

“JONAH: THE RELUCTANT PROPHET”

“Overcoming The Jonah Complex”

Scripture Reading – Jonah, 3:10 – 4:11

When God saw what they did and how they turned from their evil ways, he had compassion and did not bring upon them the destruction he had threatened. But Jonah was greatly displeased and became angry.

He prayed to the LORD, “O LORD, is this not what I said when I was still at home? That is why I was so quick to flee to Tarshish. I knew that you are a gracious and compassionate God, slow to anger and abounding in love, a God who relents from sending calamity. Now, O LORD, take away my life, for it is better for me to die than to live”. But the LORD replied, “Have you any right to be angry?”

Jonah went out and sat down at a place east of the city. There he made himself a shelter, sat in its shade and waited to see what would happen to the city. Then the LORD God provided a vine and made it grow up over Jonah to give shade for his head to ease his discomfort, and Jonah was very happy about the vine. But at dawn the next day God provided a worm, which chewed the vine so that it withered. When the sun rose, God provided a scorching east wind, and the sun blazed on Jonah’s head so that he grew faint. He wanted to die, and said, “It would be better for me to die than to live”.

But God said to Jonah, “Do you have a right to be angry about the vine?” “I do”, he said. “I am angry enough to die”.

But the LORD said, “You have been concerned about this vine, though you did not tend it or make it grow. It sprang up overnight and died overnight. But Nineveh has more than a hundred and twenty thousand people who cannot tell their right hand from their left, and many cattle as well. Should I not be concerned about that great city?”

‘And of this gospel I was appointed a herald and an apostle and a teacher. That is why I am suffering as I am. Yet I am not ashamed, because I know whom I have believed, and am convinced that he is able to guard what I have entrusted to him for that day.’

II Timothy, 1:11-12, 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: THE RELUCTANT PROPHET”

Today we conclude our series of studies on THE BOOK OF JONAH.

What is the story all about? It is not simply about a great fish (mentioned four times), or a great city (named nine times), or even a disobedient prophet (mentioned eighteen times). It is about God! God is mentioned thirty-eight times in just four short chapters, and if you eliminate him from the book, the story would not make sense. THE BOOK OF JONAH is about the will of God and how we respond to it. It is also about the love of God and how we share it with others.

 **In Jonah, chapter one, we saw God’s patience with Jonah.**

Jonah received the call of God to go to Nineveh, but he disobeyed and headed for Tarshish in the complete opposite direction. He found a boat ready to take him away from the presence of the Lord, but God sent a terrible storm that threatened the lives of the mariners. Jonah was forced in to revealing his sin and was thrown overboard. He became the first submariner when the great fish swallowed him whole!

 **In Jonah, chapter two, we saw God’s mercy towards Jonah.**

After spending three days and three nights inside the great fish, Jonah eventually prayed. God heard his prayer, honoured his faith, accepted his confession, and restored his ministry. Jonah endured God’s discipline before the Lord spoke to the whale, and it vomited up Jonah onto dry land. The reluctant prophet undoubtedly looked a sight and stunk of fish innards.

 **In Jonah, chapter three, we saw God’s power through Jonah.**

The Lord graciously called his prophet a second time, and this time he obeyed. Jonah preached a short message in a great city, and everyone responded to his message, from the king to the lowest subject. God looked down upon this repentant people and relented from the threat of immediate destruction – although he did not suspend imminent judgement!

 **In Jonah, chapter four, we see God’s ministry to Jonah.**

Jonah is devastated when Nineveh was not destroyed and engages in a conversation with Almighty God. God hears Jonah's complaint and he comforts and teaches him. Does Jonah learn the lesson? Well, he does allow God to have the last word!

"OVERCOMING THE JONAH COMPLEX"

Have you ever heard of 'TRANSACTIONAL ANALYSIS'?

Developed over fifty years ago by American psychiatrist Eric Berne, it offers a different way of looking at relationships and communication than the system developed by Sigmund Freud. Basically, Transactional Analysis provides us with three ways of looking at things:

'I AM OKAY & YOU ARE OKAY' – *This describes Adult to Adult relationships and communication, and it gives by far the best model, reflecting your good image simultaneously with the same respect for others.*

'I AM OKAY & YOU ARE NOT OKAY' – *This describes Parent to Child relationships and communication, and causes problems as it gives those who use it a 'SUPERIORITY COMPLEX' over the other person.*

'I AM NOT OKAY & YOU ARE OKAY' – *This describes Child to Parent relationships and communication, and this also causes problems as it gives those who use it an 'INFERIORITY COMPLEX' over another person.*

The reality is that whilst most of us yearn for balanced relationships, and some thrive only by acting with superiority over others, most of us end up believing that, and behaving as though, we are inferior to others. We tend to think that others do not have the same problems that we have, and that they are better than we are.

Many Christians get themselves into trouble as they become more and more aware of their own sins and weaknesses because they also assume that other Christians are not plagued with the same problems. We tend to think that other Christians (especially those who are older) have a better experience of the Lord, and are therefore more spiritually mature than we are.

We meet up for the final time with Jonah, forty-one days after he had proclaimed his God-given message: **'FORTY MORE DAYS AND NINEVEH WILL BE OVER TURNED'** (see **Jonah, 3:4**).

What Jonah wanted was to go to the edge of the city and watch Nineveh burn. And perhaps one or two would come along running for their lives and say, "WELL JONAH, YOU WERE RIGHT", and Jonah could reply, "YES, I TOLD YOU SO". Jonah aspired to be able to say 'I AM OKAY & YOU ARE NOT OKAY', but he secretly feared the opposite. It did not really surprise Jonah when **'THE NINEVITES BELIEVED GOD'** (see **Jonah, 3:5**), but he was surprised when God did what he did!

Just in case you haven't worked it out yet, Jonah had 'a superiority complex' that God had to deal patiently with...

1. JONAH'S ANGRY DISPLEASURE

'But Jonah was greatly displeased and became angry.'

Jonah, 4:1, NIV

*'Why did Jonah become angry when God spared Nineveh? The Jews did not want to share God's message with Gentile nations in Jonah's day, just as they resisted that role in Paul's day (see **1 Thessalonians, 2:14-16**). They had forgotten their original purpose as a nation – to be a blessing to the rest of the world by sharing God's message with other nations (see **Genesis, 22:18**). Jonah thought that God should not freely give his salvation to a wicked pagan nation. Yet this is exactly what God does for all who come to him today in faith.'*

"LIFE APPLICATION BIBLE", Study Notes

We come now to possibly the most astonishing part of THE BOOK OF JONAH.

Here we witness the unthinkable, the unbelievable, the irrational. We see sin and carnality at its worst. Despite being miraculously preserved in the belly of a great fish, and having an intimate and undoubted experience with God, and having seen God at work in the merciful saving of the Ninevites, Jonah was unprepared for the Lord's reaction to the works of the Ninevites!

Surely any sensible and sane person would be thrilled to see a whole city changing its ways and turning to God? Surely any evangelist would be thrilled at the prospect of 120,000 people seeking salvation? The Bible says: **'BUT JONAH WAS GREATLY DISPLEASED AND BECAME ANGRY'**! Jonah's reaction shows us just how carnal and sinful Jonah really was.

Early Salvation Army Holiness Teaching (Handbook of Doctrine, 1922) states...

AN UNREGENERATED PERSON IS UNDER SIN

He may see sin to be evil, hate it, and struggle against it; but he is still under its power, and forced to obey it. This explains why unsaved people make resolutions and break them directly. **'I AM CARNAL, SOLD UNDER SIN'** (**Romans, 7:14**) – The Unsaved Man!

A REGENERATED OR PARTIALLY SANCTIFIED PERSON IS OVER SIN

He is delivered from the power of sin; by the power of God he is able to conquer sin. But sin still exists as a principle or disposition of the soul; it is there, though it does not rule. **'SIN SHALL NOT HAVE DOMINION OVER YOU'** (**Romans, 6:14**) – The Saved Man!

AN ENTIRELY SANCTIFIED PERSON IS WITHOUT SIN

'FREED FROM SIN' (**Romans, 6:7**). He is delivered from all sin; his disposition is entirely purified; inborn sin is done away with and destroyed. **'BEING MADE FREE FROM SIN, AND BECOME SERVANTS OF GOD, YE HAVE YOUR FRUIT UNTO HOLINESS, AND THE END EVERLASTING LIFE'** (**Romans, 6:22**) – The Sanctified Man!

2. JONAH'S ASTONISHING DEFIANCE

'He prayed to the LORD, "O LORD, is this not what I said when I was still at home? That is why I was so quick to flee to Tarshish. I knew that you are a

gracious and compassionate God, slow to anger and abounding in love, a God who relents from sending calamity. Now, O LORD, take away my life, for it is better for me to die than to live". But the LORD replied, "Have you any right to be angry?"

Jonah, 4:2-4, NIV

'Jonah revealed the reason for his reluctance to go to Nineveh. He didn't want the Ninevites forgiven; he wanted them destroyed. Jonah did not understand that the God of Israel was also the God of the whole world. Are you surprised when some unlikely person turns to God? Is it possible that your view is as narrow as Jonah's? We must not forget that, in reality, we do not deserve to be forgiven by God.'

"LIFE APPLICATION BIBLE", Study Notes

If Jonah's carnality and sinfulness exhibiting itself in unrighteous anger is not bad enough, he then moves on to try to justify his earlier disobedience. However, do not make the mistake of judging Jonah too harshly, because we are all like this at one time or another...

The truth is I can start off saying: "I AM SORRY", but the more I think about it, the more I want to justify my actions, so I try to explain myself: 'YOU KNOW WHY I DID IT, DON'T YOU? IT WAS BECAUSE...'. In the end, I completely excuse myself, making my apology utterly meaningless, as I ask rhetorically: "COME TO THINK OF IT, WHAT ELSE COULD I DO?"

And, before you even think about it, don't judge me too harshly either, because I suspect that there is a tendency in every person to seek to justify themselves!

What is 'A COMPLEX'?

A 'COMPLEX' is a word used in psychology to denote unbalanced thinking. It is an obsession. It is a preoccupation with an idea that is grounded in projection not reality. We may speak of one who has a chip on his shoulder – that is a complex. Or if you are feeling sorry for yourself, feeling persecuted, feeling that no one understands you – that is a complex. A complex is the result of repression. Repression is a defensive mechanism we use unconsciously to avoid pain.

Jonah repressed the truth that he 'KNEW' about God.

One of Jonah's problems was that he 'KNEW' this truth, but it was too painful for him. He repressed his own theological understanding. There was absolutely nothing wrong with Jonah's theology, but there was a lot wrong with Jonah. Jonah knew things, but he made the wrong conclusions from that knowledge. He was angry because of what he knew about God's mercy.

Contrast the difference between the theology of Jonah and Paul...

Jonah said: "I KNEW THAT YOU ARE A GRACIOUS AND COMPASSIONATE GOD" (see Jonah, 4:2b).

'I am not ashamed, because I know whom I have believed, and am convinced that he is able to guard what I have entrusted to him for that day.'

II Timothy, 1:12b, NIV

'And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose.'

Romans, 8:28, NIV

Jonah said 'I KNEW' – his belief was theory, and living in the past.

Paul's theology was 'I KNOW' – it was fresh and vigorous. It was persuasion, and living in the present whilst looking towards a glorious future. It is one thing to say 'I KNEW', but it is quite another to be able to say 'I KNOW', because it is real, it is a present reality and experience.

Surely it is far better to know the truth of the Gospel than to make the wrong conclusions, or fail to put into practice something that you once knew to be right!

3. GOD'S PATIENT DIRECTION

BUT THE LORD REPLIED, 'HAVE YOU ANY RIGHT TO BE ANGRY?'

Here we begin to see something of the patience of the Lord.

God heard Jonah's prayer in the belly of the great fish whilst Jonah prayed with great humility and anguish, but it is a comforting thought to note that the Almighty heard Jonah's prayer even though he spoke with great anger.

When you see someone who is hostile and angry, there are three responses:

You can condone them and say "YOU ARE RIGHT TO BE ANGRY, GET IT OUT OF YOUR SYSTEM".

You can condemn them and say, "YOU ARE WRONG TO BE ANGRY" – a moralising approach.

You can understand them and say, "YOU ARE VERY ANGRY, AREN'T YOU?".

There was a little boy who had a bad temper, so his father gave him a big bag of nails and told him that every time he lost his temper, to hammer a nail in the wooden fence. The first day the boy had driven 37 nails into the fence. Then it gradually dwindled down. He discovered it was easier to hold his temper than to drive those nails into the fence. Finally the day came when the boy didn't lose his temper at all. He told his father about it, and the father suggested that the boy now pull out one nail for each day that he was able to hold his temper. The days passed and the young boy was finally able to remove all the nails. The father took his son by the hand and led him to the fence. "You have done well, my son, but look at all the holes in the fence", he said. "The fence will never be the same. When you say things in anger, they leave a scar just like these holes in the fence."

'But the wisdom that comes from heaven is first of all pure; then peace-loving, considerate, submissive, full of mercy and good fruit, impartial and sincere.'

James, 3:17, NIV

Incidentally, Jonah did not deign to answer the Lord's question.

Instead we are told that despite the suspension of God's judgement, Jonah went out to the outskirts of the city, built himself a shelter and waited to see what would happen to Nineveh. No matter what the evidence, Jonah could not give up. He had convinced himself that the Lord would respond to protect the integrity of his prophet. Jonah, who could have been celebrating with the King in the cool of the palace, was instead in the scorching heat. It was in this uncomfortable position that we again notice Jonah's sinfulness, but despite this, we also see the gracious provision and protection that God affords, and a final lesson for Jonah to learn.

“JONAH'S FINAL LESSON”

‘Jonah went out and sat down at a place east of the city. There he made himself a shelter, sat in its shade and waited to see what would happen to the city. Then the LORD God provided a vine and made it grow up over Jonah to give shade for his head to ease his discomfort, and Jonah was very happy about the vine. But at dawn the next day God provided a worm, which chewed the vine so that it withered. When the sun rose, God provided a scorching east wind, and the sun blazed on Jonah's head so that he grew faint. He wanted to die, and said, “It would be better for me to die than to live”.’

Jonah, 4:5-9, NIV

‘God ministered tenderly to Jonah just as he had done to Nineveh and to Israel— and just as he does to us. God could have destroyed Jonah for his defiant anger, but instead he gently taught him a lesson. If we will obey God, he will lead us. His harsh judgment is reserved for those who persist in rebellion.’

“LIFE APPLICATION BIBLE”, Study Notes

There is a great parallel in how God ministers to Elijah and Jonah...

ELIJAH WAS AFRAID

He was terrified as he ran from the threats of King Ahab and his wife Jezebel. The Bible tells us that he sat down under a broom tree and prayed that he might die: **“I HAVE HAD ENOUGH, LORD. TAKE MY LIFE; I AM NO BETTER THAN MY ANCESTORS”**. Then he lay down and fell asleep until he was awakened by an angel who provide him with a sustaining meal (see **1 Kings, 19:3-9**).

JONAH WAS ANGRY

He was greatly displeased when he realised that God's wrath passed over the city and prayed that he might die: **“NOW, O LORD, TAKE AWAY MY LIFE, FOR IT IS BETTER FOR ME TO DIE THAN TO LIVE”** (see **Jonah, 4:3**). Then he decided to sit down on the edge of the city, waiting to see if his preaching would be vindicated and God provided him with a vine, a worm, and a scorching east wind. Jonah fainted in the heat and again wanted to die: **“IT WOULD BE BETTER FOR ME TO DIE THAN TO LIVE”** (see **Jonah, 4:8**).

But we come now to Jonah's famous vine or ‘GOURD’ (KJV).

We have little idea about what this plant was, some suggest that it may have been a castor-bean plant, a fast-growing perennial which may reach the height of ten feet; it looked like a palm tree with large leaves. Whatever the plant was, it brought shelter and comfort to Jonah.

What is your ‘GOURD’?

Maybe it is an extraordinary answer to prayer.

Have you seen this happen lately? Maybe you felt very weak as a Christian and you wondered whether God had forsaken you, whether you did not matter any more. Therefore, what you needed was a gourd to spring up and give you great comfort.

Maybe it is a special grace given to help you through some temptation or trial.

Perhaps you have been unable to handle a particular situation, but suddenly God has provided you with an amazing special grace to aid you through and help support your wavering faith.

If Jonah's ‘GOURD’ came just when he needed it, so did his ‘WORM’.

If you have been deriving your joy from the ‘gourd’ what will happen when it is taken away? What will you do when you no longer have that prop to lean on? What happens when God is not answering your prayers? What happens if you are no longer able to persevere in the trial? What happens if you fall into temptation? What happens when the fruit of the Spirit seems to dry up? What happens if God hides his face and you can no longer sense his presence? What happens when your ‘gourd’ is gone? The reality is we all know people who have not coped with its sudden loss. Many of them no longer attend church. Many of them have even lost their faith.

Whatever your ‘GOURD’ is, it is not meant to be a permanent assurance of faith.

It is meant to give you a temporary assurance, given just when you need it. But, beware, there may well already be a worm eating its way through it. Would you be upset to losing that which is acting as a crutch to your faith? Jonah was – and the Lord noticed his reaction.

Our assurance is to be found solely in the Word of God.

I must trust in Christ even when he hides his face from me. I must live by a principle whether or not God blesses me. I must preach the Gospel whether or not there are any converts. I must stand up for the truth of the Bible whether science proves or disproves it. Jonah's needed the worm to turn his attention back to God rather than the ‘gourd’. Christ is the solid rock of our assurance.

My hope is built on nothing less than Jesus' blood and righteousness,

I dare not trust the sweetest frame, but wholly lean on Jesus' name.

On Christ, the solid rock, I stand, all other ground is sinking sand.

Edward Mote, SASB 745:1

‘But the LORD said, “You have been concerned about this vine, though you did not tend it or make it grow. It sprang up overnight and died overnight. But Nineveh has more than a hundred and twenty thousand people who cannot tell their right hand from their left, and many cattle as well. Should I not be concerned about that great city?”’

Jonah, 4:10-11, NIV

‘God spared the sailors when they pleaded for mercy. God saved Jonah when he prayed from inside the fish. God saved the people of Nineveh when they responded to Jonah's preaching. God answers the prayers of those who call upon him. God will always work his will, and he desires that all come to him, trust in him, and be saved. We can be saved if we heed God's warnings to us through his Word. If we respond in obedience, God will be gracious, and we will receive his mercy, not his punishment.’

“LIFE APPLICATION BIBLE”, Study Notes