



A Systematic Expository Study of the Word of God

COMMITMENT TO THE GREAT COMMISSION IN GREAT CITIES

Jonah 3:2-4

Big cities have peculiarities. Nineveh was no exception. The sins of the Ninevites were great. But God did not want them to perish without a chance of hearing His Word and knowing the way to escape from judgment. That is why He was after Jonah and that is why He is after us - that in the great cities of the world where we live or that we know about, we will reach out in compassion to the cities and preach the gospel to the inhabitants.

THE GREAT CITY

Jonah 3:2; 1:2; 4:11; Genesis 10:9-12; Luke 19:41, 42; Acts 18:9, 11.

God Himself thrice referred to Nineveh as "that great city." Nineveh was one of the ancient cities in existence right from the time of Genesis. By the time of Jonah, it had become a very great city. Archaeological discoveries show that the central part of the city was 1 by 2½ miles wide while the circumference of the metropolitan area was over 60 miles. It was a walled city of about 100ft high. It had a total of 1,500 towers erected around the sixty miles perimeter. Each of the towers was 200ft high. It was indeed an exceedingly great city. Any wonder the Lord said to Jonah: "And should not I spare Nineveh, that great city, wherein are more than six score thousand persons that cannot discern between their right hand and their left hand; and also much cattle?" The phrase "that cannot discern between right hand and their left hand" refers to children within the age of innocence bracket - that is, little children who cannot distinguish between what is morally good and what is morally bad. They totaled 120,000 in number. Theologians estimate that at the average rate of five people within a family, Nineveh would have had a population of at least 600,000 people. Only very few cities in the ancient world could boast of population that large.

This was the city that Jonah was sent to go and evangelize. But instead of going to Nineveh, he chose to go to the opposite direction. Do you know why? He did not see Nineveh as God saw it.

He looked at Nineveh nationally instead of individually. That is the problem we have. When you look at a city as an entity, as an ethnic group and not as never-dying individual souls in need of salvation, you have difficulty in reaching them with the gospel.

2. Jonah looked at Nineveh historically instead of prophetically. He looked at their past, at what they had done, instead of looking at their future, at what the preaching of the gospel and the grace of God can make them to be. When you look at people historically, instead of prophetically, you are going to have problem carrying out an effective and enduring gospel work among them.

As with Nineveh and Jerusalem, the Lord is concerned about the spiritual and moral condition of the big cities of our world. Oh, for the tears of compassion again from Christians that have the mind of Christ! Oh, that we will weep for the corruption, ethnic conflicts, poverty, degradation, sin, violence into which our cities have sunk! In the rush among the big cities of the world, in their skyscrapers, political and social activities, in the things that occupy the minds of the people of the world, the Lord's words still re-echo: "If thou hadst known, even thou, at least in this thy day, the things which belong unto thy peace! but now they are hid from thine eyes." Hence the need to reach out to them with the gospel becomes very imperative and urgent. We must do anything and everything to see that we preach the gospel to the inhabitants starting with the inhabitants of our own city. God is concerned about the situation in our cities and a true believer must be concerned as well.

Some big cities in the world, in Africa, Asia, Americas, Europe, mega-cities we call them, have population ranging from one to ten millions. You find them all scattered all over the world. There is much we need to do to make an impact with the gospel in many of the big

cities of the world. We must have compassion on the sinners that are living there. We must look at them with the eyes of Jesus Christ.

THE GREAT COMMISSION

Jonah 3:2-4; Mark 16:15, 20; Acts 8:5, 8; Romans 15:20, 21; Acts 24:24, 25.

God said unto Jonah, "Arise, go, preach." Acceptable obedience to the Great Commission starts with heeding those three words. Going is an important aspect of the Great Commission. You don't sit at a place and be waiting for sinners to come to you. You go where they are - on the street, in the highway, in the hedges, anywhere you can find them. You go preach the gospel unto them. "Go." Many people expect the Lord to work miracles through them. The truth is, however, the miracle will not come until we go forth with the gospel. "And Jonah began to enter into the city a day's journey, and he cried, and said, Yet forty days, and Nineveh shall be overthrown."

How was it that Jonah's message of judgment caught on with the Ninevites so quickly and led to national repentance? It was because they had a long memory and strong sense of history (Isaiah 37:21, 22, 36, 37). Having learnt a great lesson from God's judgment on Sennacherib, king of Assyria, long before this time, they did not want a repetition. There are people who feel we should preach only about the love, care and compassion of Jesus, not His judgment. That is watered-down gospel. The truth is judgment is part of the preaching of the gospel. The neglect of the Great Commission was the main and only reason that God had controversy with Jonah. In the verses that make up our text, Jonah brought the Great Commission to the very centre of the activities of his life. That has a message for the believer. It is when you bring the Great Commission to the centre of the activities of your life that your life will please the Lord. It has a message for the church as well. The church must bring the Great Commission to the centre of their activities. Then will the church be in the centre of the will of God.

THE GREAT COMMITMENT

Jonah 3:2-4; Deuteronomy 18:18; Jeremiah 1:7; Titus 1:9; John 12:50.

"Jonah arose, and went unto Nineveh, according to the word of the Lord." That is the commitment. 1. He went because he was told. 2. He went where he was told. 3. He went when he was told. 4. He went as he was told, according the word of the Lord. 5. He did what he was told. He didn't go there to get sidetracked or to do another thing. 6. He did it in the way he was told. Likewise, we are to carry out the Great Commission according to the word of the Lord, as the Lord has commanded, not modifying the method, the mandate or the message.

That has been the pattern and the practice with the people that the Lord commissioned to do the work in the past. Evangelize and edify. Bring people into the Kingdom. And when they come, develop them, teaching them all things whatsoever the Lord has commanded you. You find this kind of faithfulness among the worthies of old. As the Lord commanded them, so they did. If we are following in the footsteps of our Lord Jesus, we must declare the Word just as He has given it to us. That is what He himself did. When He came into this world, the Father gave Him a message. He did not modify the message or the mission or anything the Father had commanded Him to do. If the Lord could not change the words of His Father, neither should anybody. It is the condition, the prerequisite of our faithfulness. We go because we are told to go, where we are told to go, when we are told to go, do the thing we are asked to do in the way we have been commanded to do it. Such must be our conduct as we preach the word of the Lord. There should be in us great commitment to the Great Commission in the great cities of the world. And, as we obey the Great Commission, many people through us will come to know the Lord as their Lord and personal Saviour.

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