

**WHEN LIFE SEEMS TO SWALLOW YOU WHOLE** - Thoughts on God's Will from the Book of Jonah - Part 1  
 Sunday , June 28<sup>th</sup> - 6:30 p.m.  
 Pastor Don Horban, Cedarview Community Church, Newmarket, ON

**Jonah 1:1-3** - "Now the word of the Lord came to Jonah the son of Amittai, saying, [2] 'Arise, go to Nineveh, that great city, and call out against it, for their evil has come up before me.' [3] But Jonah rose to flee to Tarshish from the presence of the Lord. He went down to Joppa and found a ship going to Tarshish. So he paid the fare and went on board, to go with them to Tarshish, away from the presence of the Lord."

While many turn up their theological noses at the account of Jonah, the Bible accords him a place in solid history: **2 Kings 14:25** - "He restored the border of Israel from Lebo-hamath as far as the Sea of the Arabah, according to the word of the Lord, the God of Israel, which he spoke by his servant Jonah the son of Amittai, the prophet, who was from Gath-hepher."

Jesus too, spoke of Jonah as no less a historic person than He Himself was - **Matthew 12:39-41** - "But he answered them, 'An evil and adulterous generation seeks for a sign, but no sign will be given to it except the sign of the prophet Jonah. [40] For just as Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of the great fish, so will the Son of Man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth. [41] The men of Nineveh will rise up at the judgment with this generation and condemn it, for they repented at the preaching of Jonah, and behold, something greater than Jonah is here.'"

1) **WE CAN ALL IDENTIFY WITH THE WAY THIS WONDERFULLY HONEST BOOK BEGINS**

These are not the mighty exploits of a Daniel, David, or Paul. The story starts with a rather weak man who isn't very keen on doing what God wants him to do. Or maybe he comes closer to where we find ourselves at times if we say Jonah wanted to follow God the most part but found himself - at times - not wanting to do what God wanted him to do. And the first important lesson from the book of Jonah is ***God speaks to such people***. He has a plan for their lives. He can take and use ordinary people with their weak, resistant wills.

The whole book of Jonah is really a story of God's great love and mercy in bringing rebellious people to Himself. He does this, not just for the ***Ninevites***, but for ***Jonah*** as well. This is a God who salvages and redirects broken lives.

2) **GOD IS INTERESTED IN THE NINEVITES.**

Look carefully at **verse 2** - "Arise, go to Nineveh, that great city, and call out against it, for their evil

has come up before me."

The sins of great cities and capitals come up before God. The sins of your neighborhood bother God. This is where the church is commissioned. This is the work each individual Christian must be concerned with. God wasn't content to have these people unreached. He still isn't.

3) **IT'S CLEAR THAT GOD APPOINTED JONAH TO POINT OUT THE SINS OF THE NINEVITES.**

"Go to Nineveh, that great city, and preach ***against*** it"(2). Surely that can't be right. It can't be very loving to preach ***against anyone or anything***. No one is going to church to be preached ***against***.

But if we're going to let the text speak for itself at all, evidently, God felt this was the most ***compassionate*** message for these people in their sin. God knew what He was doing. His choice wasn't to ***comfort*** these people - at least not at first.

The other obvious and important point in this account is Jonah wasn't free to ***choose*** what he wanted to say. He was to hold up God's standard. He was to point out where they were missing it. He was to encourage them to repent.

There are two other important passages along this theme:

**Luke 11:29-33** - "When the crowds were increasing, he began to say, "This generation is an evil generation. It seeks for a sign, but no sign will be given to it except the sign of Jonah. [30] For as Jonah became a sign to the people of Nineveh, so will the Son of Man be to this generation. [31] The queen of the South will rise up at the judgment with the men of this generation and condemn them, for she came from the ends of the earth to hear the wisdom of Solomon, and behold, something greater than Solomon is here. [32] The men of Nineveh will rise up at the judgment with this generation and condemn it, for they repented at the preaching of Jonah, and behold, something greater than Jonah is here. [33] "No one after lighting a lamp puts it in a cellar or under a basket, but on a stand, so that those who enter may see the light."

**John 16:7-11** - "Nevertheless, I tell you the truth: it is to your advantage that I go away, for if I do not go away, the Helper will not come to you. But if I go, I will send him to you. [8] And when he comes, he will convict the world concerning sin and righteousness and judgment: [9] concerning sin, because they do not believe in me; [10] concerning righteousness, because I go to the Father, and you will see me no longer; [11] concerning judgment, because the ruler of this world

is judged.”

#### 4) JONAH'S RESPONSE WAS TO RUN AWAY FROM GOD

I think he knew this was impossible. He probably knew the truth of Psalm 139:7-10 - “Where shall I go from your Spirit? Or where shall I flee from your presence? [8] If I ascend to heaven, you are there! If I make my bed in Sheol, you are there! [9] If I take the wings of the morning and dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea, [10] even there your hand shall lead me, and your right hand shall hold me.”

I think Jonah knew God was everywhere. You can't really running from **God**. He's running from **duty**. He's running from the **will** of God rather than His **presence**. He's trying to get away from that "still small voice" that's knocking at his heart.

This is always a downhill trip. You can't change enough circumstances or buy enough gadgets to sooth a disobedient heart. Jonah was miserable and he made trouble for everybody else. One way or another, this is always the route away from God's call.

#### 5) WHY DID JONAH DISOBEY GOD?

The context makes the answer clear. He hated the Ninevites. They were enemies of the Jews. They were haters of Israel. They served other gods. Jonah wasn't wild about the idea of having his enemies restored to God. In fact, Jonah was **more** willing to have his behavior shaped by his **hatred** of certain people than by his **love** for God.

There's a lesson there for all of us. It's so easy to write people off. It's so easy to get upset with your neighbour. Hatred grows quickly in our hearts. And when it does, we become more motivated by our bitterness toward our enemies than by our devotion to God. This is when our hearts are truly off-center. This is why, when the Scriptures call us to love our **enemy**, the emphasis is on saving our own relationship with **God**. I save **myself** when I love my **enemy**:

Matthew 5:43-48 - “You have heard that it was said, 'You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.' [44] But I say to you, Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, [45] so that you may be sons of your Father who is in heaven. For he makes his sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust. [46] For if you love those who love you, what reward do you have? Do not even the tax collectors do the same? [47] And if you greet only

your brothers, what more are you doing than others? Do not even the Gentiles do the same? [48] You therefore must be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect.”

**Luke 6:31-35** - “And as you wish that others would do to you, do so to them. [32] “If you love those who love you, what benefit is that to you? For even sinners love those who love them. [33] And if you do good to those who do good to you, what benefit is that to you? For even sinners do the same. [34] And if you lend to those from whom you expect to receive, what credit is that to you? Even sinners lend to sinners, to get back the same amount. [35] But love your enemies, and do good, and lend, expecting nothing in return, and your reward will be great, and you will be sons of the Most High, for he is kind to the ungrateful and the evil.”

**Proverbs 24:17-18** - “Do not rejoice when your enemy falls, and let not your heart be glad when he stumbles, [18] lest the Lord see it and be displeased, and turn away his anger from him.”

**Romans 5:6-8** - “For while we were still weak, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly. [7] For one will scarcely die for a righteous person—though perhaps for a good person one would dare even to die— [8] but God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.”

## 6) **GOD WASN'T FINISHED WITH JONAH**

The irony is that most people see the book of Jonah as being a stern book of God’s chastening wrath. And that *is* included. But more abundantly, it’s a story of God’s relentless grace and mercy - both for Jonah and Nineveh. There is an inescapableness about the love and will of God. More about that next week.