

YOU CANNOT RUN AWAY FROM GOD
Harringay United Church-Baptist
Sunday August 26, 2012.

When we are asked to do things and we refused to do it, what did we do?

Are we expecting anything to follow our actions? Alternatively, is there any consequence for our actions?

How do we react to what follows? This determines whether we want to grow or are growing.

Last Sunday we started examining the person of Jonah through his book. He was a reluctant messenger. He was sent to Nineveh to preach a message of repentance. Instead, he headed for the opposite direction and caused trouble on the sailors and other passengers until he was thrown aboard then calmness came. Ugo told us last Sunday that Jonah puts himself in same condition of the Ninevites, which he was trying to condemn by disobeying God's command.

It is easy to see other people's sins and failed to see ours. Luke 6:42 "Or how can you say to your brother, 'Brother, let me remove the speck that is in your eye,' when you yourself do not see the plank that is in your own eye? Hypocrite! First remove the plank from your own eye, and then you will see clearly to remove the speck that is in your brother's eye." NKJV

The biggest issue among Christians today is sexual sin and we treat it as if it is only sin. Many of us even want God to see it as we see it. Unfortunately, No, He sees it the same way as lying, cheating, swearing in vain, anger, pride etc. Jonah saw the wickedness of Nineveh and the grace of God, but never considered his disobedience as equally sinful.

However, today's text shows us a gracious God whose eyes are on His own even in the deep inside of a fish and in the bottom of the sea. Jonah thought, he could run away from God, but he did not know that there is no place where God's hands cannot reach him.

Psalms 139:7-12 where can I go from Your Spirit? Or where can I flee from Your presence?

8 If I ascend into heaven, You are there; If I make my bed in hell, behold, You are there.

9 If I take the wings of the morning, And dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea,

10 Even there Your hand shall lead me, And Your right hand shall hold me.

11 If I say, "Surely the darkness shall fall on me, "even the night shall be light about me;

12 Indeed, the darkness shall not hide from You, But the night shines as the day; The darkness and the light are both alike to You." NKJV

It is easier to blame Jonah if you have not really received the call of God. Experience demonstrates that most people He calls are reluctant to yield and I am one of the worst culprits. However, as if He was to Job, always patient, tender hearted, gracious and merciful and I can testify to that again.

This takes on from Jonah's rebellion and God's discipline into a new experience of repentance and dedication. God spared him and graciously gave him the second chance to do what He wants him to do. After a fish had swallowed him, he then prayed. The content of his prayer was profound but it was in the belly of the fish, then the prayer must have been prophetic believing that God will surely rescue him.

Let us look at his prayer

He was in trouble and he cried to God v2, 7– Psalms 46:1

Prayer born out of affliction not affection, he cried out to God because he was in danger not because he was delighted. No matter what motivated his prayer, it is better for him to pray than not.

Whose prayer is ever with pure motive except Jesus? However, Romans 8:26 says "Likewise the Spirit also helps in our weaknesses. For we do not know what we should pray for as we ought, but the Spirit Himself makes intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered. NKJV

He accepted God's discipline –

You cast me into the deep. Jonah did one good thing. He did not blame the sailors, but accepted God's action of discipline because he knew even though he disobeyed, he was a true child of God. Son of Abraham, therefore a child of covenant. He knew that the discipline was for his good because God disciplines the child He loves.

The ways we respond to discipline determines how much benefit we derive from it.

1. We resent it, fight against it and we reap the reward – stepping out of God's will brings disaster.
2. We can be discouraged and faint – never move forward but sink
3. We resist it and invite stronger discipline and possibly death
4. We submit to His discipline and mature in faith and share in His holiness (purified)

Jonah yielded to God's will:

Jonah admits that were worthless. Because, the sailors and other passengers called on their god to no avail. But when they obeyed Jonah, there was an answer. He also accepted there are idols in his life that made him to lose his affection for God, which consequently led to his disobedience. Such idols are:

1. Self-righteousness- thinking they are better than the Ninevites who do not deserve God's mercy.
2. Pride of life – Jonah was too conscious about his integrity (what he predicted will not come true) rather than God's grace and mercy for the lost.
3. Revengeful Spirit (opportunity to hit back) – the Ninevites must be punished for their sins, why would God forgive them? The Assyrians have always been invading them, why would they not get something back.

Jonah made a Vow

He sealed his obedience to God with a vow that he would thank God with his mouth and declared that salvation belongs to God only and this is borne through his experience. The sailors cannot save him and nothing except God.

God's Redemption/salvation:

The person who God will use to save people himself will have to be saved. Moses has to be pulled out of the Nile before he could lead the people of Israel out of Egypt. Jonah too was rescued from perishing, the fish vomited him out into dry ground giving him the second chance.

Your Situation:

When God is allowing a situation in your life, He is disciplining you. Not because you have done something wrong but He is preparing you for greater thing. Whatever you have done in the past to disobey God, He is giving you another chance today, just forget the past God is offering you a fresh start.

At the last AGM I encourage you that your maturity has not translated into service. And this is what this book is all about. Thank God for Eyasu, Bisi, Bunmi and Sade for teaching the young people with stewardship lessons which has yielded fruits and I encourage you keep it up.

We have been asking for volunteers for various services in the Church and you are burying your head when you know you can do it. If you are in that position, you are like Jonah and God is giving you second chance today and I encourage you to say 'here I am Lord, it is I Lord,'

Do not think you are not qualified, It is your availability that God needs, not your qualification. We would put you through. Those who have been serving started one day with someone putting them through and Age is no barrier to serve God. If Lydia at 80 odd still teach Sunday school, you can do something. Moses started his ministry at 80.

Would you hear God today and say, "I will go wherever you send me and do whatever you ask me".

Let us pray: