

It is more profitable to know Jesus than to know about Him.

Weekly Edition – May 13, 2016

Jonah – Chapter 1 – part 2

Jonah Flees From the Lord

1 The word of the Lord came to Jonah son of Amittai:² "Go to the great city of Nineveh and preach against it, because its wickedness has come up before me."

³ 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.

Three Reflections on today's Text:

First Consideration: Go

- 1) There is a kind of *going* that arises out of my own nature. This type of going reflects my own good idea of what I should do or how I might serve. This is not a call from God, but rather springs up from my own character based on my natural abilities and interests.
- 2) There is also a different kind of *going* – one that is given to me by the Lord, and we refer to this kind of going as a "call." When God places a call on you and I it comes without regard to our natural abilities.
- 3) We see both kinds of *going* demonstrated in the life of Moses. When he saw the oppression of his people he felt certain he was the one to deliver them. He launched the first strike, leaving a dead Egyptian in the sands. This was the first type of going and Moses went on his own initiative. Moses called his own shots, hoping that somehow his actions would please God. They did not.
- 4) Moses fled and spent the next 40 years feeding sheep in empty discouragement. Only then did God appear to him from the burning bush and told Moses to go. This is the second kind of *going*. All the hubris and self-confidence of his youth were now removed. The man who 40 years earlier struck out in confident self-sufficiency now says to God, "*Who am I that I should go?*" (Exodus 3:10-11) Now Moses allowed God to call the shots.
- 5) In the beginning Moses realized he was the one to deliver the people, but he first had to be trained and disciplined by God. He was right in his individual perspective, but he was not the right person for the work until he learned true fellowship with God. Paul would later write, "*I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me.*" (Galatians 2:20) Both men had to learn to surrender their lives to the power of the Living God before they were right for the work. Both had to learn how to follow.

Application: What about me? What kind of *going* has been true in my life? For many of us, in our quietest moments, we feel a sense of something we should be doing – of some service or contribution we might make to the greater good. It can often be a non-specific, yet, clear tug towards some sort of *going*. Have I ever stopped to ask God what that is that I am sensing? Have I ever asked Him to "*speak Lord, for Your servant is listening*" about this hidden interior tug?

Second Consideration: Nineveh, That Great City

- 1) We have established that Nineveh was a pagan Assyrian city that did not know the Lord or acknowledge His ways. Yet, here we see the Lord refer to this wicked sinful city as being a "great" city. How can this be?

Jonah

One of the Twelve Prophets

1. The Word of the Lord
2. Jonah's mission
3. Jonah flees
4. The storm
5. The great fish
6. Three days in the belly
7. Jonah delivered
8. Nineveh repents
9. Jonah pouts
10. The gourd
11. God's mercy

It is more profitable to know Jesus than to know about Him.

- 2) This was not on account of its expansive size, but rather an indication of how God views cities. Cities are much esteemed in God's eyes on account of the vast numbers of His people who dwell in them.
- 3) God refers to Nineveh in the feminine – this city is called *she*. Great cities are often called *she* in the Old Testament, as if, despite their power and defensive walls, they need a protector like the Lord to watch out over them.
- 4) Jerusalem is also referred to in the feminine. The Lord adorned His beloved Jerusalem as it is written about her: ¹¹ *I adorned you with ornaments, put bracelets on your wrists, and a chain on your neck.* ¹² *And I put a jewel in your nose, earrings in your ears, and a beautiful crown on your head.* ¹³ *Thus you were adorned with gold and silver, and your clothing was of fine linen, silk, and embroidered cloth.* (Ezekiel 16:11-13)
- 5) There is no doubt that Jerusalem was the beloved city of God. Holy Scripture has over 800 references to Jerusalem as the “city of our God – as His dwelling place of His Shekinah glory.” “*Jerusalem is God's city, the city of Zion, He has invested His name there.*” (Daniel 9:19) Yet, could it be that this pagan city of Nineveh is also a “beloved” city of God? Could the God of Israel, the LORD, also care for these Assyrian people with the same deep affection for which He cares for Jerusalem? Does His love extend also to those who are plainly outside His covenant? The answer is a resounding “yes!” and it catches us by surprise.
- 6) Consider the words spoken through the prophet Isaiah: ²⁴ *In that day Israel will be one of three with Egypt and Assyria—a blessing in the midst of the land,* ²⁵ *whom the Lord of hosts shall bless, saying, “Blessed is Egypt My people, and Assyria the work of My hands, and Israel My inheritance.”* (Isaiah 19:24-25) Egypt will be His inheritance? Really? And wicked Assyria too? Absolutely! God is the God of all men – whether men acknowledge Him and His ways or not – He is still King of Kings and Lord of Lords!

Application: God has a special affection for cities, even though within great cities there is found abundant wickedness. God is concerned about the inhabitants of cities – even those people who are hostile towards Him and those outside the covenant of grace – so great is His love for all His creatures. In what ways are we called to serve God's cities that surround us? What messages of hope are we invited to bring to His people who dwell in the cities near us: Coatesville, Norristown, Chester, West Philadelphia, etc.?

Third Consideration: Preach Against Her

- 1) The Word of the Lord calls out to Jonah, sending him to go to Nineveh and “*call out* against her.” The Hebrew word means to “call, cry, proclaim, commission or summon.” It is the same verb used to describe a prayer of invocation: calling upon the Lord, and is later used of the sailors who invoke the names of their gods in desperate prayers to be saved from the angry sea.
- 2) It implies speaking up so as to get someone's attention. At this point we do not hear the contents of the message, only the means by which the message is to be delivered. Jonah is to call out against her – he is to make announcement, shouting Nineveh's evil out loud, for the whole world to hear. There is something that happens when sin is exposed, when sin is brought into the light.
- 3) We all know that sense of shame that we experience when our sin is exposed to the light, when it is revealed and named for what it is. Sin very much likes to hide in darkness, to cover itself, to resist exposure. It prefers the company of those who will not name it for what it is. As soon as it is called out, immediately sin deflates and loses its power.
- 4) The spiritual power of confessing our sin to another person is very real, yet our sense of shame will more often get the upper hand and prevent us from going to a fellow Christian or priest to make a private confession to him or her. Yet once the sin is exposed by confession, it deflates and loses its power over me.
- 5) The Apostle John teaches us, “*If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness.*” (1 John 1:9)

Application: Is there in me some secret sin that has not been exposed to the light? If to recall it triggers a feeling of shame, it is very much in need of public exposure before God and man. If I am not ready to speak it aloud, am I willing to confess it privately to Jesus Christ?