

Jonah's Tree

“Ordinary Object, Extraordinary Meanings”



“Jesus replied: ‘Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.’ This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: ‘Love your neighbor as yourself.’”

Matthew 22:37-39

What did Jonah have to do with a tree? Wasn't he the one in the fish? Yes, and I wonder why God chose Johan anyway! Jonah seemed to be an unhappy man. Surely there was someone who was willing to go to Nineveh that wouldn't have caused so much grief to everyone. But God chooses those that can do the job. They may not be the best dressed or best educated people. It may be the gardener or the factory worker or the president of the bank. God can see possibilities in us that other people cannot see. God chooses us every day, but we sometimes rebel like Jonah. There is a lot more to the story of Jonah than the big fish.

Jonah was called by God to go to Nineveh to preach and save the people because Nineveh was in very bad shape and God threatened to destroy everyone there. Jonah didn't like the people of Nineveh. They weren't his type of people. He was an Israelite and the people of Nineveh were his enemies. He decided to leave town. After all, God wouldn't find him if he left home. He took a ship to Tarshish.

God had plans for Jonah and God didn't give up. God caused a storm on the sea that threatened the people on the boat to Tarshish. Jonah's presence was the problem. Eventually they cast lots and threw him overboard into the sea so they could travel safely. But God was there also and saved him from the sea by providing a fish big enough for him to live in for three days until he realized he needed to do what God had asked in the first place!

As soon as Jonah was out of the fish, he went to Nineveh. He preached to the people and they listened, even the king. One would have thought that Jonah would have been happy. He had been rescued by God by a big fish and then put on dry land. He did God's will and the people had repented and everything was great. God changed His mind and decided not to destroy the people because they had changed their ways, even the king.

But Jonah was still not happy. He still disliked those people. He had done what God had told him to do but he had not done it in love. He didn't want the people of Nineveh to be saved from destruction. He wanted them destroyed.

What about that tree? Jonah went outside the town and sulked! He found a shady place to rest. Jonah doesn't understand why God changed His mind and saved these people he didn't like.

As Jonah sat there sulking and watching to see what would happen to the people of Nineveh, God had provided a shade tree to keep him out of the scorching sun. He was happy for the tree, but he wanted to see the people of Nineveh destroyed.

The next day, God sent a worm to bore a hole in the shade tree God had provided and it died. Now Jonah was angry again. God asked him why he was angry about the tree dying. Jonah replied "And I'm so angry I wish I were dead." Jonah 4:9

Jonah had a temper and didn't mind letting everyone know about it including God! God responded to him "You have been concerned about this plant, though you did not tend it or make it grow. It sprang up overnight and died overnight. And should I not have concern for the great city of Nineveh, in which there are more than a hundred and twenty thousand people." Jonah 4:10-11

Jonah's concern was about Jonah. God had provided so much for Jonah. He provides so much for us, and often times we respond in anger just like Jonah. How often do we sulk? How often do we seek shelter in the shade of a tree from the sun or how often do we go another direction when we know what we should do.

God doesn't provide a fish for us or a shade tree. Or does He? We often pout in our own way or grumble because things aren't going the way we want them to go. God is still there. He still provides for us. His love never fails. Just because we don't like someone, does not mean that God doesn't love them just as He loves us. That is a hard lesson for us to learn sometimes. It is very hard to love a neighbor some times. Do we stop to realize that the neighbor may feel the same about loving us? God loves you just the way you are. Talk with Him, He'll understand and provide that tree for you. Remember it may be in prayer or in love.

I am reminded of an old song by Civilla Martin, 1905 which always has a positive message for me.

"His Eye is on the Sparrow

Why should I feel discouraged, why should the shadows come,
Why should my heart be lonely, and long for heav'n and home,
When Jesus is my portion? My constant Friend is He:
His eye is on the sparrow, and I know He watches me;
His eye is on the sparrow, and I know He watches me.

a. *Refrain:*

I sing because I'm happy, I sing because I'm free,
For His eye is on the sparrow, and I know He watches me.

“Let not your heart be troubled,” His tender word I hear,
And resting on His goodness, I lose my doubts and fears;
Though by the path He leadeth, but one step I may see;
His eye is on the sparrow, and I know He watches me;
His eye is on the sparrow, and I know He watches me.

Whenever I am tempted, whenever clouds arise,
When songs give place to sighing, when hope within me dies,
I draw the closer to Him, from care He sets me free;
His eye is on the sparrow, and I know He watches me;
His eye is on the sparrow, and I know He watches me.”

Prayer: Loving Father, help us to show Your love to others. Many times we are eager to criticize and hesitant to love. May we know that Your love is as great for others as it is for us. Help us to forgive and see the good in the other person. Amen

1. Do you feel there are people you just can't love? How can you change that feeling?
2. Why did Jonah dislike the people from Nineveh?
3. Why did Jonah like the plant at first? Why did he change his mind?
4. Is there some area of your life in which you are defying God, and rationalizing it?
5. How does this verse from Luke 12:28 apply to us “If that is how God clothes the grass of the field, which is here today, and tomorrow is thrown into the fire, how much more will he clothe you--you of little faith!”

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