

9 27-2020 SERMON ELDER JOHNSON JONAH'S JUDGEMENT AND GOD'S MERCY

Scripture readings

- 1st Lesson – Jonah 1:1 – 17
- 2nd Lesson – Jonah 2:1 – 10
- 3rd Lesson – Jonah 3:1 – 10
- 4th Lesson – Matthew 12: 28 – 41
- Focal Lesson – Jonah 4: 1 – 11

First Scripture Reading: (OT) Jonah 1:1-4, 7-2:1

Second Scripture Reading: (OT) Jonah 2:10-3:5, 3:6-3:10

Third Scripture Reading: (NT) Matthew 12:38-41

Focal Scripture Reading: (NT) Jonah 4:1-11

Jonah's Judgement and God's Mercy

Jonah: Hebrew, Missionary Prophet, son of Amittai

Nineveh of Assyria, A great but Evil empire which was Israel's enemy They were literally proud of their cruel heartless behavior. They conquered Israel in 722 BC but were ultimately destroyed in 612 BC.

There are several major themes in the Book of Jonah:

God is in Control of All (Sovereign): Jonah chapter 1: reveals Jonah is called to preach the word but he is reluctant to do so for an "underserving" enemy of Israel. Jonah tries to flee at Sea but God the master of the Seas sends a storm which terrifies even the Pagan sailors. So, our first LESSON is God is Sovereign clear failure to obey GOD can have disastrous results, but still GOD will provide continual loving guidance and we should ultimately trust him in all ways on all days. Saying yes to God will bring divine purpose and lead to a better understanding of God's character. God is Sovereign truly Lord of Lords and King of Kings.

Another important point about Jonah being swallowed by a Great Fish and remaining in his belly for 3 days is that Jesus refers to this when the Pharisees ask him to show them a sign that proves he is the Messiah.(Matt 12:39-40) Jesus reveals that the only sign he will reveal is the sign of the prophet Jonah,

meaning the Son of Man will spend 3 days and 3 nights in the heart of the earth just like Jonah spent 3 days and 3 nights in the belly of a Great fish. This parallels the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

God's Message must be proclaimed by his people: God continually reminds us of his desire to reach all people not just the chosen people but ALL People. Even the people of Nineveh are included as later Jesus proclaimed in the Great Commission of Matthew 28: 19. "Therefore go and make disciples of ALL nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of Son and of the Holy Spirit," Jonah represents the believers who have to realize that God's love does not stop at a prison gate or a manmade wall. We worship at Mount Paran church today only because our Pastor stepped outside the church walls as a missionary for the gospel. We literally were created with a Divine Purpose to act as a missionary for Christ. As a nation, Israel's reason for existence is to spread the Gospel beyond the borders of the chosen people so that others will be blessed. (Genesis 22:18) "and through your offspring ALL nations on earth will be blessed, because you have obeyed me." Unfortunately, many believers are like Jonah and never experience any joy when God gives underserved favor to others just as he does for them.

We next see the Repentance in Nineveh. A reluctant missionary preacher goes to Nineveh with truly mixed feelings but gets an amazing response. The people of Nineveh repent after Jonah preaches "Forty more days and Nineveh will be overthrown.". One only needs to see the power of John 1:1 to understand what happened in Nineveh. John 1:1: In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God." And the people of a seemingly God forsaken place did what many in Israel had NOT, they embraced God's word and message and responded with repentance. God thus spares the people of Nineveh. God's promise to those who repent is found in (Jeremiah 18:7-8). "If at any time I announce that a nation or kingdom is to be uprooted, torn down and destroyed, and if that nation I warned repents of its evil, then I will relent and not inflict on it the disaster I had planned."

Finally, we are directed to God's Mercy after Jonah reveals how he has already proclaimed himself the Judge, Jury, and executioner of the Ninevite people. Jonah did NOT want the Ninevites to be forgiven he had judged them to be unworthy of God's Mercy and felt God should destroy the city both physically and spiritually. In fact, the Jews of Jonah's day did not feel that they should have to share God's message with the Ninevites. Sadly, we learn later in 1 Thessalonians 2:14-16 that during Paul's ministry the Jews were still resistant to sharing God's message with Gentile nations. We find that some Jews were proud of their "chosen" status with God and did NOT like the fact that non-Jewish people (Gentiles) could be FULL members within the Christian church. Jonah is angry because God will freely give salvation to a pagan nation.

We probably all know by now Jonah was wrong in not wanting to share the blessing of salvation with others but just how WRONG was Jonah? Well, we see through Genesis 22:17-18 when God speaks to Abraham stating "...Your descendants will take possession of the cities of their enemies, and through your offspring ALL NATIONS on earth will be blessed, because you have obeyed me." Whenever, we see repeated words/phrases in the OLD and NEW testaments we know that God wants to make an important point and here we know God wants to provide a blessing for ALL Nations. Israel original divine purpose was to be a blessing to ALL Nations by sharing the word of God. So long before the Great Commission in Matthew 28: 18-20 the book of Genesis already revealed that GOD wants to bless ALL nations.

This teaching has personal significance for me because of a relative who left the church partly because a Bible study class dealt with God's ability to display love and mercy to those who we feel should ONLY receive God's wrath such as criminals. It made me ask myself how many times I have shared Jonah's anger when confronted with unpleasant people. In our present world we often place punishment ahead of all else when we deal with others. As we watch the news and see a divided nation struggle with a host of issues, we wonder how many believers today are like Jonah. When we fail to obey God and instead judge and condemn those we find undesirable, we lose an opportunity to save those most in need of salvation. We cannot say in one sentence God's word is life changing and then doubt that people can be moved when we share the gospel. I would like to propose that we are a nation divided often because we the believers have NOT decided to share God's word. We sometime share the judgment and defiance of Jonah when he responds to GOD's lesson in compassion by saying 'And I am so angry I wish I were dead' In fact, he relates a desire to die not once but twice in his dialogue with the Lord.

How many others would have been killed and tortured by the Ninevites if Jonah did not preach the word of GOD? Would you let a person burn in building without at least calling 911? Of course not. Yet Jonah expects our loving and compassionate God to ignore the souls of over 120, 000 people in Nineveh. The city of Nineveh was eventually overthrown and destroyed in 612 BC, so where is the equivalent of "Nineveh" now for Christians? The Middle East, the prison system, areas of poverty, or COVID 19 wards of hospitals? God does not want us to be careless, but he wants us to be prayerful and caring. In a prior sermon I called upon fellow believers to "welcome the stranger" so again the story of Jonah reminds us what Jesus said in Luke 9:12-13 "It is not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick. But go and learn what this means. 'I desire mercy, not sacrifice. For I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners.'" Therefore, whenever we deal with others, we must embrace God's desire for Mercy before we fully act on our own version of judgment.

AMEN

Challenge

Are we aware of the real-life lessons from the story of Jonah or do we just see it as a fairy tale? Can you honestly say to yourself and others that the entire Bible is the infallible, living word of God? Do you feel God's word is eloquent but not always essential?

We need to honestly acknowledge how much we are like or unlike Jonah.

Are we disobedient and overly judgmental like Jonah? and then later go on to complain about why GOD does NOT punish other sinners more harshly than we have been punished?

Do you experience the joy that should come about when others living without Jesus see the light in God's word?

Can we commit to being ready and willing to spread God's word even when it is uncomfortable?