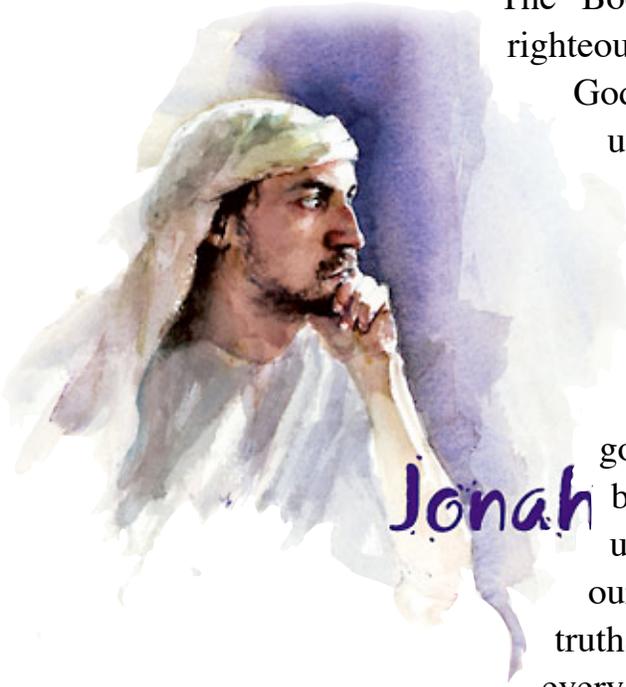


The Prodigal Prophet



The Book of Jonah presents Jonah as a self-centered, self-righteous, backslidden, prodigal prophet running away from his God-given responsibilities. The story begins with Jonah unconcerned for anyone but himself, and ends with him sarcastically arguing with God. Although he seems to be a little repentant as he uses some terminology, that he borrowed from his experience as a prophet, nowhere in the book does he get his heart right with the Lord.

The account of Jonah is not given to us to make us feel good about God's preacher who was saved from a big fish, but rather it is given to us to leave us feeling disturbed and uncomfortable. We like to have a warm fuzzy feeling about our heroes, but this story leaves us with the very unpleasant truths about the UGLINESS of the old nature that exists within every child of God.

NO REPENTANCE

The Bible gives us many examples of men who sinned and later cried out to God in repentance. We do not read of Jonah repenting; however, we do read of him blatantly charging God with being inconsistent. We should feel more empathy for the sailors and the Ninevites rather than the prodigal prophet.

A CLEAR COMMAND AND A BLATANT REFUSAL

Jonah got a clear command from God concerning his responsibilities, however, we read, he fled "*from the presence of the LORD.*" Being a prophet, he was well acquainted with the fact that God is omnipresent. He knew he could not literally escape from the presence of God. To stand in the presence of someone is often used in the sense of acting as one's official minister. He was simply Fleeing from the responsibilities God had given to him. The focus at the beginning of the story is on the *ship*, the *sailors*, the *storm*, the *sleeper*, and the *sea*. It was the sleeper who caused the storm and endangered the lives of all on the ship.

SOME FACTS ABOUT THE PROPHET

The sailors prayed; Jonah did not. The sailors were actively involved in saving the lives of the people on the ship, while Jonah slept. The sailors were obedient to what they knew. Jonah knew much and remained disobedient. The sailors had a fear of God; Jonah had no fear. Jonah, the prodigal prophet, will delight in his own deliverance and become very angry when the Ninevites are delivered.

JONAH'S FALSE FRONT (Jonah 2:1-10)

Jonah, the prophet, being familiar with the Scriptures, borrows some terminology from the Psalms in chapter two. On the surface it looked like Jonah was repenting, but his superficial words meant nothing considering his attitude toward God and his fellowman. Like all self-centered Believers, his actions speak much louder than his words. Jonah despised the Gentiles and preferred their death and damnation, rather than their deliverance. He was very quick to condemn the idolatry of the Gentiles; however, he failed to realize that his own disobedience was offensive to God.

THE MARVELOUS GRACE OF GOD

The Book of Jonah is a story of the contrast between the ugliness of the flesh and the wonderful grace of God. God's grace was available for all the sailor's on the ship, all the sinners in the city, as well the self-centered, prodigal prophet.

HE REJECTED GOD'S GRACE

Jonah rested in his position as an Israelite. The first words recorded by Jonah in this Book are *"I am a Hebrew."* He was one of God's chosen people; however, he failed to understand that his relationship to God was totally by the grace of God.

THE MASK IS REMOVED!

The stage for the events of the last two chapters of Jonah is set in the first two chapters. As the story begins, Jonah's sin was still somewhat subtle and passive. All of this changes in chapters three and four. He reveals his true spiritual condition when he "blows his stack" because of a city wide revival in Nineveh. In chapter one, Jonah simply sought to withdraw from God's service. In chapter four, he openly charges God with things that are so blatant that except for the grace of God, Jonah would have found himself back in the ocean.

BAD ATTITUDE OBEDIENCE

God commanded Jonah again to... *"Arise, go unto Nineveh that great city, and preach unto it the preaching that I bid thee. So Jonah arose, and went unto Nineveh."* Jonah preached, *"Yet forty days, and Nineveh shall be overthrown."* Jonah went, but not with a proper attitude about his responsibilities. The city responded and God did some amazing things. We read, *"So the people of Nineveh believed God, and proclaimed a fast, and put on sackcloth, from the greatest of them even to the least of them."* The population of Nineveh was between six hundred thousand and one million lost souls. Like the sea men on the boat, *"They believed in God."* We read, *"But it displeased Jonah exceedingly, and he was very angry."* There is not a sincere prophet in the Bible who would react this way at thousands upon thousands of people getting saved.

HIS OBNOXIOUS PRAYER

“And he prayed unto the LORD, and said, I pray thee, O LORD, was not this my saying, when I was yet in my country? Therefore I fled before unto Tarshish; for I knew that thou art a gracious God, and merciful, slow to anger, and of great kindness, and repentest thee of the evil. Therefore now, O LORD, take, I beseech thee, my life from me; for it is better for me to die than to live.” From the beginning to the end of the Book of Jonah, the focus of this self-centered, prodigal prophet, is on what he thinks is best for himself.

GOD’S RESPONSE

“Then said the LORD, Doest thou well to be angry?” Jonah’s response to that question was to ignore it. He persisted in his rebellion. He went outside of the city in his own personal little grandstand that he made, *“...till he might see what would become of the city”* (Jonah 4:5). Jonah’s heart was no different from the Romans who would later sit in the coliseum of Rome to watch the Christians devoured by lions.

THE PLANT AND THE PRODIGAL

God prepared another experience for Jonah to get the prodigal prophet to see his problem. This was accomplished by giving him a plant and then taking it away. God caused the plant to grow, the shade of which gave Jonah some comfort (Ch.4:6). For the first time in the story, he is described as being happy. He is pleased about having some personal comfort. His comfort is short-lived and he prayed he might die. The plant which God gave to Jonah made him happy, however, it did nothing to make him holy.

THE WHALE, THE WORM, AND THE WIND

The whale did nothing to help Jonah and God’s blessing as a plant did nothing to help him, so God sent a worm to destroy the plant. Along with the worm He sent a scorching east wind, which caused the prodigal prophet sitting on the east side of the city some great discomfort.

JONAH WAS ANGRY WITH GOD AGAIN

All of these things were part of God’s grace to help Jonah, but whether God’s grace came as blessing or judgment, Jonah was not interested in anything God had to offer. For the second time, God challenged Jonah to consider his anger: *“And God said to Jonah, Doest thou well to be angry for the gourd? And he said, I do well to be angry, even unto death”* (4:9).

God has the final word in the Book of Jonah, and His last words press to the heart of the problem (4:10-11). The heart of the problem was the problem of the heart.

Jonah 4:10-11,

“Then said the LORD, thou hast had pity on the gourd, for the which thou hast not laboured, neither madest it grow; which came up in a night, and perished in a night: And should not I spare Nineveh, that great city, wherein are more than six score thousand persons that cannot discern between their right hand and their left hand; and also much cattle?”

JONAH DESPISED THE GRACE OF GOD

The Book of Jonah starts and ends with Jonah being a despicable, self-centered, prophet whose real grievance with God was the grace of God. Grace is unmerited favor. Grace is a blessing we do not deserve. Grace is for undeserving and unworthy people. Jonah did not view himself in that light. He thought that God was obligated to bless him because he was a Hebrew. He supposed he deserved to be saved from the fish. He thought he deserved the plant. He thought God owed him something because of who he was.

When I came to Sarnia, to help a struggling little church get on it's feet, a pastor suggested to me that after all the years I have served the Lord, I deserved to have a large church with a good income, etc. I said, “Where did you get a foolish idea like that? All I deserve is to be sent straight to Hell. Anything above that is by the grace of God.”

The prophet, Jonah, despised the grace of God. People who despise the grace of God are the ones who think they do not need it. That is why it is difficult to get people saved. To the self-righteous, grace is charity and to them charity is demeaning. Jonah was saved by grace but he would not serve by grace. Going to Nineveh was not something he had to do, it was something he had the privilege to do. He had the privilege to be a witness to the sailors, but he thought he was above that, so he slept while sinners were standing on the threshold of Hell. He had the privilege to witness to the people of Nineveh, but he would rather sit in the shade and pout about what God wasn't doing for him. Our churches are infected with people who sit in church every week and gripe about what God isn't doing for them. They have no concern for the lost in their city who need the gospel. They are self-centered Christians who think ... “It's all about me!” They just sit in their church buildings and sing some nice hymns, thinking they are special because they are fundamental Baptist. These prodigal fundamentalists are no different than Jonah.

NO BACKWOODS PREACHER

Jonah was not a backwoods prophet. He was well known in the courts of Israel. In Second Kings 14:25 we read, *“He restored the coasts of Israel from the entering of Hamath into the sea of the plain, according to the word of the LORD God of Israel, which he spake by the hand of his servant Jonah, the son of Amittai, the prophet.”*

Jonah was a well known fundamentalists of his day. Jesus made seven references to Jonah when He was talking to the religious Pharisees.

Perhaps there came a day when Jonah was more concerned about others than himself, however, according to the account God has given us in the Book of Jonah, he was not interested in talking to anyone about God. In fact, the first words he speaks in the Book are spoken to tell us how important he thinks he is and he only spoke these words because someone woke him up.

CONCLUSION

The Bible says in Romans 15:4. *“For whatsoever things were written aforetime were written for our learning...”* What can we learn from the story of the prodigal prophet? We can learn that we may be prodigal, fundamental, Baptists who are more concerned about ourselves than we are our God-given responsibilities to tell others about Christ. We can learn that fundamentalists can use a little Scriptural terminology and look and sound more spiritual than we really are. We can also learn that to be self-centered is very costly. D.L. Moody said, *“God sends no one away empty except those who are full of themselves.”* Jonah missed God’s best because he was absorbed with himself. We can too.

Pastor B. Kirkland

Fair Havens Baptist Church



467 George St. Sarnia, Ontario - Telephone (519) 337-3052

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