

Jonah Warned of God's Judgment

If we spend time contemplating what it means to belong to Jesus, the reality is a mystery. How can we who are sinners be forgiven and redeemed? The more we recognize the depth and darkness of our own sin, the greater we understand the magnitude of God's gift to us: Through His Son, He reached down to display His great love and mercy. Because of Jesus' wounds, we can have full and forever forgiveness.

The Book of Jonah demonstrates this powerful truth on at least two occasions. One is highlighted in Jonah's prayer in the midst of his desperation. After running from God and being hurled into the sea, fully expecting to die at the bottom of the ocean, Jonah is swept up and swallowed by a great fish. It is from there that he cries out, "I called to the LORD in my distress, and he answered me" (Jonah 2:2). Jonah, knowing the extent of his own sin and the issue of his own disobedience, cries out in desperation to the Father and finds great comfort in a loving God receiving His desperate plea.

Later, in Jonah 3, we find a similar movement of God's reaching down and bringing about repentance among the people of Nineveh. In His grace, He relented from the looming punishment they deserved in light of their change of heart.

In both instances, the mercy and grace of God to withhold punishment due to vile sinners brought hope, and this hope ought to be ours today as well.

Isaiah 59:1 says, "Indeed, the LORD's arm is not too weak to save, and his ear is not too deaf to hear."

Though much has changed in our world since Jonah's day, the Lord has not changed. He is not too weak nor too distant to save. No matter how far you or someone you know has strayed, no matter how distant the Lord might feel, His arm is not too short to save. His love can reach down to even the darkest and vilest of all sinners. Praise be to God.

Nahum Warned of God's Judgment

Our hyper-vigilant culture is full of warnings: warnings of what will happen if you take certain medicines, warnings not to use forbidden words in particular places, authoritative warnings against actions deemed inappropriate or illegal, and many more.

Though at times these warnings may feel harsh, unnecessary, or far too limiting, they exist to guide people to right decisions that are often best for them and the people around them.

The same is true with the warnings we find in the Bible, both those directed toward people in a particular place at a particular time and those generally made for all readers of all times. They exist as God's reminder to us of what is ultimately for our good.

The warnings of Nahum fit this bill as well. These warnings come as stern and even harsh language through the prophet, intended to wake up a group of spiritually sleepy people who had again turned to their wicked ways. Nahum warned of a coming judgment and painful punishment. He warned of devastation and destruction as a consequence for sin.

Yet, these warnings stood as God's gracious gift to rebellious people. Through the prophet Nahum, God told these people of His holiness, their sin, His pending consequences, and the urgency with which they ought to take heed to these warnings.

I can imagine that these people could have received these in much the same way that we often receive warnings today: frustrations with the limitations, severity, and apparent inconvenience they present; however, as we see throughout the pages of Scripture, these warnings serve as an invitation to people far from God to turn to Him for hope, joy, and peace that can only be found by His grace.

The next time you read the warnings of Scripture, celebrate the hope they bring as they demonstrate His good grace to show us a better way, the way to Him. Remember, God doesn't desire devastation but true repentance that results in ultimate deliverance.

God's People Were Taken Captive

Throughout 2 Chronicles 36, it is easy to see that God is the one who raises up and removes kings and rulers and all who are in authority. But this reality can sometimes shake us in profound ways. It may cause us to ask why. This question is fair considering that we often see rulers who don't love God making decisions that display their lack of belief in God, and it is hard to imagine that God is the One who placed them in leadership.

Why would God allow bad leaders to be in charge? This is a tough question, but Scripture speaks to it in several ways. For one, Romans 13:1-2 remind us to submit to those in authority since they are instituted by God himself. Therefore, to resist authority is to oppose the commands of God, so long as the authority doesn't demand disobedience to God.

Another place we see this principle play out in Scripture is with Daniel. We find Daniel rebelling against the king's demand to worship something other than God. But we also find Daniel willfully subjecting himself to the king's leadership in other circumstances that do not demand his disobedience. Further, we find Daniel actually praying to God and confessing that He is the One who changes brings about the rise and fall of leaders.

Daniel 2:21 says, "He changes the times and seasons; he removes kings and establishes kings. He gives wisdom to the wise and knowledge to those who have understanding."

The Bible teaches us that God stands sovereign over all things, even the rise and fall of leaders. That includes the most godly of leaders and even those that are most opposed to the things of God. The Lord, in His good purposes may be seeking to wake us up, bring consequence, or refine His people, but His purposes are always good.

God is always working in all times and seasons. And though we may wonder about His purposes in certain circumstances, we can trust that they are always ultimately for His glory and our good, even when that is hard to understand or believe.

Every Person Matters

From the garden of Eden to the great restoration of the last days, men and women have attempted to hide themselves from God, seeking safety and avoidance of the consequences of sin due to those who think, speak, and act contrary to God's good design.

We first find this in the garden following the initial sin of Adam and Eve. After seeking their own pleasure, satisfaction, and authority, they felt the onset of conviction over their sin. Their solution to this sense of wrongdoing was to hide from the One who made them, loved them, and had given them the instructions they rebelled against. No surprise to us, God knew where they were. He drew them out of their hiding and confronted them in their attempts to hide their sin.

Even in the last days, this effort to hide from God won't be successful. In Revelation 6 as the seals are being opened, verse 15 speaks of kings, nobles, generals, rich, powerful, slaves, and free people hiding in caves and among the rocks as the wrath of God for sin becomes more and more imminent. In an effort to hide from the God, they run for cover hoping they can escape the looming punishment. In the subsequent chapters of this apocalyptic letter, that coming wrath is revealed against the ungodly and their hiding proves to be to no avail.

Reading these accounts of people seeking to hide from God brings to light at least two very important truths. First, we cannot hide from God. There is nowhere we can go in His creation that He will not be aware of. Second, God knows not just where we are, but every other detail of who we are as well.

In light of this, Psalm 139 provides the most freeing of assurances to our failed attempts to hide, giving the reader a beautiful understanding of the sovereignty of God and the value of every human life. Not only is there no where we can go to hide from God, but every other detail of our lives is known to Him, and even determined and directed by Him.

The next time you are tempted to hide from God because of sin, guilt, or shame, remember these central truths. There is nowhere you can go to flee from God. He knows you better than you know yourself. And He wants you to accept that, willingly confess your sin to Him, and trust that He is gracious and merciful to forgive His children because of His Son, Jesus.

Jeremiah Encouraged God's People

God's Word is living, active, sharp, powerful, and profitable. (Heb. 4:12; 2 Tim. 3:16-17) The Bible indicates that by the power of the Holy Spirit, God's words teach, rebuke, correct, and train us so that we are fully put together for the work that God has created us for. The Bible is full of stories, illustrations, commands, warnings, and heart-provoking questions that provide for us everything we need.

Yet, throughout our lives, we intentionally disregard God's words for us. We are guilty of the same thing that Jeremiah 29:19 describes—not listening to God's words.

When we know God's words and know that God's words are good for us, why do we continuously neglect them? The answer is simple: we prefer our own way.

Throughout the Bible, God warns us by direct command and historical example. We find explicit instructions to obey God's words and explicit assurances of the pending consequences for refusing to obey His words. We find instances where God executes His justice on those unknowingly ignorant toward His instructions and those blatantly defiant toward Him.

God takes His words seriously and expects that we do the same.

What is your relationship to God's words given to us in the Bible? Are you distant, aware, knowledgeable, or in awe? Are you dismissive, forgetful, interested, or obedient? God's expectation is that we would hear and obey His words, that we would seek His truth and live His truth, and that we would know His instructions and heed them.

The reality is that we all will fail to do this, but there is hope because of the One who has the title "The Word." Jesus, the living Word of God, lived a perfect life in full obedience to God and His words, yet He died the death that we deserve so that in our failure, we might find hope.

The answer to our struggle to listen and obey God's words is not better listening, but a greater love of God, a greater hope in His Son, and a greater trust in His Spirit. His expectations are great, but His mercy is more.

Daniel Was Faithful

I'm sure you've been there: That moment of decision when you weigh the risk versus the reward or the cost versus the benefit to determine what you will do.

These moments may come in regard to something simple like whether to eat one more helping of mashed potatoes, if it is worth it to take a detour to try and avoid traffic on your way to the grocery store, or if it is the right time to buy that new pair of shoes.

We may also face moments of discernment on much more significant questions: Do you take the new job opportunity that would relocate you and your family? Should you laugh at a colleague's derogatory joke? Should you obey God even if it is costly or uncommon among the culture?

These major points of decision require a degree of confidence and conviction. The question is not if we have confidence or conviction, but what our confidence is in and where our conviction comes from.

In Daniel 1, Daniel has a deep confidence in the Lord and a conviction derived from the same. Psalm 71:4-5 models the pattern that I imagine Daniel progressed through in determining what to do in this moment of decision: "Deliver me, my God, from the power of the wicked, from the grasp of the unjust and oppressive. For you are my hope, Lord GOD, my confidence from my youth."

The psalmist displays a deep confidence in the Lord to rescue and a deep conviction to remain hopeful and faithful. This confidence and conviction propel him toward a God-honoring response to his circumstances and direction in his decision making.

May this be our mode of decision making as well in all things, where our confidence in the Lord propels us forward and our conviction from the Lord steers our direction for His glory and our joy.

Daniel Served God

Daniel 5 contains several notable instances that are reasons to stop, pray, and consider our own lives. One of the most perplexing questions is derived from the words of the queen who entered the scene following Belshazzar's inability to make sense of the writing inscribed on the wall by an unfamiliar hand.

Following the mysterious inscription, the king called in those who would have been culturally identified as experts at explaining and creating the unseen. To Belshazzar's disappointment, none of them could explain the inscription or its meaning.

Then the queen stepped in with a brilliant thought, derived from past experiences. She recommended Daniel, a man who formerly had profound influence and insight and provided this type of help to the previous king—Belshazzar's own relative, Nebuchadnezzar.

Consider the personal challenge that arises at the mention of Daniel's name. It was Daniel's past faithfulness that opened the door for present opportunity. And the natural question that flows from this realization is this: Does my faithfulness today lay the groundwork for future opportunities?

In Matthew 5:13-16, Jesus described His followers as the "salt of the earth" and the "light of the world." These descriptions of the people of God lend themselves to cultural influence that shows the power, mercy, grace, and goodness of God. And this type of influence always leaves a mark. In Daniel's case, the mark was so significant that gave greater influence to his witness.

We can't undo the past, but we can be decisively committed to the next step, the next moment, and the next opportunity. What if you committed to faithfulness one day at a time? And what if your faithfulness marked the people around you in significant ways? Then I would imagine that your faithfulness will lead to future opportunities for greater influence.

Don't waste today. Be faithful to your purpose to live as the salt of the earth and the light of the world. And God will use you today and, Lord willing, multiply your efforts and opportunities tomorrow.

God Is Present with Us

Have you ever heard someone say something along the lines of, “God’s promise of the future should give you hope today”? Maybe you’ve heard it dozens of times or said it just as many. In part, this saying stands because we believe the Bible teaches this principle; however, at the gut level, this idea can be challenging to hear and believe.

In Isaiah 7, God reminded Ahaz through the prophet Isaiah that he had ample reason to trust God. The evidence? A future promise. In a moment where it would have made sense to the human mind to reference a past experience or previous fulfillment, God chose to offer hope with a word about something that had not yet happened.

That future promise was the incarnation of Jesus Christ. God promised Christmas would come in order to encourage Ahaz to trust the Lord in that moment.

In hindsight, it is easy for us to read this and understand that God was forecasting a promise that we know He would ultimately keep. However, at the moment, this must have been perplexing to hear.

When we make our way through the New Testament and discover some of the beautiful and hopeful promises of the second return of Christ, the eternal joy of God’s people, and the faithfulness of God through trial and tribulation, we too might be tempted to wonder if it will actually happen.

Numbers 23:19 says, “God is not a man, that he might lie, or a son of man, that he might change his mind. Does he speak and not act, or promise and not fulfill?” God is faithful. We can look to the past and find a record of this truth, which means we can look to the future with continued confidence. God is not a liar.

Though not overt, our faithlessness in the face of His future promises suggest that we at least think there may be a chance that He is not always true to His Word and faithful to fulfill His promises. Yet He will not waver, and we can set our faith in that.

Yes, be thankful for God’s faithfulness in the past, but also be confident in His future promises. God is present with us. He will not change His mind, His character, or His Word.