

The Lies of Vanity

Jonah 2:8

1

8 They that observe lying vanities forsake their own mercy. KJV

Jonah 2:8

8 “Those who regard vain idols, Forsake their faithfulness, NASU

There is some discussion as to whether or not the story of Jonah actually occurred. Some think that maybe it is just an allegory representing Israel’s relationship with God. An allegory is defined as...

2

Using that which is known to illustrate that which is not

If you have never tasted rattlesnake meat, it tastes just like chicken. That is an allegory that uses the flavor of chicken to illustrate what the flavor of rattlesnake is like. It is also a lie, rattlesnake doesn’t taste at all like chicken, but I hope that it explains what an allegory is. It means to lay two things alongside each other, one known the other not, so as to explain the unknown by the known. Personally, I feel about the account of Jonah the same way I feel about the account of creation from Genesis, God says they happened, I believe God, therefore, they happened, just the way God said they did. That said, I do think there is some benefit in looking at the story as an allegory, laying it alongside the story of Israel and God, I think there are some thoughts that can be taken from it that I think will be profitable for us.

The story may be familiar to most of us, the children have probably all heard it, but just in case, allow me a quick recap. The city of Ninevah is not doing what God wants them to do, so God tells Jonah to go there and preach to them and tell them to repent. Jonah doesn’t want to go and decides to run from God, so he gets on a boat and tries to sail away. God causes a storm to come up that the sailors all think is going to sink the boat. They get scared and after some discussion with Jonah, throw him overboard. The storm stops immediately and God prepares a great fish to swallow Jonah so Jonah can have some time to reconsider his decision to not go to Ninevah. This is where so many begin to disbelieve the story. Seriously, a fish swallows a man and he lives three days in it? The point is, and the scriptures are very clear on this, God prepared the fish to do just that, swallow Jonah. The same God that spoke the universe into existence would have had no difficulty in preparing a fish to swallow Jonah and even give him room service, if He had chosen to do so. [It really does come down to the strength of one’s faith.] After three days and nights in the belly of the fish Jonah decides that maybe it would be a good idea to do what God wants him to do. The fish vomits him out onto the shore and Jonah goes to Ninevah and begins preaching. The king listens to him, as do the people, and he and the city repent and they are spared from destruction. This is where it gets really interesting. Jonah gets mad about their repentance. He begins to complain to God saying, “Isn’t this what I said would happen, but you sent me anyway. So, is Jonah angry because Ninevah was spared, or is he angry because by obeying God’s commandment it caused him to have to step out of his comfort zone? Regardless, the conclusion that can be seen is that, had God destroyed Ninevah, Jonah would have felt vindicated. Wow, that’s not a very good commentary on Jonah, is it?

Let's now look at this story as it represents Israel and her relationship with God. When Jonah's refusal to obey the divine command to go to Nineveh and cry against it is looked at as an allegorical representation of Israel's failure to obey the divine call of God, we can see how his being cast into the sea and swallowed by the great fish, is a poetic reproduction of Israel's sufferings at the hands of the heathen countries around it. The song that Jonah sings when he is in the fish's belly, of which our text is a part, represents the actions on the part of Israel.

3 This idea of "Lying vanities" from the King James represents as the New American Standard states, idols, and their "own mercy" or faith, is speaking of their relationship with God. The text is a brief, concise statement of the great truth which had been brought home to Israel, time and time again, by their sufferings and exile, that to turn from Jehovah to false gods was to turn from the sure source of grace and mercy to lies and emptiness. That is but one case of the wider truth that an ungodly life is the pinnacle of foolishness, a tragic mistake, as well as the ultimate sin. I say it that way for a reason. Sin is sin, and telling a lie can be just as condemning as murder. That said then, what is the ultimate sin? The ultimate sin has to be the sin that cannot be forgiven, but Christ says in...

Matt 12:31

4

31 "Therefore I say to you, any sin and blasphemy shall be forgiven people, but blasphemy against the Spirit shall not be forgiven.

If any sin can be forgiven except blasphemy of the Spirit, I think it important for us to understand what Blasphemy of the Spirit is, because that can't be forgiven. It was the Holy Spirit through whom God inspired the writers of the New Testament to record His Word, eight men that we know of, Matthew, Mark, Luke, John, Peter, Paul, James, and Jude. That accounts for 26 of the 27 books of the New Testament. We are not told who wrote the book of Hebrews, but we do know that at least these eight men were guided in their writing of God's message by the Holy Spirit, 2 Tim. 3:16-17. Blasphemy, speaking against the Spirit, then means that someone is denying God's word, denying God Himself, Christ, and all that the Word reveals. When the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit revealed to us in the Word are denied, that is blasphemy, a sin that cannot be forgiven because the truth is not accepted. Sin can only be forgiven when the truth is accepted and acted on, faithful obedience. If, and when, the truth is accepted, then blasphemy is no longer occurring, sin can be forgiven, but as long as the truth is being denied, there can be no forgiveness.

Back now to our discussion, there are three thoughts we want to look at in this lesson...

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- 1) The illusion of substance of these lying vanities
- 2) The difficult service which lying vanities demand
- 3) The self-inflicted loss

Our first point of discussion then is...

6

- 1) The illusion of substance of anything other than God

The Old Testament tone of reference to idols is one of bitter contempt.

Ex 20:3

7

3 "You shall have no other gods before Me

God was explicit in His commandment to the Israelites, there will be no there god in your heart, mind, or home. He was the only true God, anything else was a...

8

“Lying Vanity”

The rigid monotheism of the Old Law was intensified by the universal prevalence of idolatry; and there is a certain hardness in its tone in reference to the gods of the nations that were around Israel and that hardness often finds expression in such names as, vanities, lies, nothingness, like what is seen in our text. To the Jew, surrounded on all sides by idol-worshippers, the choices were vehement indignation or entire surrender. This is a common occurrence, The Mohammedan in India have a hatred toward Vishnu and Siva just as the Jew did to Baal and Ashtoreth. Maybe this explains the seeming irrational attitude of the atheist Joseph Stalin we talked about last week, who shook his fist towards God as his last defiant act of blasphemy on his death bed. It is easy to be tolerant of dead gods, but it becomes treason to Jehovah to parley with them when they are alive. This is not to say that there are any so-called Gods that live. Jehovah God is the only God that is alive. But the idea is that whenever anyone believes in and accepts as living an idol god, then, in that person’s heart, that idol becomes alive, therein is the lie of the vanity.

The point, though, which we are looking at here, is somewhat broader than just the vanity of idols, though that emptiness cannot be ignored. Rather, it is the emptiness of anything that man pursues...

9

Apart from God

These last three words need to be emphasized. Remember that we saw that...

Gen 1:31

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31 God saw all that He had made, and behold, it was very good. And there was evening and there was morning, the sixth day.

God did not create evil. On our trip Karen found a fictitious article that she read about a teacher who said that since evil exists in the world, and if God created everything, then God created evil, therefore God must be evil. As the story goes, a young man stands and challenges the teacher and asks if there is cold. The teacher says of course there is. The answer is, no there isn’t, cold is just a word that is used to describe the absence of heat. Heat is energy, viable, when heat is gone, the result is cold. The student then asks if there is darkness and proceeds to explain that there is no darkness, it is merely the absence of light. God did not create evil, He created all that is good and righteous, when we decide to eliminate that which is good and righteous, we create evil, because evil is the absence of righteousness.

Idols are empty because they are founded on the absence of righteousness. That is the contrast seen in...

Ps 7:9

11

9 O let the evil of the wicked come to an end, but establish the righteous; For the righteous God tries the hearts and minds.

The emptiness of wickedness, the absence of the righteous God from the believer, is something that must be accepted, worked at. The lie that is found in anything other than God is the summation of what Solomon is seeking in the book of Ecclesiastes. Here is a man, who could be

argued to have been the richest man in the world in his age, and in all likelihood any other age. He had the resources to do anything he wanted to do. So he did. He understood the emptiness within and sought ways to satisfy that longing in man's heart. He tried fulfilling his spirit in indulging the flesh. Today we would say that he tried booze, drugs, food, satisfying every fleshly appetite and discovered that none of those things fulfilled anything except fleshly lusts, they were empty, void of substance...

Eccl 2:11 12

11 Thus I considered all my activities which my hands had done and the labor which I had exerted, and behold all was vanity and striving after wind and there was no profit under the sun.

He sought fulfillment in intellect, knowledge and wisdom, and found that to be just as empty and useless...

Eccl 1:17 13

17 And I set my mind to know wisdom and to know madness and folly; I realized that this also is striving after wind.

Solomon found after trying everything this world has to offer that there is only thing that has enough substance to fill man's spirit...

Eccl 12:13-14 14

13 The conclusion, when all has been heard, is: fear God and keep His commandments, because this applies to every person. **14** For God will bring every act to judgment, everything which is hidden, whether it is good or evil.

That really is what makes idols and the pursuits of the world a lie. They promise great things, joy, love, or fulfillment and deliver nothing. Here then is our next point...

15 2) The difficult service which lying vanities demand

The phrase in our text could be a paraphrased quotation from...

Ps 31:6 16

6 I hate those who regard vain idols, But I trust in the Lord.

The change in the form of the verb as it occurs in Jonah expresses the intensity of regard, and gives a picture of watching anxiously, like the eyes of a servant turned to his master, or those of a dog to its owner. Don't be deceived, the world is as hard a task-master as any religion out there, and requires from its servants the same concentration of thought, heart, and effort as any religion the world disdains. Many, who choose to believe the lie, scoff at the believer of the Biblical account of creation as being fooled by faith, yet, when evolution and the theories that have been made up are looked at closely, it takes far more faith in far less evidence, to accept that foolishness. Lying emptiness which promises so much must be worked at to accept and believe. How many times do we see the vanity of faith in the world? How many times have we ourselves experienced that emptiness when we chose to not trust in God? Friends, that is why we go through what the world calls...

17 ***“The Foolishness of Preaching and Teaching”***

We preach and teach God's word and try to understand and live it to give ourselves a foundation to build our lives upon. Something of substance to fill our souls so we are not empty. But we are few in comparison to the mass of voices of the world that are whispering, talking, yelling into our ears at every turn to come and indulge ourselves in its pleasures. The lie is that the harder we work at the things of the world, the more fulfilled we will become, without the foolishness of God limiting us in every way. That brethren, is the lie, that is the point. No less hideous, and maybe even more debilitating, are the surrenders that men make once their hearts have been filled with the foolish ambitions of worldly success. They give up spouses, children, family all in the name of achieving their goal. We need to fix in our minds, that nothing that this world offers is in any way, shape, or form, worth the price that it takes to achieve it.

It is only heaven that can be had for the asking, and it is only God that offers it through His Son.

All sin is slavery. Its yoke presses on the neck of the sinner, and its burden is heavy indeed, and the rest, which it promises, never comes.

Our last point, then, is...

18 3) The self-inflicted loss

The passage in Jonah seems to imply that there are two things which the folly of a Godless life does to the one who follows that path...

19 A) It demands that we leave behind God

B) It leads us to Satan

This first thought is speaking of God. There are only two choice, God and Satan. God encompasses all that is righteous, the Word, Christ, the Holy Spirit, faith and obedience, while Satan is everything, anything that is in opposition to righteousness, the lying vanities.

Matt 12:26-29 **20**

26 If Satan casts out Satan, he is divided against himself; how then will his kingdom stand?

27 If I by Beelzebul cast out demons, by whom do your sons cast them out? For this reason they will be your judges. **28** But if I cast out demons by the Spirit of God, then the kingdom of God has come upon you.

The second thought is the real crux of this discussion and the ultimate conclusion of the lies of the world.

Rom 13:1 **21**

2 Therefore whoever resists authority has opposed the ordinance of God; and they who have opposed will receive condemnation upon themselves

2 Peter 2:4 **22**

4 For if God did not spare angels when they sinned, but cast them into hell and committed them to pits of darkness, reserved for judgment;

Rom 8:1 **23**

8 Therefore there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.