

The Book of Jonah: A Quirky, Short but Powerful Story

Introduction to Jonah

- **Unique Focus:** Jonah's story is not centered on his preaching but on him as a character.
- **Not a Hero:** Jonah is not presented as a great spiritual hero but as a compromised figure, which allows us to learn how to relate to God.

Jonah's Call and Rebellion

- **God's Voice:** Jonah hears the voice of God, like Abraham and other figures, but the voice is challenging, calling him to confront Nineveh, the enemy of Israel.
- **Jonah's Reaction:** Jonah flees in the opposite direction, showing human resistance to God's disruptive voice, which is often channeled through conscience.

The Flight and the Storm

- **Resistance to God:** Jonah's attempt to flee results in a storm, showing that resisting God's will brings chaos, not just for Jonah but for others around him.
- **Spiritual Physics:** Just as Adam and Eve's rebellion led from the garden to the desert, Jonah's disobedience leads to storms.

Jonah's Impact on Others

- **Interconnectedness:** Jonah's resistance affects others, reflecting how our spiritual decisions influence those around us.
- **Jonah Takes Responsibility:** Jonah admits his fault, and after being thrown overboard, the storm calms.

The Great Fish and Jonah's Transformation

- **The Fish:** Jonah is swallowed by a great fish, symbolizing how his rebellious will must be confined and corrected. This restriction of his freedom is actually what sets him free to follow God's will.
- **A Prayer of Despair:** Jonah prays honestly from the belly of the fish, expressing his distress but placing it in God's presence. This prayer represents turning suffering into a moment of reconnection with God.

Jonah's Return to God's Path

- **God's Mercy:** After Jonah's repentance, the fish spews him out where God wants him to be, showing that God's plan will bring us to the right place, even through suffering.
- **Jonah's Sermon:** Jonah finally delivers a short sermon to Nineveh, leading to the city's repentance, showing the immense power of aligning with God's will.

Jonah's Frustration with God's Mercy

- **Unexpected Reaction:** Instead of rejoicing, Jonah is angry that God is merciful to Nineveh. He wanted punishment for the enemies of Israel.
- **Jonah's Reluctance:** Jonah reveals that he fled because he knew God would be merciful, and this frustrated his desire for judgment against Nineveh.
- **The Lesson:** Jonah's story highlights the challenge of accepting God's universal mercy, even toward our enemies.

The Deeper Spiritual Meaning

- **Jonah's Story and Us:** Jonah's struggle reflects the common human resistance to God's mercy, especially when we want judgment instead of forgiveness.
- **God's Universal Love:** Jonah's frustration serves as a judgment on all of us who struggle to accept the depth of God's love, which extends even to those we consider enemies.

Jonah in Literature

- **Moby Dick:** Melville's novel offers one of the best sermons on Jonah, exploring its deep spiritual truths.

Transition to the New Testament: Preparing the Ground

The Importance of the Old Testament

- **Understanding Jesus:** To understand Jesus fully, we must understand the Old Testament. The Old and New Testaments are deeply connected, and God speaks through both.
- **Rejecting Marcionism:** The early Church rejected Marcionism, which proposed separating the Old Testament from the New. The Church affirmed that the same God is present in both.

Israel's Institutions and Messianic Longing

- **Covenant and Torah:** The institutions of Israel (Torah, covenant, Temple, prophecy) were meant to reconcile divinity and humanity.
- **Messianic Hope:** Over time, Israel began to long for a new David, a Messiah, who would fulfill these promises and bring God's full presence to His people.

The Dual Expectation

- **Human and Divine Messiah:** The Old Testament anticipates both a human figure (the new David) and God Himself coming to shepherd His people.

Jesus as the Fulfillment of the Old Testament

Jesus: Son of David and God Incarnate

- **Davidic Lineage:** The New Testament presents Jesus as the son of David, fulfilling the messianic expectations.
- **Divine Identity:** Jesus is also revealed as God incarnate, not just another prophet but the God of Israel in human form.

High Christology in the Gospels

- **Forgiveness of Sins:** Jesus forgives sins, an act reserved for God alone, revealing His divine authority.
- **Authority Over the Torah:** Jesus teaches with authority, saying, "But I say to you," placing Himself above even the Torah.
- **Lord of the Sabbath:** Jesus declares Himself the Lord of the Sabbath, a claim to divinity.

Theological Clarification: The Nature of Christ

Early Christological Debates

- **Monophysitism:** This view held that Jesus was only divine, with His humanity being an afterthought.
- **Nestorianism:** Nestorius viewed Jesus as a super-saint, a human with a special relationship with God.
- **Arianism:** Arius argued that Jesus was a demi-god, not fully divine but a high creature of God.

The Council of Chalcedon (451 AD)

- **Two Natures in One Person:** Chalcedon affirmed that Jesus is fully divine and fully human, two natures united without confusion or mixing.

The Burning Bush Analogy

- **Divinity and Humanity:** Just as the burning bush was on fire but not consumed, Jesus' humanity is fully present and elevated by His divinity without being destroyed.

The Christmas Story: A Subversive Tale

The Birth of Jesus

- **Contrasting Kingship:** Luke contrasts the power of Caesar Augustus with the humble birth of Jesus in a manger, showing that true kingship is found in weakness and vulnerability.
- **The Shepherds:** Lowly shepherds receive the announcement of Jesus' birth, symbolizing God's preference for the humble and lowly.

The Army of Angels

- **Heavenly Host:** An army of angels announces Jesus' birth, signaling that true power belongs to God, not the worldly rulers like Caesar.

The Battle Between Two Visions

Jesus and the World's Opposition

- **Clandestine Arrival:** C.S. Lewis describes Jesus' entry into the world as a clandestine mission, slipping behind enemy lines to confront the powers of the world.
- **Herod's Reaction:** The birth of Jesus causes fear and violence from Herod, representing the world's opposition to God's plan.

The Climax: The Cross

- **The Ultimate Battle:** The conflict between the world's powers and Jesus' mission culminates in the cross, the supreme battle where divinity and humanity fully confront evil.

Conclusion

- **Subversive Christmas:** The Christmas story is not merely sentimental; it sets the stage for the battle between worldly power and the divine mission of love and salvation that Jesus brings.