

Did Jonah Finally Get It? Do We?

Joe Slater

“I’d rather die than . . .” We find some things so distasteful that we say we’d rather die than do them. Jonah meant that quite literally! The Lord ordered Jonah to preach repentance to Nineveh, the capital of the Assyrian empire. But Jonah had no intention to obey. He boarded a ship going the opposite direction!

Jonah dreaded Assyria for good reason. Conquered people suffered unspeakable cruelty from Assyrian kings. Cutting off limbs, noses, and ears, skinning people alive, and burning them alive are just a few of the barbaric ways the Assyrians terrorized and humiliated their captives.

I’ve read comments by professing Christians in reference to Islamic terrorists: “I hope they die and go to Hell!” That’s likely close to Jonah’s feeling toward the Assyrians. But while righteous indignation was justified, hatred was not. And it still isn’t!

Even when God sent a storm to plague Jonah’s ship, he chose death over repentance and obedience to the Lord’s command to preach to Nineveh. No doubt he fully expected to drown when the sailors reluctantly threw him into the sea (1:12-15).

Jonah finally submitted to God’s order, but he still wanted to die when the Ninevites repented (4:3). Such hatred! He lingered outside the city, hoping God might yet destroy it (4:5). When the plant that shaded him withered, however, he again wished for death (4:7-9).

The book concludes when the Lord shows Jonah that His own concern for lost souls was far more pressing than Jonah’s concern about shade (4:10-11). Such an abrupt ending makes us wonder: Did Jonah finally get it? More importantly do we understand that lost souls are more important than our comforts? And yes, God’s love and concern extend even to the worst of sinners. Does ours? Do we get it?

Motivation

Some are motivated by money. Some are motivated by praise. Some are motivated by fear. A few are motivated by appreciation for benefits already received. Fewer still are motivated by a strong commitment to doing what is right.

What motivates us?

I hope that it is not money. That is one motivator that God does not seem to approve (1 Timothy 6:10). But the rest have their place. Fear is not to be our primary motivator, but it has its place. Why tell us about the fire that will not be quenched (Mark 9:47-48) if avoiding that fire is not supposed to motivate us? We should not seek the praise of men, but certainly legitimate praise is not a bad thing (Romans 2:29).

Of course, we should do what is right simply because it is right, but we may need additional motivation. The highest motive is the love already shown to us. “*We love because he first loved us*” (1 John 4:19, ESV). It is “*the love of Christ*” that “*urges*” or “*compels*” us (2 Corinthians 5:14, RSV, KJV).

This is why we should remember what God has done for us. This is why we need to “count our blessings.” This is why the Israelites were constantly told to remember their deliverance from Egypt (Deuteronomy 5:15). It is why we are to constantly remember Jesus and especially his death and resurrection (2 Timothy 2:8).

Some think it is too much to worship three times per week. Actually it is far too little. The Bereans are commended because they searched the scriptures “daily” (Acts 17:11). We are to pray without ceasing (1 Thessalonians 5:17). We are to be “abounding in thanksgiving” (Colossians 2:7), and to be “watchful” in both thanksgiving and prayer (Colossians 4:2).

If we feel unmotivated, very likely it is because of the poverty of our worship. Those who constantly remember what the Lord has done will grow in motivation. Those who lack appreciation for his forgiveness will lack motivation to serve (see Luke 7:36-47).

--Thayer Salisbury (Toledo, OH)

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Ancestry

A few years ago, I received an unusual phone call: "Would you like to see the grave of one of your great, great, great, great, great grandfathers?" Taken completely aback, I pondered for a moment before saying, "Sure!" A short drive to a forgotten cemetery revealed an almost smooth marble pylon bearing the name of the individual - a man who had died in the late 1850s. If not for my friend's research, I would never have known.

Since that day, I've given much thought to this individual. To the best of my knowledge, no photographs exist. I know nothing of his life, his interests, his hopes, his dreams, or even what he did for a living. He's simply a name on a tombstone. And yet... I owe this man everything. The decisions of his life have a direct impact on my own existence. I have physical life because of the choices he made.

At some point in the distant future, one of my descendants may view a weathered tombstone with my name and wonder about my life. My life, as well as the works of my hands, will certainly be long forgotten, but that which truly matters will remain.

The Lord Jesus makes it all possible. The decisions of His life have a direct impact on my spiritual existence, and I will live forever because of the choices He made.

--Kenny Westmorland (Celina, TN)