

Peace be with you, listening friends. We greet you in the name of God, the Lord of peace, who wants everyone to understand and submit to the way of righteousness that He has established, and have true peace with Him forever. We are happy to be able to return today to present your program *The Way of Righteousness*.

In our last program, we looked into the story of God's prophet, **Elijah**. Elijah was a great prophet because the power of the Spirit of God was upon him. He prayed to God that it would not rain and there was no rain in Israel for three and a half years. Also, Elijah confronted the false prophets of Baal, exposing their false religion before all the Israelites. Thus God used the prophet Elijah to turn the hearts of many Israelites back to the Lord their God.

Today then, we want to consider the story of another prophet who came after Elijah. We will see how God chose an Israelite by the name of **Jonah**, or *Yunus* in Arabic, and ordered him to **go and preach to foreigners** who were enemies of the Israelites.

We are reading in the book of Jonah, in the first chapter. The Scripture says: *The word of the Lord came to Jonah, son of Amittai: "Go to the great city of Nineveh and preach against it, because its wickedness has come up before me."*

Did you hear what the Lord commanded Jonah? God told him to go and warn the people of the city of Nineveh to repent of their sins-even though Nineveh was the capital of the nation of Assyria, and the people of Assyria were a wicked people who wanted to destroy the Israelites!

Why did the Lord God want to send Jonah to those foreigners who despised and hated the Israelites? Did God also care about Israel's enemies? Yes, He did! God was about to judge the people of Nineveh because their sin had reached to heaven.

However, **God takes no pleasure in destroying sinners**. God wants everyone to

repent of his sin, believe God's Word and be saved. **That is why the Lord commanded Jonah to go** to the people of Nineveh, and warn them so that they could repent of their sin, turn to God, and be saved.

However, **Jonah did not want to go** and warn his enemies! Jonah did not want to be a prophet to the city of Nineveh! God wanted the people of Nineveh to repent so that He could have mercy on them, but Jonah wanted God to punish them! Thus, Jonah refused his assignment and tried to run away from the Lord God. But where could he flee to get away from the presence of God?

Let us continue the story to see what Jonah did. The Scripture says:

*But Jonah ran away from the Lord and headed for Tarshish (that is, a place very far from Nineveh). 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. Then **the Lord sent a great wind on the sea, and such a violent storm arose that the ship threatened to break up. All 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. The captain went to him and said, "How can you sleep? Get up and call on your God! Maybe he will take notice of us, and we will not perish." Then 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.***

So they asked him, "Tell us, who is responsible for making all this trouble for us? What do you do? Where do you come from? What is your country? From what people are you?" He answered, "I am a Hebrew and I worship the Lord, the God of heaven, who made the sea and the land." This 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.) The sea was getting rougher and rougher. So they asked him, "What should we do

to you to make the sea calm down for us?" "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." Instead, the men did their best to row back to land. But they could not, for the sea grew even wilder than before.

*Then they cried to the Lord, "O Lord, please do not let us die for taking this man's life. Do not hold us accountable for killing an innocent man, for you, O Lord, have done as you pleased." Then they took Jonah and threw him overboard, and the raging sea grew calm. At this the men greatly feared the Lord, and they offered a sacrifice to the Lord and made vows to him. But **the Lord provided a great fish to swallow Jonah, and Jonah was inside the fish three days and three nights.***

Let us pause here. To this point, we see how God pursued Jonah, His fleeing prophet! Jonah could run, but he could not escape the hand of God. Why did God pursue Jonah? God pursued him because He loved Jonah and wanted him to do His will. That is why God sent a huge fish to swallow him but not kill him.

Poor Jonah! Now he found himself in the belly of a great big fish! What could Jonah do to save himself? Nothing! Nothing except call out to the Lord God. Only God could save him. In chapter two, the Scripture tells how Jonah prayed to the Lord from inside the fish and confessed his sin of refusing to obey God. For three days, God protected Jonah inside the sea creature. What an important lesson Jonah had learned! On the third day, Jonah cried out, *"Salvation comes from the Lord!"* When Jonah said, *"Salvation comes from the Lord,"* the Scripture says: *"the Lord commanded the fish, and it vomited Jonah onto dry land."*

In chapter three, the Scriptures continues:

*Then the word of the Lord came to Jonah a second time: "Go to the great city of Nineveh and proclaim to it the message I give you." **Jonah obeyed** the word of the Lord and went to Nineveh. Now Nineveh was a very important city, a visit required three days. On the first day, Jonah started into the city. He proclaimed: "Forty more days and Nineveh will be overturned!"*

The Ninevites believed God.** They declared a fast, and all of them, from the greatest to the least, put on sackcloth. When the news reached the king of Nineveh, he rose from his throne, took off his royal robes, covered himself with sackcloth and sat down in the dust. Then he issued a proclamation in Nineveh: "By the decree of the king and his nobles: Do not let any man or beast, herd or flock, taste anything; do not let them eat or drink. But let man and beast be covered with sackcloth. Let everyone call urgently on God. Let them give up their evil ways and their violence. Who knows? God may yet relent and with compassion turn from his fierce anger so that we will not perish." **When God saw what they did and how they turned from their evil ways, he had compassion and did not bring upon them the destruction he had threatened.

Thus we see that **God had mercy** on the people of Nineveh, because they believed the word that He sent them. The Ninevites repented of their sin with a broken and crushed heart and turned to the Lord. However, **Jonah was not happy** that God showed mercy to the people of Nineveh. Listen to what is written in the fourth and final chapter of the book of Jonah.

The Scripture says:

But Jonah was greatly displeased and became angry. He prayed to the Lord, "O Lord, is this not what I said when I was still at home? That is why I was so quick to flee 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. Now, O Lord, take away

my life, for it is better for me to die than to live." But the Lord replied, "Have you any right to be angry?" Jonah went out and sat down at a place east of the city. There he made himself a shelter, sat in its shade and waited to see what would happen to the city. Then the Lord God provided a vine and made it grow up over Jonah to give shade for his head to ease his discomfort, and Jonah was very happy about the vine.

But at dawn the next day God provided a worm, which chewed the vine so that it withered. When the sun rose, God provided a scorching east wind, and the sun blazed on Jonah's head so that he grew faint. He wanted to die, and said, "It would be better for me to die than to live." But God said to Jonah, "Do you have a right to be angry about the vine?" "I do," he said. "I am angry enough to die." But the Lord said, "You have been concerned about this vine, though you did not tend it or make it grow. It sprang up overnight and died overnight. ¹But Nineveh has more than a hundred and twenty thousand people who cannot tell their right hand from their left, and many cattle as well. Should I not be concerned about that great city?" That is how the book of Jonah ends.

Fellow listeners, there is much that we can learn about the nature of man and the nature of God in the story of the prophet Jonah. One thing we see is that **God is no respecter of persons**. He does not show one-sidedness or favoritism. Jonah showed favoritism, but God did not show favoritism. **God's heart was very different from Jonah's heart.**

Jonah's heart was full of favoritism, but **God's heart** is full of compassion for all people. Jonah loved his own people and hated his enemies, but God loved the people of Israel **and** the people of Nineveh. Jonah wanted the people of Nineveh **to perish** because they were enemies of Israel, but God wanted them **to repent** of their sin, accept His word, and be saved. **God does not show favoritism.** Whoever you are,

whatever you are like, **God loves you**. He does not love your sin and rebellion, but He loves **you**. **God loves every individual in every nation** and wants everyone to confess their sin to Him, to hear the Truth, understand it, believe it and be saved.

Some people think that God doesn't care about each individual on earth; that He has just carelessly chosen some to burn in hell and others to bask in Paradise. While it is true that most people will die in their sins and face God's righteous wrath, it is wrong to think that God doesn't care about those who are perishing in ignorance. The Holy Scriptures tell us that God *"wants all men to be saved and to come to a knowledge of the truth!"* *"The Lord [does not want] anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance."* However, for those who refuse to repent-God will judge them, because they *"refused to love the truth and be saved...All will be condemned who have not believed the truth but have delighted in wickedness!"* That is what the word of the Lord God declares. **God is good and merciful** and has provided a way of salvation for every person. But **God is also holy and righteous** and will judge every person who does not accept His righteous way of salvation.

Friends, let no one deceive you. God never shows favoritism, nor does He take pleasure in the destruction of sinners. **God wants each person on earth to know the truth, believe it and be saved!** That is why God, in the past, inspired the prophets to write His Word, so that we can **know** the way of salvation that God has ordained, that we would **accept** it and be **saved!** Whoever accepts God's way of salvation will go to heaven. Whoever rejects it or neglects it will perish! God is no respecter of persons. As it is written: God *"wants all men to be saved!...But unless you repent, you...will all perish!"*

In the next program, God willing, we will learn about a great prophet who made many, many predictions about the Redeemer who was to come into the world to save sinners.

That great prophet is Isaiah, a prophet of God who lived seven hundred years before the Messiah entered the world....

God bless you as you remember these two lessons God wanted to teach His unfaithful prophet, Jonah:

"Salvation comes from the Lord!" (Jonah 2:10) and "God does not show favoritism!"

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