

Jonah The Reluctant Prophet

Sin runs rampant in society today.

Daily headlines and overflowing prisons bear a dramatic witness to this fact.

With child abuse, pornography, serial killings, terrorism, anarchy and ruthless dictatorships, the world seems to be filled to overflowing with violence, hatred and corruption.

We respond to this situation by seeing the need for God's intervention, "Lord Jesus come" could be our prayer. We may even find ourselves wishing for God's judgement and vengeance upon the evil and violent perpetrators. Surely they are beyond redemption!

But suppose that in the midst of such thoughts, God told us personally to take the Gospel Message to the worst of the offenders, how would we respond?

Jonah was given such a task by God.

Assyria, a great but evil empire, was at that time Israel's most dreaded enemy.

Not knowing God the Assyrians flaunted their power before God and the world through numerous acts of heartless cruelty.

Jonah's reaction to this commission from God to call the people of Nineveh, the capital of Assyria, to repentance, was to run in the opposite direction.

Is this what we are doing today?

Are we reluctant prophets of God?

Jonah knew the power of God's message, the gospel message of love, compassion and mercy towards those who repent.

Jonah knew that even to his own weak preaching, the people would respond, repent and be delivered from the judgement of God.

Jonah 4:2 [NIV] *"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."*

Eventually Jonah obeyed God and preached in the streets of Nineveh.

John 3:1-2 [NIV] *"Then the word of the LORD came to Jonah a second time: "Go to the great city of Nineveh and proclaim to it the message I give you."*

Is God giving us individually and as a fellowship a second chance today to fulfil the commission He has given to all Christians?

Matthew 28:18-20 [NIV] *"Then Jesus came to them and said, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptising them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age."*

The disciples worshipped Jesus in the way they knew from their culture and background. Jesus accepted this.

But isn't Jesus saying if you really want to worship me in spirit and in truth you will do as I am now telling you?

I sincerely believe that the power and the presence that Jesus was offering are dependent on our fulfilling the commission He is giving us.

We need to see this as **one complete package.**

Paul understood this, and lived by it.

Romans 12:1-2 [NIV] *“Therefore, I urge you, brothers, in view of God’s mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God, this is your spiritual act of worship. Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God’s will is, his good, pleasing and perfect will.”*

Our lives must be sacrificed that others may receive the Good News of what Jesus has done for all humanity.

This has to be a total sacrifice even as that of our Saviour Jesus Christ.

True Christianity is not something we do as a part-time job, it has to be a total commitment.

John 17:14-21 [NIV] *“I have given them your word and the world has hated them, for they are not of the world any more than I am of the world. My prayer is not that you take them out of the world but that you protect them from the evil one. They are not of the world, even as I am not of it. Sanctify them by the truth; your word is truth. As you sent me into the world, I have sent them into the world. For them I sanctify myself, that they too may be truly sanctified. “My prayer is not for them alone. I pray also for those who will believe in me through their message, that all of them may be one, Father, just as you are in me and I am in you. May they also be in us so that the world may believe that you have sent me.”*

The understanding of God’s Word sets us apart from the society in which we live.

But our commission from Jesus sends us back into the world to be a light to it.

Matthew 5:14-16 [NIV] *“You are the light of the world. A city on a hill cannot be hidden. Neither do people light a lamp and put it under a bowl. Instead they put it on its stand, and it gives light to everyone in the house. In the same way, let your light shine before men, that they may see your good deeds and praise your Father in heaven.”*

As a church and individually we are called to be the very presence of the future among today’s society.

James 1:18 [NIV] *“He chose to give us birth through the word of truth, that we might be a kind of firstfruits of all he created.”*

We are to be a pilot project of what God intends to bring to all of humanity.

The tragedy is that the lights in many Christians and church fellowships are switched off or hidden.

Also, if all we have to offer is what is currently on display in most churches, it is a future that most people would prefer to do without.

We are to be like crocuses in the snow, a sign of an age to come and at the same time a guarantee of its coming.

Matthew 24:12-14, 22 [NIV] *“Because of the increase of wickedness, the love of most will grow cold, but he who stands firm to the end will be saved. And this gospel of the kingdom will be preached in the whole world as a testimony to all nations, and then the end will come.” ... “If those days had not been cut short, no-one would survive, but for the sake of the elect those days will be shortened.”*

The “elect” are only those who are disciples of Jesus Christ doing the work He has commissioned the Church to do.

The message that Jonah was given to preach was not the most desirable assignment, but we must not allow social pressures or fear of people to dictate the words of our message.

Nobody likes to be told they are sinners but until we admit this we do not see the need for a saviour.

Jonah 3:4-5 [NIV] *“On the first day, Jonah started into the city. He proclaimed: “Forty more days and Nineveh will be overturned.” The Ninevites believed God. They declared a fast, and all of them, from the greatest to the least, put on sackcloth.”*

God’s Word is for everyone.

Despite the wickedness of the Ninevite people, they were open to God’s message and repented immediately.

If we simply proclaim what we know about God’s judgement and compassion we may be surprised at how many people will listen and respond.

The pagan people of Nineveh believed Jonah’s message and repented. What a malicious effect God’s words had on those evil people.

Their repentance stood out in stark contrast to Israel’s [today’s Christian churches] stubbornness. The church has heard many messages from the present-day prophets but still refuse to repent and do the work that God has commissioned the church to do.

Matthew 21:28-32 [NIV] *“What do you think? There was a man who had two sons. He went to the first and said, ‘Son, go and work today in the vineyard.’ “‘I will not,’ he answered, but later he changed his mind and went. “Then the father went to the other son and said the same thing. He answered, ‘I will, sir,’ but he did not go. “Which of the two did what his father wanted?” “The first,” they answered. Jesus said to them, “I tell you the truth, the tax collectors and the prostitutes are entering the kingdom of God ahead of you. For John came to you to show you the way of righteousness, and you did not believe him, but the tax collectors and the prostitutes did. And even after you saw this, you did not repent and believe him.”*

Which of the two sons is depicted by our life?

If we have refused to fulfil the commission that Jesus left His disciples, then we need to repent and take the second chance that God is now giving us as He did Jonah.

Or are we like the second son, claiming to be a Christian, a disciple of Jesus Christ, but **not** doing the work Christians are commissioned to do?

John 17:21-25 [NIV] *“that all of them may be one, Father, just as you are in me and I am in you. May they also be in us so that the world may believe that you have sent me. I have given them the glory that you gave me, that they may be one as we are one: I in them and you in me. May they be brought to complete unity to let the world know that you sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me. “Father, I want those you have given me to be with me where I am, and to see my glory, the glory you have given me because you loved me before the creation of the world. “Righteous Father, though the world does not know you, I know you, and they know that you have sent me.”*

Jesus wants us to be “one” with Him and the Father is for one reason only, repeated twice so we are sure to get the message, “to let the world know that you sent me.”

Jesus Christ was central to the preaching of the apostle Paul.

1 Corinthians 1:22-25 [NIV] *“Jews demand miraculous signs and Greeks look for wisdom, but we preach Christ crucified: a stumbling-block to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles, but to those whom God has called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God. For the foolishness of God is wiser than man’s wisdom, and the weakness of God is stronger than man’s strength.”*

1 Corinthians 2:1-5 [NIV] *“When I came to you, brothers, I did not come with eloquence or superior wisdom as I proclaimed to you the testimony about God. For I resolved to know nothing while I was with you except Jesus Christ and him crucified. I came to you in weakness and fear, and with much trembling. My message and my preaching were not with wise and persuasive words, but with a demonstration of the Spirit’s power, so that your faith might not rest on men’s wisdom, but on God’s power.”*

The Holy Spirit empowers those who preach “Jesus Christ and Him crucified” – the Good News that is for all humanity. Jesus’ death can be a substitute for the death we deserve of our sins.

Jonah 4:1-4 [NIV] *“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?”*

Do we, like Jonah, desire punishments to come to the evil people in this world?

Does it make us angry that evil people flourish in this society? That they are **not** receiving the punishment from God that they deserve.

This attitude of mind caused Jonah to become self-centred and angry when his “creature comforts” were taken from him.

God seeks to make us see sinners from His viewpoint, not the self-righteous viewpoint that Jonah was portraying.

Luke 23:32-34 [NIV] *“Two other men, both criminals, were also led out with him to be executed. When they came to the place called the Skull, there they crucified him, along with the criminals, one on his right, the other on his left. Jesus said, “Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing.” And they divided up his clothes by casting lots.”*

The vast majority of people in this world do **not** know what their sins are doing to them but also to tell Jesus Christ is their **only** hope of salvation and eternal life.

People may be rich in this world’s goods, but poor in eternal spiritual riches.

Just like **the people of Nineveh, who had “many cattle”** but were lost as far as know what was good and what was evil, “cannot tell their right hand from their left.”

God could have destroyed Jonah for his defiant anger but instead He gently taught Jonah a lesson, and led him to a change of attitude towards the “lost” in Nineveh.

Is our attitude towards the “lost” of this world in need of an adjustment?

2 Corinthians 8:8-9 [NIV] *“I am not commanding you, but I want to test the sincerity of your love by comparing it with the earnestness of others. For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that*

though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, so that you through his poverty might become rich.”