

## **“When Things are Dark and They Stink”**

**Romans 12:1-2; Jonah 2**

April 21, 2024

### Introduction

- Greet our guests.
  - \* Thank them for bringing their kids.
  - \* Thank them for coming to church with us.
- I want to begin by telling you about something that happened to someone I knew, a friend at the time, really.
- Well, he didn't have the best home life and his parent's told him they weren't paying for his college.
  - \* So, he went to college, but he did so by borrowing money and having to work student jobs.
  - \* It was a tough road to hoe but he was getting it done.
  - \* Then, he started a job as the mailroom director for a dorm with over 700 students.
  - \* This was where a problem began.
    - The Columbia Record Club
- He ordered everyone their free CDs, collected them when they hit the mailroom then turned around and sold them.
  - \* It was brilliant but, as you have likely figured out, really illegal.
  - \* Long story short – He Got arrested.
    - Things got bad, never jailed but it messed up his life in a way.
  - \* John got taken to jail as they booked him.
    - His parents were livid as you might imagine and they let him languish there.
    - Thing is, the Athens prison had a problem. It smelled awful.
  - \* For him, things got really dark and they stunk.

### Jonah

- Sounds kind of familiar to today's story from the Bible.
- To get this story, you've really got to get the background.
- Jonah hates the Ninevites.
  - \* FOR GOOD REASON – They're his nation's enemies.
    - And they were quite awful, really.
      - Eventually, they'll cart Jonah's people off into exile.
    - But, at the time, they were known to be militarily ruthless and cruel to the nation's they captured.
- So, it's rather surprising to hear that Jonah is called by God to tell them to repent.
  - \* God's giving them a second chance.
  - \* Jonah doesn't want them to have it and it's understandable.
    - Carolina/Duke rivalry
    - Space Jam came out – I was resolved that if it ever came down to an alien versus Duke for the fate of the world, I was still not gonna pull for Duke!
    - So, I get the hatred, I really do.
  - \* Jason, didn't you go to Duke?
    - I wasn't thinking well at the time! Lol!
- For perhaps good reason, Jonah rejects God's direction.
  - \* NOT A GOOD IDEA, Y'ALL.
  - \* This is where our mortal, created souls really get bigger than our britches.
    - Us telling God what we're going to do or not do is pretty preposterous, really.
      - God created us, ordered the universe and does everything to uphold it.
  - \* IT's at this juncture that Jonah runs.
    - In short, HE SINS.
      - This is a sin of omission.
      - When you know what you're supposed to be doing and just aren't.
        - \* That's SIN, TOO by the way.
- So, what happens?

- \* Jonah gets swallowed by a whale.
  - This is the consequence of sin.
  - EXCURSUS – whether you believe this literally or metaphorically what we can say is this.
    - \* THIS IS THE BIG POINT. Sin leads to a dark place, a place where literally and figuratively, things stink.

### The Problem of Sin

- Sin always leads us to dark places that stink.
- John's story, Jonah's story?
  - \* Although extreme examples, they do represent us as well.
  - \* Why?
    - Because we sin.
    - Romans 3:23 – ***“since all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.”***
- And that isn't to get us feeling too terribly about ourselves BUT WE DO NEED TO SEE THIS ABOUT OURSELVES.
  - \* EXCURSUS – Social, emotional learning – Self-esteem.
    - They're perfect on the inside, it has consequences.
    - Oversaturation of this ideology leads directly and inexorably to narcissistic personality disorders.
- Sometimes we need to realize that we are the problem.
  - \* **GOSSIP AND SLANDER.**
  - \* **LYING AND DECEIT.**
  - \* **ENVY AND RESENTMENT.**
    - **JUST NAILED MY WEEK.**
  - \* ***Neglect of personal responsibilities.***
  - \* ***Apathy towards the needs of others.***
- See, we're all sinners, all being led to places that are dark and smell bad.
  - \* So, if that's where you are NOW, don't feel bad.
    - The rest of us have been there and are likely on the way there now so, don't think like you're the only one.

### Solution

- But there IS a solution!!!
- Jonah's prayer.
  - \* It's a prayer of repentance and embrace of God's designs and plans.
    - Repentance as a word in the Hebrew means TURN.
    - As in you literally turn and go in the other direction.
- And a great place to do this turn is in prayer to the Lord.
 

\* "Repentance is not merely the start of the Christian life; it is the Christian life." – John Calvin
- The idea being that repentance isn't a one a done deal.
  - \* We tend to gravitate back to sin.
    - Jonah's going to show us this drift when we read it all.
    - He is mad that the Ninevites repent and SINS AGAIN.
  - \* So, we're always in need of checking ourselves to see how we can do things better.
    - This happens in prayer.
- We go to God and say, essentially, "God, I'm sorry."
  - \* The really cool thing about this is how quickly things start to feel better.
    - We take our sincere contrition to the Lord, a sincere desire to do better and He blesses us with improved emotions but also enhanced desire to do better.
- Repentance begins a process of change that can lead you to the greatest joys life can offer us.
  - \* Prayer can be like to our best friend.
    - This doesn't need to be some high and mighty thing.
    - Just a simple, heartfelt acknowledgement that things have gone wrong.

## BE Real

- Maybe sometimes you've done this BUT things still didn't change.
- Like, maybe you've gone to God and confessed and expected things inside you to get better...and they didn't.
  - \* There may be a reason why you're not getting the Jonah effect.
    - Being spit out from a whale into a nice place.
  - \* It maybe that you're ONLY offering words and not sincere change.
    - There's more to it than just that.
    - Imagine that it takes action.

Jonah's repentance leads to HIM HELPING PEOPLE.

OUR REPENTANCE SHOULD LEAD TO OUR HELPING PEOPLE AS WELL.

Repentance is Aided BY Something.

- An extra piece of the puzzle.
- Some special sauce, if you will.
- Zacchaeus
  - \* RIGHTS THE WRONGS HE'S DONE (pays back the money he's taken).
  - \* AND
  - \* Do good for others as a means to stay out of the dark and smelly Zaccheus Gives half of what he's got to the poor.
- We need to right our wrongs.
  - \* Say you're sorry.
  - \* Make amends.
- Then, IMMEDIATELY TURN TO HELPING SOMEONE ELSE.
  - \* This interrupts the cycle.
    - Remember, sin felt good to begin with.
    - Well, this feels good forever.
  - \* "God has promised forgiveness to your repentance, but He has not promised tomorrow to your procrastination." – Augustine of Hippo
  - \* Do this today, we have people ready to pray for and with you.