

## MY WAYS ARE NOT YOUR WAYS

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Jonah 1:1-2

1. As Christians and churches we must understand that God's wisdom and ways must always guide our lives and ministries. Isa 55:6-9

Seek the Lord while He may be found; call upon Him while He is near. 7 Let the wicked forsake his way and the unrighteous man his thoughts; and let him return to the Lord, and He will have compassion on him, and to our God, for He will abundantly pardon. 8 "For My thoughts are not your thoughts, nor are your ways My ways," declares the Lord. 9 "For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are My ways higher than your ways and My thoughts than your thoughts.

2. The Apostle Paul is an example of someone who understood this principal. 1 Cor 2:1-5 And when I came to you, brethren, I did not come with superiority of speech or of wisdom, proclaiming to you the testimony of God. 2 For I determined to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ, and Him crucified. 3 I was with you in weakness and in fear and in much trembling, 4 and my message and my preaching were not in persuasive words of wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power, 5 so that your faith would not rest on the wisdom of men, but on the power of God.

3. I would suggest that much of what calls itself the church, particularly in the West, has abandoned the Biblical approach to evangelism and substituted an approach that may draw a crowd, but does little to advance the kingdom of God, or lead to the genuine salvation of many lost people.

4. Years ago, in its sincere desire to make converts, the evangelical church began to move away from the biblical approach to reaching the lost.

5. From man's perspective God's way was not working so innovative preachers and evangelists began to change the way they did outreach, presented the Gospel, and designed what we call worship services.

6. Rather than focusing on man's sin and depravity the focus became God's love for sinners

**NOTE: The fact that God's redemptive love is behind His redemptive activity towards lost mankind is clear in Scripture, but it can be comprehended and appreciated only by those who have actually responded to it.**

7. Gospel tracts and presentations began with the announcement that God loves you and has a wonderful plan for your life.

8. We began to see bumper stickers that announced to the lost, "Smile, God loves you."

9. As the attribute of God's love was emphasized His other attributes of holiness, wrath, and judgment were deemphasized.

10. For many, our holy and righteous God became their celestial buddy and divine enabler.

11. Fear of God diminished and the moral life of professing Christians began to slide.

12. It has reached a point where there is little or no distinction between the lifestyles of those who profess to be Christians and those who do not.

**NOTE: Statistically there is little difference between many professing Christians and non-Christians when it comes to things like alcohol use, divorce, faithfulness in marriage, living together outside of marriage, sexual morality, worldliness, addiction to pornography and a host of other issues.**

13. All of this has happened in spite of the fact that no where in Scripture is God's approach to sinners anything like it is in the church today.

14. The book of Jonah is a good example (an example that consistently is followed throughout the Bible).

### I. God's method. Jonah 1:1-2

A. Nineveh was the capital of Assyria, and Assyria was a pagan nation that brutalized the nations that they conquered.

B. Jonah's country, the Northern Kingdom of Israel, was facing an impending invasion by Assyria.

C. The last thing Jonah wanted to see was for Nineveh to become an object of God's mercy.

D. God's instructions were clear, "Arise, go to Nineveh the great city and cry against it, for their wickedness has come up before Me."

E. After His resurrection, and prior to His ascension, Jesus instructed His followers with these words found in Luke 24:45-49.

45 Then He opened their minds to understand the Scriptures, 46 and He said to them, "Thus it is written, that the **Christ would suffer and rise again from the dead the third day**, 47 and that **repentance for forgiveness of sins would be proclaimed in His name to all the nations, beginning from Jerusalem**. 48 "You are witnesses of these things. 49 "And behold, I am sending forth the promise of My Father upon you; but you are to stay in the city until you are clothed with power from on high."

F. Note how Jesus initiated His own preaching ministry. Mark 1:14-15

Now after John had been taken into custody, Jesus came into Galilee, preaching the gospel of God, 15 and saying, "The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; **repent and believe in the gospel**."

### II. God's message. Jonah 3:1-4

A. After God convinced Jonah that He was serious about being obeyed the Lord reissued His command to the reluctant prophet.

1. Get off this beach and go to Nineveh.

2. Proclaim to it what I tell you to proclaim (no editorializing).

B. Jonah walked three days to get to Nineveh and then spent a day walking through the city crying out, "Yet forty days and Nineveh will be overthrown."

C. God's message, delivered by God's prophet, had a profound impact upon the entire population of Nineveh including its king. 5-9

D. The king issued a proclamation calling upon all the citizens of Nineveh to fast and pray and "call on God earnestly that each may turn (REPENT) from his wicked way and from the violence which is in his hands" because, "who knows, God may turn and relent and withdraw His burning anger so that we will not perish." 8-9

E. Because of the Ninevite's repentance God extended mercy and grace to them. 10

G. What is the position of lost sinners before God?

1. God's redemptive plan is motivated by His love but that should be of little comfort to those who are in rebellion against Him.

2. Even a verse like John 3:16 is true to the total character of God. "For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him **shall not perish**, but have eternal life."

NOTE: Every sinner that has rejected Christ's atoning sacrifice is perishing.

3. John the Baptist declared, "He who believes in the Son has eternal life; but **he who does not obey the Son will not see life, but the wrath of God abides on him**." John 3:36

4. Paul declared, **“For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men who suppress the truth in unrighteousness.** Romans 1:18

H. Can you imagine what would have happened if Jonah went to Nineveh and declared, “God loves you and has a wonderful plan for your lives?”

I. The people of Nineveh did not have any capacity to understand the nature of God’s redeeming love until they had been convicted of their sin, the necessity of righteousness, and the certainty of God’s eminent and certain judgment.

J. Their conviction led to genuine repentance and then they experienced God’s mercy.

NOTE: Carefully examine Peter’s message on the day of Pentecost and Paul’s masterful indictment all mankind in Romans 1-3 and you will not find one mention of God’s love for sinners while they remain in their sin.

### **III. God’s motive. Jonah 4:2, 11**

A. Jonah understood the nature of God’s love because he himself was a recipient of it.

NOTE: No person can comprehend or understand the love of God apart from a full comprehension of his or her own sin and depravity, the certainty of God’s righteous judgment, and their need to repent.

B. He knew that God would forgive the people of Nineveh if they repented and Jonah did not want them forgiven. Jonah 4:1-2

But it (God’s mercy on Nineveh) greatly displeased Jonah and he became angry. 2 He prayed to the LORD and said, "Please LORD, was not this what I said while I was still in my own country? Therefore in order to forestall this I fled to Tarshish, for **I knew that You are a gracious and compassionate God, slow to anger and abundant in lovingkindness, and one who relents concerning calamity.**

C. God made it clear in verse 11 that He acted towards Nineveh because of His compassion, but that compassion would have been of little comfort to the Ninevites had they rejected God’s clear warning of His impending judgment.

### **APPLICATION**

1. A strange and terrible thing has happened in the modern day evangelical church.
2. The church has decided that it has a better and more effective plan for reaching the lost than God has.
3. Across our land Laodicean churches are packed out with lukewarm people who give little evidence of having had a true encounter with the Living God and His Christ.
4. Earlier we sang the hymn “At Calvary.”
5. I want to close by reading the verses, and as I do notice the progression of the hymn writer’s testimony.

“Years I spent in vanity and pride, caring not my Lord was crucified, knowing not it was for me He died, on Calvary.”

“By God’s Word at last my sin I learned; then I trembled at the law I’d spurned, until my guilty soul imploring turned to Calvary.”

“Now I’ve given to Jesus everything, now I gladly own Him as my King, now my raptured soul can only sing of Calvary.”

“Oh, the love that drew salvation’s plan! Oh the grace that brought it down to man! Oh, the mighty gulf that God did span at Calvary.”

**NOTE: The writer’s ability to comprehend God’s love and grace came after he was saved and not before.**