

## **JONAH – A REMINDER OF OUR RESPONSIBILITY TO THE UNSAVED**

*Jonah 1:1* Now the word of the LORD came unto Jonah the son of Amittai, saying,

The word of the Lord came to Jonah. He was a prophet, and this was the “job description” of the prophet – to hear the word of the Lord. What is a title supposed to mean? What title do we carry today? We call ourselves “Christians”, and to be a Christian entails, among others, to reach out to the lost and dying about salvation in Jesus name. Are we honoring this title? “How beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of him that bringeth good tidings, that publisheth peace; that bringeth good tidings of good, that publisheth salvation; that saith unto Zion, Thy God reigneth!” (Isaiah 52:7). Sadly, Jonah’s feet were not beautiful in the sense that Isaiah declares; how beautiful are our feet? I wish to use the story of Jonah to challenge us in our approach to reaching a lost world today. The aim is not to shame Jonah but to shame the Jonah that is in us today – the Jonah that holds gentiles in contempt. Now we know that Jonah not only decided to disregard the command of God to go to Nineveh, but he next fooled himself into thinking that there is the possibility of escape from God.

*Jonah 1:3* But Jonah rose up to flee unto Tarshish from the presence of the LORD, and went down to Joppa; and he found a ship going to Tarshish: so he paid the fare thereof, and went down into it, to go with them unto Tarshish from the presence of the LORD.

Is there a fee we can pay to escape the Lord? Jonah found this trip to be the most expensive and dangerous he ever undertook. Did he think that God only spoke in Israel or that God had no jurisdiction over Tarshish? Had he forgotten the words of David who poetically captured the futility of escaping the presence of God, “If I take the wings of the morning, and dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea; Even there shall thy hand lead me, and thy right hand shall hold me” (Psalm 139: 9&10). Just as a prophet who disregards the word of God becomes completely delusional, so too the Christian who forgets his or her responsibility to the lost and dying. Jonah was blinded to the fact that, even in the ship to Tarshish, he was already surrounded by unsaved gentiles. Perhaps some of them were Ninevites. We rejoice when God provides tokens of his supernatural guidance, as he did with Eleazer the servant of Abraham. But we may not be so glad for the tokens when we are in rebellion against God. I wonder what emotions welled up inside the Apostle Peter whenever he heard a rooster crow after he repented.

**Jonah 1:6** *So the shipmaster came to him, and said unto him, What meanest thou, O sleeper? arise, call upon thy God, if so be that God will think upon us, that we perish not.*

**Jonah 1:7** *And they said every one to his fellow, Come, and let us cast lots, that we may know for whose cause this evil is upon us. So they cast lots, and the lot fell upon Jonah.*

The gentiles did not know who Jonah was; they could only go by his behaviour. They changed his title from prophet to “sleeper”. Solomon noted, “Even a child is known by his doings, whether his work be pure, and whether it be right” (Proverbs 20:11). I know we may be eager to be called Christians but what would the unsaved world call us if we were asleep? What would they call us based only on the behaviour they observe in us? The gentiles were praying but the man of God was asleep; he did not even perceive the danger he was in. Right now, in every corner of the world, Muslims, Hindus, Buddhists and adherents of countless other religions and belief systems are praying and calling upon the name of their gods. Sadly, sometimes, the people who know the true God may be asleep and hence endangering everyone else. The gentiles in the ship forced Jonah to wake up and pray. The unsaved world is expecting us to call upon the name of our God. It should have the opposite: Elijah challenged the prophets of Baal to a contest of calling upon the true God. “And call ye on the name of your gods, and I will call on the name of the LORD: and the God that answereth by fire, let him be God. And all the people answered and said, It is well spoken” (I Kings 18:24).

**Jonah 1:13** *Nevertheless the men rowed hard to bring it to the land; but they could not: for the sea wrought, and was tempestuous against them.*

**Jonah 1:14** *Wherefore they cried unto the LORD, and said, We beseech thee, O LORD, we beseech thee, let us not perish for this man's life, and lay not upon us innocent blood: for thou, O LORD, hast done as it pleased thee.*

It is indeed a very sad day when the unsaved world struggles to save the prophet of God. I pray to God the unsaved will not have to pray to save the Christian. This was indeed a spiritual tragedy! The unsaved world is not always hostile to the Gospel; sometimes they actively cooperate in their own salvation. “And a vision appeared to Paul in the night; There stood a man of Macedonia, and prayed him, saying, Come over into Macedonia, and help us” (Acts 16:9). One would imagine that mighty and ferocious sharks would jostle to tear Jonah apart and devour him. But God prepared a great fish. See the mercy of God – he prepared a great fish. Even when the Christian may rebel against God and fail in his mission to reach and unsaved world, the Lord doesn’t destroy, but prepares something. God’s prisons can be most unusual and quite scary. It is fair to assume that Jonah was subjected to a form of controlled torture. This was God’s “Guantanamo Bay”, if you will excuse the comparison. He was

deprived of light, his movements were severely restricted in the stomach of the great fish, one can only imagine the sleep deprivation he suffered in regard to the non-stop movements of the fish, and the stench must have been terrible. If the fish swallowed humongous amounts of water, Jonah would have been subjected to a form of waterboarding.

***Jonah 2:3** For thou hadst cast me into the deep, in the midst of the seas; and the floods compassed me about: all thy billows and thy waves passed over me.*

***Jonah 2:4** Then I said, I am cast out of thy sight; yet I will look again toward thy holy temple.*

***Jonah 2:5** The waters compassed me about, even to the soul: the depth closed me round about, the weeds were wrapped about my head.*

The sea represented the unsaved world. It has no boundaries. The greatest diversity of creatures is found in the depths of the sea. Jonah was held prisoner in the unsaved world, so to speak, until he repented and was prepared to preach the word of God to the Ninevites. God gives power to the unsaved when Christians refuse to do their duty. In the distant past, God commanded the waters to destroy the rebellious, but Noah sailed safely on the surface because he was righteous and obedient. He sailed safely because he built an ark to save his family and the creatures God appointed. “Which sometime were disobedient, when once the longsuffering of God waited in the days of Noah, while the ark was a preparing, wherein few, that is, eight souls were saved by water” (I Peter 3:20). Jonah did not catch fish for God – he was caught by a fish. “And he saith unto them, Follow me, and I will make you fishers of men” (Matthew 4:19). If we don’t catch fish, God prepares “fish” to catch us. Finally, note that when Jonah declared, “Yet forty days, and Nineveh shall be overthrown” (Jonah 3:4), he had already postponed Nineveh’s day of repentance by six days 3 days in the fish and 3 days journey to the city). Were there people who died in the meantime? We cannot know. If so, Jonah had blood on his hands. Every day we procrastinate in preaching the Gospel of salvation souls, we risk having the blood of the unsaved on our hands. May the Lord grant us mercy to boldly declare, as Peter did on the Day of Pentecost.

***Act 2:38** Then Peter said unto them, Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost.*