

# JONAH GO!

TEACHING NOTES #4

## REVIVAL IN OUR TIME?

Let's look now at one of the largest revivals in human history. It's the story of the spiritual awakening of one of the wickedest cities ever—Nineveh. Because of its wickedness, Nineveh was on God's radar, big time. Nineveh was a city so wicked it stunk to high heaven. God said of it, "Their wickedness has come up before Me" (Jonah 1:2 NKJV). Or literally, "Their wickedness has reached a high degree" or "the highest pitch."

### NINEVEH WAS LEGENDARY FOR ITS CRUELTY.

Graphic accounts of their cruel treatment of captives have been found in Assyrian records. The Ninevites were well-known for their savagery in plundering cities. When the Ninevites conquered a nation, they would torture and murder cold-bloodedly. They were known to burn boys and girls alive and torture adults, tearing the skin from their bodies and leaving them to die in the scorching sun! Rather than hide such depravity, they celebrated and proclaimed it! They even built monuments to their own cruelty! So very wicked and celebrating it too—sounds like the Nazis.

The population of Nineveh was huge at this time historically, around one million—a bit more than San Francisco. Nineveh, the capital of mighty Assyria, was the superpower of her day. It required three days to circle metropolitan Nineveh. And the Ninevites lived large. They enjoyed the best chariots, the finest food, and the most exotic entertainment. It had an extensive business and commercial system like none in the world. In addition, Assyria had ruled the world for 200 years and was the strongest military power.

But unbeknownst to them, their days were numbered. It would not be long before Babylon would overtake Nineveh. God was giving Nineveh one last chance. If God could bring a mighty revival in Nineveh, with no better representative than Jonah and no more gospel than what he preached in their streets, He surely can do the same thing for America.

So, God revealed this to the prophet Jonah and told him to go and preach to them. But Jonah basically said, "God, they drink hatred in Nineveh and I won't go!" Jonah flatly refused, because he knew the nature of God and His willingness to forgive. He felt if he did not go, then God would destroy Nineveh, an avowed enemy of Israel. It would be like God coming to an Israeli today and telling them He was going to judge Iran. That Israeli might be delighted because Iran has vowed to destroy Israel.

So Jonah, an Israeli patriot, refused and went the opposite direction. He boarded a ship going as far as he could from Nineveh, and a mighty storm came. The seasoned sailors, who had seen it all, had never seen a storm like this. They determined Jonah was the cause of the storm. They asked him why he would run from a God this powerful. And Jonah told them to throw him overboard and the storm would stop. They did, and it did. Enter the whale, or great fish, that swallowed Jonah.

## WHY DID GOD ALLOW JONAH TO BE SWALLOWED BY THE GREAT FISH?

Was the Lord getting even with Jonah for running the other way? Absolutely not. God was chastening, or disciplining, Jonah because he was His child. It's the same reason God chastens us. He only chastens the ones He loves. Hebrews 12:6 says, "The Lord disciplines the one he loves, and he chastens everyone he accepts as his son" (NIV). Understand this, chastening is not for the purpose of getting even. God *got even* at the cross, when Jesus died in our place. In Isaiah 53, we read how He was punished for our sin.

No, this chastening was because God loved Jonah and Nineveh. Know this: God's chastening is preparation for a future task.

## GOD'S CHASTENING TELLS US THAT HE HAS SOMETHING MORE FOR US TO DO.

Jonah had big work to do, so there was a big storm, a big fish, and a big spanking! So, if you are in deep waters right now, take it as a sign that God loves you. Because it's a clear sign that God is not finished with you.

For Jonah, his greatest work was still ahead. Jonah was revived and re-commissioned by God. God sent revival first to Jonah, then to Nineveh. That's because nothing can happen through you until it happens to you. So, the prodigal prophet is barfed on the shore of Nineveh.

### Jonah 3:4-10

"On the day Jonah entered the city, he shouted to the crowds: 'Forty days from now Nineveh will be destroyed!' The people of Nineveh believed God's message, and from the greatest to the least, they decided to go without food and wear sackcloth to show their sorrow. When the king of Nineveh heard what Jonah was saying, he stepped down from his throne and took off his royal robes. He dressed himself in sackcloth and sat on a heap of ashes. Then the king and his nobles sent this decree throughout the city: 'No one, not even the animals, may eat or drink anything at all. Everyone is required to wear sackcloth and pray earnestly to God. Everyone must turn from their evil ways and stop all their violence. Who can tell? Perhaps even yet God will have pity on us and hold back his fierce anger from destroying us.' When God saw that they had put a stop to their evil ways he had mercy on them and didn't carry out the destruction he had threatened" (NLT).

## THIS IS A STUNNING SPIRITUAL AWAKENING!

An entire city turning to God. They even turned from their sin of violence, which they were known for. So God spared them and sent a nationwide revival. It's really amazing that the city turned to God after a sermon like this! Jonah shouts, "Forty days from now Nineveh will be destroyed!" (Jonah 4:4 NLT). No promise of forgiveness or offer of hope. Just a warning that judgment was coming.

Yet, the people of Nineveh believed God's message. Again, it reminds us that nobody is beyond the reach of God.

## **NO ONE IS BEYOND SAVING.**

Think of the most godless person you know. Now, start praying for them. I dare you to ask them to the Harvest crusade or to Harvest America. We, like Jonah, are also called to go. So, when is the last time you delivered the good news?

We really overcomplicate this thing called evangelism. Sometimes we are shocked when people respond to our message! A pastor came to C.H. Spurgeon complaining about people not coming to Christ. He said "I don't understand it. Whenever I preach, no one comes to Christ!" Spurgeon asked, "Do you expect people to come to Christ every time you preach?" The young pastor responded, "Of course not!" And Spurgeon said, "That's your problem!"

## **WE NEED TO ATTEMPT GREAT THINGS FOR GOD AND EXPECT GREAT THINGS FROM GOD!**

We know there have been some great spiritual awakenings in our history as well. In the United States, we have had four great spiritual awakenings. The first, during the 1700s, was led by such men as Jonathan Edwards and George Whitfield. During just two years of this revival, from 1740-1742, some 25,000 to 50,000 people were added to the New England churches. This out of a population of only 300,000!

The second great awakening, from 1790 to 1840, was led by many, including Charles Finney. It was a time when the Wild West was prevalent. The law was disregarded and sexual sin was rampant. At the camp meetings, crowds as high as 15,000 would gather for several days; an incredible figure considering the scant population at that time. Thousands came to faith—more than 10,000 in Kentucky alone between 1800 and 1803. Abraham Lincoln attended some of those camp meetings and was impacted.

The third great awakening in America was from about 1857-1859. How this revival began is unique. A 48-year-old businessman named Jeremiah Lanphier began a prayer meeting on Fulton Street in New York City. It began slowly and soon exploded. The stock market crashed and these prayer meetings spread quickly. Prayer meetings broke out all over New York City, filling theaters on Broadway. Within six months, 10,000 people gathered daily for prayer throughout New York City! It is reported that 50,000 New Yorkers were converted from March to May. There were 10,000 additions to church membership weekly. During that single year the number of reported conversions throughout the country reached an average of 50,000 a week, and it lasted for a couple of years. Over one million people came to Christ in this brief period. One of the men that came out of this revival was a former shoe salesman known as D.L. Moody, who personally led countless thousands to Christ! But look at how it all started. One simple layman decided to pray and it started a wave that impacted the nation!

Finally, there was the Jesus Movement. I believe this was the fourth great awakening. And I was privileged to have a front-row seat, as I was one of those kids that came to faith. There is no question in my mind

this was a modern-day revival. Things were bleak in the late '60s. The country was in turmoil. Bomb drills in classrooms were mandatory. The Cuban Missile Crisis brought us to the brink of nuclear confrontation with Russia. President Kennedy was assassinated, as well as his brother Bobby, and Martin Luther King, Jr. The Vietnam War was raging with no end in sight. Watergate was about to happen. Kids were rebelling against society and turning to drugs, sex, and rock and roll. The slogan of the time was "Turn on, tune in, and drop out." The church, by and large, was not effectively reaching them.

John Lennon famously said that the Beatles were more popular than Jesus. And, the fact is, for many kids that was true at the time. It certainly was for me. In 1966, Time Magazine even did a cover story titled, "Is God dead?" Some liberal protestant theologians announced that indeed He was. But God intervened and brought the Jesus Movement, and it saved a generation. Across the country, thousands of young kids were coming to Christ. The churches that welcomed them experienced revival. The churches that did not welcome them missed it. One man that was open to this was Chuck Smith, and really it was his wife, Kay, at first. Chuck met his first hippy, Lonnie Frisbee. Lonnie preached and kids came to Christ. Contemporary Christian music and worship was born during this time. Thousands and thousands of young people came to Christ. Our own church, Harvest Christian Fellowship, was born out of this revival. Out of this revival came pastors such as Mike MacIntosh, Raul Ries, Jon Courson, Don McClure, and Skip Heitzig. The church was influenced globally by what God did in the Jesus Movement. But that was over 40 years ago! The kids of this movement are now grandparents!

We can't live in the past, but we can learn from it. Now, we look at this generation and realize we need another Jesus movement.

## WE NEED ANOTHER SPIRITUAL AWAKENING IN AMERICA.

Even our own children, who have been raised in the church, need their own encounter with God. What we want is to see the Lord do it again! Psalm 85:6 says, "Will You not revive us again, that Your people may rejoice in you?" (NKJV). The prophet Habakkuk understood this when he prayed this prayer: "I have heard all about you, LORD, and I am filled with awe by the amazing things you have done. In this time of our deep need, begin again to help us, as you did in years gone by. Show us your power to save us. And in your anger, remember your mercy" (Habakkuk 3:2 NLT).

But how badly do we really want to see another revival? We know there has been revival in the past. We pray for prosperity, but often revival explodes when there is calamity. If all is well, why pray for a revival? Again, the third great awakening happened after the stock market crash.

But what is revival? Revival is a community saturated with God! One person said, "Revival is invasion from heaven!" And Richard Owen Roberts said, "Revival is an extraordinary movement of the Holy Spirit producing extraordinary results." A.W. Tozer defined revival as "that which changes the moral climate of a community."

Listen, revival is nothing more or less than a new beginning of obedience to God. It's a church word, *revival*. It is not for the nonbeliever. Revival starts with the church, and then affects the world. The world does not need revival, the church does. The world needs evangelism. Evangelism does not bring revival, but revival always brings evangelism. That is why we are doing Harvest America!

## WE HAVE OUR MARCHING ORDERS FROM JESUS TO GO INTO ALL THE WORLD.

C.H. Spurgeon defined revival this way: “To be revived is a blessing which can only be enjoyed by those who have some degree of life. Those who have no spiritual life are not, and cannot be, in the strictest sense of the term, subjects of revival. . . . A true revival is to be looked for in the church of God. Thus, revival is for believers only!” But evangelism is for nonbelievers.

Our focus for Harvest America is the United States, because I don’t think most Americans have heard the gospel. I think America is filled with *almost Christians*—far more than outright nonbelievers. What is an almost Christian? It’s like a husband waiting for his wife to come out of the bedroom to leave. He asks, “Are you ready yet?” She replies, “Almost.” That is chick code for “another hour, minimum!” You cannot be an almost Christian, really. You either are or you are not. It’s like being almost pregnant! You either are or are not pregnant.

One day, Paul was standing before Herod Agrippa preaching the gospel. It appears he was moved by what Paul said, causing him to say, “You almost persuade me to become a Christian” (Acts 26:28 NKJV). Agrippa was close, but not close enough; as are many Americans. They seem to know just enough to get them into trouble. Despite a recent rash of books attacking faith by avowed atheists, the fact is, there are very few real atheists in America today.

## AMERICA NEEDS TO HEAR THE GOSPEL.

Just like Jonah, we need to preach the message He has given us. Now, we come to the conclusion of the book of Jonah. This is one of the reasons I believe the Bible is God’s word. Because Jonah’s book does not end with chapter three, but with chapter four. If I were Jonah, I might have left out chapter four. Keep in mind, Jonah himself wrote this. Jonah did this to show us what he was really like. Perhaps he did this so we would see ourselves in this chapter.

So, this great spiritual awakening has broken out; thousands are spared. And how does Jonah react? Does he rejoice? No, he is hopping mad!

### **Jonah 4:1-4**

“This change of plans upset Jonah, and he became very angry. So he complained to the LORD about it: ‘Didn’t I say before I left home that you would do this, LORD? That is why I ran away to Tarshish! I knew that you were a gracious and compassionate God, slow to get angry and filled with unfailing love. I knew how easily you could cancel your plans for destroying these people. Just kill me now, LORD! I’d rather be dead than alive because nothing I predicted is going to happen.’ The LORD replied, ‘Is it right for you to be angry about this?’” (NLT).

Jonah was angry God did not wipe out the Ninevites. In a clearer translation, God speaking, it would say, “You are very angry, aren’t you!” The word *anger* could also be translated *to burn*. Jonah was fuming! Burning with anger. He should have been rejoicing; instead he is angry. He was preoccupied with himself.

**V.3** *“Just kill me now, LORD! I’d rather be dead than alive because nothing I predicted is going to happen.”*

Here is Jonah, a man who survived three days and nights in a fish’s stomach. A man who repents, prays, and preaches the truth to the people of Nineveh. Surely such a man would never sin after this! Sometimes, people worry about new believers not changing quickly enough. I am more concerned with *old* converts who have stopped changing. They are no longer growing spiritually.

## THE MOMENT YOU CEASE TO MOVE FORWARD AS A CHRISTIAN, YOU GO BACKWARD.

Perhaps they have turned from old vices like immorality, drugs, drinking, and cussing. But have they replaced those sins with pride, backbiting, gossip, and bitterness? Jonah was an older saint who knew better, but was having a relapse. He was angry with God. Are you angry with God? Maybe He did not answer your prayers as you wanted Him too. Things did not turn out in life as you had hoped they would. Or He has blessed someone else and you are jealous.

Sometimes people will wonder why a good God would allow bad things. Jonah wonders why a good God would allow good things, especially for bad people. Jonah wanted God to be bad, not good. He is hoping against hope that God will not be predictably merciful but instead will judge. And he pulls up a ringside seat to watch the action. All that was missing was some popcorn and a Coke. Watch people die, now that’s entertainment! Ironically, people pay good money every day to see that in movies.

### **Jonah 4:5-7**

“Then Jonah went out to the east side of the city and made a shelter to sit under as he waited to see if anything would happen to the city. And the LORD God arranged for a leafy plant to grow there, and soon it spread its broad leaves over Jonah’s head, shading him from the sun. This eased some of his discomfort, and Jonah was very grateful for the plant. But God also prepared a worm! The next morning at dawn the worm ate through the stem of the plant, so that it soon died and withered away” (NLT).

The King James Version calls this plant a gourd. It was a plant like a palm tree, offering ample shade. So, at least he had his shade and comfort. Now, we may look down our noses at Jonah but this is a warning for us!

## HAVE WE BECOME MORE CONCERNED ABOUT OUR COMFORT THAN THE SOULS OF OTHERS?

Those of us who have known the Lord for years and have grown lazy, and even bitter. The Bible is no longer alive to us. Prayer is no longer a part of our life. Our involvement at church is in decline. And if we are honest, we cannot remember the last time we shared our faith. We are more interested in being comfortable than available.

We become like the older brother in the prodigal story. He was resentful that God forgave his wayward brother. That brother certainly had sinned greatly, dragging the family name in the mud. He had been

with prostitutes and squandered all his money. But, broken and humbled, he had come home. The father was so excited, he ran to greet his long-lost son. The father was ecstatic with joy and threw a great party. The reaction of the older brother, just like Jonah, was anger.

We read in Luke 15:28–32, “The older brother stalked off in an angry sulk and refused to join in. His father came out and tried to talk to him, but he wouldn’t listen. The son said, ‘Look how many years I’ve stayed here serving you, never giving you one moment of grief, but have you ever thrown a party for me and my friends? Then this son of yours who has thrown away your money on whores shows up and you go all out with a feast!’ His father said, ‘Son you don’t understand. You’re with me all the time, and everything that is mine is yours—but this is a wonderful time, and we had to celebrate. This brother of yours was dead, and he’s alive! He was lost, and he’s found!’” (MSG).

The context of this story is that the Pharisees were angry at Jesus for hanging out with sinners. So, in this story, He was saying that they were like the older brother. Which of the prodigals are you most like? The boy who realized what he had done was wrong and returned to his father? Or the self-righteous boy who was more concerned with comfort than transformation.

Let me put it another way: Are you making plans to bring someone to the crusade or Harvest America this year? If not, why? If you say, “Well, I don’t really know any nonbelievers!” then you need to get out more and meet some and engage them. You say, “But I don’t like to fight the crowds!” But what about the opportunity to see people saved? Or “Well, it’s not my style of music!” Who cares? It’s somebody’s style. Newsflash: it’s not about you, but it is about them.

Or is it more about your comfort than the souls of people? Earlier in the story, Jesus spoke these words, His main point: “I say to you that likewise there will be more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine just persons who need no repentance” (Luke 15:7 NKJV).

I remember the first Harvest Crusade I did only days after Christopher went to heaven. Though it was the hardest time of my life, God came near to me and heaven opened. As I saw people come to Christ, I could almost hear the applause in heaven. Or at least I understood it better. If God would open the window to heaven for a brief glimpse, how would we change? If He opened the window for a glimpse of hell, we would change even more.

Eternal destinies are at stake and we are thinking of comfort? So, the Lord sent a worm to eat Jonah’s plant, or gourd. Jonah was *out of his gourd*. A wind blew on him and the sun beat upon his head. Jonah said, “I would rather just die now!” God had spared thousands of lives and Jonah missed his shade!

## HEAVEN REJOICES WHEN A SINNER BELIEVES, AND SO SHOULD WE.

God cares about lost people and so should we. Want to hear an amazing statistic? Between 80 and 90 percent of the people who have the gospel shared with them, have it shared from people who have known the Lord for two years or less. I am telling you, if you want to experience revival, get a new believer in your life. See what God has given you through the eyes of a new convert. That is why we are encouraging you to engage as a counselor or host location. Especially those of you who are younger. But you who are older play such a key role as well.

Let's not be too hard on Jonah. He did include this last chapter to show us his weakness and God's grace. And he also gave God the last word.

**Jonah 4:10-11**

“Then the LORD said, ‘You feel sorry about the plant, though you did nothing to put it there. And a plant is only, at best, short lived. But Nineveh has more than 120,000 people living in spiritual darkness, not to mention all the animals. Shouldn't I feel sorry for such a great city?’” (NLT).

There is a *Nineveh* we are all called to. It is not necessarily far away. It may be very close. It's that place where we are called to obey God. A place where popularity does not matter. A place where faithfulness to the will of God is all that matters. And finally, a place that leads to a blessing beyond our wildest dreams.

**ONE OF THE GREATEST REVIVALS  
IN HUMAN HISTORY STARTED WITH A MAN.**

He was a man who ran, but eventually came to his senses. And this man did that which was uncomfortable. He put it all on the line, and God blessed. Will you be a man or woman to do that? We have all been called to *preach the gospel*. I am asking you to make yourself available to Him today.

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