

Lessons From the People of the Bible

Jonah

Lesson 1: Jonah – Reluctant Missionary

Reading

Jonah 1.

Reluctant Missionary

God told Jonah to go to Nineveh. That was east of where he was. Jonah decided to go west. *'God couldn't want me to go to that wicked city. They are all evil and deserve to die. I'm not going to warn them – they will get their just desserts. I'm going off west to Spain. Oh look, there's a boat going there. I knew I was right. Oh great, I've even got the right money for the trip. Wow, there's one place left – must be just for me. Now I know I'm doing the right thing.'* Wrong!

Beware circumstantial 'evidence'. It is usually neutral. Jonah knew better. He was just plain callous and disobedient.

Did you notice? While everyone else was terrified and doing all they could to stay afloat, our friend Jonah was fast asleep in his 'couldn't-care-less' cabin. He thought he would be O.K. He was unknown. He wasn't bothering anyone else. But he was found out. So will we be. He had to admit to being a follower of the true Creator God.

I wonder why he wanted to be thrown overboard. Was it to be 'aided suicide'? Over he went but that was only the beginning. Did he touch the water or was it straight down the throat? Whichever it was, it was really cosy for the next 3 days, wasn't it?

Listen. Disobedience is disobedience, regardless of the excitement. God expects us to warn the lost, and obey His last command – *'Go (and preach) and make disciples'*(Matthew 28: 19). Be obedient and own up to being one of His followers.

We might be judgmental over Jonah as a person, but can we be so without being hypocrites? How many of us, as Christians, have been asked to do something by God and gone off and done nothing about it, or just like Jonah done the complete opposite?

You see, the Lord has actually asked each of us to do the very same thing He asked Jonah. To go to the cities and tell the people there that they need Jesus and that He is The Answer to their needs. Maybe if our message were more direct like Jonah's, people would listen up.

How are you doing with that or are you trying to go 'west'?

You can't hide. (And watch out, you could end up in a watery grave or worse.)

Lessons From the People of the Bible

Lesson 1 continued: Jonah – Reluctant Missionary

Jonah would say to us today...

Don't argue with God... The results can be frightening.

Prayer

Father, please make me a risk-taker for You. Help me to be sensitive, responsive and obedient to each of Your promptings in my life. Forgive me whenever I try to rationalise or explain them away. Please give me the faith to follow You wherever You want me to go and to speak to each one You want me to speak to. Amen.

Additional readings

Romans 11:11-21; Acts 9:1-9; Numbers 16:1-35.

Questions

Why are we reluctant to share the Good News of Jesus?

Why do we even try to argue with God?

What experiences have you had when you have argued with God? (Or not followed through on His prompting?)

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Lesson 2: Jonah – Received God’s Mercy

Reading

Jonah 2.

Received God’s Mercy

Jonah found himself inside the ‘whale’. It must have been a pretty scary and unique experience. For him it was obviously as good as death. He was in a watery grave – smelling awful. Yet even in this desperate state, he turned to God. Where else? God had got his attention, hadn’t He?

As you read Jonah’s prayer, you realise that it turns from where he was at – to where he believed God would yet take him. He responded according to his understanding of the character of God. Even before he was vomited out, he said, *“But you brought my life up from the pit... I with a song of thanksgiving, will sacrifice to You... Salvation comes from the Lord”* (Jonah 2: 6 & 9). With that exclamation, Jonah hit the beach.

I wonder if Paul thought of Jonah when he and Silas were in jail in Philippi? (see Acts 16: 22 – 31) What is the message of Jonah Chapter 2? It is Messianic. Jesus refers to it and likens His death to Jonah’s temporary accommodation. And verses 2 – 7 remind us of Psalm 22, Psalm 69 and Psalm 130. They give us an insight of how Jesus felt on the Cross as He was dealing with our sin and rebellion.

The ‘Good News’ is that Salvation still comes from the Lord, and if we were a thankful, praising people, we would see it and experience it more often.

When Jesus healed Legion, out of love and gratitude Legion wanted to follow Jesus wherever He went. However, Jesus told him to go home and tell them what God had done for Him. You see, Jesus expects our gratitude and worship to be worked out in evangelism. Worship is not for our ‘benefit’ but for the extension of God’s kingdom – through our obedience and others accepting the good news of salvation.

Are you on dry land or still at sea?

Remember – Jonah’s praise and thanksgiving began *before* the rescue. That’s a challenge and a reminder for us all. Praise often precedes deliverance. Why not praise God today – despite your circumstances? Who knows, your circumstances might even change afterwards – as well as your attitude towards them.

Lessons From the People of the Bible

Lesson 2 continued: Jonah – Received God's Mercy

Jonah would say to us today...

God's mercy should always lead us to worship Him, and worship should always lead us into obedience to God.

Prayer

Father, I need Your mercy every day. I am so grateful that You are prepared to forgive me and go on forgiving me because of the perfect sacrifice of Jesus on the Cross. However, I want to learn to worship You in my lifestyle so that I become more and more like Jesus and obedient to You like He was. Amen.

Additional readings

Psalm 51; Luke 7:36-50; Hebrews 12:1-13.

Questions

What is true worship?

Why does God want obedience more than sacrifice?

Why do we need to constantly recognise God's mercy to us?

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Lesson 3: Jonah – Experienced God’s Miracles And Revival First Hand

Reading

Jonah 3.

Repent

As we have seen so many times already, God is more interested in character than convenience. He also honours obedience, however reluctant or hesitant.

Just imagine the scene. A man appears. More than an ‘old salt’, more than an ‘old sea dog’ – this guy is stinking of fish. Ever smelt the breath of a fur seal? You are getting the picture if you have. If not – never stand down wind. Jonah has had, if not still had, seaweed wrapped around his head. He was more than likely slimy and green. (The theory of evolution is still wrong – it may be slimy and green but it is still a man.)

This ‘man’ came into the city and cried, *“Forty more days and Nineveh will be overturned.”* Be honest – what would you do? Something about Jonah caught their attention. *“The Ninevites believed God”*(v 5).

And that was for the first time. From the King down they repented, held a fast and put on sackcloth and ashes – a sign of self-imposed humility.

I love what follows: (They said, not Jonah) *“Who knows? God may yet relent and with compassion turn from His fierce anger so that we will not perish”* (v 9).

Who told them God was like that? Or did they see Jonah? Jonah, the one disobedient to God, saved from death and walking their streets because of God’s grace?

Whatever the case, a miracle followed Jonah’s obedience. He faithfully brought God’s message to the people of Nineveh as God had asked him, and guess what? The hearts of the people turned to God. That took a miracle. But it happened.

Even the wicked city of Nineveh could turn around at the prompting of one dishevelled, smelly man.

Tell me, what stops you giving out the ‘Good News’?

Arrogance and pride or a callous uncaring heart?

Do you want to see a miracle? Do you want to see a revival?

Then try being obedient like Jonah – Go and share the Good News with someone today.

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Lesson 3 continued: Jonah – Experienced God’s Miracles And Revival First Hand

Jonah would say to us today...

Miracles always follow our obedience to God’s will. We have to take the first step – then God will overwhelm us with what follows.

Prayer

Father, You are an amazing God. I am overwhelmed that You are prepared to use someone like me to accomplish Your plans. Please keep me always ready to follow and serve you so that You can see Your purposes on earth fulfilled in and through me. Amen.

Additional readings

Exodus 14:10-31; Joshua 3:1-17; 1 Samuel 15:1-23.

Questions

Why do miracles follow obedience?

What miracles have you seen in your life?

What miracle are you seeking God for right now? Do you need to be obedient before it will be released?

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Lesson 4: Jonah – Successful Missionary

Reading

Jonah.

Successful Missionary

Jonah was a callous, selfish and heartless person. He acted childishly and was a pathetic example of humanity. He was protective and demanding and thought he had a monopoly on God. He got upset with God because He 'changed His mind.' He sulked, not so much because his message was proved wrong, but that God had kept to His character and relented.

He moaned that he went off to Tarshish because he knew God would not punish the Ninevites. *"I knew that You are a gracious and compassionate God, slow to anger and abounding in love, a God who relents from sending calamity"* (v 2). (*Why do you have to be that way? Why can't you just kill these evil people – they deserve it?*) *"Now, O Lord, take away my life, for it is better for me to die than to live"*(v 3).

What a pathetic little man Jonah really was. *"But the Lord replied, 'Have you any right to be angry?'"*(v 4)

Then we read about the issue with the vine or gourd, which grew up and gave Jonah shade to revive him and the worm that came along and destroyed it with the help of the sun and wind. Jonah carried on in his self-indulgent, self-pitying way. Because he then felt faint, he said, *"It would be better for me to die than live."* *But God said to Jonah, "Do you have a right to be angry about the vine?" "I do" he said, "I am angry enough to die"*(v 8 – 9).

Man! Has this guy got an attitude problem, or what? Self-centred, bitter and chauvinistic. He doesn't care a fig' about anyone else. They can go to Hell as far as he is concerned – he is more interested in his own comfort. In fact, he was interested only in himself and his own needs.

What a detestable little man Jonah really was.

Hello! Hello! Have you looked in a mirror recently? I have deliberately 'exposed' Jonah, to try to show what is at the bottom and root of his character and attitudes. Why? Because we are the same. God has given us Jonah to be a mirror. To show us what we are so often like. God wants us to change.

He wants us to become like Jesus, not Jonah. Someone who gives himself/herself for the benefit of others. The 'Good News' is not for us to keep to ourselves. It is for us to give away to those who desperately need it.

Stop wanting the Church to meet just your needs and start giving the 'Good News' to those who

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Lesson 4 continued: Jonah – Successful Missionary

are on their way to Hell. Without God and without hope in this world (see Ephesians 2: 12).

'*Throw Jonah overboard*' and become more like Jesus.

You see, God is passionate in His love for people who don't know Him – even those who reject Him and carry on living in disobedience and rebellion. His love engulfs each one. And just as it took a miracle for us to become a Christian, God has a miracle ready for them. Sometimes He needs to be able to use us in order to release it.

Jonah would say to us today...

God is passionate about the people who don't know Him. If you want to experience the highest joys there are in life, spend your life introducing people to Jesus.

Prayer

Father, please forgive me for keeping the Good News of Your salvation to myself. Give me a glimpse of Your aching heart and release in me that same longing to see more and more people set free by You. Amen.

Additional readings

Luke 4:14-21; John 3:1-21; Romans 10:1-17.

Questions

Who are the people you are praying for to become Christians?

What are you 'doing' about it?

Have you experienced the joy that comes through leading someone to Christ?