



A Systematic Expository Study on the book of JONAH

Study 2: THE STORM WITH A POSITIVE PURPOSE

Jonah 1:4-16

The love of God would not leave Jonah alone because He wanted the work committed into his hand to be done. He needed to win over the prophet so that He can use him to win the people who are living contrary to His will. As we read about the storm that assailed the Tarshish-bound ship with Jonah on board, there is on the one hand, *human interpretation*. There is on the other hand, *divine intention*. Human interpretations are almost always different from divine intention. While it can be said that the wrath of God was upon Jonah, the intention of God was not to manifest just His wrath, anger or indignation but to recover Jonah from the path of rebellion. A look at the eye of the storm might make us read *divine frown* but a deep look into the eyes of God will make us see *divine favour* at work. Everything that God does or permits in the life of His own child is out of deep eternal love. We must be very careful of the interpretations we give to happenings in our own lives as well as in other people's lives. Just because there is a storm in somebody's life does not mean the person is a Jonah. In Acts 27, we read of a similar storm in Paul's life (see verses 1,13,14,18-24). Yet, unlike Jonah, Paul was a willing missionary. The sailors in Jonah's Tarshish-bound ship were converted, as were the sailors in Paul's Rome-bound ship. It is advisable therefore not to rush into hasty conclusion in times of troubles and trials. Yet, on the other hand, like Jonah, there are people who would not do the will of God until the storm of life catches up with them.

A DISCIPLINE OF LOVE

Jonah 1:4; Hebrews 12:6,10; Psalm. 89:30-33; Psalm 119:67,71,75; Proverbs 13:24.

Storm came into Jonah's life. But it was to make rather than to mar him. Every discipline that God brings our way is always motivated by love. The Lord wanted to call him back. He wanted to make his life useful. The reason the Lord sometimes engages in a struggle with us when we are minded to go our own way is because He knows that if He allows us to do what we want, our lives will not be profitable to us, to our community, to our country and to our generation. In God's display of displeasure against Jonah, we see His love trying to bring him back to fulfill his call. A call of God is upon your life. He has called you to be a soul winner, a preacher and a minister of the gospel of the kingdom. Great reward awaits you if you will do it willingly. As a proof of His divine love, we find the Lord always taking the initiatives all through Jonah's ordeals. Amid the wave, in the belly of the whale or with the worm among the gourds, the Lord always worked so that something good can come out of a seemingly bad situation (Jonah 1:4a, 17; 2:10a; 4:16,17). God does not discipline anybody except for a purpose. Not even when the human instruments being used to bring the punishment our way do not share in the Lord's plan or vision is the discipline any less purposeful. God still moderates, oversees everything in order to bring His will to pass in our lives. Every discipline that He brings our way, He does out of love, mercy and grace. The same principle should guide church leaders in disciplining erring members, and Christian parents in correcting their wayward children. We should not rebuke or correct out of anger, irritation or disappointment, but rather out of love.

THE DISRUPTION OF LIVES

Jonah 1:5-10; Proverbs 16:33; Numbers 32:23; Ecclesiastes 9:18; Joshua 22:20; 1 Chronicles 21:1,14; Hebrews 12:15

The sailors' exposure to danger because of the presence of Jonah in their ship shows that no man is an island. Ours is a life surrounded by a web of relationships. One man's rebellion or disobedience to divine directive is likely to affect others who were not in any way privy to or connected with his rebellion or disobedience. Here we find Jonah sleeping while the storm raged. Amid the storm, everyone began to cry to their god - dead gods that have no ear to hear, no heart of compassion and no power to deliver. The sailors prayed unto them anyhow. **"But Jonah was gone down into**

the sides of the ship; and he lay, and was fast asleep. So the shipmaster came to him, and said unto him, What meanest thou, O sleeper? arise, call upon thy God, if so be that God will think upon us, that we perish not." It is ironical that instead of Jonah being used to turn the sailors from hopeless faith in idols to a living faith in God, the sailors were used to wake up Jonah to an active faith in Him!

When all efforts proved abortive, the sailors, determined to get to the root cause, cast lot among themselves. It fell on Jonah. That was hardly coincidental. The hand of the Lord who sent the raging wave into the sea, who asked the whale to vomit Jonah and the worm to eat up the gourd, was very much behind it. **"The lot is cast into the lap; but the whole disposing thereof is of the Lord."** Men may cast lot but it is the Lord that eventually makes it to work out His will and purpose. There are times the Lord will direct the unbelievers who did not know Him at all to discover the truth. So He did here! Jonah was forced to disclose his true identity and the reason for his flight from the presence of the Lord. **"And he said unto them, I am an Hebrew; and I fear the Lord, the God of heaven, which hath made the sea and the dry land."** If Jonah really feared God as he professed, he would have obeyed His command; he would have done His will. Like many believers, so-called, Jonah was sound in theology but short of testimony. He acknowledges God to be the Creator of the heavens and the earth, yet he tried to run away from His presence. His theology was correct; his behaviour was wrong. The theology we have of religious or spiritual matters is not as important as the testimonials we bear.

DEVOTION TO THE LORD

Jonah 1:11-16; Isaiah 26:13; 1 Thessalonians 1:9; Acts 26:18.

In continuation of his willful disobedience, Jonah preferred death to obeying the Lord's command to go preach to the people of Nineveh. **"Then said they [the sailors] unto him, What shall we do unto thee, that the sea may be calm unto us? for the sea wrought, and was tempestuous. And he said unto them, Take me up, and cast me forth into the sea; so shall the sea be calm unto you: for I know that for my sake this great tempest is upon you."** The sailors did as they were commanded. **"They took up Jonah, and cast him forth into the sea: and the sea ceased from her raging."** This incident [the immediate cessation of the raging waves] dissolves all doubts as to whether these incidents were divinely guided or not. God eventually gets the glory out of every situation even when man does not want to give Him the glory due to His name. Head or tail, God always wins. The sudden cessation of the storm drilled into the sailors fear and reverence for God. It led to the spiritual transformation of their lives. Whereas at the beginning of the storm **"the mariners were afraid, and cried every man unto his god"** after the storm, **"the men feared the LORD exceedingly, and offered a sacrifice unto the LORD and made vows."** In other words, the sailors were converted. They changed from idol-worship to worship the Almighty God, from praying to dead gods to calling upon the living God.

Though Jonah was an unwilling missionary, yet God brought the mariners unto Himself through the knowledge they received of God through Jonah's experiences. But then there is no reward for Jonah to glory of as rewards await only those who do the work of God willingly and not those who do it unwillingly. Jonah's attitude sharply contrasts with Paul the apostle's who though suffered the same fate as Jonah's, proved himself a willing disciple, missionary and a preacher. That is what the Lord is calling every one of us to be. If we will obey the Lord willingly, rather than willy-nilly, many people who never knew Jesus as their Lord and personal Saviour can become devoted to Him through our life and ministry.

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