

*It is more profitable to know Jesus than to know about Him.*

**Weekly Edition – October 21, 2016**

**Jonah – Chapter 3 – part 5**

<sup>6</sup> *When 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. <sup>7</sup> This 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. <sup>8</sup> But let people and animals be covered with sackcloth. Let everyone call urgently on God. Let them give up their evil ways and their violence. <sup>9</sup> Who knows? God may yet relent and with compassion turn from his fierce anger so that we will not perish."*

<sup>10</sup> *When 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.*

## Jonah

### One of the Twelve Prophets

1. The Word of the Lord
2. Jonah's mission
3. Jonah flees
4. The storm
5. The great fish
6. Three days in the belly
7. Jonah delivered
8. Nineveh repents
9. Jonah pouts
10. The gourd
11. God's mercy

### Three Reflections on Today's Text

#### First Consideration: The Character of this Unnamed King

- 1) When Holy Scripture is silent on certain details – things that might seem at first as though they matter – it is because the LORD wants us to pay attention to other things – the things which are revealed in God's Word.
- 2) In this spirit we take note that Holy Scripture is silent about how Jonah's warning reached the king of Nineveh, whether by Jonah's appearing before him, or whether by the response of his people to the prophet's warning, or by some other means. We simply don't know how word of Jonah's message came before this king. What is important is that it got to him, what is unimportant is the means by which this occurred.
- 3) Nor do we know the identity of this king. We do not know his lineage, his wars, or even his policy towards Israel. His name is never spoken, just like we never learn the name of the captain of the boat back in chapter one. By the omission of these details, we are directed to focus our attention on what is revealed in Holy Scripture: namely, the king's response to the message.
- 4) And the king's response to the Word is simply wonderful. The king shows himself to be a responsible monarch and one who cares about his people – just as the captain had shown himself to be a good man back in chapter 1. Only the king shows himself to be more insightful than the captain – after all, there is no storm blowing, no jettisoning of cargo to lighten a ship in grave danger, no fear of imminent drowning. With no imminent mortal danger at hand, the king had to use his insight to think ahead 40 days to what might be.
- 5) Scripture tells us that Jonah arose back in the begin of this book (1:3) and once again after being up-chucked by the great fish (3:3). Here we are told that the king of Nineveh also arises to take action. But in contrast to Jonah, the king's action is a symbolic declaration of his own helplessness. This is something that the prophet didn't get around to recognizing until he was in deep water!

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- 6) Elsewhere in Holy Scripture we are given only the name of a single king of Nineveh – and this king who is now before us is not the one named elsewhere. That king, whose name was the Assyrian Emperor Sennacherib reigned from 705 to 681 BC. He was a proud king who boasted of being stronger than the gods of all other nations, including the LORD. He was eventually assassinated by his own sons in the temple of his god. His example is so important that Holy Scripture recounts the story three times in three different books to amplify that fate of those who refuse the LORD's kindness. (2 Kings 18-19; 2 Chronicles 32 & Isaiah 36-37)
- 7) But this king now before us proves himself to be honorable and responsible by heading the Word of the LORD and declaring a fast.

**Application:** Holy Scripture omits important details so that we might focus on the really important things that it reveals to us. We don't know any of the mundane things about this king, only his response to the Word of the LORD. Will I be remembered by mundane details that really don't add up to much or count for much in the long run, or will I be remembered for my response the Word of the LORD?

### **Second Consideration: What we Cling To and What we Divest**

- 1) Holy Scripture tells us that the king of Nineveh *"rose from his throne, took off his royal robes, covered himself with sackcloth and sat down in the dust."*
- 2) The Hebrew word translated to "royal robes" means "glory, splendor, or magnificence." The royal robes were symbols of the king's glory and splendor. So by removing these, the king divests himself of glory.
- 3) Said differently, he humbles himself. He removes all the visible splendor and magnificence of his office and replaces it with sackcloth – the same debasement that his people have assumed by placing themselves in sackcloth.
- 4) Holy Scripture says nothing about the king tearing his garments; and this is important too, since elsewhere God speaks through another prophet telling the people of Israel to "rend their hearts, not their garments." (Joel 2:13) It is a real change of heart we see, not only in the people of Nineveh, but also in their king.
- 5) His gesture of humility is also a gesture of solidarity with his people – one vulnerable human being joining the rest as they beg for mercy. It is a really big step – an act of faith.
- 6) To top it off, he steps from his throne to sit in ashes! It is a particularly dramatic gesture of repentance. Job also humbled himself in this way (see Job 2:8) but only after he had suffered severe losses. This king has lost nothing at all – but has only heard rumors of losses to come. It makes his actions all the more remarkable.
- 7) In our Christian faith journey you and I are like this king. We have heard rumors of losses to come when we reach the veil of this life and pass through death to greet eternity. Holy Scripture has a great deal to say about the benefits to be gained for those who stand justified in Jesus. And it has much to say about the losses to be suffered by those who do not share in Jesus Christ.

**Application:** We cling to many things that hinder our growth toward our goal of becoming loving persons in Jesus Christ our Lord. Self-sufficiency. Pride. Honor. The list goes on and is different for each of us. Yet here we see the picture of humility – the picture of rending our heart. What do I hold fast to that God may be asking me to divest (opinions, rules, habits of heart, etc.)? What have I divested that God may be asking me to take up again?

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### **Third Consideration: The Leadership Difference**

- 1) Leaders matter a great deal. And Holy Scripture often ties the fate of a people to the choices of their leaders. The central event in this third chapter of Jonah is the king's proclamation. The Hebrew verb means "to cry, cry out, call, call for help." So in issuing a proclamation to his people, he is also crying out to heaven for mercy for himself and his kingdom.
- 2) The story does not inform us how the king comes to understand how he stands before the LORD, the God of heaven and earth. Namely, that he is a ruler responsible for an evil people who will be destroyed together with him if he doesn't take action to change things.
- 3) So the king makes official the fast already proclaimed by the people. He puts his royal stamp of approval on it, and he joins it in himself – as we have previously noted, by removing his glory, stepping down from his throne to sit in ashes and putting on sackcloth. It is a big action – signaling a big change of heart.
- 4) The king figures all this out without any help from Jonah – showing us something about the natural abilities of the king as a leader with vision and a sound sense of consequences – and also the supernatural grace of God working in the heart of this king.
- 5) The king even recognizes his own lack of knowledge. He says, "who knows?" This king recognizes that he is operating in the dark. And while he may be operating in the dark about the exact threat – who decreed it? By what means will Nineveh be destroyed? Who is the destroyer? Etc.? – he evidently can recognize evil when he sees it, and can recognize that it is an evil for which he is responsible (whether by participation in it himself, or by permitting it to be business-as-usual in the kingdom under his rule). Either way, he is alarmed and afraid enough to take the right action.
- 6) The king has the proclamation ratified by the entire ruling class of Nineveh (i.e., "his nobles") and in this way we see the entire leadership hierarchy of Nineveh moving to embrace the spirit of repentance. The entire nation, people of every rank, and the entire leadership hierarchy join in the fast – and not only the people – but also the people ensure that their animals join in as well.

**Application:** Leaders make a difference. Leaders matter. A people's leaders are often a reflection of the people themselves – and in this we have much to lament about the sad state of America today – what our presidential candidates say about us as a people – and what they say about our culture. Would our leaders today respond as this king of Nineveh responded? Would Congress respond like these nobles? What is my role as a citizen of heaven? As a citizen of America?