**Pastor Tim’s Message Notes from 5-2-2021
Nineveh On Its Knees**

I remember when I was in somewhere around 8th or 9th grade and I was invited to go with a group from my church to an event called Heaven’s Gates, Hell’s Flames. You may recall me sharing on this a bit last summer, when I shared some significant moments in my faith journey. But in light of the biblical passage we will be looking closely at today, I felt led to reflect a little more on that event.

Have any of you heard of this production – *Heaven’s Gates, Hell’s Flames*? The play begins with a depiction of the passion of Jesus and then after this, His triumphant resurrection. Next the play describes several different scenarios of people that are going about life and then pass away, sometimes suddenly or unexpectedly. And then each of these people are either welcomed into heaven or taken into hell.

Now as you might except, watching a play like this will affect you. It affected me. In fact, it literally scared the hell out of me you could say.

But while it was traumatic in some ways and even though it did, for whatever reason, take some time before I was truly able to rest in the assurance of my own forgiveness and salvation, I appreciate the wakeup call that the play gave me.

Without the wakeup call to my own sinfulness and need for God’s mercy, it would be far more likely that I would still be spiritually asleep today.

Before that play, I often viewed my goodness or badness based on comparing myself to others around me, certainly putting myself before many others, particularly bullies at school.

But after that day, the Lord helped me to see my spiritual condition was not based from my perspective or opinion, but from His. The Holy Spirit opened my eyes to my own need for God’s mercy and forgiveness, my own need for saving faith in Jesus.

Think about your own faith journey for a moment. At some point you were awakened to your need for Jesus and His sacrifice. The Lord can certainly make us aware of our need in different ways, but one way can certainly be by making us aware of God’s judgment against us in our present state.

This is not the easiest subject to share on. In speaking about these things, one is considered a fire and brimstone preacher, which is viewed as archaic and judgmental.

In fact, just this weekend a pastor-friend of my sent me a video of a person preaching in the street in the UK and then getting arrested, because his views were considered hate speech.

We must remember that while it is certainly possible for Christians to be judgmental and prejudice, our Triune God is a God who is not judgmental or prejudiced. When we proclaim His Word in love, including His words of judgment, it is not being judgmental or prejudiced. It is simply speaking truth to those who need to hear it.

And so, we turn again to another well-known street preacher – the prophet Jonah.

And our reading today picks up with Jonah back on dry land, rescued by God’s grace.

Let’s us turn again to God’s Word found in Jonah 3:1-10

**3 Then the word of the Lord came to Jonah a second time: 2“Go to the great city of Nineveh and proclaim to it the message I give you.”**

**3Jonah obeyed the word of the Lord and went to Nineveh. Now Nineveh was a very large city; it took three days to go through it. 4Jonah began by going a day’s journey into the city, proclaiming, “Forty more days and Nineveh will be overthrown.” 5The Ninevites believed God. A fast was proclaimed, and all of them, from the greatest to the least, put on sackcloth.**

**6When Jonah’s warning reached the king of Nineveh, he rose from his throne, took off his royal robes, covered himself with sackcloth and sat down in the dust. 7This is the proclamation he issued in Nineveh:**

**“By the decree of the king and his nobles:**

**Do not let people or animals, herds or flocks, taste anything; do not let them eat or drink. 8But let people and animals be covered with sackcloth. Let everyone call urgently on God. Let them give up their evil ways and their violence. 9Who knows? God may yet relent and with compassion turn from his fierce anger so that we will not perish.”**

**10When God saw what they did and how they turned from their evil ways, he relented and did not bring on them the destruction he had threatened.**

Wow! What a passage of Scripture. There are a lot of things that we can unpack from this text.

**First, it is important to note that Jonah gets it right this time and obeys the LORD when he calls him a second time to go to Nineveh.**

Now we do not know when the word of the LORD came to Jonah this second time. It could have been right on the shore after being vomited out of the large fish. It could have been days or weeks later. But when the LORD clearly instructs Jonah to go to Nineveh and speak on God’s behalf, Jonah does not run this time. He is off to Nineveh.

And it is not like Nineveh was right around the corner. It wasn’t a quick walk to Wellsville or even Camp Hill, Nineveh was about 500 miles from Israel. This would have been a month’s long journey for him, perhaps camping outside many nights. And it would have been even farther if Jonah was given this second word from God right after his being ejected from the fish, because he has gone in the complete opposite direction from Nineveh.

Either way, it was a long journey for Jonah to arrive in Nineveh.

**Second, after Jonah arrives at Nineveh, he proclaims a very simple message. “Forty more days and Nineveh will be overthrown.”** Now, in all likelihood, Jonah’s preaching was a little longer than that. Perhaps Jonah spoke of some of the evil behaviors that were practiced by the Ninevites. Maybe he shared how God pursued him and rescued him after he ran from this calling from God. We don’t know.

What we do know is that the Holy Spirit used the words of Jonah to bring great conviction in the city. God’s anointing was upon Jonah.

And Jonah was not likely speaking with lots of compassion and love towards the people there, for as we will get into in a couple of weeks, Jonah was hoping for God’s judgement to fall on the city. He was not likely speaking the truth in love to the Ninevites – just the truth.

I am convinced that the LORD used Jonah despite himself. And as Jonah spoke, it was as if God Himself was there convicting person after person of their need for God’s mercy and forgiveness. It was a wake-up call through a message of impending judgment.

**Third, the Ninevites repent of their sins and turn to God.** The king of Nineveh himself puts on sackcloth as a sign of his mortality and need to humble himself before God. And he proclaims a fast throughout the land. Even animals were forbidden from eating and drinking.

Just to pause there for a second. We may think why would this king do this? Why would he listen to a foreign prophet like Jonah?

The simple answer is that God has been at work in Nineveh before Jonah got there. In the New Testament Book of Romans, chapters 1 & 2 describe how God has made himself known throughout the world. God, in His mercy, gives humanity a knowledge of Himself through the works that He has made. And this certainly included the people of Nineveh in Jonah’s day.

Deep down, every person knows God’s qualities and goodness and power and holiness, but we repress through truths and exchange them for lies. Deep down we all know that we need a savior.

Scholars believe that the events of Jonah took place during the 8th century BC, which was a time of political instability and weakness in the nation of Assyria. Perhaps it was this time of uncertainty that helped prepare hearts and minds in Nineveh to turn to the LORD and to turn from living sinfully.

**And fourth and finally, the text tells us that God relents from the destruction that He was considering bringing on Nineveh.** There was great rejoicing in this city when this 40-day period was up and Nineveh was not destroyed.

Friends, as we think about this scene, there are a few things in particular that I believe are helpful takeaways for us today.

**First, God is a God of second chances**. Can I get an amen to that? We all, like Jonah, mess up. Even as seasoned Christians, we sometimes ignore God’s leadings. We sometimes make very poor choices. But the Lord is a God of 2nd changes and oftentimes 3rd changes and 4th changes as well. He is compassionate and He loves to work through us as His children.

**Second, there is a place for proclaiming God’s judgment**. We can speak of God’s judgment without being judgmental. And while we are to speak truth in love, we are to be people of truth. And this is even when it’s not politically correct. Whether we are called to be a street preacher or not, we are all called to share our faith.

I love the Andrae Crouch song *“Jesus is the answer for the World Today.”*

Jesus is the answer. He is the good news in light of the bad news of our sin.

**Third, God cares about every person**. Nineveh was an important city to God. Every person is of immense value to God.

Pray for those who do not know Christ. Your prayers are powerful in God’s hands. And good for opportunities to lovingly speak God’s truth to people around you.

**And fourth and finally, use your influence to draw others closer to God**. The king in Nineveh was convicted of his sins and repented. But he used his influence to call others to repentance in the city.

Think of the people whom we have influenced in their lives. How can we impact with the good news of Jesus? How can we be intentional? Every one of us has a sphere of influence.