

Remnant Life Church
July 31, 2016
Sunday School Stories Retold:
Jonah – The Impact of Selfishness
Jonah 4

- Jonah shows us 3 distinct aspects of himself in this story
 1. Selfishness and Fear (chapter 1)
 - Jonah did not want the Ninevites to be saved
 - He did not trust God to protect him
 2. Repentance and faith (chapters 2 and 3)
 - Jonah realized what he had done and his heart changed
 - He prayed in faith even though he had no guarantee that he would live
 3. The on-going battle we all face with selfishness (chapter 4)
 - Jonah started out well by obeying God
 - But his heart returned to what got him in trouble in the first place

READ – Jonah 4 (enter with **Jonah 3:10**)

- Jonah's selfishness comes roaring back again
 - **Jonah 4:2** *He prayed to the LORD, "Isn't this what I said, LORD, when I was still at home? That is what I tried to forestall by fleeing to Tarshish. I knew that you are a gracious and compassionate God, slow to anger and abounding in love, a God who relents from sending calamity.*
 - Selfishness never makes sense
- Jonah presents us this morning with a question of identity
 - From the very beginning Jonah was not sure of his identity and as a result his entire focus was on himself
 - It took 3 days in a fish for him to be reminded of not only who he was but, and this is the very definition of selfish, it was not all about him
 - Many today struggle with their identity
 - Children of mixed marriages often grow up having difficulty identifying their culture
 - Going through your teenage years focuses on establishing identity
 - Identity is so important that religions and philosophies have been built around finding, knowing, loving, and protecting self
 - We now even have those who claim they can't identify what gender they really are
 - Seeking your identity apart from God breeds confusion and confusion is not of God
 - **Jer 29:11** - *For I know the plans I have for you," declares the Lord, "plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future.*
 - How can I avoid the confusion? Ask Him!
 - Every one of His disciples struggled at one time or another with who and what they were - But Jesus never wavered –
 - In answering the Pharisees who were challenging what Jesus did...

- **John 5:19** - ... *“Very truly I tell you, the Son can do nothing by himself; he can do only what he sees his Father doing, because whatever the Father does the Son also does.*
- Jonah ends up very confused regarding his identity – he forgot that God is God and he is not!
 - Is that not an issue for most people today at least in some measure? Even for Christians?
 - Do you really trust God fully with your life, your plans, your future?
 - Can you really let God be God?
 - The tell-tale statement – “I trust God, BUT...”
 - Can I trust Him enough that when things are happening not in the way I think they should I keep my trust in Him?
 - Let’s look at that just a little bit further...
- This is not easy! It can even be a little bit hard to understand
- **James 1:2-4** *Consider it pure joy, my brothers and sisters, whenever you face trials of many kinds, because you know that the testing of your faith produces perseverance. Let perseverance finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything*
 - Perseverance is about acting or responding in a consistently right way
 - But to have joy in those times?
 - **Rom 5:3-5** (Modern English) - *And we are also happy with the troubles we have. Why are we happy with troubles? Because we know that these troubles make us more patient. ⁴ And this patience is proof that we are strong. And this proof gives us hope. ⁵ And this hope will never disappoint us. We know this because God has poured out his love to fill our hearts through the Holy Spirit he gave us.*
 - Wait – happy with the troubles we have?
 - Happy is not about the carefree attitude of no struggles it is about celebrating what is happening
 - Because it is not the trouble that is the focus but what it produces in us that brings the celebrating
 - God is much more concerned about our character than our comfort
- Jonah was not comfortable in the fish but his character was being changed
- Jonah needed to rediscover who he was, his identity, that began by realizing that God is God – PERIOD!
- God’s love and mercy are His to give – what’s “fair” is a question that only we ask
- God was God and was going to do what He pleased for His purposes – **Ex 33:19** - *I will have mercy on whom I will have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I will have compassion*
 - Jonah would have read this verse many times but without a Godly identity his selfishness took control of his life
- What is the book of Jonah about?
 - It is not about the fish
 - It is not about Ninevah
 - It is not even about Jonah
- **THE BOOK OF JONAH IS ABOUT GOD’S COMPASSION**

- God then addresses Jonah's selfishness that has manifested itself in anger
 - **Jonah 4:4** - *"Is it right for you to be angry?"* (note that Jonah does not answer)
- Jonah has just completed the greatest city-wide revival in all of history and he was the key-note speaker
 - EVERYONE got saved! Even the King!
 - Not even Billy Graham pulled that one off
- But his response is dictated not by gratitude to God for the power of the Holy Spirit that has just been witnessed and the lives that have been saved but by his selfishness!
 - He could not realize that now Israel would no longer be tormented by the Assyrians
 - That perhaps now they would have a powerful ally
 - Selfishness not only makes no sense but it also prevents clear thinking
- The story of Jonah begins to wind down with a somewhat strange scenario
 - Three things happen in quick succession –
 - God makes a vine to grow to provide shade, a worm to eat it, and then a scorching wind to blow
 - It is an object lesson from the hand of God
- God wanted Jonah to see how twisted his priorities were
 - He was so upset by the heat of the wind and losing the vine that he wanted to die
 - He did not care about 120,000 confused and ignorant people
 - Jonah, to the very end, could not seem to grasp the heart of God for the people of Ninevah

Three truths of God's love we see in the book of Jonah:

1. God loves people
 - Ninevah was not just a city it was a lost people who needed to know God
 - Your co-workers, your lost family, the guy in line at the store, the guys you play ball with are all Ninevah
 2. God's plan for people involves people
 - That's you and that's me
 - Do we have the compassion for others?
 - Are we watching?
 3. God will do whatever it takes to save people
 - How far will he go?
 - Ninevah's salvation was so important God would not let Jonah go and in the process taught Jonah a lesson about true identity
- Who are your Ninevites and will you obey God and be the messenger who could very well be the catalyst that brings salvation to their hearts, their family, or even an entire nation?
 - But my selfishness will twist the priorities of my life and that will always put me in a place where God will need to get my attention to reveal my heart
 - For Jonah it was the belly of fish
 - What fish belly are you in right now?