

INFLUENCING COMMUNITY CHANGE Sunday School- March 7, 2010

Unifying Topic: MISSION TO THE COMMUNITY

Lesson Text

I. **Jonah's Commission** (Jonah 1:1-2)

III. **Jonah's Disobedience** (Jonah 1:3)

III. **Repentance And Reformation Of Nineveh** (Jonah 3:1-9)

The Main Thought: 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. (Jonah 3:5, KJV).

Unifying Principle: In a world filled with good and evil, people are forced to choose between good and evil. What happens to people who turn from their wicked ways in sorrow? Jonah's plea to the people of Nineveh caused them to believe in God and to fast, trusting that God would forgive them.

Lesson Aim: Jonah did not want to go to Nineveh, so he tried to run from God, but God has ways of teaching us to obey Him and to follow Him.

Life aim: When we ignore God or show disobedience, He may punish us, but He will show compassion and forgive us if we turn from our sins.

1:1 Now the word of the Lord came unto Jonah the son of Amittai, saying,

1:2 Arise, go to Nineveh, that great city, and cry against it; for their wickedness is come up before me.

1:3 But Jonah rose up to flee unto Tarshish from the presence of the Lord, and went down to Joppa; and he found a ship going to Tarshish: so he paid the fare thereof, and went down into it, to go with them unto Tarshish from the presence of the Lord.

3:1 And the word of the Lord came unto Jonah the second time, saying,

3:2 Arise, go unto Nineveh, that great city, and preach unto it the preaching that I bid thee.

3:3 So Jonah arose, and went unto Nineveh, according to the word of the Lord. Now Nineveh was an exceeding great city of three days' journey.

3:4 And Jonah began to enter into the city a day's journey, and he cried, and said, Yet forty days, and Nineveh shall be overthrown.

3:5 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.

3:6 For word came unto the king of Nineveh, and he arose from his throne, and he laid his robe from him, and covered him with sackcloth, and sat in ashes.

3:7 And he caused it to be proclaimed and published through Nineveh by the decree of the king and his nobles, saying, Let neither man nor beast, herd nor flock, taste any thing: let them not feed, nor drink water:

3:8 But let man and beast be covered with sackcloth, and cry mightily unto God: yea, let them turn every one from his evil way, and from the violence that is in their hands.

3:9 Who can tell if God will turn and repent, and turn away from his fierce anger, that we perish not?

HISTORY:

¹We now come to the most well known of "The Minor Prophets": Jonah, whose name means "Dove" His book does not contain prophecy per se, rather it contains the history of a prophet... A prophet reluctant to fulfill the mission God assigned him; a prophet who complained when his mission proved successful. This short book of "Jonah" easily falls into four sections...

- a. "Running Away From God" (chapter one)
- b. "Running To God" (chapter two)
- c. "Running With God" (chapter three)
- d. "Running Ahead of God" (chapter four)

The Book of Jonah is an unusual book. It is the only prophetic book that places more emphasis on the messenger than the message. The prophetic message of Jonah consists of only seven words. Another unusual feature of the book is it revolves exclusively around a Gentile nation. Jonah was the only Old Testament prophet sent directly to the Gentiles and the only prophet who refused to obey God. One purpose of the book is

¹ http://executableoutlines.com/mp/mp_05.htm

<http://www.pitwm.net/pitwm-sundayschool.html>

to convict God's people of selfishness and bigotry. The book demonstrates the universal nature of God's compassion. It points to the future redemption of both Jews and Gentiles through the finished work of Christ.

LESSON:

Jonah 1:1-2: Jonah's Commission

²The Book of Jonah begins just like eight of the twelve books of the so-called "*minor prophets*": "The word of the Lord came to..." (Jonah 1:1). The difference between Jonah and the other prophets is that they obeyed God's command, but Jonah made up his mind to disobey God.

God commissions Jonah to preach in Nineveh; telling Jonah to go to the people of Nineveh and announce His judgment against them. Jonah's seven-word prophecy was short but to the point: "*In forty days Nineveh shall be overthrown*" (3:4). In this section we are introduced to the prophecy, the prophet, and the problem.

- **The prophecy** is characterized as being "the word of the Lord." The prophecy that comes from Jehovah God, thus the source and authority of the message which makes it important.
- **The prophet** is introduced simply as Jonah (dove) "*the son of Amittai*" (truth).

"*Arise and go to Nineveh, to that great city, and cry against it...*" The city was called "*great*." Nineveh, first mentioned in Genesis 10:11, was the ancient capital of the Assyrian Empire and was located on the eastern bank of the Tigris River. It was the largest city in the world in that day and was a formidable threat to the existence of Israel. She reveled in her immorality. No one could conquer this center of the Assyrian empire. Like the Laodiceans, she thought that she was rich, increased with goods, and had need of nothing (Rev. 3:17). The prophet would have loved to go to Nineveh and declare God's judgment, but not God's grace. Jonah's situation is unique in two respects:

1. It is the only instance of a prophet being sent to a heathen nation.
2. It is the only instance in which a prophet refuses to carry out his commission.

Their Wickedness Drew God's Attention:

The omniscient God knows the depth of our sin. But when a people's wickedness "*has come up before God*," then you know that He has uncovered it so that a people might understand their wretchedness before God. Is that not what happened to David when he sinned with Bathsheba? When the voice of Jesus Christ called out to Saul of Tarsus on the Damascus Road, his sin was uncovered before him and he cried out, "Who art Thou, Lord?" Isaiah the prophet had been used mightily of God in delivering one oracle after another. But when he had the throne-room vision of chapter 6, his sin was uncovered so that Isaiah cried, "Woe is me for I am ruined!" In each case, the discovery of sin came with the greatness of divine mercy.

- This shows that for all time, the wickedness of heathen nations does not escape the notice of God.
- It further shows that God is concerned about the wickedness of heathen nations, even though His own prophet is calloused against them.
- It further introduces the extremes to which God will go in order to get His message to those nations for the accomplishment of his purpose.

We do not see a people who sought God or desired Him. There were no prayers for revival within her walls. Instead we find a God who takes action to call out a people for Himself; even a people who had no interest in Him.

Jonah 1:3: Jonah's Disobedience

"*But Jonah rose up to flee unto Tarshish from the presence of the Lord and went down to Joppa...*"

- **The problem** is that Jehovah has given a specific command but the prophet chose not only to ignore the commission, but to do the exact opposite. Jonah rebels against God's plan.

Nineveh was east of Palestine, while Tarshish was at the extreme western end of the then-known as "*the end of*

² http://www.lightstreamers.com/sunday_school/sunday_school_02-17-02.htm
<http://www.pitwm.net/pitwm-sundayschool.html>

the world." Joppa is the city of Jaffa, the Mediterranean city used today as a seaport by Israel. Instead of following faithfully after the word of the Lord, Jonah had his own mind made up of just what he would do and just how far he would go in faithfulness to the Lord.

The phrase "*from the presence of the Lord*" does not indicate that Jonah thought he could escape the omnipresence of God. Rather the phrase is used to indicate the land of Israel where the Lord dwelt in His Temple.

Jonah 3:1-9: Repentance And Reformation Of Nineveh

The Lord again commissions Jonah to preach in Nineveh. And this time Jonah obeys and proclaims God's message. These were pagan, unbelieving people who had no knowledge of God before them. They had no Scripture to read. They had received no previous ministry of divine revelation as far as we know. They heard the preaching of one man declaring the law and judgment of God against sinners; and they responded in faith in that revelation proclaimed. The people of Nineveh are moved to repent, including the king.

1. OBSERVATIONS IN READING THE TEXT...

- a. Jonah's message was brief, yet clear - 3:4. Jonah did not preach, "God loves you and has a wonderful plan for your life." He preached God's loathing of them, His "burning anger" toward them, and the certainty of His judgment. "*Yet forty days, and Nineveh shall be overthrown.*"
 - i. 40 days of rain for Noah's ark was a time of washing away the moral pollution of generations.
 - ii. 40 years wandering in the wilderness where Israel was being trained to live by the promises and guidance of God.
 - iii. Elijah's 40 days on the run from Jezebel prepared him for God's reassurance;
 - iiii. Jesus' 40 days of temptation and 40 days of resurrection appearances verified both the Messenger and His message.
 - b. An unusual fast is proclaimed - 3:5-7. The Ninevites saw that their sin was against God. There was a genuine response of shame and repentance over their sin, when the recognition of their sin confronted them.
 - i. Three days without food and water
 - ii. For both man and beast
2. With sackcloth for both man and beast, the king calls for a true change of behavior - 3:8-9. This was an immediate response of turning from sin to God.
 3. The king of Assyria reasons like the prophet Joel - 3:9 [with Joel 2:12-14]. They saw this window of mercy but did not presume that God would deliver them. They gave themselves to seeking mercy from the God whom they had angered.
 4. Nineveh's example of repentance is a discredit of Israel. It was not that some believed, but all of Nineveh believed; unlike Israel and Judah.
 - a. Israel in Jonah's own day - 2Ki 17:13-14,18; 2Ch 36:15-16.
 - b. Israel in the days of Jesus - Mt 12:41.

God was not obligated to awaken Nineveh. Jonah came with no promises, but only with the evidence that a God who would warn sinners of His impending wrath "*might also show mercy toward them if they turned to him.*" The Ninevites discovered that God was more merciful than they imagined.

There are some pertinent and simple lessons which we can draw our focus to, on the gracious work of God in coming to Jonah "the second time."

- There is a new level of attentiveness. Humbled by the disciplining hand of the Lord, brought a new capacity of hearing the Word of God.
- Obedience to the will of the Lord became more important than his personal feelings or desires. He being motivated by the Lord for what He had done after praying!
- He got the message. God used even the result of Jonah's disobedience to equip him for service. The message was simple, yet profound!

MORE LESSONS:

1. Such preaching of condemnation is often conditional - Jer 18:7-10.
2. The least likely prospects might be the ones who will convert- e.g., 1Co 6:9-11.
3. We see the result of fasting and prayer, as one seeks to petition God - e.g., Ezr 8:21-23.

Jonah's mission was a success! Souls headed for destruction were saved! It is not the level of experience which qualifies a person to be a Christian; it is the reality of their faith set upon Jesus Christ alone for their salvation. The thing which produced faith in the Ninevites was their fear of God's wrath. You would think that Jonah would have been elated. But read the final chapter.

SUMMARY:

Jonah was a prophet of God. His name meant "dove". He was told by God to go to a town called Nineveh, foreign soil and preach to foreign people. He was supposed to warn the people there to turn from their wickedness or face the wrath of God. Nineveh was a place of violence and bloodshed. The people there worshipped false gods, did immoral sex acts, burned and sacrificed babies to idols. However, Jonah is a story of God's action to save unworthy and uninterested sinners. God is forgiving and longsuffering and there came a time when He said enough is enough. In His divineness the Lord sent forth His prophet Jonah to declare the solitary message of hope. And Jonah's response to God's command was entirely different from what the prophets of God are known to do. He was trying to go as far in the opposite direction as possible. Nineveh was out of the question. He headed to Tarshish on a boat that had room for him, bound for Joppa, fleeing from God's presence. He thought he could get away from God. Disobedience results in broken fellowship! Even with the prophet's disobedience/rebellion, God still worked to use His designated prophet and to turn the hearts of the Ninevites to Himself.

Just as God give sinners chance after chance, He also give saints chance after chance. The book of Jonah teaches us that God's commands don't change because we try to run from Him. God sends Jonah again to preach repentance to the Ninevites. He gives the same command again because it had not gotten done. This time there is something different about the prophet. Jonah had learned that he couldn't run from the presence of God. He had learned that there were consequences when being on a ship God did not tell him to get on. He endangered his life and many others by being out of position, like Adam. He had learned the discipline of God. And now, he learns that obedience is the secret to intimate fellowship with the Lord as he prayed!

It took a person three days to walk across Nineveh, yet Jonah walked into the city as far as he could go in one day and "*cried Forty days, and Nineveh shall be overthrown.*" Everyone in the city believed and put on mourning clothes and went on a fast—declared by the king and his nobles. "*Let neither man nor beast, herd nor flock, taste any thing: let them not feed, nor drink water.*"

The mission was to a people Jonah didn't like, didn't care for, but God cared for. God may send us to people we don't like or care for to declare a message they might not want and it seems like a warning for some and just planting seeds for others. Only God knows the reason and commands He gives. Only God knows our heart of disobedience of why we shun some and flock to others. Only God knows our purpose at that particular time in our life and their lives. Influencing others means getting our lives right with God first. Before we can influence others' thinking, do they see Jesus or have seen a spirit of disobedience in our lives. Jonah's mission did not take many days, but only one day. When Jonah prayed in the belly of the fish, change came and when change starts in a person, then they can influence a community.

God's message to Jonah:

1. The love of God is for all mankind.
2. The will of God is to be done.

APPLICATION:

Think about this the next time you decide to choose your own will over God's.

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- Think about Jonah when God calls you to give and you decide to keep.
- Remember Jonah when God sends you to minister to the sick or the imprisoned and you sit on your couch and read a book.
- Don't forget Jonah when God calls you to teach or to work in the nursery or to scrub toilets and you decide that's not what you really want to do.

It's not worth running from God. It's not worth demanding our own will when we know God has shown us His "WILL". God will indeed have His way and His sovereign "WILL", will be done! We can choose to do it His way the first time and be blessed or do it our way and share in Jonah's experience. Remember, delay in responding to God's "WILL" is no different than disobedience.

When God calls, go, do, and enjoy His incredible blessings! When our will conflicts with God's "WILL", it is not a question of who will win. It's just a question of how long we're going to fight the outcome. May our repentance demonstrate that our faith is real! It's **His** community we are to influence and it's **His** to change! Be the best messenger ever!