

## Monday Morning Rewind – December 1, 2008

*Rabbit, Rabbit!* Just my way of being the first to welcome you to December. Good morning! Today it's rabbits, but on Sabbath it was fish—in particular the fish God prepared for Jonah.

To recap: Jonah was a prophet who refused to obey God's command to preach against the wicked city of Ninevah. At the time, Ninevah was soon to become the capitol of the Assyrians—a pagan people who were legendary for their cruelty and terrorism. The book of Nahum details Ninevah's wickedness. (i.e., "city of blood," "full of lies," "piles of dead," "sorcery," "prostitution," "witchcraft," and "endless cruelty." See Nahum 3.) Jonah despised them. It was the last place on earth he wanted to go, so he ran from both his calling and from his God. Jonah booked passage on a ship bound for Tarshish. God sent a terrifying storm that caused the pagan sailors on board to call on their gods. Storms have a way of producing prayer! But Jonah wasn't praying.

Jonah had gone below deck, where he lay down and fell into a deep sleep. Is this a description of the church today--going where God never said to go, doing what God never said to do, and sleeping when lives are in mortal danger?

The ship's captain finds the runaway prophet and says, "How can you sleep? Get up and call on your god! Maybe he will take notice of us, and we will not perish" (Jonah 1:6). This is the cry of the world to the church: "How can you sleep now? Wake up and pray!" This is a call for God's people to intercede on behalf of those who are caught in sin and afraid of the "storms" of life. Will we do it? The church, like Jonah, is God's chosen instrument of salvation, but Jonah wasn't doing his job. When the church does not do its job as an intercessor it becomes a danger to itself and to those it is called to save.

After casting lots, it becomes clear that the pagan sailors are not to blame for the crisis. The man of God is! After an argument that clearly shows that the pagans had more compassion for Jonah than he had for them, Jonah is thrown overboard, the sea calms, and God prepared a great fish to swallow a turkey—*Jonah!*

From the belly of the fish, God heard the cry of Jonah. He was about as far from God physically as you can be, but there is no distance between God and the soul who cries to Him for help. Rewind to Psalm 139:7-12 to see that wherever you are, God is. Jonah's time out in the fish, and his subsequent miraculous deliverance proves that your sin is never too great and your predicament is never too difficult for God.

Thankful to be alive after the fish spat him up, Jonah goes to Ninevah, but his attitude towards them remains unchanged. He preaches a message of condemnation, but the Ninevites repent! Jonah converts the entire city with one politically incorrect sermon. God accepts their repentance and does not destroy the city. Jonah is furious! He was not willing to give to others the grace He himself had received. Are we ever like this?

God caused a vine to grow and give Jonah shade. The next day, God caused a worm to eat the vine and it withered, leaving Jonah exposed to the sun. Jonah was enraged and wanted to die. He cared more about the vine, which wasn't his to begin with, than he did about human beings who belonged to God. What do we care about? What makes us angry? What gets our juices stirred? Are they the same things that God cares about?

Church people are legend for getting angry at each other over music, diet, carpet color, etc. God could care less. What does make Him angry is what sin is doing to His kids. He cares about the fatherless, the widow, the alien, and the orphan. He cares about the poor and the oppressed. He cares for the lost—so much so that He leaves the 99 righteous to go look for the one lost sheep. What is the worth of one soul to God? What is it to us?

If we care more about prophecy and than people, more about ourselves than others, and more about a new car than the new birth, it's a sure bet we haven't been born again, regardless of how long we've incubated in the pew.

Rewind to the book of Jonah and meditate on these lessons from this story:

- God cares deeply for us as well as for people we resent and even hate.
- God will accomplish his purpose, even through reluctant and unwilling servants.
- God will do whatever it takes to save us.
- God is patient with sinners and patient with his servants who are also sinners.

- You can't fall so low that God can't lift you up.
- Your prayer for help will always be heard by God.
- It's time to get up and call on our God!

We are one month away from our public evangelism meetings, and God is calling us to prayer on behalf of our community. We want to "get up and call on our God" for precious souls to come and respond to the gospel message that will be presented January 3-Feb. 14. To help us pray in one accord and with one voice, we're initiating a 30-day prayer vigil with a specific prayer and scripture focus for each day.

The vigil will begin this coming Friday, December 5<sup>th</sup>, and will conclude on January 3<sup>rd</sup>, the launch day for our "Community Conversations Live!" meetings. You may pray anytime during the day, but it might make it easier to remember if we target the hours of 6:00AM, 12:00 Noon, 6:00PM, or 12 Midnight. You may choose one or more of these times to read the text and pray just for a minute or two wherever you happen to be. In this way, we will be united in calling on our God for ourselves, and our community. –Pastor Randy