**Pastor Tim’s Message Notes 6-4-2023
Majoring in the Minors – Jonah**

Friends, one of the most profound and revolutionary things that Jesus taught was that His followers were to love their enemies and to pray for those that persecute them. No matter the generation, this is a difficult truth to embrace. But it is life-giving when it is embraced and lived out.

This was definitely not easy to embrace in the 1st century, as the people of Israel lived under the oppression of the Roman Empire.

But this truth that Jesus taught was actually not a new thing. God’s people were always called by God to be a light on a hill for the world. God’s people were to have love for all people and a concern that all people come to know and love their Creation as well.

Perhaps there is no clearer picture of this in the Old Testament than in the Book of Jonah. In our journey through the Minor Prophets, we come to Jonah today. This short but powerful Book is arguably the one we are the most familiar with. In fact, this is a book that is commonly preached on in its entirety. Complete sermon series have been dedicated to this powerful book.

And while it is true that many are drawn to this story because of Jonah’s near-death experience, the message of this book is so incredibly profound. In fact, there are many, many profound takeaways from this book. Dr. David Dorsey, listed 27 applications for this book. I have a sheet listing those on the desk in our lobby outside the sanctuary.

But today I would like for us to focus on what I believe is the biggest point of Jonah’s book, which is the calling of God to love and care about everyone, even those that would see us as an enemy.

But before we turn to our highlighted passage from Jonah, let’s again set the context a little bit. Jonah ministered during the 8th century BC. And he was from the northern kingdom of Israel.

We know this based on a reference to Jonah in the book of 2 Kings. 2 Kings 14:25 reads as follows: **Jereboam restored the boundaries of Israel from Lebo-Hamath to the Sea of the Arabah, in accordance with the word of the LORD, the God of Israel, spoken through his prophet Jonah son of Amittai, the prophet from Gath Hepher.”**

So Jonah lived during the reign of King Jereboam II of Israel. And during that time, Israel was expending. They had actually become almost as big in size as they were during the reign of King Solomon.

And the verse from 2 Kings tells us that Jonah heard a message from God that Israel’s kingdom was expanding. And this came to pass.

I love how Sight and Sound Theatre depicts the Book of Jonah. They show the people of Israel celebrating Jonah’s announcement of the good news that Israel was being blessed and expanding.

You can picture him winning the ‘man of the year award,’ or something like that. Maybe he would have been given the equivalent of the keys to the city today.

But then, at some point or another, God came to Jonah again with a message. But it was a very different message. It was a message pertaining to Nineveh, the capital city of the nation of Assyria.

Israel saw Assyria as an enemy. In fact, many years later, the nation of Assyria would become the superpower of the region and would conquer Israel as God’s instrument of judgment against Israel.

Please try to put yourself in Jonah’s sandals as you hear these opening 17 verses of his book.

**1 The word of the Lord came to Jonah son of Amittai: 2“Go to the great city of Nineveh and preach against it, because its wickedness has come up before me.”**

**3But Jonah ran away from the Lord and headed for Tarshish. He went down to Joppa, where he found a ship bound for that port. After paying the fare, he went aboard and sailed for Tarshish to flee from the Lord.**

**4Then the Lord sent a great wind on the sea, and such a violent storm arose that the ship threatened to break up. 5All the sailors were afraid and each cried out to his own god. And they threw the cargo into the sea to lighten the ship.**

**But Jonah had gone below deck, where he lay down and fell into a deep sleep. 6The captain went to him and said, “How can you sleep? Get up and call on your god! Maybe he will take notice of us so that we will not perish.”**

**7Then the sailors said to each other, “Come, let us cast lots to find out who is responsible for this calamity.” They cast lots and the lot fell on Jonah. 8So they asked him, “Tell us, who is responsible for making all this trouble for us? What kind of work do you do? Where do you come from? What is your country? From what people are you?”**

**9He answered, “I am a Hebrew and I worship the Lord, the God of heaven, who made the sea and the dry land.”**

**10This terrified them and they asked, “What have you done?” (They knew he was running away from the Lord, because he had already told them so.)**

**11The sea was getting rougher and rougher. So they asked him, “What should we do to you to make the sea calm down for us?”**

**12“Pick me up and throw me into the sea,” he replied, “and it will become calm. I know that it is my fault that this great storm has come upon you.”**

**13Instead, the men did their best to row back to land. But they could not, for the sea grew even wilder than before. 14Then they cried out to the Lord, “Please, Lord, do not let us die for taking this man’s life. Do not hold us accountable for killing an innocent man, for you, Lord, have done as you pleased.” 15Then they took Jonah and threw him overboard, and the raging sea grew calm. 16At this the men greatly feared the Lord, and they offered a sacrifice to the Lord and made vows to him.**

**17Now the Lord provided a huge fish to swallow Jonah, and Jonah was in the belly of the fish three days and three nights.**

There is a lot that we can talk about from this. But again, picture yourself as Jonah. This time the LORD gave him a message to share with the people of Nineveh. He was told to preach against it, because of its wickedness.

But Jonah goes as far as he can. Instead of going towards Nineveh, he disobeys God and goes in the complete opposite direction. He goes to Joppa and finds a ship sailing for Tarshish. This would be like if you were in Chicago and were told to go to New York City and instead you go to San Diego.

But why was Jonah running away? It was because Jonah didn’t love his enemies. Jonah wanted to see judgment on his enemies.

This message from God for Jonah told Jonah that God loved the people of Nineveh and God wanted to forgive them and spare them from judgment. In fact, the Book of Jonah pretty much says that towards the end. It was because Jonah knew how compassionate God was that he ran the other way.

It wasn’t the fear of being persecuted that caused Jonah to run the other way, it was his fear of them responding in repentance that led to Jonah to run from God’s calling.

But before we start throwing shape on Jonah, it is important to remember that Jonah was a righteous and godly man. He truly did love God. But Jonah, like pretty much everyone else at that time, had bought into the lie that anyone outside of Israel was a threat and an enemy.

The Book of Jonah is filled with irony. Righteous and godly Jonah flees from God’s call, the pagan sailors respond to Jonah’s words through godly repentance. Even in the midst of Jonah’s disobedience, God is at work in the situation and revealing Himself to these pagan sailors.

 Also, as the book goes on to describe, the pagan Ninevites truly repent of their sins and ask the LORD for mercy. In fact, the leader of Nineveh proclaims a fast throughout their land as an act of prayerful repentance. And we are told God relents from bringing the judgment on Nineveh that He had threatened.

And finally, there is the irony that Jonah is upset that Nineveh was not destroyed by God. **This is the biggest irony of them all – that God’s spokesperson was the only one that is not behaving as God wants them to throughout the story.**

Before we dive into our main takeaway from Jonah, let us consider a few observations.

**First, the fact that we have the Book of Jonah today reveals that Jonah most likely learned his** **lesson**. It seems unlikely that we would have the Book of Jonah if Jonah didn’t learn his lesson, which was that he was not to hate the Ninevites, or anyone else for that matter, but to earnestly desire God’s best for them.

People can change. As Rocky Balboa says at the end of Rocky IV in reference to Russian crowd that has begun to support him during his fight with Ivan Drago.

In fact, Bryan, if you could share that movie clip for everyone, that would be great.

# Rocky IV (12/12) Movie CLIP - Everybody Can Change (1985)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Uc6tQH8yHF>

**Second, the Book of Jonah reminds us that God loves every creature and God cares about everyone, including the animals.** The Book of Jonah concludes with God telling Jonah, **“Should I not have concern for the great city of Nineveh, in which there are more than a hundred and twenty thousand people who cannot tell their right hand from their left – and also many animals?” –** In other words, despite the many sins of Assyria and Nineveh, there were many innocent children and animals in the city. And God cares for and loves everyone

Yes, Israel had a special and unique relationship with God through the covenant agreements that were made through Abraham and Moses and others. But despite that, God views all people as precious and significant. And God wants all to come to know Him. Like Israel in the Old Testament, the Christian Church are the ones that are living into the new covenant that Jesus began for us. But God still loves those that have not said yes to Jesus. And the church is to love them as well.

**Third, God goes to great lengths to minister through broken vessels like Jonah**. God pursued Jonah. God miraculously saved Jonah. God gave Jonah another opportunity to preach in Nineveh.

**And fourth and finally, God is full of mercy and eager to relent from bringing judgment.** Of course, repentance was needed and still is needed today. But God’s will is always to bless. He is full of compassion and mercy. Eventually, through Jesus Christ, God offers humanity mercy over judgment by submitting to Jesus as Lord and Savior.

So, what is the big takeaway from the Book of Jonah for us today? And I believe that it is this – **we are to love all people, even those that would see us as enemies, and we are to actively seek God’s best for them.**

This still goes against the grain. But it’s still God’s will. The most common way that we are to love our enemies is to pray for them.

Who would see you as an enemy?

On a national level, we can think about nations that would view all Americans as an enemy. While we are called to stand against injustice and corruption everywhere, as Christians we are to refuse to view any human being as an enemy.

Perhaps on a more personal level, maybe we can think of people that have wronged us or wronged others that we care deeply about. It is easy to wish judgment on them, as Jonah did - To hope that they get what they deserve, so to speak.

But God’s desire is that no one gets what they deserve. Everyone deserves God’s judgment because of their sins, including us. But God’s will and desire is that no one perishes.

The most common way the Lord will give us opportunities to love those that oppose us is through prayer. We are to bless them in prayer. We are to lift them up before God.

We can remember this when we are cut off while we are driving or when people are passing us illegally. God wants us to respond by praying for them and blessing them.

And finally, God may call us to go to someone like the Ninevites. Someone that is hostile to God and most likely to us as well.

We are told in the New Testament that we are to speak truth in love. There are times that God may call us to warn people of the destructive path that they are on and that Jesus is the answer.

Many times, the most loving thing is not to be silent, but to speak truth in love. We need wisdom in this. We need the Holy Spirit to help us. Last week was Pentecost Sunday. It is a reminder that we need the Holy Spirit to help us in everything that we do.

But part of being that light on a hill does include being open about our faith and that Jesus is the only One that can set us free from sin’s bondage and the only One that can give us true peace within and the only One that can give us eternal life.

We do not have to have all the answers. But, like Jonah, we are called to personally know God and to be vessels to share God with others. And God gives us many opportunities to shine Jesus in this world.

Who is your Nineveh? Whom are you called to pray for and to reach out to with the love and grace of God offered to us in Jesus Christ?

Long before Silvestor Stallone was born and well before Rocky said “everybody can change,” God revealed this to be true. The Ninevites could change. Jonah could change. Those around us can change. And as we yield to God’s callings in our lives, we will undoubtably change as well. Change to become more and more like Jesus.

Let’s pray…

Resources:

[www.BibleGateway.com](http://www.BibleGateway.com)

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<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Uc6tQH8yHF>

Dr. David A. Dorsey – handout on 27 things we can learn from the Book of Jonah