



Nails in the Coffin

SIX DEATH RATTLES IN THE THROAT OF A LOCAL CHURCH

1. We can't lose sight of the harvest

JONAH 4:5-11

5 Jonah went out and sat down at a place east of the city. There he made himself a shelter, sat in its shade and waited to see what would happen to the city.

6 Then the Lord God provided a vine and made it grow up over Jonah to give shade for his head to ease his discomfort, and Jonah was very happy about the vine.

7 But at dawn the next day God provided a worm, which chewed the vine so that it withered.

8 When the sun rose, God provided a scorching east wind, and the sun blazed on Jonah's head so that he grew faint. He wanted to die, and said, "It would be better for me to die than to live."

9 But God said to Jonah, "Do you have a right to be angry about the vine?" "I do," he said. "I am angry enough to die."

10 But the Lord said, "You have been concerned about this vine, though you did not tend it or make it grow. It sprang up overnight and died overnight.

11 But Nineveh has more than a hundred and twenty thousand people who cannot tell their right hand from their left, and many cattle as well. Should I not be concerned about that great city?"

JOHN 4:34

34 "My food," said Jesus, "is to do the will of him who sent me and to finish his work.

35 Do you not say, 'Four months more and then the harvest'? I tell you, open your eyes and look at the fields! They are ripe for harvest.

36 Even now the reaper draws his wages, even now he harvests the crop for eternal life, so that the sower and the reaper may be glad together.

Notes on the Context

1. The people of Nineveh were counted by God, were spiritually assessed by God, and were of great concern to God.
2. God called Jonah to bring his message of grace to Nineveh, but Jonah whined and resisted all the way through the process.
3. In the end, Jonah was more concerned with his own comfort than he was about the life-and-death crisis of an entire city.
4. Jesus urged his disciples not to ignore the harvest as if the harvest were at some other place or at some other time or for some other workers to tend to.

Nails in the Coffin

1. When believers misdiagnose the spiritual status and underestimate the spiritual crisis of the unbelievers around them, all urgency toward evangelism evaporates.
2. When a local church loses its corporate passion and priority for reaching its community with the message of God's saving grace, it has lost the very heart of God; and when it loses the heart of God, it will surely lose the power of God.
3. When the "mature" saints in a congregation begin to value traditions and styles and systems and structures more than they value seeing people saved, the rest of the church follows, unless a new generation rises in spiritual rebellion and revival.
4. When new, young believers are not treasured and enfolded quickly into the body by being loved lavishly and practically by the saints, there is great risk of spiritual *sudden infant death syndrome*.
5. When believers are educated in God's Word but not employed in God's work, they become ends unto themselves rather than means and conduits for the flow of God's grace.
6. When Christian witnesses limit their work to one narrow field, they often miss the riper fields and become frustrated and discouraged at the work of harvesting. There are many fields.
7. A church filled with inwardly-focused believers will be an inwardly-focused church. A church filled with outreach/ingathering-minded believers will be an outreach/ingathering-minded church.

Notes to the Congregation

1. We must see ourselves as God's offensive agents, both corporately and individually, in a dying world, possessing the life-changing gospel of Jesus Christ and called to invade the darkness.
2. We must give ourselves to a fresh level of personal surrender and sacrifice, recognizing that the value of eternal souls (people) far outweighs the value of temporary comforts and conveniences and preferences and privileges.
3. We must be proactive in finding and even creating ways to pray and work together in bringing Jesus to the lost and multiplying the gospel work force, both at home and abroad.
4. We must rejoice at seeing the harvest gathered into the Kingdom, one life at a time. When conversions are missing from a congregation, a vital source of joy leaves the body and the building.