

## The Sign Of Jonah

One of the blessed truths that these scriptures reveal to us about the Lord Jesus is that while He was fully human in every way, just as we are, He also remained fully God, with all of the attributes of God. And one of those attributes that I have mentioned often and is spoken about all throughout these gospels is that as He ministered among the people each day, He knew what each of them was thinking, their deepest thoughts and the motives of their hearts.

And that was taking place on this occasion that we'll study about today in this passage given in Luke chapter 11.

Recall that in the scripture verses given to us earlier in this chapter, how as the crowds gathered around Jesus as He was casting out a demon, that some of them, especially the Scribes and the Pharisees, were accusing Him of being in league with the devil. And they began demanding that He show them signs as to who He was. And there in verse 17 we're told,

<sup>17</sup> . . . the Lord Jesus, knowing their thoughts, said to them, "Every kingdom divided against itself is laid waste, and a divided household falls. (Luke 11:14-17)

Those words there in verse 17 clearly tell us this truth about the Lord Jesus, how He knew the thoughts of everyone who was there with Him that day. And then also, much more than that, Jesus knows the thoughts of everyone, everywhere, in all of time. And He didn't just know what those people were thinking, He also knew their motives and the evil presence that provoked their evil thoughts about Him. Folks, that is an attribute of God, and Jesus is God.

And then here, in the passage that we'll be studying today, Jesus addressed those secret thoughts that were prompting their questions and their accusations. And we need to especially notice that Jesus does not hold back with His precious words of truth as so many of our modern day preachers seem to do.

Jesus didn't concern Himself with how He might offend some of His congregation. He simply spoke the Truth and He let it stand on its own merit. And folks, we must always do the same.

Listen to these words beginning in verse 29 of Luke chapter 11.

<sup>29</sup> When the crowds were increasing, he began to say, "This generation is an evil generation. It seeks for a sign, but no sign will be given to it except

the sign of Jonah. <sup>30</sup> For as Jonah became a sign to the people of Nineveh, so will the Son of Man be to this generation. <sup>31</sup> The queen of the South will rise up at the judgment with the men of this generation and condemn them, for she came from the ends of the earth to hear the wisdom of Solomon, and behold, something greater than Solomon is here. <sup>32</sup> The men of Nineveh will rise up at the judgment with this generation and condemn it, for they repented at the preaching of Jonah, and behold, something greater than Jonah is here. (Luke 11:29-32)

As we consider these words, may we keep in mind the Godly attribute that we mentioned a moment ago, that Jesus was able to fully know all of the inmost thoughts and intents of every person's heart in that great crowd that had gathered around Him that day.

And He knew that they had not come with humble hearts desiring redemption from their sins. He knew well that the condition of their souls was still so thoroughly vested within their "evil generation" that they were blinded to their deeper need, the need for salvation.

And he knew also that, at best, they were seeking for a "sign", not realizing that they had already been receiving "signs" from God. They had just not been able to recognize them.

In another place in these gospels, Jesus would tell these people about an incident involving a beggar and a rich man, a circumstance in which both of them had died. In that story, the beggar was resting comfortably in Abraham's bosom, Paradise, but the rich man was enduring terrible suffering in torment. And the rich man, seeing the beggar Lazarus, asked if Lazarus might be allowed to go back and warn the rich man's family. But He was told "no", that the man's family had already received their opportunity for warnings and signs. They had the miracles and the laws of Moses and the words of the prophets to guide them.

But as we're told all throughout these scriptures, an evil and corrupt generation has difficulty with the things of God. They struggle to see and to hear the "signs" that God has already given to them. They are most often blinded by their own ideas, their own philosophies and religious practices, too invested in their own beliefs to see the real truths of God.

But, even knowing all of this, with great mercy and love, Jesus went ahead at that time and gave them “signs” of warning anyway, two of them. First, He gave them the “sign” of Jonah, a man who had been sent by God to give a message of salvation to a vile and corrupt group of people. And then also bringing to their minds how Jonah was in the belly of the whale for three days and then was raised back to life by God.

Perhaps later on, some of those people listening that day might think back on Jesus’ words and realize that He had also been speaking of His own travail while in the grave after His crucifixion.

Then, Jesus also gave them another “sign”, pointing out how the “Queen from the South” had with great humility, put forth great effort and traveled a very long distance just to hear and to experience the Wisdom of Solomon.

And Jesus humbly, but emphatically pointed out to them that “One greater than Solomon” and “One greater than Jonah”, stood before them that day.

As those people listen to Jesus, they would not comprehend His words at that moment. And most of them probably never would really grasp the precious truth He was giving to them. But He, the One speaking to them that day truly was far “Greater” than anyone who had come before Him or would ever come afterwards. He was the Great and Almighty God of the Universe, the Messiah, the Son of the Living God.

And these “signs” that Jesus gave to them were good signs. But because these people’s hearts were hard, and because they didn’t have the Holy Spirit dwelling within them to explain His words to them, they were blinded from seeing and hearing the truth.

But even though these people’s hearts were hard, Jesus, the ever faithful and “true watchman at the gate”, still called forth a warning to them, saying to them that, if they did not repent of their ways and of their condition, that a day would surely come, a great and terrible day of judgment, a day when all people would be called into account for all that they have ever done in this life. And on that day, the people of Nineveh and the Queen of the South would rise up as witnesses against them.

And also, for any in that crowd that might possibly be willing to hear, within the “sign of Jonah” Jesus also gave a deeper, more implicit sign, a warning about a “double accountability”. The Hebrew people were the ones who had been entrusted to carry forward all the precious oracles and truths and warnings from God. And to not only know them for themselves, but to also, then go and preach them and teach them to others.

But they had done neither. They had not followed through with that special calling. Their eyes were unable to see and their ears were unable to hear, and they didn't seem to even know that they had a responsibility for such things. And so, they had failed, miserably.

And it would later on be the Gentile world who would take up the responsibility for that call and would be witnesses, both to them, and also on that great and terrible “day of judgment”, be witnesses against them.

And how sad it was that God's own dear children had become so totally corrupt and had so completely missed out on the purposes that God had called them to be about. How truly sad!

A question that you and I must consider as we read these words here today is, “is there a similar warning being given to us within these words, to you and to me? Does God intend these words to be a rebuke to us for our own personal lack of obedience?”

As we well know, you and I live in a very similar “crooked and perverse and evil generation”, and we very easily get caught up within its grasp. And on that great and terrible day when we stand before the Holy and righteous judge of all the earth, will we also be found guilty of having fallen short of the calling and the purpose that God has for us?

Just as with Jonah, you and I, as believers, have received the precious truths of God. And we have been given them with the intention that we would “go ye into all the world and preach and teach them to others,” to “go ye” into our own cities like that of Nineveh and to give them the gospel that will save their souls.

But what have we done with the truths that God has given to us? Have we held onto them and used them for our own personal benefit alone, or have we, as God intended, joyfully shared them with others?

I do fear that for the most part, very much like Jonah, we have been unwilling to go forth and give these truths to others.

Recall that Jonah had been sent forth to Nineveh with a message that would save those people from their sins, and from their certain destruction. But, for reasons within his own heart, he was unwilling to go.

You and I also have a special calling issued to us. And oftentimes, just like Jonah, we are very reluctant to go on forward and to fulfill the ministry that God has called us to do.

And most often, our reasons for not going on forward are not big ones. They are usually nothing more than petty self-centeredness.

Or at best, perhaps we are like some of those mentioned in this gospel. One man said, "but I have a wife and I must tend to her. And another said, "Let me first go and bury my father." Those might be good reasons, but they will not sound so good on our day of judgment.

In looking at my own reasons for not going on forth with this gospel of Christ as I should, I find that most often I am simply caught up in matters of my own "self". I have a life-style, a "self-life" that has a strong grip on my soul and I don't have much time left over to "Go ye into all the world and preach this gospel".

So, what then is the answer. What is the "cure" for your and my wretchedly self-centered reluctance?

The cure for us is the same cure that God had to administer to Jonah. We, you and I, will need to go through our own "belly of the whale" experience. God will need to take us through a "death to self" experience.

In Galatians chapter 2, God calls that experience, being "crucified with Christ". Listen to the words of Galatians 2:20!

<sup>20</sup>I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me: and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me. (Galatians 2:20)

Our “old self”, our “sin nature” is a powerful entity who, before we were saved, lived within us and controlled us in the same way a slave-master controls his slaves, continually influencing and controlling all the matters of our day. And though our “old self” has now been defeated and washed clean by the blood of Christ, it still tries to reach back and regain the control it once had over us, tempting us to join ourselves back to this “evil generation”, and into its sinful ways.

But as God said to Cain, just before Cain went out and killed his brother, “Sin is crouching at your door, and it desires to have you, but you must master it”.

We, you and I, can by the indwelling power of the Holy Spirit within us, master the sin nature that wants to control us. But there is only one way, one cure available to us. We must go the way of Jonah. Like him, you and I must go through our own personal “death to self” experience. Listen again to that deep and difficult truth!

<sup>20</sup>I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me: and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me. (Galatians 2:20)

Think long and hard on these words folks! And please understand that these words are not speaking about our “salvation” experience. Not at all! Jonah did not go through a salvation experience in his three days in the belly of the whale. He was already saved long before that took place.

No, in the belly of the whale, Jonah went through a “Sanctification” experience. And that is what God is calling us to experience. We have our salvation, but for most of us, our salvation is kept for our own personal benefit and not shared with others so that they also can be saved.

And that is not God's plan for us. Like Jonah, He is calling you and me to go on forth, and bring more people into His kingdom. But to do that, we must first divest ourselves of our old ways, our old habits and old affinities, anything that holds us back from going on forward with the calling God has placed upon our hearts.

God calls this kind of stepping on forward "our sanctification". In 1 Thessalonians 4, He gives us these simple, but profound words,

<sup>3</sup>For this is the will of God, your sanctification. (1 Thessalonians 4:3)

Folks, it is absolutely imperative that you and I move on forward with our sanctification, else our lives will be worth little more than those very churchled religious leaders that Jesus was speaking to here in these words.

In our salvation, you and I have been born again, and God wants us to truly become new creatures. And we can do that, but only if we are willing to take this "sign of Jonah" and make it our own by going through the death experience of being crucified with Christ. It is then and only then, that we can truly become the "new creatures" God desires us to be. He tells us in 2 Corinthians 5:17,

<sup>17</sup>Therefore if any man be in Christ, *he is* a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new. (2 Corinthians 5:17)

Folks, I know that these things are mysterious and often incomprehensible to our ordinary minds, but it is still our calling. And if we will only allow God to take us through these experiences, then we can be truly transformed.

And yes, these steps are painful, but once we have agreed with Christ to go through them, we will find that we have truly become "new creatures", living in a miraculously new condition that He calls a "resurrected life".

Listen to the words of that promise in Romans chapter 6. This is the change that will raise you and me up out of this "evil generation" on into the realms and the likeness of Christ.

<sup>2</sup> . . . How shall we who died to sin live any longer in it? <sup>3</sup>Or do you not know that as many of us as were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into His death? <sup>4</sup>Therefore we were buried with Him through baptism into death, that just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life. <sup>5</sup>For if we have been united together in the likeness of His death, certainly we also shall be *in the likeness* of His resurrection, <sup>6</sup>knowing this, that our old man (our old self) was crucified with *Him*, that the body of sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves of sin. <sup>7</sup>For he who has died has been freed from sin. (Romans 6:2-7)

Folks, these words are truly mysterious yes, but one thing comes through loudly and clearly, and that is that we, our habits, our behaviors, and our life-styles truly can change. We no longer have to live under the control of our old sinful nature. The blood of Christ has killed it out of us and we need to go ahead and let it die.

And I for one am ready to be set free from it all. And I want the same for you.

And so, I would ask you and me today to begin to pray that God would grab hold of us and carry us through the same “death-to- self” experience that He did with Jonah, so that we can begin to live a life that is free indeed. Listen as I close!

<sup>36</sup>If the Son therefore shall make you free, ye shall be free indeed. (John 8:36)

<sup>17</sup>Therefore if any man be in Christ, *he is* a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new. (2 Corinthians 5:17)

Let's pray.