

Jonah And The Love Of God

Joe Slater

Before you criticize Jonah too severely, put yourself in his place. God commanded him to preach to Nineveh, the capital of the Assyrian empire. Assyria was a fierce and dreaded enemy of Israel. I could make you nauseous with details of the Assyrians' cruelty to their enemies. The worse the pain they could inflict and the longer they could make it last, the better they liked it. No doubt Jonah would have been happy for God to wipe them from the face of the earth. Good riddance!

How would you react if God told you to go preach to Pyongyang (North Korea, ruled by Kim Jong-un)? Or to Kabul (Afghanistan, ruled by the Taliban)? Or to ISIS in parts of Syria? Jonah's assignment had much in common with those.

Jonah was wrong to disobey God. Let there be no doubt about that! Jonah's nationalism kept him from understanding God's love for even the worst of sinners. God's nature doesn't change. Today He isn't willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance (2 Peter 3:9); that was true in Jonah's day too. The sheer ignorance of the Assyrians didn't excuse their hideous abuses, but it did result in the Lord being longsuffering with them even as He was with Israel and still is with us.

Can you love people who hate you and would be all too happy to kill you if they could? Jesus prayed for the very people who were mocking and murdering Him. A few weeks later His blood cleansed some of them from their sins!

God loves the good and the evil, the just and the unjust, His love is perfect (complete, mature, Matthew 5:43-48). It's nothing special to love those who love you (v. 46). But loving your enemies makes you like God.

Let's Go Fishing!

Have you ever wondered why fishing is mentioned so often in the four gospels? Could it be that fishing is the activity that most people can relate to in one way or another? Even if you've never fished in your life, you have a general idea of what fishing is all about. A person uses certain tools like hooks, lines, bait, or nets to go into the water and catch fish.

There's a great fishing story in Luke 5:1-11 telling how Jesus got into a boat with Simon Peter and said, "*Launch out into the deep and let down your nets for a catch*" (v.4). Peter, being a professional fisherman, told Jesus that they had fished all night and caught nothing. However, because Jesus had commanded it, Peter went fishing anyway. The results were amazing! They caught so many fish that the nets broke; other boats and fishermen had to come and help with the great catch. As Peter witnessed the miracle he fell to his knees and said to Jesus, "*Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord!*" (v.8). Jesus' response to Peter was both comforting and profound, "*Do not be afraid. From now on you will catch men*" (v.10). I'm not sure Peter completely understood what Jesus meant, but it moved him so that he abandoned all he had and followed the Christ (v11).

Though Peter's road to becoming a "fisher of men" (Matthew 4:19) was paved with imperfections and mistakes, he did just as Jesus had commanded. Peter's adventures in evangelism are recorded for us in the book of Acts, and the letters of 1st & 2nd Peter inspire us to this day. Jesus' instruction to cast out the net of the Gospel was not only meant for Peter and the Apostles, but for us as well. We must be fully equipped with the fishing gear of truth and always be ready to troll the waters of the world for lost souls. So with that, "Let's go fishing!"

--Jay Launius (Maud, TX)

What You Don't Know

Ignorance is often willful and self-imposed. The inspired apostle describes some as being "*darkened in their understanding*" (Ephesians 4:18). Jesus describes them as loving "*the darkness rather than the Light*" (John 3:19). Light exposes the nature of our deeds (vv. 19-20). For that reason, many prefer darkness to light – i.e. they prefer ignorance to the knowledge of the truth.

According to the Oxford Dictionary of Proverbs, "What you don't know can't hurt you" is an expression that has been around for centuries, the oldest written version dating back to 1576. Back in the day, it would have read: "So long as I know it not, it hurteth me not." The dictionary goes on to comment: "More recent practical experience, as well as empirical research, suggests the opposite."

What you don't know can hurt you! While this can be easily illustrated in the natural world, it is also true in the spiritual realm. God lamented the spiritual unfaithfulness of His people, saying, "*My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge*" (Hosea 4:6). Correspondingly, Jesus spoke to believing Jews of His day, saying, "*If you continue in My word, then you are truly disciples of Mine; and you will know the truth, and the truth will make you free*" (John 8:31-32). We cannot ignore His teaching or choose to abide in ignorance. Instead, we are to be like newborn babes, longing "*for the pure milk of the word*" so that we might "*grow in respect to salvation*" (1 Peter 2:1:2).

We leave no stone unturned in our effort to properly educate our children so that they will not experience the pain of not knowing things essential to their happiness in this life. But how have we fared in passing on matters related to their eternal salvation? What they don't know will hurt them! Before it is too late, we must earnestly teach our children to know God and obey His commandments (2 Thessalonians 1:7-10).

--Glen Elliott (Greenbriar, AR) adapted