

When Revival Comes

From the series, *Jonah: The Great Adventure*

Jonah 4:10-11

By Dr. David H. McKinley

From the beginning, I should have subtitled this series, *The Great **Misadventure***, because every part of Jonah's story seems to be a misstep, a mistake, and a misdirected decision in the life of this man by the name of Jonah.

My all-time favorite outline of the book of Jonah is very simple—four chapters, four themes:

Jonah Running From God

Sailing to Tarshish—Chapter 1

Jonah Running Into God

Encountering a Great Fish—Chapter 2

Jonah Running With God

Preaching in Nineveh—Chapter 3

Jonah Trying to Run God

Pouting Over a Plant—Chapter 4

Review

Chapter 1: As we open the book the book of Jonah, we recognize it's a book of action. Jonah's on the move. He's running from God and sailing to Tarshish.

Chapter 2: Then we see Jonah running into God. Jonah gets tossed into the sea, swallowed by a great fish, and suddenly he meets God in the belly of that great fish. Jonah has a revival, though it were, of his heart.

Chapter 3: Then we see Jonah running with God. It's an amazing story of how Jonah went to preach in Nineveh, and the impact of that message in that great city—and ultimately, in the nation of Assyria.

Chapter 4: Here we see the strange, unusual ending to this book where Jonah is trying to run God. Jonah is pouting over a plant. Although he had been called of God—a prophet of God and used by God—this man was so obsessed with himself, his entitlement, and his creature comforts, that in the end, he's trying to run God instead of living under the rule of God.

And of course, for the better part of this book, we've spent time talking about how Jonah is often a reflection of who we are in the way we act and respond to God—"I am Jonah!"

Let's look again at Jonah 4—how it started and how it ended. I told you last week, I wish the book of Jonah had ended after chapter three. Jonah preaches, the city repents, there's a great revival and return to God, and God relents of His wrath and anger against the people of Nineveh. Wouldn't it be great to end there and write the words, "And they lived happily ever after"? But chapter four begins with a very simple statement:

"But it displeased Jonah exceedingly, and he was angry" (Jonah 4:1).

This angry evangelist, this preacher who had phenomenal success, started pouting.

"And the Lord said, 'You pity the plant, for which you did not labor, nor did you make it grow, which came into being in a night and perished in a night'" (Jonah 4:10).

Jonah was mad. He created a little booth and just sat there. God allowed a plant to grow over it, and it provided Jonah shade on a hot day. But then the Lord sent a worm and let the plant wither, and Jonah pitched another fit. God ends with this question:

"And should not I pity Nineveh, that great city, in which there are more than 120,000 persons who do not know their right hand from their left, and also much cattle?" (Jonah 4:11).

What a strange ending to the book! There's no sense of resolution, just this lingering question: *Should God not be merciful, and should Jonah not be thankful?*

As we look at the conclusion of this book, I don't feel I've given enough attention or emphasis on this one subject: *While God is indeed interested in our lives as individuals, God is also interested in and involved in the life and the movement of time in history among the nations.*

The Bible tells us that God is not a distant God, but God is active and working out His purpose and His plan in the world. That includes His work among the nations, and particularly, His work of judgment. I fail to preach and teach the message of Jonah if I don't adequately focus upon God's pending judgment upon a city and a nation. In the book of Job, we read:

“He makes nations great, and he destroys them; he enlarges nations, and leads them away” (Job 12:23).

And in the New Testament, we read in the book of Acts:

“And he made from one man every nation of mankind to live on all the face of the earth, having determined allotted periods and the boundaries of their dwelling place” (Acts 17:26).

God is actively engaged and working in the world! And the way in which God is most engaged is in the realm of His justice and judgment.

I know the message of God’s judgment is not a pretty or ultimately a popular message. We don’t like the message of judgment. We like a God who is loving and merciful, and certainly that’s a part of this message. But the backdrop of everything in this book has to do with the reality of the ever-present, urgent need to respond to the coming judgment of God upon the world, among the nations, and in our own lives.

1. The Charge of God’s Pending Judgment (Jonah 3:1-4)

I want to go back to Jonah 3 and remind you that the big issue—the dark cloud hanging over this book—is ultimately the charge of God’s pending judgment.

In Jonah 3:1-4, God told Jonah *the second time* to go to Nineveh and to *call out* a message to that city. In 40 days, Nineveh would be overthrown. There was coming in a moment in time a meeting with God. There was going to be a “come to Jesus” moment in Nineveh. Either the people would respond or God would release the fury of His judgment upon them.

When Jonah preached this message, he provided the Ninevites with a countdown clock:

“Yet forty days, and Nineveh shall be overthrown!” (Jonah 3:4b).

The number 40 in Scripture is very important. It’s the number of *testing* or of *trial*. In the Old Testament, the Bible tells us Moses spent 40 years in the wilderness preparing to become the leader of Israel. And when Moses led the people of Israel out to the wilderness, they were to pass through to the promised land. But the people built false idols and worshipped them, and ultimately, and there were 40 years of wandering in the wilderness. In the New Testament, the Bible tells us there were 40 days of testing and temptation of Jesus. So the number 40 is significant. In Nineveh, there was a

countdown clock, and this great city was on a collision course with the judgment of God. But thank God, amid His judgment, there was something more. God would ultimately overturn what He had intended.

Let me remind you how much the Bible has to say about God's judgment:

"For the LORD is our judge. The LORD is our lawgiver; the LORD is our king; he will save us" (Isaiah 33:22).

"God is a righteous judge, and a God who feels indignation every day" (Psalm 7:11).

"But the LORD sits enthroned forever; he has established his throne for justice, and he judges the world with righteousness; he judges the peoples with uprightness" (Psalm 9:7-8).

"Our God comes; he does not keep silence; before him is a devouring fire, around him a mighty tempest" (Psalm 50:3).

"...before the LORD, for he comes, for he comes to judge the earth. He will judge the world in righteousness, and the peoples in his faithfulness" (Psalm 96:13).

"I said in my heart, God will judge the righteous and the wicked, for there is a time for every matter and for every work" (Ecclesiastes 3:17).

"... because he has fixed a day on which he will judge the world in righteousness by a man whom he has appointed; and of this he has given assurance to all by raising him from the dead" (Acts 17:31).

Judgment. Judgment. Judgment! Old Testament and New Testament. The biblical judgment of God sits upon a condemned Earth and a guilty people. That is the message we see in Jonah.

In 40 days, Nineveh is going to be overthrown. That word, *overthrown*, can either mean it can be *turned over and destroyed*, but it also carries the idea that it can be *turned around*. David Levy, a Jewish-believing scholar, said,

"The Bible abounds with accounts of God's judgment. In His righteousness and holiness, He destroys both individuals and nations that are saturated with sin. But He also tells us plainly, 'I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but that the wicked turn from his way and live' (Ezekiel 33:11). Jonah 3 is a

monument to the goodness and grace of God, who restored His disobedient prophet to a position of service and extended mercy to a nation that truly repented.” —David Levy

That’s the happy part of the story. The heavy part of the story is that judgment was real and unrelenting, apart from a changed course of the city and the people of Nineveh. That’s why the Bible warns us again in the New Testament:

“It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God” (Hebrews 10:31).

Let’s make sure we remember this. Let’s make sure we don’t distort this—to make God so much like us in accommodation, affirmation, and acceptance, that we fail to realize the truth of God’s justice, judgment, and righteousness.

2. The Chance for Revival in America

Just as God turned around the course of the people of Nineveh and brought blessing instead of cursing, I believe there is a chance for revival in America today.

Jesus tells us in the New Testament book of Matthew 12:38-41 that Nineveh is a *sign* to all people and all time. And that sign is that while God indeed brings judgment and the world deserves it, God also gives us the sign of hope through a message of mercy and renewal. God’s witness to us is that His mercy is not limited by the crooked, corrupt, and condemning context of the culture in which we live. That message blesses me today! God can and God does send revival to His people—even a people living in a nation soon to celebrate its 250th anniversary next year!

I think it’s so important for us to go back to Scripture, to go back to Nineveh, to go back to the work of God, and say, “Could God... would God bring a great revival to America?”

I am deeply grateful to be an American. I am thankful for our national heritage. I am thankful for our spiritual freedom. I am thankful for the prosperity and blessing we have known as a nation. I think we would be fools to say anything less than “God shed His grace” on America! God *has* shown us His grace—no doubt about it! We are a nation of tragedy and a nation of triumph. We are a nation of vice and a nation of violence. We’re a nation of division and a nation that ultimately, fights one another. We’re a nation of excess and indulgence. But we are a nation marked by grace! And let that grace be a calling to us here, now, today, to ask that God revive us and revive this nation in the days to come.

There's much I don't know about the future of America. But I can promise you—according to the authority of the Word of God and His work in time and history—one of two things is going to happen in the future of America: either **revival** or **ruin**. My pastor, Adrian Rogers, used to say: "If God doesn't judge America, He will have to apologize to Sodom and Gomorrah."

The wickedness of who and what we are as a nation is great, both past and present. But somehow amid all this, we have seen the grace and mercy of God. If anything, that should prompt us to seek the Lord in a fresh and new way. While I've not been called by God to preach for 40 days across America about a great, impending judgment, I do believe that just as Jonah preached with urgency and fervency, there's an urgency in my heart today to speak to you as your pastor and say, "We need revival in our lives, in our nation, and in this land!" Our need is not political renewal, financial prosperity or greater educational opportunity. The great need of this nation and of our lives is spiritual revival that can only come from God! That's it! We desperately need this in our land.

It was none other than our first president, George Washington, who, in the farewell address (published in Philadelphia) said, "Reason and experience both forbid us to expect that national morality can prevail in exclusion of religious principle." Without religion, there is no basis of freedom. We believe that *all men are endowed by their creator* with freedom, and that is the foundation of the responsibility we share in our citizenship. A part of that responsibility as believers is that we ultimately cry out to God for a work—a new work—in us and in our nation.

America today reflects the ways of ancient Nineveh. Can you think of a better description of America than a nation with cities full of people "who do not know their right hand from their left" (Jonah 4:11b)? We live in a morass of cultural confusion. "Everyone [does] what [is] right in his own eyes" (Judges 17:6b; 21:25b). And yet, amid all this, we have this message and this need to pray for God to send a revival.

When we talk about revival, is it something that happens in a nation or is it something that happens in the church? Let me give you a simple answer. Yes! Revival needs to begin in the church, and then it will impact the nation. We are praying God would work in America, but God forbid we think He'll work in America if we don't ask Him to work in Augusta. That's where it needs to begin.

"Our most pressing obligation today is to do all in our power to obtain a revival that will result in a reformed, revitalized, purified church... Each generation of Christians is the seed of the next, and degenerate seed is sure to produce a degenerate harvest." —A.W. Tozer

I'm asking you to pray with me...

- For our nation and a movement of God—a movement that can only come from God that begins and works in us.
- For a recovery of a culture of life in our nation, beginning with us, honoring the sanctity of life and a renewal and renewed understanding of the sacredness of marriage, the home, and the family as God intended.
- That we would remember the authority of God's law—if we're going to have any authority for law at all in the world—and that we would work to reconcile with our neighbors, both across relational boundaries, social differences, and even the political divide.
- That we would be peacemakers in a world filled with anger and angst that surrounds us.
- That we would realize, as a nation and beginning with us, how much grace has been poured out upon us and the need for gratitude to God for all He has given to us. Never start a new day without thanking God for all that you have, because you have so much more than what so many in the world have.
- That we would resolve to be productive people, instead of talking about the privileges we feel we have been denied. We need to refocus on responsibilities as citizens, not just the rights in which we think we are deserving.
- For ultimately, a return to the Lord and a return of the Lord that the glory of God might rule and reign in our hearts and, of course, over this land.

Pray, seeking God and the chance for revival! It is a reality!

3. The Change of the Ninevites' Heart (Jonah 3:5-9)

I want to wrap up this message and this series today referencing the change of the Ninevites' hearts. What we learn from the Ninevites is how to return to the Lord, and how to have a national and personal revival. The amazing thing is that we learn very little from Jonah except how to be a proud, self-righteous, and "religious" people.

Jonah is not the example of who or what you want to be as a believer. But curiously, the positive lesson we learn comes from the Ninevites—what God did and how God moved and worked in their lives. So what was revealed through the Ninevites? What are the conditions for revival? What is the result of revival?

• They Heard the Word

"Faith comes by hearing and hearing by the Word of God" (Romans 10:17).

When Jonah began to preach that in 40 days Nineveh would be overthrown, the Bible says,

“And the people of Nineveh believed God” (Jonah 3:5).

There was a sense of faith in response, a response believing what God said was true and right. Someone said the Ninevites came to believe they were living in God’s world, but not on God’s terms, and they quickly realized they were out of line due to the strict, stern message of judgment directed toward them. There was an authoritative message that the law of God had been violated, and therefore the judgment of God was coming.

One of the great responsibilities I have to you and that I have in a calling from God is to preach with authority the message of God’s law, beginning with the Ten Commandments—the “thou shalt” and the “thou shalt not.” While we may not like the law, the reality is that God gave us the law not to impress upon us what we need to do to reform our lives or to be better people; God gave us the law as a tool, as an instrument, to show us how misaligned, messed up, and out of bounds our lives really are. The purpose of the law is to lay a straight edge against the crookedness of life so that we see our sin and all the aberrations of the plan and purpose of God so that we come to God and say, “God, I’m broken. I’m messed up. I need to be changed.” And in return, we hear the word of God that says you *can be changed!* The law of God, then, is accompanied by the love of God.

What makes the Good News of the Gospel good about God’s grace, salvation, and forgiveness is the bad news that we’re condemned and broken, and we can’t fix ourselves. When we understand that “all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God” (Romans 3:23), and that God sent His Son, Jesus, to bear the penalty of our sin and to give us life through His name, then that becomes a transformative message of grace that results in a transformed life of gratitude lived out for the glory of God. The people of Nineveh heard God’s word and believed!

“If we want revivals, we must revive our reverence for the Word of God.” —Charles H. Spurgeon

• **They Humbled Themselves**

The Bible says the people understood the message of judgment and believed God, and something happened that had such impact on them that they began to fast—not eating anything—and they put on sackcloth and ashes. This demonstrated the brokenness and the shame of their lives on the outside because of the shame and guilt of their hearts on the inside.

Not only did the people fast, but the cattle also. They didn't feed the cows! Do you know what cows do when they don't eat and are hungry? They make a sound. Moooooooo. Imagine the scene: Not only were the people walking in sackcloth and ashes and fasting, but night and day all you heard was the echoing, endless sound of these cows mooing, reminiscent of the people saying to God, "We are desperate that You would see our brokenness and heal us from our condemnation."

The Bible tells us that we are to take a "mooing position" before God:

"Draw near to God, and he will draw near to you. Cleanse your hands, you sinners, and purify your hearts, you double-minded. Be wretched and mourn and weep. Let your laughter be turned to mourning and your joy to gloom. Humble yourselves before the Lord, and he will exalt you" (James 4:8-10).

Other translations say, "He will lift you up" (James 4:10b NLT). God lifts humble people. The Bible tells us that God puts down the proud, but He lifts the humble. (See James 4:6).

"Revival is the visitation of God which brings to life Christians who have been sleeping and restores a deep sense of God's near presence and holiness. Thence springs a vivid sense of sin and a profound exercise of heart in repentance, praise, and love, with an evangelistic outflow." —J.I. Packer

God not only to hears, but moves in our lives!

- **They Hungered for God**

The Ninevites were not only physically hungry, but also spiritually hungry. In Jonah 3:8b, they called out "mightily to God." They called out with desperation and passion.

It's a great tragedy to sometimes fall into the trap of "emotional Christianity." Emotional Christianity is doing all the right things but not doing them from a desperate heart. Quiet time? Check. Bible reading? Check. Prayer time? Check. Went to church? Check. As a pastor, it's all there on my checklist too. I have had two and three services every Sunday for most of my life. Check. Check. Check. But the critical question is not, "Did I do my duty?" Instead, "Is there a desperation, a hungering, and a thirsting for God, for righteousness?" That's what happened in the hearts of the Ninevites. They humbled themselves, but then they hungered for God, and they asked that God move and work in their lives and spare them of judgment because they knew they deserved it.

- **They Honored God's Appeal** (Jonah 3:10)

“They turned from their evil way” (Jonah 3:10b).

The Ninevites changed their attitudes and actions. They repented. They relented. Then God relented and extended mercy and grace to them. At the end of the entire story, Nineveh experienced revival and tragically, Jonah was filled with resentment. Nineveh had life and Jonah was walking around talking about how entitled he was to some further blessing of God.

Don’t you know God gets sick of His spoiled children—those whom He has blessed and graced, but those who do nothing but complain about what they don’t have instead of recognizing what they do have. The people of Nineveh honored the Lord, and in honoring Him, God brought renewal and revival to them.

I don’t know about you, but I don’t want to be one of God’s spoil brats. I want to be a man—and I want us as a people—to be like the people of Nineveh who honored God’s Word. I want us to humble ourselves, continually hunger after God, and then ultimately, hear the Word of God and honor that Word through our lives day by day.

“We want those who are born into gospel-loving homes to own their sin, from the earliest age, and find refuge in the covenant-keeping God. We want those who have grown up in the church but have remained spiritually indifferent to be convicted by this truth: religious habits are not enough to make a person right before God. You must be born again! We want those who have no connection to the church to realize that they are sinners in the hands of a righteous God. We want them to seek and find Christ through the ministry of the gospel among us. We want to know the power that accomplished the greatest revival in the history of the world.” —William Boekestein

Why? Because God cares. God said, “Should not I pity Nineveh?” (Jonah 4:11a). God cares. He cares about the condition of His people, the condition of His church, the condition of this nation, the condition of lostness. The question is, “Do you care? Do I care?”

“Revival is nothing more than a new beginning of obedience to God.” —Charles Finney

I don’t think revival is some mystic, mysterious, strange thing that we’re hoping is going to suddenly come upon us as we wake up in a haze. I believe that true revival always takes us to one place—the cross! The one thing that will crush you under the condemnation of your own sin and that will cure you with the wonderful reality of a heart filled with gratitude is the recognition of who Jesus is, why Jesus came, and what Jesus has done for you.

When we only let the Gospel be a message we heard and responded to once, we fail to let the Gospel be the dominant message in our hearts. Every day I need to preach the gospel to myself—every day I’m a sinner and I can’t save myself. That what’s wrong with me. It is something that is not only broken, but wicked. But there is One who came and bore my brokenness that I might be made whole. The One who came to cleanse me from my corruption is the One who was nailed to a cross and died and suffered in my place, who tasted death but rose again so that He might give life—yes, new life (revival!) to all who believe on His name.

Do you want revival? That revival begins with a fresh recognition of the saving grace of God made possible in Jesus Christ. What I deserved, Jesus took! What I don’t deserve, Jesus gives!

Father, I pray today for a revival in me. I pray today for a revival in Warren. I pray today for revival through us that would touch this community. I pray for a revival in churches all across America that would truly bring a revival in America. We realize we’re not a spiritual national state, but we are a spiritual people living in a national state desperately in need of Your grace and mercy!

And so we come to You. We look to You. We wait upon You today and ask You to meet us at the place of brokenness and humility that we might honor You when we leave this place and as we walk forward in the days to come.

Lord Jesus, we give You thanks for the life we have and share because of You. We know there’s not anything we can do to fix ourselves or anyone else spiritually, to make ourselves better morally. There’s nothing that we can do to gain integrity apart from the saving mercy and grace of God in Christ.

Father, I pray for people today who are in bondage. I pray for people today who may be living unsure between what is right and what is wrong, what is good and what is bad. Today may they look to Jesus and believe the Word of God that says, “The wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord” (Romans 6:23).

Lord, would You let someone today believe on and call upon the name of the Lord? Would you let someone here today call out to You in a fresh and new way. Revive us, oh God! Revive us again that we may be saved. How we pray for that work in our hearts today. In Jesus’ name, Amen.

“Restore us again, O God of our salvation,
and put away your indignation toward us!

Will you be angry with us forever?
Will you prolong your anger to all generations?
Will you not revive us again,
that your people may rejoice in you?
Show us your steadfast love, O LORD,
and grant us your salvation”
(Psalm 85:4-7).

That’s my prayer for us. That’s my prayer for our nation as we approach yet another national birthday. That’s my prayer that there might be a revival in us and among us, and might it even begin to be seen and known today.

This is an edited version of a message preached from the pulpit of Warren Church, 3203 Washington Road, Augusta, GA 30907 on Sunday, June 29, 2025, by Dr. David H. McKinley.

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