



I'm Not Listening: To Flee or Love Thy Neighbor

Devotion

"Now the word of the Lord came to Jonah the son of Amittai, saying, 'Arise, go to Nineveh, that great city, and call out against it, for their evil has come up before me.' But Jonah rose to flee to Tarshish from the presence of the Lord. He went down to Joppa and found a ship going to Tarshish. So he paid the fare and went down into it, to go with them to Tarshish, away from the presence of the Lord." Jonah 1:1-3

What far would you go to get out of something? If you're like the prophet Jonah, you run in the opposite direction you're told to go and try to disappear from the face of the earth. It seems odd that Jonah would have this reaction given what he was asked to do. Jonah, like most of Israel, despised the Ninevites. They were sworn enemies of Israel. You'd think having the chance to go preach against them would be like winning the lottery for a prophet of Israel. Yet he doesn't want to listen to God because he knows there's more to His plan, and it doesn't match the wrath Jonah feels toward Nineveh.

Jonah knows if Nineveh repents, God will relent from the disaster He planned for the city. Jonah was given the opportunity to see hearts changed and a city of Gentiles become faithful to the one true God. After a three-day timeout in the belly of a fish, Jonah goes to Nineveh and delivers the shortest prophetic message ever (it's only eight words). The people repented and believed in God.

God therefore relented from the disaster planned for the city. This sent Jonah over the edge and into a fit. He tells God he ran away because "I knew that you are a gracious God and merciful, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love, and relenting from disaster" (Jonah 4:2). Jonah knew God would honor a repentant heart, even for Israel's enemies, and he hated it.

We can be a lot like Jonah sometimes. We know that we are to love our neighbor, even if we don't like them. The message God has for us, as He did for Jonah, is that He cares for *all* people. He wants to see their hearts turned toward Him so they will receive the blessings of being a child of God. When we're uncertain about God's plan for us to love our neighbor, we go to Scripture and pray to God. He reassures us that His plan can be trusted. His ways and thoughts are higher than ours (Isaiah 55:8-9). This comforts us knowing we don't have to understand everything; we simply move forward in faith and share the Gospel.

God's plan for salvation ENDURED when it was brought to the Gentiles despite an unwilling prophet. Jesus is the ultimate fulfillment of God's salvation plan and greatest demonstration of God's love for all. Jesus' death paid the sins of all people and nations. God gave His best (His Son) that we might receive the best (eternal life).

Today, we are able to ENDURE doubts, fears, confusion, and failures because we know Christ died for us and claims us as His own in baptism. Nothing can undo His sacrifice. We have the honor of serving a God who abounds in love, grace, and mercy. It is our privilege to bring the Gospel and the message of hope to all nations, and the reminder that one day we will be with Him in paradise forever.

Journal Questions

1. What area of your life are you tempted to avoid or run away from right now (a test at school, chores, your job, etc.)? What's causing you to have doubts about that area? How might Scripture reassure you and give you courage?
2. Who is someone God may be calling you to witness to or share the Gospel with? How can our group pray for you and encourage you as you look for an opportunity to speak the truth of Christ in their life?

Prayer

Loving God, we praise you for your boundless love that you show to your people. We pray that we would be encouraged to share the truth of your Gospel with our neighbors, classmates, friends, family, and strangers we meet in everyday life. May our life be a reflection of Jesus' love and obedience to You, that those who see our good deeds would praise You in heaven. In Jesus' name, Amen.