

9-5-2021, COTR Texarkana

Title: Return to God America, pt. 4 (Missed Opportunity)

Purpose: Purpose: Provoke people not to miss opportunities to call people to return to God.

Spiritual Truth: Don't let excuses stand in the way of calling people to return to God.

Text: Jonah chapter 3-4

Topic: Revival, Return to God, Spiritual Awakening, Jonah, Excuses

Series purpose: Call America to return to God and provoke Christians to follow the Biblical prescription for revival.

Series spiritual truth: When people return to God, a spiritual awakening can change a nation.

Return to God America, pt. 4 (Missed Opportunity)

I. Introduction

- A. Review Series: 'Return to God America'. We all know America's in trouble and a spiritual revival, i.e., a spiritual awakening that causes a nation to return to God. Last week we examined a revival in Nehemiah and learned, Spiritual truth: **One person can make a difference in calling a nation to return to God.**
- B. **Pic/names**: 2.2 billion people have heard the gospel from Billy Graham. He shared the gospel with more people than anyone history. What if Edward Kimball decided not to teach the ss class or was too busy to go to shoe store? What if Billy Sunday decided to keep playing baseball instead of becoming an evangelist? **God would have used someone else and he would have missed the opportunity of a lifetime.**
- C. Today I'll challenge you to not miss opportunities or make excuses people for not calling people to return to God. We'll use Jonah as an example and see how God wants to send revival, but we have to choose whether we'll let Him use us or not.
- D. Title: Return to God America, pt. 4 (Missed Opportunity)
- E. Spiritual truth: Don't let excuses stand in the way of calling people to return to God.

II. Jonah ran from God's calling but later reluctantly obeyed.

- A. Background, Jonah's call and response. [**Jonah 1:1-3 (NLT)**] The Lord gave this message to Jonah...2...**go to the great city of Nineveh.** Announce my judgment against it because I have seen how wicked its people are." 3 But **Jonah got up and went in the opposite direction to get away from the Lord.**] God wanted the people of Nineveh to repent of their evil ways, turn to Him and experience a spiritual awakening. Jonah wanted nothing to do with it, so he disobeyed and ran away.
- B. Context: great fish, [**Jonah 3-4 (NLT)**] Then the Lord spoke to Jonah a second time. 2 "Get up and go to the great city of Nineveh, and deliver the message I have given you." 3 **This time Jonah obeyed the Lord's command** and went to Nineveh...4...he shouted to the crowds: "**Forty days from now Nineveh will be destroyed!**" In these words of judgment, the HS was drawing people to God.
 - 1. // Jesus gave Christians a mission to call people to turn/ return to God. It's called the Great Commission. We're commissioned to tell the lost and backslider to return to God.
 - 2. [**Romans 10:13-14 (NLT)**] For "Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved." 14 But how can they call on him to save them unless they believe in him? And **how can they believe in him if they have never heard about him?** And **how can they hear about him unless someone tells them?**] i.e., you and me

3. Ex. at work talking about Covid. Ask him RU100%SURE? Girl at Taco Bell card
- C. **Vs. 5 The people of Nineveh believed God's message...**they declared a fast and put on burlap to show their sorrow...⁷ Then the king...sent this decree throughout the city...⁸ People and animals alike must wear garments of mourning, and **everyone must pray earnestly to God. They must turn from their evil ways and stop all their violence...**¹⁰ When God saw what they had done and how **they had put a stop to their evil ways**, he...**did not carry out the destruction he had threatened.**
1. Who were the Ninevites? They were from Nineveh, one of the capitals of the Assyrian empire in modern day northern Iraq.² They were a violent, warring people who worshipped idols including the city goddess of love and war Ishtar^{3, 2}
 2. Vs 8 calls them to repent from their evil ways and violence and return to God. **Even the worst sinner can feel conviction and change.** 4:11 says 120,000 people lived there and didn't know their right hand from their left, i.e., they lived in utter spiritual darkness and didn't know the difference between right and wrong.²
 3. //, **Pictures**, Harvard chaplain, communist teacher and Texas abortion ruling. We can look at people and be disgusted, get angry or pray and tell them about Jesus.
 4. **John 4:35 (NLT)** You know the saying, 'Four months between planting and harvest.' But I say, **wake up and look around. The fields are already ripe for harvest.** **Mt. 9:36-38 (NLT)** When he saw the crowds, he had compassion on them because they were **confused** and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd. ³⁷ He said...**"The harvest is great, but the workers are few.** ³⁸ So pray to the Lord...of the harvest; **ask him to send more workers into his fields."**
 5. People are ripe for God. They're confused and afraid about Covid, economy, etc.
 6. What happened in Nineveh can happen in America if people return to God.
- D. **Ch. 4:1** This change of plans greatly upset Jonah...² So he complained to the Lord... "Didn't I say...that you would do this, Lord? **That is why I ran away to Tarshish! I knew that you are a merciful and compassionate God, slow to get angry and filled with unfailing love. You are eager to turn back from destroying people.** ³ Just kill me now, Lord...if what I predicted will not happen."
1. **What excuses did Jonah have for resenting the Ninevites turning to God?** (1) Amos and Hosea prophesied Assyria would be Israel's destroyer and they'd have to pay tribute.^{4, 2} (2) Jonah believed they deserved to suffer for what they'd done; They didn't deserve to be forgiven. (3) Jonah felt his personal reputation was at stake. He'd prophesied destruction, and if it did not occur, he'd be embarrassed.⁵
 2. Sometimes Christians make excuses for not calling people to return to God.
 - a. **We're worldly and too busy with the wrong things;** our priorities are messed up. **[1 John 2:15-16 (NLT) Do not love this world** nor the things it offers you, for when you love the world, you do not have the love of the Father in you. ¹⁶ For the world offers only **a craving for physical pleasure, a craving for everything we see, and pride in our achievements and possessions...**] Our challenge is to enjoy what the world offers but not be controlled by it.
 - b. **We fear what people will say or do to us;** intimidated. **[1 Samuel 15:24 (NLT)** Then Saul admitted to Samuel...I have disobeyed your instructions and the Lord's command, for **I was afraid of the people and did what they**

demanded.] Don't let the pressure to be accepted by people be more important than pleasing God. Be willing to be rejected or persecuted.

- c. **We want to fit in with the world.** [John 12:42–43 (NIV)]...many even among the leaders believed in him. But because of the Pharisees **they would not openly acknowledge their faith for fear they would be put out of the synagogue; 43 for they loved human praise more than praise from God.]** We all want to be liked. Nobody wants to be made fun of as a Christian. We can't care more about what people think about us than what God does.
- d. **Someone hurt us/ did us wrong.** They don't deserve God's mercy, e.g., Mr. Biden re. family killed in Afghanistan, [Matthew 6:15 (NLT)] **But if you refuse to forgive others, your Father will not forgive your sins.]** All of us have been hurt by someone who wronged us. I can't let my desire for their punishment or revenge keep me from calling them to return to God.
- e. **We'll tell people tomorrow but tomorrow may never come.** [James 4:13–14 (NCV)] Some of you say, "Today or tomorrow we will go to some city. We will stay there a year, do business, and make money." 14 **But you do not know what will happen tomorrow!** Your life is like a mist. You can see it for a short time, but then it goes away.] There is no better time than now to call people to return to God.

III. Conclusion: This isn't the 1st time America was in a dark place: America has a history of revivals and spiritual awakenings that changed the nation.

- A. **Picture**⁸, Prayer Meeting Revival: In the 1840s and 1850s the United States experienced a 35% population growth but a nation intent upon getting and spending had lost interest in religion. The West had opened up. Gold was discovered in California. Railroad building was a craze. Fortunes ballooned and faith diminished. Immigration led to work shortages and race riots. The slavery issue was splitting the country. The stock market crashed on October 10, 1857. Bank runs and failures occurred and then God began to work. Jeremiah Lanphier became burdened about America's problems. On September 23rd he launched a weekly noon-hour prayer meeting for businessmen. No one showed up for the first half hour; six men straggled in to pray the second half hour. Twenty people came to pray the next week but by early November it had become a daily prayer gathering with 200 people from a wide variety of denominations attending each day. Other prayer meetings sprang up across New York City, and by the following April 10,000 people were gathering daily for prayer in NYC. Similar prayer meetings and genuine spiritual revival quickly spread through cities across the United States. In the 1st prayer meeting, there was no great outpouring of the Spirit of God and Lanphier had no way of knowing that it was the beginning of a great national revival which would sweep an estimated one million people in a nation of 30 million, into the kingdom of God. Countless people participated in thousands of daily prayer meetings throughout the country. One time a man wandered into the Fulton Street meeting who intended to murder a woman and then commit suicide. He listened as someone was delivering a fervent exhortation and urging the duty of repentance. Suddenly the would-be murderer startled everyone by crying out, "Oh! What shall I do to be saved!" The revival continued to be marked by

- prayer meetings, trans-denominational unity, innumerable conversions, easing of interracial tensions and a significant drop in crime rates.^{6,7}
- B. What would have happened if Jeremiah Lanphier got discouraged and made excuses to quit? He'd have missed the opportunity of a lifetime to be involved in a spiritual awakening that changed America. It happened before and it can happen again.
- IV. Response
- A. Prayer: What kind of excuses are you making for not calling people to return to God?
- B. Souls
- V. Bibliography/ Resources: Logos Bible Software and Library, Platinum Edition, was used to prepare this message.
1. <http://www.travisagnew.org/2013/07/22/the-chain-of-events-for-billy-grahams-conversion/>
 2. Elwell, W. A., & Beitzel, B. J. (1988). [Nineveh \(Nineve\), Ninevite](#). In *Baker encyclopedia of the Bible* (Vol. 2, pp. 1553–1554). Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House.
 3. Emberling, G. (2000). [Nineveh](#). In D. N. Freedman, A. C. Myers, & A. B. Beck (Eds.), *Eerdmans dictionary of the Bible* (p. 966). Grand Rapids, MI: W.B. Eerdmans.
 4. Hannah, J. D. (1985). [Jonah](#). In J. F. Walvoord & R. B. Zuck (Eds.), *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures* (Vol. 1, p. 1470). Wheaton, IL: Victor Books.
 5. Smith, B. K., & Page, F. S. (1995). [Amos, Obadiah, Jonah](#) (Vol. 19B, pp. 271–272). Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers.
 6. <http://vancechristie.com/2015/07/06/the-prayer-meeting-revival/>
 7. https://www.cslewisinstitute.org/webfm_send/577
 8. <https://duckduckgo.com/?q=Prayer+Meeting+Revival&iax=images&ia=images&ia=http%3A%2F%2Fmans1015.com%2Fwp-content%2Fuploads%2F2018%2F03%2F1857-Prayer-Revival.2-1200x800.jpg>
- VI. Additional info:
- A. Prayer Meeting Revival The convicting work of God's Spirit became so strong during the Prayer Meeting Revival that there were several instances of pressing conviction falling upon ships' crews and passengers before they even reached American shores. Pastors were sometimes called out to sea to minister to those aboard the ships who were overwhelmed with distressing conviction.^{6,7}
- B. Newspapers everywhere thought the revival was front page news. Headlines similar to these might have told the story: New Haven, Conn.—City's Biggest Church Packed Twice Daily for Prayer. Bethel, Conn.—Business Shuts Down for Hour Each Day; Everybody Prays. Albany, N. Y.—State Legislators Get Down on Knees. Revival Born In A Prayer Meeting 4 Schenectady, N. Y.—Ice on the Mohawk Broken for Baptisms. Newark, N. Y.—Firemen's Meeting Attracts 2,000. Washington, D. C.—Five Prayer Meetings Go Round the Clock. New Haven, Conn.—Revival Sweeps Yale.^{6,7}