

## **“JONAH: THE RELUCTANT PROPHET”**

### ***“Jonah’s Big Moment”***

#### **Scripture Reading – Jonah, 1:1-10**

*The word of the LORD came to Jonah son of Amittai: “Go to the great city of Nineveh and preach against it, because its wickedness has come up before me”. But Jonah ran away from the LORD and headed for Tarshish. He went down to Joppa, where he found a ship bound for that port. After paying the fare, he went aboard and sailed for Tarshish to flee from the LORD.*

*Then the LORD sent a great wind on the sea, and such a violent storm arose that the ship threatened to break up. All the sailors were afraid and each cried out to his own god. And they threw the cargo into the sea to lighten the ship. But Jonah had gone below deck, where he lay down and fell into a deep sleep.*

*The captain went to him and said, “How can you sleep? Get up and call on your god! Maybe he will take notice of us, and we will not perish”. Then the sailors said to each other, “Come, let us cast lots to find out who is responsible for this calamity”. They cast lots and the lot fell on Jonah. So they asked him, “Tell us, who is responsible for making all this trouble for us? What do you do? Where do you come from? What is your country? From what people are you?”.*

*He answered, “I am a Hebrew and I worship the LORD, the God of heaven, who made the sea and the land”. This terrified them and they asked, “What have you done?”. (They knew he was running away from the LORD, because he had already told them so.)*

***‘Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness and respect.’***

***1 Peter, 3:15b, NIV***

**This series, ‘JONAH: THE RELUCTANT PROPHET’ is based on THE BOOK OF JONAH.**

Daily newspaper headlines and overflowing prisons bear dramatic witness that sin runs rampant in society today. With child abuse, pornography, serial killings, terrorism, anarchy, and ruthless dictatorships, the world seems to be filled to overflowing with violence, hatred, and corruption. In the light of these tragedies, we begin to understand the necessity of God’s judgment. We may even find ourselves wishing for vengeance by any means upon the violent perpetrators. Surely they are beyond redemption.

**How would you respond if God told you to take the Gospel to the worst offenders?**

Jonah was given such a task. Assyria, a great but evil empire, was Israel’s most dreaded enemy. The Assyrians flaunted their power before God and the world through numerous acts of heartless cruelty. So when Jonah heard God tell him to go to Assyria and call the people to

repentance, he ran in the opposite direction. Jonah hated the Assyrians, and he wanted vengeance, not mercy, so he ran. Eventually, Jonah obeyed and preached in the streets of Nineveh, and the people repented and were delivered.

*As you read Jonah, see God’s love and compassion and realise that no one is beyond redemption. The Gospel is for all who repent and believe. Learn from the story of this reluctant prophet and determine to obey God, doing whatever he asks and going wherever he leads...*

#### **“JONAH’S BIG MOMENT”**

*There is a plague that seems to have stricken the Christian Church. At first glance it looks like ‘ENCEPHALITIS LETHARGICA’, also known as ‘SLEEPING SICKNESS’, but news reports have begun to surface indicating that this paralysing illness is the result of action by certain terrorist cell groups who perpetrate satanically inspired attacks upon the Children of God.*

*The Security Chief for the World Church Council claims that five terrorist cell groups, specially trained in Spiritual Warfare have been identified as operating throughout the worldwide Church. He stated that a further cell group is actively engaged in the identification and eradication of these five dangerous cells, which are determined to rid the world of true Christianity.*

*The five terrorist cell groups are led and organised by leaders, whose names they have personified by their actions. Be on the lookout for them: OSOMEHAVE BIN ARGUING, OSOMEHAVE BIN COMPLAINING, OSOMEHAVE BIN FIGHTING, OSOMEHAVE BIN MISSING, and OSOMEHAVE BIN SLEEPING. Each leader has been trained in subversive spiritual warfare by Lucifer, the chief terrorist leader, for the purpose of defeating the Body of Christ.*

*Their mode of operation is to come inside the Church disguised as followers of Jesus, then work within each fellowship to discourage, disrupt, and destroy the vital work going on. Every member of the Body of Christ has already been indoctrinated and absorbed into one of the terrorist cells without even realising it. Each member is instructed to examine their own mind, heart, and activities, in order to discover which of these terrorist groups has had an impact upon their spirit.*

**There are many similarities between Jonah and the Christian Church.**

Like Jonah, the Church has received a high calling from God. Our commission is to preach the Gospel and make disciples of all nations. Like Jonah, we often seek to do our own thing rather than God’s desire. We too prefer to work in Tarshish whilst God calls us to preach in Nineveh.

**Jonah had sleeping sickness that prevented him engaging in spiritual warfare.**

Whilst the storm was raging around them, the sailors on board were holding a multi-faith prayer meeting, as ‘EACH CRIED OUT TO HIS OWN GOD’. Jonah – who alone aboard ship knew the one true God – was fast asleep below deck, oblivious to those who were around him.

*God called the Jews to be a blessing to all the nations of the earth, but whenever the Jews were out of the will of God, they brought trouble instead of blessing. Jonah brought trouble to a boatload of pagan sailors because he fled in disobedience to the call of God.*

### **Are you making life unbearable for others, and blaming it on them?**

*A man was asleep one day when his children rubbed smelly cheese into his moustache. When he woke up, he got up and said, "This room stinks". He went into other rooms in his house and said, "This house stinks". Finally, he went outside, took a deep breath, and declared, "This whole world stinks".*

**Consider all that Jonah lost because he was no longer a blessing to others...**

#### **JONAH'S LOSS: HE LOST THE VOICE OF GOD**

**We no longer read that 'THE WORD OF THE LORD CAME TO JONAH'.**

God was no longer speaking to Jonah through his word. Instead, a great storm broke loose over the waters. God was speaking to him through his works – the sea, the wind, the rain, the thunder, and even the great fish. Everything in nature obeyed God except his servant! God even spoke to Jonah through the heathen sailors who did not know YHWH. It is a sad thing when a servant of God is rebuked by pagans.

<b>ALL THE SAILORS WERE AFRAID AND EACH CRIED OUT TO HIS OWN GOD</b>
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### **We, like Jonah, live in a multi-ethnic, multi-faith society.**

Whilst we are not exactly surrounded by people from other faiths, we do see an increasing number of Jews, Hindus, Muslims, and Sikhs. We should not forget to include those who claim to be Christians and yet have strange beliefs – e.g. Mormons and Jehovah's Witnesses – they are perversions of Christianity. Our world is noticing an increase in what is known as the New Age movement, which is a mishmash of strange beliefs and customs from throughout the world. Our society also contains those who worship the devil and his demons. A witch practices the satanic art of witchcraft whether or not she calls herself a white witch.

*It is important to know what the Bible says about living in a multi-faith society...*

#### **THE TEN COMMANDMENTS**

*"I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of Egypt, out of the land of slavery. You shall have no other gods before me. You shall not make for yourself an idol in the form of anything in heaven above or on the earth beneath or in the waters below. You shall not bow down to them or worship them; for I, the LORD your God, am a jealous God."*

**Exodus, 20:2-5, NIV**

### **A 'GOD' is whatever people put first in their lives.**

Some people literally worship other gods by joining cults or strange religions. In a more subtle way, many of us worship other gods by building our lives around something other than the one true God. If your greatest desire is for popularity, power, or money, you are devoting yourself to something other than God.

**God is very jealous for his own name.**

How would you feel if someone took a picture of you, framed it, stared at it a lot, showed it to others, but completely ignored the real you? God does not want to be treated this way either. He wants a genuine relationship with us, not mere ritual. He wants us to know him. God knows that if we put anything other than him at the centre of our lives, we will not reach our potential and become all that he wants us to be.

#### **ELIJAH CONFRONTS THE PROPHETS OF BAAL ON MOUNT CARMEL**

*'At noon Elijah began to taunt them. "Shout louder!" he said. "Surely he is a god! Perhaps he is deep in thought, or busy, or travelling. Maybe he is sleeping and must be awakened".'*

**1 Kings, 18:27, NIV**

#### **GOD HIMSELF KNOWS OF NO OTHER GOD**

*'For this is what the LORD says – he who created the heavens, he is God; he who fashioned and made the earth, he founded it; he did not create it to be empty, but formed it to be inhabited – he says: "I am the LORD, and there is no other".'*

**Isaiah, 45:18, NIV**

#### **THERE IS ONLY ONE WAY TO THE FATHER**

*'Jesus said, "I am the way and the truth and the life. No-one comes to the Father except through me".'*

**John, 14:6, NIV**

### **Jesus said he is the only way to God the Father.**

Some people may argue that this way is too narrow. In reality, it is wide enough for the whole world, if the world chooses to accept it. Instead of worrying about how limited it sounds to have only one way, we should be saying, "THANK YOU, GOD, FOR PROVIDING A SURE WAY TO GET TO YOU".

#### **THERE IS ONLY ONE WAY OF SALVATION**

*'Peter said, "Salvation is found in no-one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to men by which we must be saved".'*

**Acts, 4:12, NIV**

Many people react negatively to the fact that there is no other name than that of Jesus to call on for salvation. Yet this is not something the church decided; it is the specific teaching of Jesus himself. If God designated Jesus to be the Saviour of the world, no one else can be his equal. Christians are to be open-minded on many issues but not on how we are saved from sin. No other religious teacher could die for our sins; no other religious teacher came to earth as God's only Son; no other religious teacher rose from the dead. Our focus should be on Jesus, whom God provided as the way to have an eternal relationship with himself. There is no other name! There is no other way!

### **Jonah's big moment came when he acknowledged his allegiance to the LORD...**

A professor stood in the front of his class and declared there is no God. Then he got a little braver and challenged any God up in heaven to strike him down. Nothing happened, so he repeated the challenge. A few moments went by as he stood staring up towards heaven with his fist clenched and his teeth gritted. A young man, who had just recently been discharged from the Marines, got to his feet and walked forward and knocked the professor from his stand. The professor shook his head in disbelief and said, "I was challenging God, I dared him to knock me down". The young ex-Marine smiled and said, "God knows what you said; he just told me to do it for him".

**BUT JONAH HAD GONE BELOW DECK, WHERE HE LAY DOWN AND FELL INTO A DEEP SLEEP**

### **Jonah should have been preaching about God to the pagan sailors.**

His divinely appointed task was to stand up and be counted for the Lord, but Jonah was absent from the action on the board and the storms of the sea and sky. He should have been calling upon his soldiers to pray to the one true God, but instead, Jonah had retreated from the battlefield. He was not praying below decks on his own in a secret place, he was fast asleep.

### **Once upon a time, The Salvation Army called their halls 'BARRACKS'.**

They were viewed as a 'GARRISON' or a 'STATION' wherein troops were trained for the task of engaging in spiritual warfare. Nowadays, we call our halls 'CITADELS'. A citadel is a fortress, a place of refuge and safety. It is a stronghold that offers escape from the dangers of battle. One of the synonyms you can use instead of 'CITADEL' is 'SANCTUARY'.

### **JONAH'S LOSS: HE LOST HIS SPIRITUAL ENERGY**

#### **Jonah went to sleep during a fierce storm.**

This clearly demonstrates that the disobedient prophet was totally unconcerned about the safety of the others. The sailors were throwing the cargo overboard, and Jonah was about to lose everything, but still he slept on.

*'A little sleep, a little slumber, a little folding of the hands to rest – and poverty will come on you like a bandit and scarcity like an armed man.'*

**Proverbs, 24:33-34, NIV**

### **If the Church is asleep, Satan has already been busily at work.**

The devil wants the Christian Church to continue to sleep, because whilst we are, we are offering him no threat or opposition at all.

*There are three truths that apply equally to both physical sleep and spiritual sleep...*

### **WE DO NOT KNOW WE ARE ASLEEP UNTIL WE WAKE UP**

*'The hour has come for you to wake up from your slumber, because our salvation is nearer now than when we first believed. The night is nearly over;*

*the day is almost here. So let us put aside the deeds of darkness and put on the armour of light. Let us behave decently, as in the daytime.'*

**Romans, 13:11b-13a, NIV**

### **WE DO THINGS IN OUR DREAMS WE WOULD NOT DO IF WE WERE AWAKE**

*'Have nothing to do with the fruitless deeds of darkness, but rather expose them. For it is shameful even to mention what the disobedient do in secret.'*

**Ephesians, 5:11-12, NIV**

### **WE HATE THE SOUND OF AN ALARM**

*'It is light that makes everything visible. This is why it is said: "Wake up, O sleeper, rise from the dead, and Christ will shine on you".'*

**Ephesians, 5:14, NIV**

**THE CAPTAIN WENT TO HIM AND SAID, "HOW CAN YOU SLEEP? GET UP AND CALL ON YOUR GOD!"**

### **Not only was Jonah absent and asleep, but after the alarm came an accusation.**

It is a sad thing when a servant of God is rebuked by pagans. God even spoke to Jonah through these heathen sailors who did not know the Lord. The captain in charge of the stricken vessel came to Jonah and practically said to him, "WE'VE TRIED OUR GODS, BUT THEY WERE NO USE, IF YOU KNOW A GOD, WE'LL TRY YOURS NOW".

### **There is a parallel here between Jonah and Jesus on the Sea of Galilee.**

*'When evening came, Jesus said to his disciples, "Let us go over to the other side of the lake"... A furious squall came up, and the waves broke over the boat, so that it was nearly swamped. Jesus was in the stern, sleeping on a cushion. The disciples woke him and said to him, "Teacher, don't you care if we drown?".'*

**Mark, 4:35, 37-38, NIV**

### **So often, those we try to help the most are those who declare, "You don't care!"**

However, Jonah the sleeper really did not care about himself, the sailors, and the Ninevites!

### **JONAH'S LOSS: HE LOST THE POWER OF PRAYER**

The heathen sailors were calling on their gods for help while Jonah slept through the prayer meeting, the one man on board who knew the true God and could pray to him. Of course, Jonah would first have had to confess his sins and determine to obey God, something he was not willing to do. If Jonah did pray, his prayer was not answered. Loss of power in prayer is one of the first indications that we are far from the Lord and need to get right with him.

*'If I had cherished sin in my heart, the Lord would not have listened, but God has surely listened and heard my voice in prayer.'*

**Psalms, 66:18-19, NIV**

THE SAILORS SAID, "LET US CAST LOTS TO FIND OUT WHO IS RESPONSIBLE FOR THIS CALAMITY"  
THEY CAST LOTS AND THE LOT FELL ON JONAH

The sailors discussed the terrible storm they were enduring and concluded that it was not at all like any other storms they had experienced. As seasoned mariners, they had been able to handle other storms, but not this one. They concluded rightly that someone on board the ship was to blame and so they decided to trust to luck to find out the reason for their calamity.

**It is a dangerous occupation to just trust to luck.**

*A man wanted desperately to hear a word from God. He took down a dusty old Bible from the shelf, said a quick prayer, and opened it at random. His eyes fell on **Matthew, 27:5...** 'JUDAS WENT AWAY AND HANGED HIMSELF'. Surely not, he thought, so he asked God for another word. He opened his Bible again, and his eyes fell on **Luke, 10:37...** "GO AND DO LIKEWISE". I'll give it one more go, he thought, and this time, his eyes fell on **John, 13:27...** "WHAT YOU ARE ABOUT TO DO, DO QUICKLY".*

**God caused Jonah to choose the short straw.**

People may think that such things are determined by chance. They speak of 'LADY LUCK' or work out some mathematical odds. But God tells us that he controls what happens. **Proverbs, 16:33** says, 'THE LOT IS CAST INTO THE LAP, BUT ITS EVERY DECISION IS FROM THE LORD'. The dice were cast into the lap, but God determined the outcome. **Donald Barnhouse** paraphrased this verse saying that 'MAN THROWS THE DICE; BUT IT IS GOD WHO MAKES THE SPOTS COME UP'.

The Scriptural truth that Jonah forgot was: 'BE SURE THAT YOUR SIN WILL FIND YOU OUT' (see **Numbers, 32:23**).

THEY ASKED JONAH, "TELL US, WHO IS RESPONSIBLE FOR MAKING ALL THIS TROUBLE FOR US?  
WHAT DO YOU DO? WHERE DO YOU COME FROM? WHAT IS YOUR COUNTRY?  
FROM WHAT PEOPLE ARE YOU?"

**JONAH'S LOSS: HE LOST HIS TESTIMONY**

**He certainly was not living up to his name, for 'JONAH' means 'DOVE'.**

The dove is a symbol of peace. Jonah's father's name was AMMITAI, which means 'FAITHFUL, TRUTHFUL' – some thing that Jonah was not. We have already seen that he was not living up to his high calling as a Jew, for he had brought everybody trouble instead of blessing; nor was he living up to his calling as a prophet, for he had no message for them from God. When the lot pointed to Jonah as the culprit, he could no longer avoid making a decision.

**To his credit, Jonah did not become friends with the sailors on the boat.**

There are those that say, "We need to relate to the world... We need to rub shoulders with the world... The trouble is the world does not understand us... Well, all we have to do is just show the world that we are no different from them... We need to show them that we are just ordinary people".

**Making the message of the Church relevant is not found in concealing our identity.**

The world is waiting to see something different, while we are told that we need to mix with the world. The problem with such an approach is that the Christian identity is lost, but true faithful friendship has not followed.

**A soul-winner needs intensity, but he must never compromise his integrity.**

We have all heard the phrase: 'WHEN IN ROME, DO AS THE ROMANS DO'. Well, if you were in Rome and you did as the Romans did, then the Romans would have won you as opposed to you winning them! The Christian should not allow himself into a compromising position on the pretext of trying to bear witness for Jesus. The greatest danger a lifeguard faces when trying to rescue a drowning man is not the wind, the waves, or the water. The greatest danger is that the drowning man will pull the would be rescuer down with him.

**'You do not have to dress up like a clown to witness to a circus', said Vance Havner.**

We do not have to drink the world's booze, speak the world's language, go to the world's bars, or dance to the world's beat, in order to get worldly people to listen to us. We should never be isolated from lost people. Jesus was a friend of sinners, and we should have sinners for friends. Although we are not to be isolated from sinners, we must remain insulated from them.

JONAH ANSWERED, "I AM A HEBREW AND I WORSHIP THE LORD"  
THIS TERRIFIED THEM AND THEY ASKED, "WHAT HAVE YOU DONE?"

Jonah had already told the crew that he was running away from God, but now he told them he was God's prophet, called by the God who created the heavens, the earth, and the sea. This announcement made the sailors even more frightened. The God who created the sea was punishing his servant and that was why they were in mortal danger!

**When Jonah revealed his true identity, this revelation 'TERRIFIED THEM'.**

These veteran sailors were more afraid at this point of the LORD than they were of the storm itself. The reason had to be that they had heard about the God Jonah proclaimed. This is the LORD who brought the plagues on Egypt. This is the LORD who had opened the Red Sea. This is the LORD who had drowned Pharaoh's army. This is the LORD who had brought down the walls of Jericho. This is the LORD who had caused the sun to stand still for Joshua. The God pursuing Jonah was a great God, a powerful God! No wonder the sailors were terrified!

*Great is the Lord and most worthy of praise,  
The city of our God, the holy place, the joy of the whole earth.  
Great is the Lord, in whom we have the victory.  
He aids us against the enemy, we bow down on our knees.*

*And, Lord, we want to lift your name on high,  
And, Lord, we want to thank you for the works you've done in our lives;  
And, Lord, we trust in your unfailing love,  
For you alone are God eternal, throughout earth and Heaven above.  
**Steve McEwan, Magnify 15***