ANSWERING GOD’S CALL

**THE LIFE STORY OF JONAH**

***Written By: Tommy Romans March 2021***

In this Newsletter, we are going to look deep into the heart and life of God’s prophet Jonah, but before we do, we may ask ourselves the question – does it pay to obey and serve the Lord? Yes! If we answer when God calls and do His bidding, we will be blessed, our families and those around us will be blessed and benefit from our obedience to God. We must assuredly know that when the Lord calls us and we give Him our hearts and lives, we must obey Him in everything He tells and shows us!! There are dangers and great perils in life when we go away from Him. To be disobedient and out of the Lord’s will is the most fearful, uncertain and unsafest place to be! That’s one thing for sure you don’t want and you cannot afford!!

 You might say – “How do I know if I am in God’s divine will and pleasing to Him?” There will be a peace down deep in your heart! You will have an inward confidence and blessed assurance deep inside that you know everything is alright with your soul. You will have the witness in your life as you walk in God’s will that He is nigh and is with you. The Spirit of the Lord will witness to you in different ways. You will see His hand move for you in your life, making ways and supplying needs. The Holy Ghost will bless your soul! He’ll answer prayers and prove Himself to you & you’ll see others touched, saved and blessed in your obedience!!

 We are going to go into the life of Jonah and watch him learn the greatest lesson he ever learned in his whole life and he learned it the hard way! How many of you know that we learn by experience? Believe me, when we disobey the Lord and get out of His will, we along with Jonah will find ourselves at the mercy of the elements and they can be cruel, you sure can be cast overboard in life and sink to the bottom! **Jer. 2:19** – Thine own wickedness shall correct thee, and thy backslidings shall reprove thee: know therefore and see that it is an evil thing and bitter, that thou hast forsaken the Lord thy God, and that my fear is not in thee, saith the Lord God of hosts. **Experience** sometimes is our best teacher. Even a child learns not to do certain things because it hurts and causes pain.

 This preacher can tell you that sometimes we learn the hard way. The Lord never wants to harm us, that’s never His intention. But He lets us learn our lessons. He wants us saved, safe and blessed. He wants it well with our soul both here and hereafter. So many times we harm ourselves and cause our own hardships and problems and have our own selves to blame. In my almost 47 years of serving God, I have learned many important lessons. Wisdom for me came the hard way at times but I have learned the voice of the Lord and it has saved me from many pitfalls and messes. When I first came to Jesus and gave Him my heart to serve, I’ve had my ups and downs. There have been times that I was self-willed and wanted to do things my way and I missed the Lord and got out of His will and I sure suffered for it! I know what it’s like to fail and have the Lord to reprove and correct me with His chastening, and O how it hurts! But I thank God that He did it because He loved me and brought me back to Him. I don’t think there’s any of God’s children who have not messed up and missed it since they’ve started on their spiritual journey to Heaven. **Micah 7:8** – Rejoice not against me O mine enemy: when I fall, I shall arise. There’ll be times you will fall, get bruised and scuffed up, but get back up and dust yourself off and go on with the Lord! Don’t let the devil keep beating you down over it. God forgives, He restores and reinstates. He still shows mercy when we need it. He doesn’t give up on us when He knows we have a heart to serve Him. He will deal with us and show us things in our life that we need to do and to change to make us better.

GOD’S CALL COMES TO JONAH

**Jonah 1:1** ¶ Now the word of the LORD came unto Jonah the son of Amittai, saying,

 **2** Arise, go to Nineveh, that great city, and cry against it; for their wickedness is come up before me.

 **3** But Jonah rose up to flee unto Tarshish from the presence of the LORD, and went down to Joppa; and he found a ship going to Tarshish: so he paid the fare thereof, and went down into it, to go with them unto Tarshish from the presence of the LORD.

 **4** ¶ But the LORD **sent** out a great wind into the sea, and there was a mighty tempest in the sea, so that the ship was like to be broken.

 **5** Then the mariners were afraid, and cried every man unto his god, and cast forth the wares that were in the ship into the sea, to lighten it of them. But Jonah was gone down into the sides of the ship; and he lay, and was fast asleep.

 **6** So the shipmaster came to him, and said unto him, What meanest thou, O sleeper? arise, call upon thy God, if so be that God will think upon us, that we perish not.

 Listen, if you ever get a call from God, answer the phone! The Lord is wanting to talk to you! Ring\*\* Ring\*\* - Hello! Who is it? This is the Lord! I can tell you, if you ever get a call from the God of this universe, you better answer the phone in your heart – your Maker is calling you and it’s one call you don’t ever want to miss! My wife has told me many times, hurry and answer the phone before they hang up! When the Lord calls you, that means He wants you for a reason, don’t let it slip you by. He’s interested in you, He’s got something for you. God wants to talk to you personally and give you good things, good instructions and directions. When the Lord speaks, He speaks directly to your heart.

 God was telling Jonah – I’ve got a work for you to do and a place for you to go to do my will, but Jonah rose up to flee to Tarshish from the presence of the Lord. Three times in the above scriptures Jonah went down. When you go away from the Call of God, your road will go down!

Do you know why Jonah would not go to the city of Nineveh to take God’s message of mercy and preach to the people to get them saved? It was because they were an evil, cruel and barbaric people that liked to fight and war and Israel, God’s children, hated these people and were afraid of them. Jonah wanted God to destroy them. It is estimated there were (1,000,000) one million people living in Nineveh. It was the largest city in the world at that time. Their city was prosperous, it was fortified with a tall wall that reached 50 miles around it. The wall was so wide, wide enough history says, that you could ride 3 chariots abreast, side by side on the top of it. Stand on one side and look across the city, it would reach 20 miles to the other side. Yes, they were very prosperous, but within their gates lived a people, hundreds of thousands of precious souls that were lost! Destruction was at their doorstep - they didn’t know God, and they were all headed to Hell! O Jonah, where is your burden? Don’t you know God’s heart?

In essence Jonah was saying – God, I don’t want to go. I don’t like those people, they’re no good, they’re not worthy – go ahead and send judgment. Israel is your people, so let those bad people die. Why would you call and send me to that evil nation? Do you know what God’s answer was to Jonah? At the end of the book, the Lord tells Jonah – “There are a 120,000 in that city that can’t discern between their right hand and their left!” You don’t see them like I see them Jonah! You see them as no good and not worth saving, but I look down in their hearts and I see One hundred and twenty thousand precious innocent souls of children that don’t even understand or know me. These people don’t realize they are headed into eternity lost. I want to Save them. I’ll show them Mercy if you’ll go and tell them and warn them. If you’ll take my message of warning to them, they’ll repent of their evil – so, Go Jonah, go now before it’s too late!

How stubborn and self-willed can a person be? Jonah thought if he could run fast enough and far enough away from God, he’d get away from the Call and he wouldn’t have to worry about it anymore. Wrong!! From where Jonah was when God called him that day at Joppa in Israel to Nineveh was 500 miles distance. But, instead of boarding a ship and heading northeast to the city of Nineveh – Jonah set off on a voyage to Tarshish which is 2500 miles in the complete opposite direction, which was 5 times farther away! It was the most western point in the known world from Nineveh in the east. Tarshish was located in what is modern day Spain today.

How far will you go soul of man, from the presence of God? What is your reason for not obeying Him? You could have a dozen excuses! What is the thing holding you back? How far will you run away from God’s Call? Your only safety and security is being obedient to the Spirit of the Lord when He speaks and deals with your soul. When you miss the call, you’re out of God’s divine will and surely outside the ark of safety! There’ll be no peace in your heart when you’re away from your Saviour. Nothing will go right. Believe me, you’ll put your money into bags with holes in it. Everything in your life and around you will go wrong, break down and fall apart.

Jonah heads down to the seaport and finds a Ship loaded with cargo heading to Tarshish. He pays his fare and gets on board. Don’t forget, there’s no free rides on the devil’s fairgrounds. This one will cost the prophet more than he could ever pay and will be a ride to Hell and back that he will NEVER FORGET! When the sailors untied the ropes from the dock, Jonah started his journey down – it’s down from here on preacher and minister! He went down into the bottom of the ship and went fast asleep – a sound sleep! All seemed fine as the land faded from view. Out into the middle of the deep waters of the Mediterranean Sea, there’s a ship with a disobedient prophet on board, running from the Lord. The Lord looks toward Nineveh and sees lost souls groping in sin on their way to Hell and He looks back to the ship heading in the opposite direction with a man trying to sleep off the gnawing feeling of conviction to go testify and preach! Look out soul, your sleep is about to be interrupted. God wants you to know, He will get your attention one way or another, but what will it take? How bad does it have to get before people will answer the Call? You may not be called to preach or Minister, but know this one thing, if God draws you and calls you to be a Christian and serve Him – you must answer and obey!! There are people right now who would not answer and their lives, families and homes are broken and they have suffered losses and continual troubles and heartaches. Beware soul of man when God warns and Calls! Don’t ever forget, the best, safest and most peaceful place to be is in the Lord’s presence serving Him.

 O Jonah, it’s come time to wake up! God sends out a Great Wind into the sea and there’s a mighty tempest so bad that it looked like the ship would break apart and go down. The mariners were so afraid that they cast their cargo overboard to lighten the ship. Do you know what is one of the saddest parts to this story? The ships poor Captain and his innocent sailors were caught in the middle of Jonah’s storm. It wasn’t their fault they were suffering. When we get out of God’s will and disobey, we bring hardships and suffering to our family and those around us – they hurt because of us.

 The shipmaster wakes Jonah up to pray to God for mercy on them all. He’s so far out of it in his slumber that he’s oblivious to the trouble around him. He doesn’t even realize that 6” below the planks of wood where his head is laying, a monster of the deep is lurking and keeping pace, a whale that’s as long and big as the ship is right beneath him just waiting. All Jonah would have had to do is tell the Captain to turn the ship around and take him back – “Sir, I’ve got to obey God and go to Nineveh and preach and then this storm will cease and all will be calm and peaceful.” How far will you go soul of man and How stubborn and self-willed will you be before you answer God’s divine call?

 Jonah confesses and tells them that it’s his fault the storm is raging. I’m sorry for your trouble and suffering on this ship, I’m out of my Lord’s will – just throw me overboard and the winds will stop. Isn’t it amazing and shocking there’s nothing that shakes some people? They go from disaster to disaster – from heartache to tragedy and it doesn’t persuade them to turn and serve God! Stubborn pride will be the downfall of many souls in this life and they will meet with unpleasant and premature deaths, but worse yet, they will live out their lives in vain and face God with an unanswered Call!! OH GOD! Unfulfilled lives and ministries that could have touched and brought peace and blessings for themselves and many around them, but all is now lost and can’t be recalled. Standing before God empty is the most fearful thing there will ever be in your life as you face eternity! OH GOD!

JONAH IS THROWN OVERBOARD

 The innocent mariners tried desperately to bring their ship under control but could not. As a last resort to keep from sinking, they picked Jonah up and threw him overboard into the angry sea. I just can’t imagine anyone willing to drown and die to have their own way to keep from obeying the Lord! Jonah no more than hit the water till a huge whale that God had prepared swallowed him alive. (O backslider, God prepares many things to awaken your hardened conscience and persuade you to do what He wants you to do. The farther away from the Lord you go, the harder and bigger your troubles get!! The Lord sometimes lets you stare death in the face to instill the fear of God in your soul so you will cry for mercy!)

A TASTE OF HELL

 **Here’s Jonah’s testimony** to describe what he felt when the whale swallowed him up “Thou hast cast me into the deep, in the midst of the seas; and the floods compassed me about: all thy billows and thy waves passed over me, then I said – I am cast out of thy sight; yet will I look again toward thy holy temple. The waters compassed me about, even to the soul: the depth closed me round about, the weeds were wrapped about my head. I went down to the bottoms of the mountains; the earth with her bars was about me forever. They that observe lying vanities forsake their own mercy. (*It was my fault and selfish pride that I went away from you O God*). When my soul fainted within me, I remembered the Lord and my prayer came in unto thee, into thy holy temple.” Then Jonah prayed unto the Lord his God out of the fish’s belly, and said – “I cried by reason of mine affliction unto the Lord, and He heard me; out of the belly of Hell cried I and thou heardst my voice. I will sacrifice unto thee with the voice of thanksgiving; I will pay that that I have vowed – Salvation is of the Lord.” (*I’ll go now and obey O Lord, if you will deliver me and give me one more chance!*) And then the Lord spake unto the fish, and it vomited out Jonah upon dry land!

 This is a child’s story they teach in Sunday school, but O how real and true. Many will tell you that this story could not and did not happen, that a whale cannot swallow a man, **but** a giant sperm whale that could have swallowed a man is exhibited in the Smithsonian Institute in Washington DC. Captured off Knights Key, Florida in 1912. This whale is 45 feet long, has a mouth 38” wide and weighs 30,000 pounds. A fish that was found in its stomach when it was captured, weighed 1500 lbs. Numerous stories of men being swallowed alive by whales and surviving the ordeal have been validated. In Feb. 1891 the crew of a whaling ship “Star of the East” sighted a large sperm whale and harpooned it. In its death throes, it swallowed a man named James Bartley who fell overboard. A day and a half later his shipmates who thought he had drowned found him unconscious in the whale’s belly. Bartley lived to tell about it and his story was published in the newspapers. Describing his sensations as he slid into the innermost part of the whale, he said he could breathe easily but the heat was unbearable, his whole appearance was changed. His neck, face, and hands which had been exposed to the whale’s gastric juices were permanently bleached to a livid whiteness. Jonah was in the prison of Hell for 3 days and 3 nights.

Jesus referred to Jonah’s ordeal as a type of His death, burial and resurrection; for Jesus said in Matt. 12:40 – For as Jonas was 3 days and 3 nights in the whale’s belly, so must the Son of Man be 3 days and 3 nights in the heart of the earth.

O THE MERCY OF GOD!

HIS DIVINE PERSUASIONS

 The founder of the Salvation Army, General Booth, said: “I wish all my soldiers could be hung over the pits of Hell for an hour so that they could see the torments of the damned, so they might have a greater zeal for the salvation of men.” God gave Jonah a taste of it! There’s no greater horror that you could ever feel than to experience the cold numbing fear that would sweep over your soul to know you missed and rejected the Lord’s call and ended up in Hell and know you can never get out. Minus the torment of Hells flames, just the dread, the fear and panic of hopelessness that will weigh heavy on your soul throughout eternity will be more than you could ever bear!! No wonder Jesus said there would weeping and wailing and gnashing of teeth – the weeping & wailing because you missed your opportunity and you’re shut out forever from God’s presence where not one little hint of light or love can ever shine through – Grace is forever gone – you’ll never hear the Lord’s voice again or feel His merciful hand touching your heart!! O GOD! Hell is a place where the worm (soul of man) dieth not, there’ll be gnashing of teeth from the unquenchable fire and the smoke of the torments of the damned as the flames of Hell ascends up forever and ever. Hell was never made for man – it was made for the devil and his demons!

 You better go Jonah! You’d better hurry and make up your mind to serve the Lord fast – your time is running out, so is your lost family & the sinners all around you. It will be now or never! Answer the Spirit’s Call. Today is the day of Salvation – harden not your heart! It’s too late to lay down to go to sleep now on the brink of eternity!

The Bible says in Jonah 3 – And the Word of the Lord came unto Jonah the second time, saying – Arise and go to Nineveh and preach unto it what I bid thee. Then Jonah arose and went to Nineveh. I don’t know but it could have been that the mariners of the ship told the story to the crew of another cargo ship heading to Nineveh about a man named Jonah who told them that he was a backslider running from God and how they threw him overboard to calm a raging storm and they saw a giant Fish swallow him up. No doubt that story could have been published and told throughout the streets of Nineveh. So, when Jonah shows up entering their gate crying Repent, Repent – they saw the white face and hands of a man bleached out and it was as if someone had risen from the dead! The fear of Almighty God struck through their hearts!

The whole city of multiplied thousands believed the message and turned to God. They were persuaded from a man who had been to Hell and back and carried the witness in his body and soul!! This is the greatest revival ever recorded in the Bible! From the king on his throne to every man, woman and young person fasted and prayed in sackcloth and ashes. They cried for mercy, repented and turned from their evil ways and God heard and saved them!

Oh Jonah, you just about lost out, so did the precious souls of Nineveh in your day! O God, the scary thought of not being where God wants us and doing His Will! As I close this Newsletter, we can’t afford to miss the Lord’s call and the precious souls around us suffering and being lost! O God, help us – Jesus is coming, souls are crying, men are dying, won’t you win them to the cross! Jesus is calling – can you hear Him? Where are all my disheartened Jonahs? Listen, when God really touches us and we are persuaded, then it will touch others. They will never be persuaded until we are!! Get ready Church, I believe Revival is coming!! The Spirit of God is moving and going to move even GREATER – He’s calling all His children and ministers right now to arise, Rise up. Get ready - souls are going to come to the Lord and the backsliders are going to return and be restored!! God is calling - It’s time to MOVE!! May God Bless all my readers!