

Series: Purposeful	Reference: Jonah 2:1	Title: Jonah: Living as God's Missionary	Date: 03.10.18
Website Writeup:			
<i>What can we learn from Jonah, a man who ran from God's call? We see the term 'missionary' isn't reserved for the few, but the all - we are all called to live as missionaries in God's purpose. Charles Spurgeon was correct, "Every Christian is either a missionary, or an imposter."</i>			

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This is our last sermon in the series *Purposeful*. We've explored our purpose as Christians & as the local church collectively through various personalities in the Scriptures. We've centered much of our efforts in understanding the Great Commission in Matthew 28:18-20, His last command, our first concern, where it says...

¹⁸ Then Jesus came to them and said, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. ¹⁹ Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, ²⁰ and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age."

This is Jesus' desire for His followers & with this passage as the drumbeat in the background, we began looking first at Moses who made life decisions to follow God in this purpose. Then Nehemiah, who refused to be derailed by the temptations & distractions of life from this purpose. Then Peter, following Christ in obedience no matter the cost, unconcerned with what culture or individuals think of our obedience to Jesus in this purpose. And last week, we looked at John, who said, we're sent out in peace bearing Christ to others for the sake of God's glory & God's mission. And today we learn to live as God's missionaries by looking at Jonah.

Jonah 2:1 begins, *"Then Jonah prayed to the Lord his God from the belly of the fish."*

Charles Haddon Spurgeon, one of the greatest 19th Century English preachers & theologians is quoted saying: *"Every Christian is either a missionary, or an imposter."*

He pastored one of the first megachurches of the modern era, *The Metropolitan Tabernacle*, in London. Thousands of people came to faith under his ministry. It's estimated he preached to upwards of 10 million people over the course of his life.

Do you think he meant ALL Christians are to be cross-cultural missionaries relocating miles away from home, family & friends?

Of course not, although we know some *are* called cross-culturally to relocate to such places. Kim & I did for 9 years in Lampung Indonesia, and as a church we support

missionaries across the world in places like Indonesia, Syria, Lebanon, Morocco & one who trains others in order to send them out to various places around the world.

However, Spurgeon was speaking about all Christians, everywhere. In his mind, the essence of what it means to be a Christian is - *we live our lives as missionaries, regardless of where we live*. God calls us to a life of faithfulness & obedience, that as we go about life, we make disciples wherever we are. This is where the intriguing narrative of Jonah invites us on a journey to discover the implications of what it means to serve God's purposes, regardless of personal preference or cultural bias. Our purpose is that we live as people sent of God - modern-day missionaries where we live, work & play.

People identify themselves in so many ways these days. By activity: rock climbers, football fans, baseball fans, etc. Or vocation: chemists, pastors, salespersons, business people, film-maker, etc. And for the first time in history some have chosen to identify themselves by various gender terms divorced from their biological sex.

But Christians don't get caught up in the changing cultural waves of distraction. Nor do we put anything before & above Christ in life. Christians identify themselves with Jesus Christ - hence the term Christian - defining our lives through the lens of a Biblical world view & God's created order - aligning ourselves with His purpose of glorifying God in obedience to his Mission. We are Ambassadors of Christ, Missionaries wherever we are. Activities, vocation, sexuality, or what have you, all conform to the biblical worldview as God has defined it, everything in submission to Christ & his purposes for our lives. It matters how we live & what we say in this missionary life.

In what ways does the term 'missionary' resonate with your vocation & life? Do you think of your life in the sense of that word? Or is that term reserved for someone else? As you think on these questions, consider these points...

Firstly, Jonah 2:1 begins, *"Then Jonah prayed..."* Which may seem insignificant, yet it is indicative of the many ways Jonah sought to escape God's direct command, and his role as a prophetic voice on behalf of God to those in Nineveh. It's significant that until chapter 2, there's no prayer which guides Jonah's decision-making process. He did not seek God in prayer before this...

We asked last week, how have we usurped the *Missio Dei* (the mission of God), turning it into *Missio ME* (my mission/purpose - my American Dream)? Give yourself a litmus test...have you ever prayed asking the Holy Spirit to tell you what you should do with your life? When you think of decisions, especially large ones you face, do you ask God what He would have you do? Or do you push forward in your own wisdom only to seek His blessing on your decisions after the fact? Or only pray when you get yourself in a bind? Do you employ other faithful Christians who know you well for their wisdom & advice when you face such decisions? If not, then you may be living the *Missio ME*, instead of the *Missio Dei*.

We said last week that we're responsible under the grace of Christ, with not only what we say, but how we live - we're called to proclaim & demonstrate the Gospel. To emulate Christ's example in life. Jesus didn't set us free to live for ourselves, he set us free to emulate him in seeking his glory & mission. He placed his righteousness on us in order to be lights of his salvation glory to the world!

Romans 6:18 says this...¹⁸ You have been set free from sin & have become slaves to righteousness. We've not been untethered to live for ourselves, we've exchanged an evil taskmaster for a benevolent King.

Jonah was a prophet called by God to preach in the capital city of Assyria - Nineveh. Jonah resisted God's call to preach to Israel's longtime enemy - he was a racist. But after disobeying God & ending up in the belly of a fish, only then did Jonah pray. Then reluctantly, he went to Nineveh & found Israel's enemies responsive to God's message.

We often live as if we're in control of ourselves, asking God to put his stamp of approval on our decisions only after the fact. We make decisions & get ourselves in a bind, then at worst, we blame God. Or at best, we do as Jonah did, praying for deliverance only after we've entered the fish. We must remember, like Jonah's situation, God's not been invited to lead our process from the outset, and can't be blamed for the trouble in which we find ourselves.

Jonah was misguided because of his lack of prayerfulness, humility & transparency. He could've avoided the ordeal he found himself in by being obedient from the outset. We often make the same mistakes, and can even find ourselves knowingly doing so at times, as if we could be so flippant with life. Falling into the trap of claiming, "Well, Israel often did the same!" As if to say our disobedience is expected & condoned, since we reside under the grace of Christ. We operate thinking God expects our disobedience, what if we turned that over thinking that God expects our obedience for all He's done for us?

In Hebrews 10:19–23, Paul, using the imagery of the Most Holy Place in the Temple where God resided, said, ¹⁹ Therefore, brothers & sisters, since we have confidence to enter the Most Holy Place by the blood of Jesus, ²⁰ by a new & living way opened for us through the curtain, that is, his body, ²¹ and since we have a great priest over the house of God, ²² let us draw near to God with a sincere heart & with the full assurance that faith brings, having our hearts sprinkled to cleanse us from a guilty conscience & having our bodies washed with pure water. ²³ Let us hold unswervingly to the hope we profess, for he who promised is faithful.

So there's a sense of God's work of grace here, imaged by being able to enter into God's presence due to Christ's death & resurrection. Remember, His death ripped the curtain in two which separated the Most Holy Place from people. Jesus, the final sacrifice, restores our relationship with the Father. His atoning work is received by grace through faith alone. But, Paul also continues in verse 26...²⁶ *If we deliberately keep on sinning after we have received the knowledge of the truth, no sacrifice for sins is left...*

Kind of chilling...there's a sense that grace must be internalized, producing life-change & if we're still living life only for ourselves, we've not done that. So stories like Jonah's aren't there to emulate & abuse grace. God won't be *used* for our selfish purposes. We're to learn from these stories, turning away from our sinful desires with *sincere hearts & the full assurance faith brings, having our hearts sprinkled to cleanse us from a guilty conscience & having our bodies washed with pure water*. With a sense of cleansing to live in the righteousness & purposes of Christ.

The Scriptures teach we're both saved & being saved in Christ (1 Corinthians 1:18), we can't sit back & treat Jesus as mere fire insurance, living simply for ourselves, thinking we'll make it in the door in the end. Rather we pray, *your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven* (Mt 6:10). Now, not in the future. We live under the conviction of the Spirit, following Jesus in holiness & purpose.

Secondly, we learn from Jonah that not every open door is to be embraced. In Jonah 1:3, after God calls Jonah to Ninevah to preach to them, it says, *3 But Jonah ran away from the Lord & headed for Tarshish. He went down to Joppa, where he found a ship bound for that port. After paying the fare, he went aboard & sailed for Tarshish to flee from the Lord.*

Just because Jonah found a ship going to Tarshish doesn't mean God provided an alternative to obedience. There'll be many diversions along the road to fulfilling our ministry purpose. We need to remain prayerful & attentive, in order to discern what's from God & what's there to distract or derail us. We're faced with many choices in life, there are plenty out there we can choose instead of obedience to the Lord. Just because they're there, doesn't equate to God giving us an 'out'. And 'outs' have consequences.

Someone asked me to order a few books for the church. I did, since I liked what they said. They both have to do with our pursuit of a spouse in life. Many people are looking for someone who'll simply 'make them happy' or who 'shares their interests', etc. But what if our pursuit of a spouse centered around the question of 'who is going be a partner in the kingdom of God with me?' Who, out there, am I called to give my life to in order to spur them onto growth in Christ, and them, me? Who would be my kingdom partner? If you're looking for someone only based on looks, or sexual compatibility or interest, you're asking for trouble. When we become unequally yoked in marriage, or any relationship, be it business or otherwise, we're drawn into things which hinder our witness & purposes in the Lord.

Thirdly, in this passage, we often underestimate the provision of the fish. God's deliverance isn't always easy, or what we may expect. Jonah expected death, yet God's deliverance was a fish that would add further credibility & a sense of urgency to His mission as God's mouthpiece.

If we find ourselves in trouble due to our disobedience to the Lord, we can't blame God. Children do that. Not adults. Adults own their mistakes. Christians realize, no matter how old we are, or how far we've come in life, in light of God, we are always children

dependent on our Spiritual Father. God always knows best for us. **And we know His will by way of 3 avenues: His Word, His Spirit & His Church.**

If we're faced with what seems to be discipline due to our disobedience, we can always take heart in Hebrews 12:5-8 *"My son, do not make light of the Lord's discipline, and do not lose heart when he rebukes you, ⁶ because the Lord disciplines the one he loves, and he chastens everyone he accepts as his son."⁷ Endure hardship as discipline; God is treating you as his children. For what children are not disciplined by their father? ⁸ If you are not disciplined - and everyone undergoes discipline - then you are not legitimate, not true sons & daughters at all.*

Legitimate children are in an active relationship with their father. Discipline's a sign of love. Since the wisdom & love of God is willing to see you go through hardship to learn what's actually best for you, despite your not wanting to do it. Jonah didn't want to go, but God loved him enough to discipline him in order to turn his heart & teach him vital lessons of the spiritual life - that being, God's calls his children to love all peoples, no matter who they are, by leading them into relationship with Himself through proclamation & demonstration - making disciples - the Great Commission!

Fourthly, we learn, prayer fuels ministry, and a lack of prayerfulness leads to all kinds of sin & wrongdoing on the part of God's people.

I remember Kim & I following a missionary friend a mile down in the subways of Moscow. He knew Moscow. We did not. He spoke Russian. We did not. We were standing on the platform, with Kim in front of us, when a train pulled up. Kim was mesmerized by the beauty of the Russian subways & hadn't heard my friend say, "This isn't our train, don't get on." She jumped on & the doors shut! This was before cell phones, we were passing through Moscow with no address for her to find. She would've been totally lost without my friend's guidance! It was a blessing that he was able to yell, "Get off at the next stop & stay there, I'll get you!" Which he did.

The point being, if we're not listening, or distracted, we can quickly get lost in the world. One wrong decision can make for a lifetime of hell! We all have testimonies to that fact.

How does your prayer life shape your witness & add to your credibility? You may feel God doesn't answer. You may feel you have no direction, but God's listening, but He's also speaking. The question is, are we? Prayer takes practice, a slowing down, centering on Christ, His words & purpose. With a sincere heart which has laid down its pride & has stopped dictating TO God, and begins to listen to Him! We live in a culture which seems almost demonically orchestrated to keep us from seeking solitude with the Lord.

Pick up that little book we give away to newcomers, *My Heart, Christ's Home*, which describes how Jesus waits to commune with us, to talk, to direct, and to guide. He sits in the living room with an open chair for you to sit next to him. But we run out the door frantically to the next thing in life, never taking the time to sit & listen.

So...to apply all this... **Firstly**, prayerfulness precedes action & ensures God-honoring ministry which bears lasting fruit. Is your life built on the sure foundation of prayer & worship of God? Not dictating, but listening prayer?

Secondly, God's desire is that we obey His word & call, willing to become a witness of His name in the darkest of places. Jonah was called to the dark place of Nineveh. We're called to the dark place of the Eastern Main Line. Don't let the Mercedes & Maseratis fool you, people are very lost! Remember, our lives matter - we're to reflect Christ in both proclamation & demonstration. So, is your missionary identity something you can readily embrace, or is it something you struggle with? Why, or why not?

Thirdly, when's the last time you depended on prayer as the only means of deliverance in a situation? Think back in your life & ministry at the times when God answered you, despite yourself, in spite of your sin, in order that He may redirect you to pursue His mission - which is always best for you.

Two simple challenges for you today...

(1) Spend a moment defining carefully what the Bible speaks of in terms of our missionary calling. What synonyms, in word or phrase, does Scripture present for the task of missions?

Like, 'go & make disciples', 'your kingdom come, your will be done', 'be like-minded', 'have the same love & mindset as that of Christ Jesus', 'look not to your own interests, but to the interest of others', 'through you I will bless all nations', 'love your neighbor as yourself', etc... I could keep going, but these all speak of our following & emulating Christ in purpose. That we would bring him glory & be about his mission, and these concepts span cover to cover in the Scriptures.

How do these statements shape & define your life & purpose?

And finally, (2) what areas of your life & ministry do you need to submit to God in prayer? Where are you being led astray in your thinking & disobedience? You've been moved from being a slave to sin, to a slave of righteousness - how are you flirting with disaster, by your disobedience to that righteousness?

Because, all these people we've studied resonate with the Great Commission in Matthew 28:18-20, showing that we're to live as missionaries in proclamation & demonstration. Christ is our identity first & foremost. His heart is to be followed in word & deed.

Spurgeon was correct, *"Every Christian is either a missionary, or an imposter."*