

The Mission and Call of God For His People: Jonah 1

Preached by Pastor Michael Gunn @ Harambee Church on August 9th, 2009

“In a day when prejudice and hate inflame men’s emotions and pervert their judgment, Jonah speaks with compelling force about limiting our love and sympathies only to some of our fellow human beings and excluding others from our pity and compassion.”

Frank Gaebelein

Intro

We have just completed a series on the gospel and its affect in our lives, and now we open a four part series on the book of Jonah, which is a short but great book demonstrating the gracious love of God for all nations including those nations that are bitter enemies of Israel (See **Romans 12:14ff**). The gospel is larger than nationalism, and our own desires and God’s people are found in all nations, ethnicities, races, etc. (See **Revelation 5:9, 10; 7:9**).

Jonah, according to **2 Kings 14:25** was a prophet to King Jeroboam II (To whom he prophesied his victory over the Syrians, and the enlarging of Israel’s borders), and was the son of Amittai from Gath-Hepher. The book with his name on it is placed with the Minor Prophets, but in reality it is a narrative describing God’s grace toward an evil people, with no prophecies made.

This book is a story of God’s grace, and His call of His people to carry out His mission to the “Nations.” This so often lost on a western church that sees church as a haven for “Self Improvement.” The church (Ecclesia) is a gathered group of people to help carry out God’s mission in the world (See **John 20:21**). For many this sounds like a clashing gong, that only makes the leadership of the church externally minded, without caring about those inside the church, however a full understanding of the workings of the church and the call to “*Make disciples*,” includes both the nurturing of one another by all people in the body, and the outward thrust of the gospel to the “Nations” (See **Matthew 28:19-20**). This book, though small is a narrative unpacking God’s intention for Israel (**Genesis 12:1-3**) in spite of the fact that they had not been the witness to the nations God had intended. Ouch, sounds all too familiar!

In our passage today (Chapter One), we see God’s call and Jonah’s disobedience based on nationalistic pride and bitter hatred for the people whom God loves and calls.

From the Head...

What we see right away, is that God is concerned with Iraq as much as He is with America. And like America, God is concerned with their wickedness, and in spite of His love for His creation, His just judgment is fair and righteous. God takes no pleasure in the death of the wicked (**Ezekiel 33:11**). This is an important thing to understand about God. He is loving and gracious and long suffering, but He is also just and holy (See too **Exodus 34:6-7**)! Let’s look at **Four Questions** that might navigate us through this first chapter:

What Was Jonah commanded to do?

Preach the Gospel to Nineveh

He was called to “*Arise, go to Nineveh, that great city, and call out against it, for their evil has come up before me.*” This command is similar to the command of the church from the lips of Jesus in **Matthew 28**. We so often have excuses of why we don’t share with the people we love. Sometimes those appeals seem legitimate; it could get you killed. Maybe this is how Jonah felt? According to Nahum the prophet, Nineveh was a wicked place (See **Nahum 3:1-4**). Simply we don’t have excuses, but our hardened, comfortable hearts keep us from caring. Showing compassion and love to people does not mean that we agree with their lifestyle. **Jonah was sent to Nineveh to lovingly “Call out against it!”** It is a loving thing to proclaim the gospel, even when it appears mean. There are definitely better ways to communicate this truth, but if God’s judgment is a reality, we are compelled to preach the truth of His gospel, and not transform it into a self-help manual! A true gospel calls for repentance and belief.

What was Jonah’s sin? Why did he disobey this direct command, and rather die himself than obey the command?

Jonah Was More Concerned About Nationalistic Pride Than He Was The Gospel

Jonah’s reason for disobedience is found in **4:2**. He knew God could/would save them, and that was bad for his people. Jonah was more concerned for Israel (Nationalism) than he was for the gospel and the glory of God.

One commentator wrote, “*He knew, by inspiration of the Holy Spirit, that the repentance of the Gentiles would be the ruin of the Jews, and, as a lover of his country, was actuated not so much by envy of the salvation of Nineveh, as by unwillingness that his own people should perish.* Church father **Jerome** supposes, *he really grudged salvation to the Gentiles, and feared lest their conversion to the living God should infringe upon the privileges of Israel above the Gentile world, and put an end to its election as the nation of God.*”

This is a racial issue. The apostles had a similar problem until God showed them what He desired (**Acts 8, 10, 13, 15** cf. **Genesis 12:1-3**). This is why we need to think “Glocally” and plant churches that reflect this vision for the kingdom of God, and not merely homogenous ones. Jonah’s nationalistic and racial pride got in the way of the gospel. It was an idol that needed to be expunged. Jonah had bitter hatred for his enemies. Jesus came however and told us to “Love” those who hate and persecute us (**Matthew 5:43-44**), and Paul reiterates this in **Romans 12:17-21**. Are we more concerned about the plight of America, than we are with the gospel? What do we think about immigrants coming into our country? Are we more concerned about guarding our tax money than we are God’s purposes in this world? Should we view people not like us differently for the sake of the gospel?

When we harden our hearts to the Lord, we too try to flee His presence. “I won’t go to church!!” But we fail to realize that God is omnipresent, and **Psalm 139: 7-10** reminds us that we can’t “*Flee from His presence!*” I’m sure Jonah was very familiar with these words, but they obviously remained just that; words to him in the midst of his rebellion. Hmm, sound familiar? No one know for sure where Tarshish was, but it is assumed it was the furthest tip of Spain, which would make Tarshish the exact opposite direction from where God had told him to go. It is important to realize that **you are better off going to the place God has for you, that being in a safer more comfortable place of your choice.**

How did God bring Jonah’s sin to light?

God Brought Jonah’s Sin to the Light Via A Storm

Jonah seemed to have no real conscious issues in regards to his sin. He went into the boat and slept. It took a storm to wake him, and the spiritual sensitivities of pagans to get him moving. It is interesting that Jonah was more willing to die than to obey God in this instance. As the rest of the story will show, it took God raising the “Heat” level to get Him to comply, but this narrative shows us is that God sovereignly moves His people through the people we come into contact with, and the through the circumstances of our lives. We can either use the “Heat” of our lives to turn toward the cross in repentance, resulting in fruitful lives, or we can become embittered towards God, resulting in thorns. Many of the “Storms” in our lives are the result of a sovereign God moving us to where He wants us.

Interestingly enough Jesus used this story, which includes Jonah’s direct disobedience as an analogy for His time in the grave (See **Matthew 12:39-40**).

In what ways is this story similar to Jesus’?

Jesus Took On The Punishment For Our Sins

His death is substitutionary on behalf of us. In this sense, Jonah being thrown over board was voluntary and on behalf of the rest of the sailors on the boat. But even in a different way, Jesus’ death is congruent to Jonah’s because Jonah deserved his punishment for his sin, and while Jesus doesn’t “Deserve” His punishment, He takes on our punishment that is deserved. **2 Corinthians 5:21** says, “*For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God*” reminding us that Christ became who we are, so that we could become who He is. In that sense, His death is like Jonah’s and “Deserving” because Jonah deserved it, and He (Jesus) took that on Himself, so in that sense Jesus can say, “**Just as Jonah was in the belly of the whale...**”

Jesus’ Death, Burial and Resurrection Was a Literal Miracle

Jonah’s narrative is a fanciful story apart from a God who not can intervene, but has the power of miracle. Jonah being swallowed by a whale is no more fanciful than a person being raised from the dead, or a god who creates the universe with a word. We could try to figure out that a man could be swallowed by a whale and live (As many men have done), but that wouldn’t make it a miracle, just a fortunate coincidence. We begin with the belief that there is a God who reveals Himself, and is sovereignly able to control what He has made, and from there we are able to explain the world around us. One writer says that “*Christians believe in one big, bold miracle; God. As a result, everything fits into place. The rest of the world (Non-Believing World) denies God, the creator and needs a miracle to explain everything created.*” Once you begin with the belief/presupposition that there is not God, then you explain the world with natural assumptions, and miracles don’t fit, but either way, we begin with a simple faith act.

Jesus uses this story literally to display the literal claim of His Easter miracle. He would be one day killed, buried and risen for the forgiveness of sins and the demonstration of God’s power over the most heinous thing known to humanity; Death!

...to the Heart

It is certainly a privilege to be on God’s team and active in the purposes by which He has called us. But so often, we place idols and ideals in front of the gospel, and turn church and fellowship into something it’s not. We exist in community because of God and His purposes and His glory that we are to proclaim to the nations. There is no doubt that this includes us loving and nurturing one another, but we do this in the context of mission. What are those heart issues that cause us to “Flee” God’s presence? What is it in your life that you know you don’t want to do no matter what God seems to be telling

you? We should never serve God of guilt and duty, but we are called to serve Him out of love and gratitude. This is our call, and I hope that looking into Jonah's life gives us all a window into our own. We too are often hardened in certain areas, and have racial/ethnic or nationalistic prejudices that kill our desire to proclaim God's glory to those that live around us.

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