

“But God, I Don’t Like ‘Em”
Proper 20-A September 21, 2008

Introduction:

The story of Jonah gives us a way to deal with a failing in our human nature. When it comes to answering the call of God to witness to others about God’s love for them we all suffer from

The Jonah Syndrome:

Have you heard? Do you know? We human beings are full of prejudice. Can you believe it? Have you experienced unwarranted prejudice? Have you struggled with unwarranted prejudice?

I’m saying unwarranted prejudice for a reason. I think a case can be made for warranted prejudice, but it can become a slippery slope. For instance, I’m prejudiced against thieves, liars, and people who spread gossip. I think I’m warranted to have prejudice against such people because their behavior makes it near impossible for me to trust them; and, I can’t have a meaningful relationship with someone I can’t trust. But, the slippery slope involves judging behavior and not judging a person’s soul.

Jesus says we can judge a tree by its fruit, but the New Testament also says we are to judge not lest we also be judged. So, I can say to a thief: “I don’t trust you because you are a habitual thief. Therefore, I cannot leave you alone

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in the presence of my possessions. But, I cannot say to the thief, "You are going to Hell". That judgment is reserved only for God Almighty. I think it's fair to say, "You are living a life that dishonors God. Or, God wants me to offer you help so you can live a life that is more pleasing to God, but I cannot pass judgment on their eternal destination.

What I call the Jonah Syndrome involves people whom God calls to go to others and be part of God's plan for their salvation; but, the kick is, they don't like the people they are serving. Their prejudice against those people gets in the way. Jonah's story is a classic example and may be why God has included in the Bible.

Ideally, God should be able to send anyone of us to minister to any other person, or group of people, right? But, the reality is – and what the story of Jonah points out – is a point St. Paul makes in Romans: *"For all have sinned and come short of the glory of God"*.

So, it seems, we have a dilemma. There are people all over the world who need to know that there is a God; and that God loves them; and that God has sent a Savior into the world who will help every man, woman, and child go to Heaven who wants to go. Not only are there people all over the world, there are people right here in Polk County, in Winter Haven, and wherever we live. And, God is

constantly calling people who love Him to go to people who don't yet know and love God. God's problem is us. Too many of us are like Jonah. We will do almost anything to avoid having to go and tell someone else about God. We'd rather jump off a ship and take our chance in the ocean, or live in the belly of a fish then go to our Nineveh's.

Don't you think God gets frustrated at the Jonah syndrome. God also has a syndrome. What is

God's Syndrome?

God's syndrome is this: God hates sin, but God loves the sinner. God hates sin because it is so corrosive. Sin separates people from God, from each other and even from themselves. Yet God loves the individual sinner. God would not have sent Jesus into the world to die for sinners if He didn't love sinners. It's John 3:16: *"For God so loved the world that He sent His only begotten son ... "*

We tend to hate sin and the sinner. That's why we are so reluctant to go out of our way to share God with sinners. We're not convinced they deserve God's grace. We've forgotten we, too, are sinners saved by grace. It's easy, after a while, to think we are better human beings than they are. As superior people we deserve God's blessings. As inferior sinners they deserve God's judgment.

This was the situation with Jonah. He finally ended

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up in Ninevah and he delivered the message God appointed: “40 more days and Nineveh will be destroyed”. The city repented and turned to God, and that should have been the joyful end of the story. But Jonah was mad because God was gracious to the Ninevites and, using a vine, God had to teach Jonah the absurdity of his prejudice.

Have you ever been around a person who was mad because God saved someone?

When I was in Seminary I had a part-time job at a small church leading their evangelism effort. Every Tuesday evening I would meet with a small group who wanted to learn how to share their faith. We would eat a quick dinner. I would teach that night's lesson and we would go to someone's house and practice sharing Christ with them. The visits were prearranged – we had appointments. One night we went to a family whose mother and children were regular at church but we never saw the husband. At their home we took turns sharing different portions of the gospel presentation I was teaching the students. After we finished sharing the Gospel I ask the man if what we had shared made sense to him. He replied that it had. I asked him if he wanted to invite Jesus into his life, and He said “yes” he did.

I then led him through a prayer in which he invited Jesus to forgive him of his sin and come into his life. When

the prayer was over and I opened my eyes I expected to see his wife overflowing with Joy because her husband was now a Christian. What I saw and heard shocked me. The look on her face was near hatred. She looked at me and growled, "You mean to tell me that my husband is now a Christian the same as I am, and will go to Heaven the same as I will". I replied "Yes", isn't God great? "No", she said. "I've been going to church all my life, doing all the right things, and because you come to our house and he says one prayer, he's in the same line as I am. It's not fair, and I'm angry"!

I was shocked. It was my first experience with the Jonah Syndrome. Not everyone is glad when God saves. God hates sin, but God loves people – even sinners. And because God loves People we, too, are to love them, and want for them what we want for ourselves – to go to Heaven.

God Has Given The Church A Job.

We are to lead people to the Cross. There they meet Jesus their Savior. God, then, leads them to Heaven. We are never to be ashamed of the Cross or mad about God's amazing grace. The Cross is God's NO to sin, and God's YES to sinners.

Who do you know that would benefit from God's grace? Would you begin to pray for that person, or persons;

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and if God gives you an opportunity – invite them to come to church so they can taste and see, and know that the Lord, he, is good?