sin. So he's an evil king, but listen to what happened.

He restored the border of Israel from the entrance of Hamath, that's up in Syria, as far as the sea of Arabah, according to the word of the Lord, the God of Israel, which he spoke through his servant Jonah, the son of Amittai, the prophet who was of Gathhefer. For the Lord saw the affliction of Israel, which was

very bitter, for there was neither bond nor free, nor was there any helper for Israel. The Lord did not say that he would blot out the name of Israel from under heaven, but he saved them by the hand of Jeroboam, the son of Joash.

So during this 41 year reign of a king who was notoriously evil, God showed grace to the people of the northern kingdom of Israel and actually delivered them. And there in the court of Jeroboam, the second, was this man named Jonah, a prophet from the city of Gathhefer, Jonah, the son of Amittai from the city of Gathhefer. I wonder, as I read this, apparently Jonah had impact on the king.

He seems to have been something of a court advisor as well as a prophet. He clearly was a prophet. He was a little bit like, I guess in recent memory, like Jerry Falwell was to some of the Republican administrations in Washington in the 1970s and 1980s.

He's a pastor, but he was in Washington a lot and was talking to presidents a lot. That seems to have been the nature of Jonah's ministry. Now Jonah, whose name means dove, was anything but a likely missionary candidate to the city of Nineveh.

Here's his story. The story opens with God saying to this prophet in Israel, this prophet who was apparently frequently at the court of King Jeroboam, he says to Jonah, I want you to go to the city of Nineveh and preach to that city. Now that was asking a patriotic prophet of Israel to go to the capital of one of the greatest enemies the nation had at that time, the greatest military threat that was knocking on Israel's door.

As we know, a few decades later, it was Assyria that took Israel captive and exiled them. And so God comes to Jonah and he says, I want you to go to Nineveh. Jonah says, I have a better idea.

So he went down to the city of Joppa and he boarded a ship, paid his fare, got on the ship and took off for Tarshish. Tarshish is probably the far western extreme of the known world that day. In that day, today, probably most scholars would say it's Spain.

Anyway, it was a long way to the west. God said, I want you to go east. Jonah said, I'm going to go west.

He got on the ship. He went down into the hold of the ship. It was a cargo ship.

And he found a little nook and cranny somewhere down there. And he went sound asleep. Jonah is running from God.

He does not want to go to Nineveh and preach to the people there. He is not interested in God saving Nineveh. He's not interested in a spiritual awakening in that city.

And so God and the sovereignty of God emerges throughout this little book of four chapters constantly. God in the picture is very vivid. God literally hurled through a storm into the Mediterranean Sea.

Now, these were experienced sailors on this ship, but they'd never seen a storm like this. And so as the storm rocked that ship back and forth, threatening to sink it, the sailors all gather on the deck. And they cry out to their gods, their polytheists, their idol worshipers.

They cry out to their gods. The storm only gets worse. So finally, they go down and they shake Jonah.

And they say, come on. How is it you're sleeping? Get up. You, we're calling on our gods.

You call on your god. So they cast lots. They cast lots to see whose fault this storm is.

And sure enough, the lot falls on Jonah. So they said, tell us what's going on. He says, I'm a Hebrew.

I fear the God of heaven that made the sea and the dry land. The men became very much afraid. How could you do this, they say.

Because he'd already told them he was running from God. So they put the ball in Jonah's lap, in his court. What should we do to you? You know the God who made the sea, the God who's thrown the storm into the sea.

You tell us. What should we do to you? Jonah says, throw me in the ocean and the sea will be calm. That was too radical, even for these pagans.

They said, no, no, no. So they rode harder. They tried to bring the ship to land.

They couldn't do it. So finally, they pray a prayer of confession to God in advance. Lord, don't hold this against us.

And they took Jonah and they threw him in the ocean. And immediately, the sea was calm. End of Jonah, right? Well, not quite.

Because as soon as Jonah hit the water, he was in big trouble. As he tells us in his prayer, it's interesting. He said, as I was sinking down, I cried for help from the depth of Sheol.

That probably here means a grave. He figured the ocean was his grave. He was a goner.

But I cried for help and you heard my voice. The currents engulfed me. The breakers and billows passed over me.

He talks about in chapter 2, verse 5, the seaweed wrapped around his head as he's sinking down into the sea. But God was in control and the sovereign God had a fish prepared. That fish came and swallowed up Jonah.

Though we're not told in the book of Jonah, the Lord Jesus tells us in the New Testament that three days and three nights, Jonah was in that fish's belly. Imagine how dark it was there. Imagine how bad it smelled.

Just put yourself in the belly of a fish for three days. I don't even know how Jonah breathed, but God provided oxygen for him. Guess what? When God brings a disobedient servant of his into a place like that, what do you suppose the only thing Jonah could do? He could pray.

And Jonah prayed. And that's what he tells us in chapter 2. He prayed, while I was fainting away, I remembered the Lord and my prayer came to you and to your holy temple. In his mind, he was praying toward Jerusalem.

And he says this. Jonah had a little time to think in that fish and a little time to pray. And here's what he said.

Those who regard vain idols forsake their faithfulness, but I will sacrifice to you with the voice of thanksgiving that which I have vowed I will pay. I think Jonah is saying here, and this isn't recorded, but

Jonah basically had said to God, I'll do whatever you want to do. I'll go wherever you want.

See, sometimes God has to put us in places like that before we say, OK, whatever you want, Lord, that's what I'll do. And then he makes a statement. The last line in chapter 2, verse 9, salvation is from the Lord.

Lesson learned. That's the theme of the book of Jonah. That's the theme.

Jonah now knows that salvation is of the Lord. Now, what we witness in Jonah is not exactly a revival. They're in the city of Nineveh.

A revival, as we've been talking about it, is a moving of the spirit of God upon the people of God who have fallen into spiritual decline. God's people are asleep. God's people are not alive with the power of the spirit.

That's when God enters in and revives his people. That's not what you have here. You have a pagan city.

However, this is a monumental spiritual awakening. It's much more like a mass evangelistic crusade without the organizing. And as such, it demonstrates even more vividly than anywhere else the principle of God's sovereignty in the awakening of spiritual life.

So technically, it wasn't a revival, but it is a massive spiritual awakening. And that's why there is a correspondence between this event in Nineveh and the revival of the church even in our day. So I want to share with you the three following ways in which revival comes.

That's what we're talking about in these days. How does revival come? The answer here, threefold. First of all, revival will not come by human effort.

Now, this slaps, I think, in the face the whole argument of Finney. Finney's argument that you have to use the right means. It's just a matter of using the right means.

I shared this with you before. But a little tract that the famous evangelist R.A. Torrey wrote that says, I can give you a prescription that will bring revival to any church or community or any city on earth. And he says, I have given this prescription around the world, and in no instance has it failed.

It cannot fail. Well, I'd like to review that with Torrey, and I would probably beg to differ with him. But the fact is that there is no such thing as a prescription.

That's the whole point of this. I want you to notice that revival will not come by human effort. How does it come? First of all, spiritual awakening is the product of God's sovereignty.

The word of the Lord came to Jonah the second time saying, Arise, go to Nineveh, the great city, and proclaim it to the proclamation, which I'm going to tell you. I have an idea that Jonah never expected to hear anything more about Nineveh. That fish had vomited Jonah out up on the shore, and he went back home and cleaned himself up and went back to the court of Jeroboam, and I think he would just as soon have wiped his hands clean of all of Nineveh.

But God comes a second time and says, Jonah, I want you to go back to Nineveh, and I want you to preach the message that I'm going to give to you. So while Jonah had no desire, no intention ever to have anything to do with Nineveh, God had other plans. And he recommissions his disobedient prophet, the most unlikely preacher in Israel.

And this just shows us that God is in control. He intends to bring spiritual awakening to Nineveh, and he intends to do it with Jonah, in spite of Jonah's resistance and his disobedience. I am driven back to the classic statement.

We saw this in our Sunday school hour today. This is the great passage in all of Scripture on the sovereignty of God. Isaiah chapter 46, verse 9. Remember the former things long past, for I am God, and there is no other.

I am God, and there is no one like me, declaring the end from the beginning. From the ancient times, things which have not been done. There'd never been a revival like this or awakening like this that takes place in Nineveh, saying, my purpose will be established.

I will accomplish all my good pleasure. And if my good pleasure means Jonah goes to Nineveh, Jonah will go to Nineveh. Listen to verse 11.

Calling a bird of prey from the east, the man of my purpose from a far country. Truly I have spoken. Truly I will bring it to pass.

I planned it. Surely I will do it. Pay attention, Jonah.

God's in control. And this is the lesson of the fish. Salvation is from the Lord.

Now, the principle was explained a long time before in the history of Israel. Let me take you for a moment back to Mount Sinai. Israel was in dire need of spiritual revival.

They had just sinned grievously against God by worshiping a golden calf at the foot of Sinai. As they danced their pagan dances around a calf, the image of their Jehovah God, Moses is up on top of the mountain getting the law from God. You remember that.

When Moses comes down, he is angry. And God is angry as well. Moses intercedes for the people of Israel just as powerfully as he had had to do at other times, and he would do in the future.

He throws himself on the ground before God, and he pleads for the mercy of God to Israel. Lo and behold, God says, OK, I will show them mercy. Exodus chapter 32, verse 14.

After he has pled with God, Moses has pled with God, O Lord, why does your anger burn against your people whom you brought up out of the land of Egypt with great power and with great might? He says to God, the Egyptians will hear about this, and they'll think you weren't able to bring us out. So the Lord changed his mind about the harm which he said he would do to his people. God relented from what he said he would do.

But Moses is still deeply exercised over this, because God then says to Moses, I'm relenting, I'm not going to judge them, I'm not going to destroy the nation and start another nation over with you, but here's the deal. You take them up to the land that I promised. I'm not going.

And Moses comes back to God and says, if you don't go, then we don't want to go either. If your presence does not go, do not lead us up from here. For how can it be known if I've found favor in your sight, I and your people? Is it not by your going with us? And so once again, the Lord says to Moses, I will also do this thing of which you have spoken, for you've found favor in my sight and I have found you by name.

What a powerful man of prayer Moses is. God relented again. God said, okay, I will do what you're praying to me to do.

I will go with you. But I want you to listen to what God said. As Moses prays to God, I pray you show me your glory.

I want to see your glory. Now here's what God said. I myself will make all my goodness pass before you and I will proclaim the name of the Lord before you.

Okay, Moses, I'm going to do that too. I'm not going to destroy the nation. I will go with you.

I'll show you my glory. But I want you to know one thing. And here it is.

Exodus 33, 19. I will be gracious to whom I will be gracious and will show compassion on whom I will show compassion. God is saying, Moses, I'm answering your prayers, but don't get the wrong idea here.

I'm in control. And maybe there's a day I don't want to show compassion. You see, Moses, don't think you can control God.

God's being very gracious and answering your prayers. But God is still sovereign. Here's the lesson.

Nobody dares presume upon God. His grace, his favor is given according to his own sovereign will. So spiritual awakening is the product of God's sovereignty.

He is in control. Secondly, here, spiritual awakening is also the product of God's word. Did you notice this? Now the word of the Lord came to Jonah.

Go and proclaim the proclamation, which I'm going to tell you. Verse four. So Jonah began to walk through the city and he cried out and said the message that God had given to him.

Now, Jonah is a chastened man. He is reluctant, but he is compliant. He obeys.

I don't think he obeys joyfully. I don't think he obeys enthusiastically, but he does obey. Now his message is carefully defined.

It is only what I'm going to tell you. I rather imagine Jonah had some words he would like to have said to the Ninevites. But he is told you go to them and you preach only what I reveal and nothing else.

When we look at the history of spiritual awakenings throughout the Bible, and especially throughout church history, we find that it normally comes in response to the faithful preaching of God's word. God's word is always central in revival, as we saw in one of our earlier messages. So Jonah delivers his message obediently.

Verse four. The city here was 90 miles. Archaeologists tell us 90 miles in circumference.

That's a big city. It took three days. In those days, it would have taken three days to walk all the way through the city of Nineveh.

Jonah begins his trek. He only goes one day into the city before things begin to happen. Jonah's message was brief and to the point.

Now, he may have said more, but this is the heart of the message. In the original text, it's very blunt. It says, only 40 days and Nineveh is destroyed.

40 days and this great city is history. Think how Jonah must have felt. From the sophistication of the courts in Samaria to humiliation in the streets of Nineveh.

Here's a foreign fool. Yet in the streets and in the marketplaces, workers lay down their tools and they cease their trading. Women put down their baskets in the marketplaces and they listen to this fool from Israel.

And the amazing thing is no one ridicules him. It's amazing. It's the lesson of the fish.

Salvation is of the Lord. Do you think that Jonah could have brought about this kind of response? Absolutely not. Now, what kind of a response? This brings me to the second way in which revival comes.

We've seen that revival will not come by human efforts. Second way, revival will come through humble repentance. Verses five through nine.

As Jonah preaches, something utterly amazing happens. Nineveh believes and Nineveh repents. The entire city.

Now, note the three parts of this repentance. First of all, there will be faith. Then the people of Nineveh, notice this phrase very carefully, believed in God.

That is a little different than saying they believed God. They believed in God. That's not just saying that they heard a message and agreed with it.

This says that they put their trust in it. I mean, this is the kind of language we use of getting saved in the New Testament. Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ.

You will be saved. They heard the message. They received it as true, and they staked their lives on it.

God's word produced fear of judgment, apparently, and hope for reprieve. I think this is a faith that is without precedence in biblical history. Where else do you read of so many utter pagans who had no background or tradition in the God of Israel coming to repentance so quickly? All at once.

An entire city? Where have you ever heard of that? There's no explanation for this apart from, and this is the unseen character in all of this, the Holy Spirit of God. He clearly was at work in the city of Nineveh. There will be faith.

They believed in the Lord, in God. Secondly, verses five and six, there will be brokenness. Did you notice the people of Nineveh believed in God? They called a fast, and they put on sackcloth from the greatest to the least of them.

And when the word reached the king of Nineveh, he rose from his throne, laid aside his robe from him, covered himself with sackcloth, and sat on the ashes. So much so that he issued a proclamation of fasting. Complete fasting.

No eating, no drinking. And they covered themselves with sackcloth. Not only themselves, even they put sackcloth on their cows, on their flocks.

We don't know how many people lived in Nineveh. We estimate from the end of the book where there's a reference to 120,000 persons who do not know the difference between their right and left hand. Scholars have wrestled with that.

They think probably he's referring to children who couldn't tell their right from their left. If that's the case, they've made a wild guess that somewhere probably in the neighborhood of half a million, 600,000 people, something like that. A big city.

And the entire city is in mourning. The people spontaneously call a fast. They dress in sackcloth.

They sit in the ashes of contrition. What in the world did Jonah say? Well, he said 40 days and the city's going to be overthrown. But he may have said more than that.

God may have given him other things to say. Perhaps he told them the story of Sodom and Gomorrah. That would have been calculated to strike terror.

Did Jonah possibly quote to them the second psalm and those concluding verses in that second psalm? You know how they go this way. Now therefore, O kings, show discernment. Take warning, O judges of the earth.

Worship the Lord with reverence and rejoice with trembling. Do homage to the son that he'd not become angry and you perish in the way for his wrath may soon be kindled. How blessed are all who take refuge in him.

Maybe he quoted that. At any rate, you have here a demonstration of humiliation that is utterly public and open. If this king of Nineveh is indeed the king of the Assyrians at the time, it was none other than Shalmaneser IV, he wants to know what's going on.

When he finds out, he joins the public mourning, verse 6, and he issues an official proclamation of humiliation. So the whole city is ordered to repent. There is a terrified seeking after God, a desperate longing for salvation.

The king says, who knows? Who knows? God may turn and relent and withdraw his burning anger so that we will not perish. Again, the lesson of the fish. Salvation is of the Lord.

There will be faith. There will be brokenness. The third thing you see in a revival like this is there will be prayer.

The people are commanded to call earnestly upon God. They're told to pray. Wherever there's a spiritual awakening, there is earnest prayer for God's mercy.

We've seen that throughout the church age. As you read the histories of the revivals, you're aware of the fact that prayer is probably the most conspicuous element of the revivals. I read of a coming awakening.

It's the one that the Lord Jesus will bring about when he presents himself to Israel someday as their Messiah. And we're told that the Lord will pour out upon them a spirit of grace and supplication, spirit of supplication. Again, I have to believe that the Holy Spirit was at work in Nineveh, and he did, in fact, pour out a spirit of supplication.

These people would not have prayed on their own initiative. They're calling out to a God that has nothing to do with all their pagan idols. This is a God they didn't know anything about.

But now they're calling out to him earnestly. Verse 8, call on God earnestly that each may turn from his wicked way. King seems to have an understanding that they can't repent of their own will, their own strength.

They don't have the strength to repent. He's asking them to pray to God that God will enable them to repent. And I think that's the secret of revival in our day.

We need to be praying, Lord, we can't repent in our own strength. Pour out upon us here in Wading River Baptist Church. Pour out upon us in the churches of Long Island.

Lord, pour out upon us a spirit of grace and supplication, a spirit that will enable us to pray. I'm asking this for myself. Lord, I can't pray like I need to pray.

Lord, give me a spirit that I can pray. Again, this all demonstrates the lesson of the fish. Salvation is of the Lord.

And then thirdly, revival will come as a heavenly response. Verse 10, the Lord regards their decision when God saw their deeds. Do you see that statement? He saw their deeds.

That's revealing. See, when revival comes, visible deeds of repentance are going to follow. Every time when you look at the history of revivals, you see this.

One of the things you see are public confessions of sin. Another thing you see is public restitution. As people make right those things that have been wrong between them, and they do so publicly.

People make restitution to the world even, as they go and repay debts that they have left unpaid, as they go and make right things they've stolen from their employers or from their neighbors or whatever. Repentance is visible. The world sees it.

There are no secret revivals. Now, you notice what the foremost of their repentance was here. They turned from their wicked way.

Does that sound familiar? We've already looked at 2 Chronicles 7, 14, right? My people who are called by my name will humble themselves and pray and what? Turn from their wicked ways. That's exactly what the people of Nineveh did. They turned from their wicked way, and the Lord saw it.

And then we see that while he regarded their decision, he went one step further. The Lord relents from their destruction. And God relented.

By the way, that's a much better word than some translations that say repented. God was not sorry for what he had said before. Absolutely not.

God is sovereign. That's the lesson of this whole issue, this story. God relented.

They did what God wanted them to do. They repented, and so God relented. Just get that principle down.

When Nineveh repented, God relented. And the same thing could be true here in America. Now, here's the Lord's promise to Israel.

This is to Israel, mind you. But I want you to listen carefully to what God says here. This is a great passage.

Jeremiah 18, verses 7 and 8. At one moment, I might speak concerning a nation or concerning a kingdom to uproot or pull down or destroy it. If that nation against which I have spoken, any nation, not just Israel, turns from its evil, I will relent concerning the calamity I planned to bring. So God's response to Jonah, to Nineveh in Jonah chapter 3, is not God changing his mind.

He didn't change his mind. He just did what he said he'd do. When I say that I'm going to judge a nation and they repent, I will relent.

There's no criticism of the character of God there. Again, God is sovereign. Well, now, Jonah's reaction is quite interesting.

God has brought spiritual awakening to this great city. And Jonah is all sour grapes. He is an unhappy camper.

He is unhappy with the Lord and he is disappointed with his own success. For the very next words that we read are, It greatly displeased Jonah, and he became angry. And then he prayed to the Lord and he said, Now, I love this.

Lord, isn't this what I said when I was back in my country? Isn't this what I said to you when I went west to Tarshish, when you told me? I said, for all I know, if I go to Nineveh, you'll save the city. You are a gracious and compassionate God. Slow to anger, abundant in loving kindness.

Good, Jonah. Prophet, you got your theology straight. And one who relents concerning calamity.

You got that right too. Now, Lord, just kill me. Take my life away.

This is the most shameful day of my life. What? Can you imagine? There isn't a preacher alive today that would be thrilled and grateful to God to see his preaching used to convert a whole city. He'd be on his face before God saying, Thank you, Lord.

And Jonah is angry and he's bitter because he hates the Ninevites. He hates the Assyrians. They are a potential enemy.

He is a patriot, a zealous court prophet in Israel. The last thing he wants to see is his enemies saved. So he goes out and he sits on the east side of the city.

Hoping against hope that God's going to change his mind and bring fire from heaven like he did with Sodom and Gomorrah and wipe him. He sits there in the heat. You know the story.

A plant grows up, gives him a little shade. Jonah's happy to have the shade and the heat while he's waiting for the destruction of Nineveh. And then the plant wilts, withers away.

And he gets angry, goes back to God, blames God again. Angry. I have good reason to be angry, even to death.

And the book of Jonah ends on a very strange note. God says, Jonah, you see that withered plant right there? See? I withered that plant. Because I decided, I brought that plant up and I withered it.

Now look at that city out there. Can't I do what I want to do with my own? These are my people. I am the sovereign God of creation.

I made them. I can do what I want. The bottom line, the lesson of the fish.

Salvation is of the Lord. Now, this awakening, like all revivals, was temporary. No revival lasts forever.

And 150 years later, another prophet comes along. His name is Nahum. And he has a message for Nineveh.

Only this one isn't very comforting. Nahum chapter 1, verse 2. A jealous and avenging God is the Lord. The Lord is avenging and wrathful.

The Lord takes vengeance on his adversaries. He reserves wrath for his enemies. Who can stand before his indignation? Who can endure the burning of his anger? His wrath is poured out like fire and the rocks are broken up by him.

The Lord is good, a stronghold in the day of trouble. He knows those who take refuge in him. But with an overflowing flood, he will make a complete end of its sight and will pursue enemies into the darkness.

Verse 14 of chapter 1. The Lord issued a command concerning you. Your name will no longer be perpetuated. I will cut off the idol and the image from the house of your gods.

I will prepare your grave for you are contemptible. Chapter 3, verse 1. Woe to the bloody city, completely full of lies and pillage. Chapter 3, verse 19.

For on whom has not your evil passed continually? Listen, 150 years was not so long that they did not have some memory in their records of this revival, of this awakening. And yet they chose to go back to their idols, back to their pagan gods, back to their violence. Now, as Nahum writes, and by the way, Nahum is the name, is the Hebrew word for that word that we saw in Jonah.

Relent. A reminder that God is the one who relents of the judgment he promises if a nation repents, but this time Nineveh didn't repent. Nineveh had become the premier world power on the stage of the globe.

They were conquering every nation in sight. They were the nation to be feared, and they were not about to repent. Some 25 years after Nahum spoke, Nineveh was destroyed by the allied Babylonian and Median.

Now, the fundamental lesson here is that the Lord didn't have to give awakening to Nineveh. They were not revived on their own initiative. Apart from the sovereign work of the Holy Spirit, there was no chance Nineveh would have been transformed like it was.

They didn't have God's word. They didn't have a prophet of God. They were thoroughly wicked.

Salvation is of the Lord. And for what reasons known only to God himself, God chose to awaken this great city. Why is it, for example, that God in this 18th century, what we know as evangelical revival, why did God bring revival to England, Great Britain? But just across the channel over in France, there was revolution.

There was no revival in France or revival in Spain or any of those places, and yet a mighty moving of God in England and in the colonies. And you can look at all the revivals and say, why did God do it here and

not there? That is God's business. He is sovereign.

What a powerful lesson Nineveh is to the church today. What a powerful incentive to seek the Lord in revival. Here's a pagan nation that doesn't even know God in sackcloth and ashes, pleading earnestly for God to deliver them.

And yet we in our church sit in our complacency today in evangelical Christianity, and we live like the world and there is no spirit of prayer, there is no spirit of humiliation or repentance. What a rebuke Nineveh is to the church. I'm going to close today, however, by bringing this great truth to bear upon your hearts personally.

I haven't done this much through this series, but today I want to. Some of you may for a long time have been unmoved by appeals to God's love and to his grace. You won't come to Christ in spite of the message of the gospel.

I want you to consider the message of judgment. Listen, God's patience eventually runs out. Genesis chapter six, verse three, God said, my spirit will not always strive with man.

The Lord Jesus Christ drew a very sobering lesson from this spiritual awakening in Nineveh. Listen to Jesus as he speaks in Luke chapter 11, verse 32. Here's what he says, the men of Nineveh will stand up with this generation at the judgment and condemn it because they repented at the preaching of Jonah and behold something greater than Jonah is here.

That's interesting because that tells me those people in Nineveh are going to be in heaven someday. That's amazing. And they're going to be a rebuke to the generation of the Lord Jesus, especially because Christ himself was there and they rejected him.

But we have the word of God. We have the spirit of God at work in our world today. We have no excuse for rejecting Jesus Christ.

And if you continue to reject Jesus Christ, Jesus says someday the people of Nineveh who were pagans, who repented at the preaching of Jonah, they are going to stand up as a rebuke to all who refuse to believe. Nineveh repented at the preaching of a rebellious prophet. You will not repent at the word of the son of God.

And Jesus said in Luke 13, verse three, I tell you no, but unless you repent, you will all likewise perish. And so if you continue to ignore God's word of judgment, someday people of Nineveh will face you and you will be without excuse. Now, my dear friend, listen carefully.

Nobody can promise you even 40 days until your final opportunity to repent has passed. Nobody can promise you one day or even one hour. But what I can say to you is that with God, there is mercy.

If you will humble yourself, if you will repent, if you will believe in the savior whom God has provided for the salvation of sinners. So don't let sinful pride stand in your way one moment longer. The Ninevites humbled themselves.

Proud, arrogant sinners were sitting in sackcloth and ashes, crying out to God, come down from the throne of your own desires and cover your guilt with the sackcloth of sorrow and call upon the God who is calling you and he will receive you even now. Remember, the lesson salvation is of the Lord. God calling yet,

shall I not hear earth's pleasures? Shall I still hold dear? Shall life's swift passing years all fly and still my soul in slumber lie? God calling yet, I cannot stay.

My heart I yield without delay. Vain world, farewell. From you I part.

The voice of God has reached my heart. Will you say that? Father, we get it. The lesson of the fish, salvation is of the Lord and every single one of us who have come to repentance and faith in Jesus Christ have come by the sovereign operation of your spirit.

We are born again, regenerated into new life and faith. And when it comes to your sleeping church, when it comes to your people who are so spiritually careless, we still acknowledge that salvation is of the Lord. Spiritual awakening is a sovereign work of the living God.

Revival is something that you give and you give in your own time, in your own way, according to your own will. But Lord, like Nineveh, we pray today, we earnestly ask you for that awakening, for that revival. For Wading River Baptist Church, for our sister churches here on Long Island, for churches like ours, Bible-believing churches all across our nation.

And most immediately, Lord, right here in our own hearts, we pray for a sovereign work of the Spirit of God to awaken us into fresh zeal and passion and to pour out upon us a spirit of grace and supplication that we will pray and pray until the showers of blessing fall. Lord, if there's one who is without Christ today, may they see this vision, this prophecy of the Lord Jesus of a day coming when the citizens of Nineveh will stand as a rebuke to unbelievers. May they give their heart and life, their repentance and faith to Jesus Christ, we pray.

Call even now those whom you will save, in Jesus' name, amen. Number 336 in your hymnal today, a hymn of invitation which tells it all, really. Out of all of my sin, the bondage of my sin, Jesus, I come.

If you have never come to Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior, I'm not asking you to walk down an aisle, raise a hand, fill out a card. I'm asking you to do business with God and God alone. Right where you stand, I'm asking you to call on his name.

Say, Lord, out of my shameful failure and my loss, my unrest, my arrogant pride, out of all of my fears, especially the fear of death, Lord, I come to you and plead, will you save me for Jesus' sake? And he will, he will. That's his promise. Sing that, won't you, all of us together as we stand, number 336, singing.

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