

3-5-00

Nazareth or Nineveh

I read an article by Tommy Tenney recently which I want to convey a lot of to you in this message. He is a man who left his denomination UPC and was rejected by them as a heretic because he wouldn't push certain doctrines that were questionable. An experience one Sunday morning as a guest speaker broke the man to the extent that he can't even talk about it without being in tears for days. He seems to have entered into a place of brokenness where he has a greater realization than most of the glory of God and how it obliterates the glory of man. It comes through in his "Tale of Two Cities". I'll try to relate in my own words as I see its application to us.

If you or I were to pick which town was most likely for revival between Nineveh and Nazareth, that is if we never read the end of the story, we would pick Nazareth. After all Jesus spent 30 years of ministry there! Everyone there surely knew him and experienced the fruits of the Spirit evident in his life. It was a small village that was filled most likely with descendants of David. That is where the city name Nazareth comes from - Netzor – the branch, descendants of David. So Jesus was a Netzorene – one from the city called the branch after the branch of David. That is often confused with Nazarene – the group that did not cut their hair or drink wine, -ie: Samson.

Certainly if anyone was ready for accepting salvation and the coming of the promised Messiah from their family line it would be them. They had a nice synagogue where the word is read on a regular basis. Surely this would be where revival would start, where the Spirit could move freely changing lives.

And if you had to compare it with Nineveh it wins hands down in the eyes of men. The Ninevites were brutal. They would do disgusting inhumane things to their enemies, that are so gruesome I don't even want to try to describe them to you. And the enemy was often Israel. They didn't know such disgusting acts were powerful psychological warfare, but they knew it made 'em afraid. They were proud of such barbarism. And the city was huge: 120,000!

No wonder Jonah sailed off in the opposite direction! He wanted them to die. The world would be a better place without them, he thought. Can you imagine walking into a skin head meeting and crying out "Repent or be destroyed"? But when Jonah got coughed up on that shore he knew he had little choice. God wanted him to be the messenger and after 3 days in whale belly anything looked easy. He quickly carried out his mission getting it over with as soon as possible. In front of him arrogant brutal men, behind him broken hearts crying out to God for mercy. They even made the animals fast, hoping they would be spared from the judgements of God. They knew they were bad and they knew they needed forgiveness. God had prepared their hearts.

But Nazareth on the other hand was taking Jesus, this mild mannered man that grew up in their midst, out to a high pinnacle to throw Him off. He had to miraculously (Lk 4:17-30) walk through their midst to escape. Why?! What turned them so violent?

Jesus dared to tell them the truth. He talked about their prophets blessing the Gentiles.

You see they thought they had the monopoly on this man, that they knew Him all too well. In their haughty arrogance they thought they knew his family tree. "Isn't this the carpenter's son? Are not his sister and brothers here with us? They knew earthly facts about Jesus but they didn't know Him. In their false sense of thinking they knew all about Him, they did not believe He could do what they had heard, and that lack of faith stopped God from doing what had been done in Capernaum. Capernaum had seen the whole town healed but there in Jesus' hometown he could only lay his hands on a few sick folk and see them healed.

Now if we were going to draw up a formula for revival we would have picked the Nazareth formula, certainly not the Nineveh one. But the big difference is in perception of need. The Nazareans thought they had all they needed and who was this guy that grew up among them to say He was special. But the Ninevites knew they were needy people. And who are the Nazareans today? Satisfied, set in their way church people who think they know Jesus when it is all head knowledge and not personal relationship. They have a form of godliness but deny the power that changes lives. Relationships are not affected. And when you meet them it is not about Jesus and what He is doing in their midst but about a program or a man or some other thing that ranks high on their list of success in the eyes of the world.

I think the Lord is telling us not to be like them. You think you know Jesus and you are self satisfied with where you are and have worked out a nice little compromise with faith and comfort. Knock knock knock - Its Jesus and He wants in! Don't run Him off a cliff. Don't tell him you know him and all He has to say. There is so much more to know. Let us be humble broken men and women of God that know we need Him desperately. He probably has some hard sayings for us that we have shunned up till now. Those words are to set us free from things that we are relying on that are not the risen Lord.

The trouble is we don't see our barbarism like the Ninevites did. We think we are pretty good. If you have any righteousness whatsoever it is from Jesus and not your own! Here it is: You know you are in desperate need or you think you got it all together. If Christ is truly Lord – Master in your life, you are where you need to be and must continue decreasing as He increases in your life. Just keep moving deeper into brokenness and letting His life come through you, filling you.

Jesus tells this message in the two praying men. Luke 18:10-14 There is the honorable Pharisee with all his efforts to be perfect before God. He stands up before all in his Sabbath finest and thanks God he is not like other men but has somehow been blessed to arrive above the place of needing God's help. Notice he is really praying about himself. And then there is the tax gatherer who hangs his head, smites his chest and cries out "God be merciful to me a sinner" He knew he was in need – and in the realization of the gulf between his humanity and the holiness of God he cries out for mercy. That is what God longs to hear. A desperate cry of realization

that it is not with in us and for the mercy and grace of God to be poured on us needy sinners. The forgiveness and mercy and anointing of God come pouring into those honest humble places like a mighty river. "For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled and he who humbles himself will be exalted."

Where do you live? Nineveh or Nazareth? Do you see how desperately you need him every day? In facing every situation? Or you think you know him? If you think you know him but you don't realize you need to know him better... I think you may be hanging out in Nazareth. Are we praying about ourselves or desperate for Jesus' mercy? Take another look at your need. An honest look will reveal how great that need is in every area of your life. Be honest with God. If my people who are called by my name – Christian – will humble themselves and pray, and seek my face, and turn from their wicked ways. then will I hear from heaven and will forgive their sin, and heal their land.

Our land is in a mess. The organized church of America is in a mess. The divorce rate among professed born again Christians is now 6% higher than that of atheists. We need to seek His face. We need forgiveness. We need to turn from our wicked ways. God's calling us to be a Biblical church, a church that drops all the traditions of men and seeks the will of God. Can we go there? A church that will dare to be different and not just follow the programs of man.

We may never be noted for it, no one may ever care, but if you are like me, someday I want to hear, "Well done good and faithful servant. Enter into the joy of the Lord." I just want to be faithful to what He tells me day by day. I want the power of His life in me to touch the world around me. It doesn't matter if it is received or rejected, it matters if I am faithful, to the One who called me, who also will do it.

As we reach out we need to look for Ninevites, not Netzoreans. We have a tendency to look for good people. God is looking for needy people. Let us recognize our great need to submit to that life in us at every turn and know that without Him we can do nothing.