

6/9/24 Christ Fellowship

## The Vision of Jonah for the Country

## Jonah 1

Have you ever tried to use the wrong tool for the job? You know what I mean. You needed a hammer but didn't have one so you took off your shoe and used it. Or maybe you had a hammer but what you really needed was a wrench. What happens when you use the wrong tool for the job? It doesn't work out as well, does it?

Years ago, before cell phones, I was out of town and locked myself out of my truck and since there was nobody else around and I felt like I had no other options, I decided I would just have to break out a window. No big deal. I've seen guys on TV break out car windows lots of times. I've watched enough movies to know how to do this, right? So, like they do, I took off my shirt and wrapped it around my hand.

Then I reared back and hit the side window of the truck as hard as I could. And do you know what happened? I realized at that moment that Hollywood lies! That glass didn't break but my hand did. It was awful! It was like hitting metal. I don't remember how I actually got into that truck but it wasn't by breaking a window with my hand. That was the wrong tool to use for that job.

Every tool has a use and if it is used for the wrong reason, it might not work out well. That's why even a simple screwdriver has a warning label on it. *"Do not use this to pry with. Do not use this to install your contacts."*

I want you to think of yourself as a tool. God made you into a tool for His use. And when you are used like He intends, things work out great. But when you are not used like He intends, things don't work out so well. So, God gives us a vision of what we are supposed to do and for we are supposed to be used for. God wants all of us to know what kind of tool we are and what He wants us to be used for.

Some of us are hammers and some are screwdrivers and others may be pliers or wrenches but we all have a use and we are all valuable to the Kingdom of God. But if we are not allowing ourselves to be used for His plan, things just don't work like they should. And so God gives us a vision of what His plan is for us. You can call it a vision or a revelation or a divine communication. It may come from a dream like God often did with the Old Testament prophets but today God speaks mainly through His word, the Bible.

In **Proverbs 29:18**, the KJV says, *“Where there is no vision, the people perish.”* The NIV translates it this way: *“Where there is no revelation, people cast off restraint.”* God has a plan for you as an individual and He has a plan for us as a church. He has a plan for this country. He has a plan for our families and our finances. And if we would just see that plan and embrace the vision, God’s will is going to be done and those areas of our lives will be blessed.

The problem is that sometimes God’s plan and His vision is different than ours. That’s where there is conflict. It’s also the birthplace of discontentment, disunity and all kinds of heartache. **Jonah** is a fascinating case study for learning about the problems that come with not embracing God’s vision. The book of Jonah has always fascinated me. It’s one of what we call the minor prophets toward the end of the Old Testament just because it’s not very long. But it’s different than most other prophetic books and is not even really prophetic in the same way Amos wrote or the way Nahum prophesied.

When you hear the name “Jonah”, what do you think of? He was swallowed by a whale or a big fish, right? Everybody knows that part of the story, even people who have never read the Bible. I heard the story of the schoolteacher who asked her class what they knew about whales. One little girl spoke up and said that Jonah was swallowed by a whale. The teacher smiled and said she didn’t think that was very likely because, even though whales can be big, their throats are not big enough to swallow a man.

But the little girl was adamant and maintained that Jonah was swallowed by a whale. The teacher became impatient and reiterated that this was physically impossible. But the girl was unmoved, and said that when she got to heaven, she would ask Jonah. The teacher said, **“Well, what if Jonah isn’t in Heaven?”** The little girl answered, **“Well, then you ask him.”**

**Jonah 1:17** actually calls it a big fish. We don’t know if it was a whale or what it was exactly. In fact, it says that God provided the big fish. So, maybe God created a one-off unique big old fish or maybe it was a whale. Who knows? Who cares? But more importantly, why was Jonah swallowed by the fish? Let’s turn there and look at it. Jonah is in between Obadiah and Micah. It’s a very small book, only four chapters. And I want to read just the first few verses. You know most of the story but I want to concentrate on God’s vision that He gave to Jonah concerning a neighboring country.

Let’s read just **verses 1-3** of **chapter one**. *“The word of the Lord came to Jonah son of Amittai: 2 “Go to the great city of Nineveh and preach against it, because its wickedness has come up before me.”*

*3 But Jonah ran away from the Lord and headed for Tarshish. 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.”*

God gave Jonah a vision. He made it plain. It wasn't complicated. What was the vision? Go to Nineveh and preach against it. Now, Nineveh was a country about 500 miles east / northeast of Israel. This also sets Jonah apart from most of the other prophets in that most of the others were told to prophecy against Israel to get them to repent. Here, God's vision is for a Gentile nation to repent. And that was the problem for ol' Jo. See, Nineveh was the capital of Assyria and the Assyrians were known for being just awful people. The book of Nahum tells us they weren't just evil but they took pride in their evilness and they were brutal to the helpless and cruel in war. And for Jonah, that was just unforgivable.

It would be like us being called to go witness to ISIS or Hamas or the Taliban or some other crazy cruel group. Not only would it be very dangerous for Jonah but the main problem Jonah had was he didn't think they deserved to be forgiven by God. They didn't deserve to be given grace or mercy.

So, what does Jonah do? He ran. Nineveh was east. Jonah went west. I read one commentary that said not only did Jonah go the wrong way, he continued to go down. Leaving Jerusalem, one always goes down. Then Jonah went down to Joppa, went down to a boat, went down to the bottom of the boat and fell asleep. God sent a storm so the sailors threw Jonah down into the water and then he continued to go down in the fish. Down, down, down.

**Psalm 139** says, *“Where can I go from your Spirit? Where can I flee from your presence?  
8 If I go up to the heavens, you are there; if I make my bed in the depths, you are there.  
9 If I rise on the wings of the dawn, if I settle on the far side of the sea,  
10 even there your hand will guide me, your right hand will hold me fast.”*

When God gives you a vision of what He wants, there's no use trying to run away from it or avoid it or put it off. If you don't do what He wants, you are like the wrong tool for the job. It just doesn't work out for you very well.

But let's think about this from Jonah's point of view. Let's think about all the ways that this could go wrong and all the reasons why he shouldn't do it. First, it's a long way. It's 500 miles from here to there and that's a big investment in time, energy and money just to get there.

Second, it's dangerous. Those are mean people and they are Israel's enemy. He could be killed or taken captive and tortured. Those Assyrians didn't mess around.

Third, what are the chances that they actually listen to him? He's a foreigner, the enemy, and so why should they even care what Jonah has to say? Also, even worse, what if they do listen to him and receive God's mercy and grace? That's the worst-case scenario for Jonah. None of this makes sense to Jonah. None of this is fair to Jonah. None of this is Jonah's vision, that's for sure.

But what was God's vision? Go to Nineveh and preach against it. The word translated "preach" there means to cry out or call out loudly. It means to speak the truth to those God tells you to speak to. And Jonah could do that and he eventually would do that but he did it under protest and with a bad attitude. But he did it.

So, now let's think about this from our point of view for a minute. What has God called us to do? What is His vision for this church? We know His vision is for us to minister to the poor, the addicted and the incarcerated. It was revealed to us many years ago. It's not my idea. It's not your idea. If you have been around here for a while, you know this to be true. It has to be a God vision because only God could make this work. As we have said many times, it's not a very good business model. There's no money to be made when your demographic is the poor, the addicted and the incarcerated.

So, that's one reason not to do it. Let's talk about the others. Well, if we are to minister to the poor, the addicted and the incarcerated, what can we really do for them? We are not a rich church. Not many of us are really wealthy. Some of us are struggling ourselves. How can we help the poor?

And what about the addicted? Is anybody here a professional counselor specializing in helping people through their addictions? I'm not. In fact, the only places I know of that have that kind of help are outside of this county. I literally have to send people away from here to get that kind of help. That's very frustrating.

For the incarcerated folks, do we have any sheriffs or deputies or judges or lawyers here? No? Just a bunch of folks that have been in jail a time or two. Good grief! What are we supposed to do for them?

So, we are just not able to help those people God has called us to help. It's not that we don't want to, like Jonah. We just don't have the resources, do we? So, let's just forget that. Obviously, God has mistakenly given us more than we can handle. We don't have the people or the resources to do what He has called us to do.

So, let's talk about something else. On a completely unrelated note, I want to ask you to just close the book of Jonah -we're giving up on him - and go left in your Bibles to the book of Judges. I want to revisit a friend of ours by the name of Shamgar in **Judges 3:31**. You remember Shamgar. I just preached on this passage a few weeks ago. I love the story of Shamgar. Two sentences. One verse. It's all we know of ol' Shammie but it's enough. Let me read those two sentences once again.

*"After Ehud came Shamgar son of Anath, who struck down six hundred Philistines with an ox goad. He too saved Israel."*

Now, this is a completely different scenario than what Jonah was facing. Shamgar wasn't called to preach against somebody. He was called to kill them. And it wasn't the Assyrians he was facing. It was the Philistines. So, completely different scenario that has nothing to do with Jonah or with us ministering to the poor, the addicted and the incarcerated, right?

Now, do you remember my simple outline for this passage in Judges? Shamgar used what he had...when he had it...right where he was. He used what he had...when he had it...right where he was. God called him – gave Shamgar His vision for what God wanted – and gave Shamgar everything He needed to get the job done. He gave Shamgar an ox goad. He gave him a pointy stick and said, *"Here. Go do the impossible with what you have, while you have it and where you are. And when you do, I'll give you the power, I'll get the glory and you will get the blessings."*

Man! Don't you wish God would do that for us at Christ Fellowship? Don't you wish that God hadn't changed over the years in His old age? Don't you wish He was still all-powerful and all-knowing and all-loving like He used to be? Don't you wish He would empower us and bless us and give us everything we needed to minister to the poor, the addicted and the incarcerated? I mean, especially since that's the vision He has given us!

Isn't that what we are saying when we say we can't help those people? When we say we don't have the resources to help the people God has called us to help, aren't we calling God a liar? Aren't we saying He is wrong? How is that not sin? And if we are sinning, then how can we expect God to bless our efforts?

Now, here is where I think part of the problem is. We have talked before many times about doing things in God's power. We talked for several weeks about *Semper Stantes*, Always Standing and doing it in God's power. That passage in **Ephesians 6** that says we are to put on the full armor of God tells us to be strong in the Lord and in His mighty power. And I believe that y'all believe that. God will give us the power to do what He has called us to do.

The problem is that that does not mean it's going to be easy. The task set before us didn't go from difficult to easy because of God's power. It went from impossible to possible with God's power. It will require effort. It will be difficult. It will cost you money. It will cost you time and it will cost you great effort. But we have to do it. There are no good excuses.

Don't you know Shamgar had some questions for God as he saw that horde of Philistines coming over the hill? *"Uh, excuse me God. Yea, uh, I'm only one guy and all I have is this pointy stick. Are you sure this is what you want me to do? Well, aight then."* And with much effort and almost to the point of losing his life, Shamgar killed 600 Philistines with an ox goad. And do you know who gets the glory for that? Not Shamgar. Everybody for miles around went, *"Wow! Look what **God did** through Shamgar!"*

It's the same for us at Christ Fellowship. Excuses? We have plenty. Not many of us. Nobody is especially wealthy. Nobody especially talented or influential to be able to do what God has called us to do. There are other, bigger, wealthier churches in the area that could do this. But God looks at us and gives us His vision, his revelation, His command and says, *"You are exactly who I want to do this. And I want you to use what you have...while you have it...right where you are. And when you do it, people for miles around will say, "Wow! Look at what **God did** through Christ Fellowship!"*

Now, what does this effort look like for you? Again, we are all tools but we are all different tools and have different gifts. In **1 Corinthians 12**, Paul describes us as different parts of the same body. So, some people will be better at helping the church minister to the poor than they can with the addicted and so on. But everybody can do something. And as this series goes on, we will have different ways that we can all help.

But let me give you one very easy, very inexpensive way that you can make a real difference. I go to the Wise County Jail once a month or so and have a Bible study with some of the inmates. I always tell them that if they will write to me and ask, that I will send them a copy of my sermon every week. And I also try to send them a little something else every now and then. Maybe it's a personal note telling them I'm praying for them or something like that.

Right now there are 34 names on that list. I need 17 people today to agree to writing two people on that list. Just write them a quick note and tell them you are praying for them. And then actually pray for them! Or send them your favorite Bible verse. Whatever. Some of the names on there some of you may know. Maybe not. Doesn't matter. But for the sake

of safety, just use the church's address which is PO Box 645, Chico. Maybe they write back, maybe not.

Yes, some of those people have done horrible things. There are names of murderers, rapists, pedophiles, addicts and thieves. But Jesus died for them too and I don't want them to go to Hell. And many, many of them may be in jail or prison for years and years and never have anybody write to them or show they care. You have the opportunity to make this little easy baby step toward ministering to the poor, the addicted and the incarcerated. Will you do that?

Maybe today you don't have a relationship with God through His Son Jesus. Maybe you know about God but you don't really know Him. All you have to do is admit that you are a sinner in need of a Savior. Then ask for forgiveness of those sins and repent of those sins. Turn away from that lifestyle and ask Jesus to be Lord of your life. He died on the cross to pay the price for your sins that the Father said was due. Now just believe in Him to be your Lord and Savior. Do it right now as the music plays.