

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

Weekly Edition – May 27, 2016

Jonah – Chapter 1 – part 4

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: He Went Down

- 1) "Jonah went down to Joppa." Jonah's descent is more than geographical, more than merely following the topology of the Judean landscape westward to the lower elevations where the sea greets the port of Joppa.
- 2) His descent is also spiritual. Anytime we flee from the presence of the Lord, we "go down" in a spiritual sense.
- 3) Biblically speaking, Jerusalem is the high point of Jewish life and worship. No matter what the starting point, Biblical references to Jerusalem always indication "going up" to Jerusalem – ascending to the place where the Shekinah glory of God dwells in the Temple at Jerusalem. To ascend to Jerusalem is not only to gain elevation relative to sea-level but also to gain spiritual elevation – to ascend to the House of the LORD.
- 4) Similarly, from a Judean perspective, all travel away from Jerusalem means "going down" from the Temple Mount where God is present in a particular way. Neither Jerusalem nor Israel is named in the Book of Jonah. At best we get an allusion to both of these places in the phrase "he went down" – running away from the LORD.
- 5) Could it be that Jonah not only runs away from the face of the Lord, but also wants to forget Jerusalem and Israel all together? Jonah places all three of these "behind his back" so to speak as he flees from the Lord. Yet all three seem to be generating an unseen but palpable gravitational pull on everything he does. Jonah may be writing them off – but they are not writing him off.
- 6) What about me? I recall a time in my life when I ran away from the Lord. Like Jonah I put God, the church, and faith in general behind me and headed off in the opposite direction. Thankfully, while I abandoned the Lord, the Lord never abandoned me. Even in my darkest times (and there were plenty) He was there – exerting an invisible gravitational pull on me although I was completely oblivious to His presence.
- 7) As was the case with Jonah, God engineered my circumstances in such a way as to call me home. I was only able to see this with the benefit of hindsight – in real time my experience was a pathetic series that involved encountering one disappointment followed by another, moving from one frustration to another.

Application: What has been my experience of fleeing from the Lord? Have I ever written Him off completely in my life? What happened in my circumstances that brought me home? With the benefit of hindsight, how am I now able to see God's presence and invisible gravitational pull in my past disappointments and frustrations? How does this inspire hope in whatever frustrating or disappointing circumstance I may find myself now?

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

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Second Consideration: Joppa

- 1) Jonah went down to Joppa. Located on the eastern shore of the Mediterranean, it is the only natural harbor between Egypt to the south and Phoenicia to the north – the ancient city-state that hugged the coast along what are now the coastal regions of Syria, Lebanon and northern Israel.
- 2) Joppa is the only port city easily accessible to Judea. It is the port city to which the cedars of Lebanon were shipped for the building and rebuilding of the Temple. (2 Chronicles 2:16 & Ezra 3:7) Assigned to the tribe of Dan when the lands were apportioned among the twelve sons of Jacob (i.e. the tribes of Israel) (Joshua 19:46), this territory was usually under Philistine control as the Israelites were unable to secure the seacoast and eventually migrated north. (Joshua 19:47-48 & Judges 18)
- 3) For whatever reason, the Israelites were not sailors. When Solomon built a fleet it had to be maned by sailors from Tyre. (1 King 9:26) Nothing indicates that Jonah encountered any of his countrymen in the sea port of Joppa.
- 4) It was along the seacoast near this place where Elijah, another prophet of the Northern Kingdom, encountered the widow of Zarephath, a Gentile, and restored the life of her son. (1 Kings 17:8-24).
- 5) It was also along this same coast of Tyre and Sidon where Jesus healed the child of the Syrophenician woman – the one Matthew labels a “Canaanite” – the name for those people whom the Law of the Lord calls an “abomination to be utterly destroyed.” (Deuteronomy 7:1-5) These are the very ancestors of the people to whom Jonah is now being sent by God to preach a word of repentance! You will recall that Jesus rebuffs this woman, saying: “*It is not right to take the children's bread and toss it to the dogs*” referring to the Canaanites. Yet she won His admiration by her reply: “*Yes it is, Lord, yet even the dogs eat the crumbs that fall from their master's table.*” (Mark 7:24-30)
- 6) She must have told everyone about what Jesus did for her because later we are told there was a great multitude from Tyre and Sidon following Jesus. (Luke 6:17 & Mark 3:8)
- 7) Jesus, sometime later, warned the cities of Galilee about the Day of Judgement using the example of Tyre and Sidon to shame them. He said: “*Woe to you, Chorazin! Woe to you, Bethsaida! For if the miracles that were performed in you had been performed in Tyre and Sidon, they would have repented long ago in sackcloth and ashes.*” (Matthew 11:21)
- 8) After Christ's resurrection, Joppa becomes one of the first places to where the gospel spreads to the Gentiles. This is where Peter raises the girl named Tabitha from the dead. (Acts 9:36-43) And it is from a rooftop here that Peter receives the vision in a dream that teaches him that even Gentiles can be clean. (Acts 10:9-16, 28)
- 9) Throughout Biblical history we see this same place – Joppa – being named and visited time and again.

Application: Time and again, the word of the Lord touches the same place. Each time it is both the same and it is different. Likewise, in my life, the word of the Lord touches the same places in me through the passage of time. Old wounds are revisited. Old scars are reexamined. Old places of sin and shame are re-exposed. Each time I revisit an old interior place it seems to be for the purpose of receiving new grace – to receive deeper healing. What places in me – once touched by grace – am I now being invited by the Holy Spirit to revisit again?

Alternate Application: The Syrophenician woman must have told everyone about what Jesus did for her because afterwards a great multitude from her region followed Jesus. Who have I told in the past week about what Jesus has done for me? Who have I invited to “come and see” the goodness of the Lord in the past month? If I am not telling out the wonder of the Lord in my life – why not?

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Third Consideration: Found a Ship Headed for Tarshish

- 1) Last week we saw that while Nineveh was a seat of military power, Tarshish was a seat of luxury and wealth. The finest of things including “*gold and silver, ivory, apes, and peacocks*” (1 Kings 10:22) could be found aboard her ships – and also some of the most impressive achievements in human craftsmanship.
- 2) Tarshish was *the* place of trade and items of the most exquisite craftsmanship were readily on display in her shops and markets.
- 3) Tarshish is named not once, but three times in this one verse. It adds emphasis to highlight the fact that this destination is far removed from the sacred place; Jonah was descending to the world of commerce and technology – the finest the world had to offer.
- 4) In the ancient understanding of *sacred space*, “profane” does not mean obscene or wicked, but simply outside of the sacred ambit – in an area or sphere not consecrated to a god but also not necessarily unclean. It is the domain where people go about their business not burdened by the immediate awareness of the Divine Presence.
- 5) This is where we build ships, or write code, or finance trade and new ventures, where we warehouse and ship goods, where we deliver professional services. It is where most of us spend most of our day. These things represent “the good life” – we might even say they represent the American dream! As Frank Sinatra boasted, “If I can make it here – I can make it anywhere....”
- 6) Jonah descends to a ship sailing for Tarshish, no doubt filled with the very finest items of wealth and luxury the world has to offer – stowed within the haul of a vessel that represented the highest expression of technological achievement in the ancient world.
- 7) Yet for all this achievement in human craft, wealth and power, these things proved not enough to save him.
- 8) There is only one thing that can save us. We are saved by faith in Jesus Christ, our Lord. “⁸ *But God demonstrates His own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.* ⁹ *Since we have now been justified by His blood, how much more shall we be saved from God's wrath through Him!*” (Romans 5:8-9) We are saved by the blood of the Lamb!

Application: Where do I find my security? In what do I place my trust? Do I place my trust in Jesus Christ alone, or have I added other things beside Jesus in which I find or seek shelter?

Alternate Application: In what ways has my work-space, my professional place and workmanship been transformed from profane into sacred on account of my relationship with Jesus Christ? In what ways does the Divine Presence seep into my work relationships and my work product? How does it manifest itself on the job?