



Lent Day 17, March 8, 2012 Ash Wednesday

So the people of Nineveh believed God, proclaimed a fast, and put on sackcloth, from the greatest to the least of them. 6 Then word came to the king of Nineveh; and he arose from his throne and laid aside his robe, covered himself with sackcloth and sat in ashes. 7 And he caused it to be proclaimed and published throughout Nineveh by the decree of the king and his nobles, saying, Let neither man nor beast, herd nor flock, taste anything; do not let them eat, or drink water. 8 But let man and beast be covered with sackcloth, and cry mightily to God; yes, let every one turn from his evil way and from the violence that is in his hands. 9 Who can tell if God will turn and relent, and turn away from His fierce anger, so that we may not perish? 10 Then God saw their works, that they turned from their evil way; and God relented from the disaster that He had said He would bring upon them, and He did not do it. Jonah 3:5-10

These verses in Jonah really spoke to my heart about the powerful result that fasting had for the people of Nineveh. If you remember the story of Jonah and the whale, the Lord was angry with the city of Nineveh for their great wickedness, and He appointed Jonah to go warn them that God was going to destroy Nineveh. Jonah, however, did not want to do this, so he tried to run away from God to Tarshish (Spain). What follows is a series of events that ends with Jonah being tossed into the sea and swallowed by a whale. After living for three days in the whale's stomach, Jonah finally prays to God for help; the Lord speaks to the whale, and it coughs up Jonah. By now Jonah is ready to obey, so he heads to Nineveh and delivers his message.

What is so amazing is that the king and his people actually listen. The king makes a decree that not only the people, but also the animals are not to eat or drink. Instead they are to mourn, cry to God, and turn away from their evil. This story has a happy ending. God sees works of the people and He relents of His plans to destroy them.

A word that keeps running through my mind when I read this story of fasting is the word *humble*.

The king and the people humbled themselves before God. The king set the example by exchanging his throne for ashes and his kingly robes for sackcloth. When faced with his own demise, he suddenly had an epiphany of who holds the real power--and it wasn't him. It was God.

This story shows us a key to fasting. We need to approach our time of prayer and fasting with humble hearts, knowing that God is the one in charge, not us. When we confess our sin and humble ourselves before God, we have done what we can to put ourselves in right standing before God. In the case of Nineveh, God decided not to destroy the nation.

This gives me hope for our own nation. Might the people of God be able to change the tide of our nation if we all started fasting and praying for our country? Right away 2 Chronicles 7:14 pops into my mind, "If My people who are called by My name will humble themselves, and pray and seek My face, and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven, and will forgive their sin and heal their land."

Application: Consider adding a time of fasting for our nation to your calendar. Could you fast one or two times a month for America? Let's start banding together by humbling ourselves before God to make a difference in our country.

Prayer: Lord, help us to learn from the king and the people of Nineveh. Glve us hearts that yearn to intercede for our country, to dare to make a difference in the direction our nation is going. In Jesus' name. Amen.