

Blessed To Be A Blessing – July 24, 2011

The Word of the Lord

“Now the word of the LORD came to Jonah the son of Amittai, saying, “Arise, go to Nineveh, that great city, and cry out against it; for their wickedness has come up before Me.” But Jonah arose to flee to Tarshish from the presence of the LORD. He went down to Joppa, and found a ship going to Tarshish; so he paid the fare, and went down into it, to go with them to Tarshish from the presence of the LORD.”

Jonah 1:1-3

Jonah and the whale is an Old Testament story learned by most children in Sunday School. They learn how Jonah was swallowed by the great fish and spit out on the shore 3 days later...by all estimations an unpleasant experience for certain. General questions most likely arise about how Jonah could possibly have survived such an experience. God does miraculous things...and being God He could surely preserve Jonah in such a predicament. Jonah displays at minimum an unwilling attitude. God wants him to go to the city of Nineveh and warn them of the coming judgment. Jonah heads in the opposite direction. Not so smart...or as we say today Jonah surely demonstrated that he was not the brightest bulb in the pack! God surely would know that Jonah didn't go and He would surely have been displeased. Jonah didn't really think about the end game...he didn't really plan things out. He just knew that he didn't want to go to Nineveh and he wasn't going...God could just get over it.

It should not surprise any of us that Jonah could serve as the poster child for “every man”. We are just like Him. The Word of God tells us to be in His house every Lord's Day...and people find it very easy to run in the opposite direction. For whatever reason they don't wish to attend services and they are not going to show up....and God can just deal with it! It is easy for us to understand that Jonah might well have been afraid to go to Nineveh and do what God asked. It is not so easy to see that Jonah's trip to Nineveh was just as much for the sake of Jonah as it was for the people of that great city. When Jonah finally arrived in Nineveh he was as full of

self-righteousness as ever. He preached God's warning and the people repented. Jonah expected God to "let 'em have it". Jonah had been subjected to a taste of God's displeasure in the belly of the great fish; these people, much more wicked than he, must surely be marked for a splendid display of God's wrathful vengeance...but God was merciful. Instead of leveling the playing field and evening the score, God forgave their sin and that didn't sit well with Jonah. Jonah's shameful behavior—reasonably considered by sinful men as a momentary lapse in good judgment—was now to be recorded in sacred history for all time and these people received not even a slap on the wrist. Not fair God—not fair!

Jonah had to learn that God desires mercy and delights in forgiving sin. There is no place in life for sinful self-righteousness. The forgiveness of Nineveh was a lesson in mercy for Jonah and for us. It is never wise to go against God's word. God has invested everything in being merciful to us through the death and resurrection of our Savior, Jesus Christ. Willful disobedience is not just a lapse in judgment, but a spurning of the saving grace of God which He so freely extends to us all.

God has given us a task to do also. He has sent us to make disciples of all nations---to declare repentance in the name of Jesus. Each time we share with someone else the love of Jesus, we, like Jonah, learn anew the lesson of God's grace and mercy for us too! Share the Good News with everyone you meet!

Pastor Jacobs

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