

VISION 2050

DEVOTIONAL GUIDE

Sunday, September 8, 2024

Jonah 1:1-6

Notes:

It is not so much the case that God has a mission for His church in the world, as that God has a church for His mission in the world. Mission was not made for the church; the church was made for the mission - God's mission.

- Christopher Wright

Questions:

How does the book of Jonah reveal the heart of God for His world?

God has a people for His mission – how does Jonah represent the people's response to that mission?

God still has a people (the church) for His mission – how is your response to that mission similar or different than Jonah's response?

Where has God called you to participate in His mission? Are you moving towards that mission or running away from it?

Passage: Genesis 3

In Genesis 3, we read the account of humanity's fall into sin. Despite Adam and Eve's disobedience, God offers a promise of redemption. In verse 15, God speaks to the serpent, saying, *"I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and her offspring; he shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise his heel."*

This verse is often referred to as the "protoevangelium," or the first gospel. It foretells the coming of a Savior who will defeat sin and Satan. Even amid judgment, God reveals His plan for salvation, pointing forward to Jesus Christ, who would ultimately crush the serpent's head through His death and resurrection.

Questions:

What consequences of the fall do we see in Genesis 3?

How does Genesis 3:15 provide hope amid judgment?

In what ways does this promise point to Jesus Christ?

How can you find and share hope in God's redemptive plan today?

Passage: Genesis 12:1-9

In Genesis 12, God calls Abram to leave his country, his people, and his father's household to go to the land He will show him. This call is not just for Abram's benefit but for the blessing of all nations. Through Abram, God initiates His plan to bring salvation to the world.

God's mission is to bless all the families of the earth through the descendants of Abraham. This promise finds its fulfillment in Jesus Christ, through whom all nations are blessed.

Questions:

How does God's call to Abram relate to His mission in the world?

What promises does God make to Abram, and how do they point to Jesus?

How can we as the church participate in this mission to bless all nations?

Are there specific ways you can be a blessing to others in your community?

Passage: Jeremiah 31

Jeremiah 31 speaks of a new covenant that God will make with His people. This covenant is characterized by the law being written on their hearts, a deep and intimate relationship with God, and the forgiveness of sins.

God's mission involves establishing a new relationship with His people, -one that transforms them from within and restores them to Himself. This new covenant is fulfilled in Jesus Christ, who inaugurates it through His life, death, and resurrection.

Questions:

What are the key features of the new covenant described in Jeremiah 31?

How does this new covenant advance God's mission in the world?

What does it mean for God's law to be written on your heart?

How can you live out the reality of this new covenant in your daily life?

Passage: Luke 19:1-10

In Luke 19, Jesus encounters Zacchaeus, a tax collector. Despite Zacchaeus' sinful past, Jesus reaches out to him, resulting in Zacchaeus' repentance and transformation. Jesus declares that salvation has come to Zacchaeus' house and states His mission: to seek and save the lost.

Jesus' mission on earth is to seek and save the lost. His encounter with Zacchaeus illustrates the transformative power of God's grace and the inclusiveness of His salvation.

Questions:

What does Jesus' interaction with Zacchaeus reveal about His mission?

How does Zacchaeus respond to Jesus' invitation?

How should we respond to those who are lost and in need of salvation?

Are there people in your life to whom you can extend God's grace and love?

Sunday, September 15, 2024

Jonah 1:7-18

The scope of God's purpose [in telling Abraham His plans] must be carefully noted. His will, as made known to Abraham, bound all Abraham's descendants.

Certainly, God does not make His will known to us so that knowledge of Him should die with us. He requires us to be His witnesses to the next generation, so that they may in turn hand on what they have received from us to their descendants...In this way, we must propagate God's truth. It was not given for our private enjoyment; we must mutually strengthen one another according to our calling and our faith.

- John Calvin

Notes:

Questions:

How does Jonah's experience on the boat exemplify our understanding of our role in God's mission?

How does Jonah's honesty about his sin challenge our view of what is required to live on mission?

How does Jonah's response point us forward to the work of Christ?

Even in Jonah's disobedience, a ship full of sailors comes to faith. How does that truth encourage us to go all in on the mission of God?

What are you willing to sacrifice for others to be saved?

Passage: Isaiah 49:1-7

There are approximately 2.13 million people in the Central Florida area. God's people (the Church) exist to declare the "good news" of the gospel to all peoples; to celebrate the works of Jesus and His coming kingdom. This week we are considering Willow Creek Church's mission in the world.

In Isaiah 49, we read God's heart is to reach the peoples from afar. He sent Jesus to call His people to Himself, saving them from their sins and calling them to place their trust in His Lordship. This call to all peoples comes to fruition through the instrument of His Church – the visible gathering of God's people who worship Him and reflect His light as a light for the nations.

Questions:

Why does God's Church exist? What is our primary role?

The "servant of the Lord" mentioned in our scripture is ultimately fulfilled in Jesus. What connection is there between serving others and declaring what Jesus has done for others?

Who in your life do you have an opportunity to be a "light" in pointing them to the true light, Jesus?

Passage: Matthew 5:13-16

When you search for a "satellite map of North Korea at night" on the internet, you will see a striking contrast between the darkness of North Korea and the vast light shining in South Korea. God's word tells us that *God is light* (1 John 1:5) and that His people are *the light of the world* (Matt. 5:14.) God's people don't create light in themselves, but rather, reflect God's light to people living in darkness.

Our mission is to reflect the light of Jesus to those *living in darkness* (Matt. 4:16). How do we do that? Jesus says it is through our good works that glorify our Heavenly Father. God's light, through Jesus' work in His people's lives, is not meant to be kept "hidden." It is meant to radiate outward, so that others may see, know, and worship God and celebrate the work of his son, Jesus.

Questions:

Recall a time when you were in "pitch darkness." Describe the emotions you felt and what is it about darkness that makes us feel a certain way.

How does it encourage you that God is light? What about that statement gives you hope for your life?

As a follower of Jesus, how do you reflect His light to those living in darkness?

When (or with whom) are you likely to keep Jesus' light in your life "hidden?" Pray for the courage to shine His light even in those challenging moments.

Passage: Isaiah 42:1-9

The Lord's "servant" in our passage is clearly and undeniably foreshadowing Jesus Christ.

There are many who are spiritually blind and who are currently "prisoners" of their sins. May we (Christians), cling to and follow the beloved "servant" Jesus who we already know will bring forth His justice. Instead of complaining about the world's darkness, pray and point people to the One who is light. The One who brings those currently in their metaphorical "self-prison" into the freedom found in following the One who came to rescue us.

Questions:

In addition to Isaiah 42:1-9 & 49:1-7, read Isaiah 50:4-9 and 52:13-53:12. Describe how Jesus is the fulfillment of these "servant songs."

What does Biblical justice or God's justice mean? What is an example of how justice has been served by God? What is an example of how justice is promised to be served by God?

How does the Church (the people of God) demonstrate justice in our community? In our nation? In the world?

How are people currently "blind" to the light and truth offered in God's word? How have you been "blind" until God revealed His truth to you?

Passage: Matthew 28:1-20

Following the incredible resurrection of Jesus, an angel of the Lord tells the women who approached Jesus' tomb to "*not be afraid... Jesus is not here, for He has risen, as He said. Come, see the place where He lay.*" In response, the women "*departed quickly from the tomb with **fear and great joy and ran to tell his disciples.***"

Our simple yet profound task is to invite others to "come and see" by "going and telling" the truth of Jesus and what He accomplished in His life, death, and resurrection. This may stir up fear within us, but be reminded that Jesus said, "I am with you always, to the end of the age." Find great comfort and strength in the promise of Jesus' presence with you.

Questions:

How have those around you pointed you to Jesus through their words and actions?

Why is there a mixture of "fear and great joy" when it comes to sharing what Jesus did for you with other people? What is often your greatest fear when considering the call to tell others about Him?

Why is it important that the church communicates clearly the truth of who Jesus is? What are the dangers of communicating an "unclear" or "false" gospel?

Who are people in your life whom God has called you to invite to "come and see" who Jesus is? Pray for those individuals to know Jesus as Lord.

Sunday, September 22, 2024

Jonah 2

Notes:

If someone reads on the side of a bus, “There probably is no God...”, they should think, “That can’t be right. I know Sally, and she’s a Christian, and God is very clearly alive and well in her life.” We are called to be the living proof of the living God, to bring God to people and people to God. That is our priesthood. That is part of the mission of God’s people.

Questions:

In the midst of his calamity, where does Jonah turn when he is in the belly of the fish?

How does Jonah’s experience of prayer inside the fish offer us a glimpse of the hope offered in the gospel?

For Jonah to convey the grace of God, he first needed to experience grace himself: How has your experience of grace led you to share that same story of grace with others?

Who could you share your story of God’s redeeming grace with this week?

Passage: I Chronicles 29:10-15

In I Chronicles 28 and 29 we find David and the people of Israel providing gold, silver, bronze, jewels, and marble in abundance; “offering willingly” additional gold, silver, and jewels for the treasury of the temple. Following the abundant offerings for the temple’s construction, David offers an outpouring of blessings and praise found in I Chronicles 29:10-15.

God provided His people with the resources to give their special treasure for a time such as this. They gladly submitted to God’s will – deferring their current gain to participate in God’s greater mission of building His temple and His kingdom.

When we give our time, talents, and treasures to God, we are giving back to Him what He has given us as an act of worship. It is one of many paradoxes of God’s grace that He allows us to participate in the mission of building His kingdom.

Questions:

How did God’s people participate in the mission of building the temple?

What are the things that God provides?

Are the abundant offerings and gifts for the temple construction from the people or God through the people?

What perspective allowed David and the people of Israel to give so generously over and above?

Passage: Psalm 139

If you’ve grown up in the church or hung around it for any length of time, you might hear people say, “Give God your time, talent, and treasures.” What they mean is when we give to the church, our giving should consist not only of our finances (treasure), but of our life (time), and our skills and gifts (talent). Have you ever stopped and wondered, “On what basis should God ask for me to give my time, talent, and treasures?” In Psalm 139, David declares God’s intimate knowledge and understanding of us as individuals.

In addition to everything being created by and possessed by God, our Father is our intimate Creator; He knows our path, behind and before us, all-knowingly formed all our days. As our Creator, God not only made everything, He knows us completely and thinks of us constantly.

Questions:

What are the many things that God does and knows about us from Psalm 139?

How does God’s intimate knowledge of us motivate us to give to Him our time, talent, and treasures?

How is this different or similar to our giving because everything belongs to God?

Passage: Luke 12:13-21

Did you know there are over 2 billion square feet of personal storage space in America? This is the equivalent of filling up over 36,000 football fields with the stuff we store up for ourselves. Is this amount of storage space evidence of how caught up we are in our possessions? In Luke 12, we see things were no different, we see a man who asks Jesus about dividing the inheritance with his brother.

Jesus is not condemning the storage industry or being prepared. Jesus' concern is for the one who is focused on "the abundance of his possessions" and "laying up treasure for himself." Like all people, we can make idols of good things, so God uses possessions to reveal our flawed perspective. Jesus summarizes the lesson with "So is the one who lays up treasure for himself and is not rich toward God."

When it comes to our possessions and finances, we can either 1) manage the resources God has blessed us with (stewards) or 2) be managed by our possessions (not rich toward God).

Questions:

How does Jesus answer the man who wanted to divide up the inheritance?

Why do you think Jesus answered in this way?

How is God using your possessions and financial resources to teach you His perspective on your heart?

Passage: Luke 12:22-31

True confession time. In 1988 when I was married and starting my career, I thought if I were to earn so much per year and save up a certain amount, I would be set. But as we had kids, the pressures of working to provide "security" grew into anxiety to the point where I was seeking God's blessings but not God Himself.

In the teaching that follows the request to split the inheritance, Jesus talks to his closest followers.

Jesus talked so often about money and materials because he knew this was a place we would often stumble. As David reminds us in Psalm 139 and Jesus makes this point again, our Father knows what we need – better than we know for ourselves. Yet, sometimes we dwell in anxiety rather than seek Him and His kingdom first.

Questions:

Does handling money and material resources make you anxious or fearful?

How does God use these things to increase our faith?

Are you seeking God for His blessings or are you seeking Him for Himself?

Sunday, September 29, 2024

Jonah 3

Notes:

The experience of grace transforms us into gracious people. It is not just about inter-personal conflict. It is about how we treat other people. It is about economic generosity. While God forgives our sins, we forgive our debtors. Luke could have used the word “sin” in both cases, but he chose to highlight the economic implications of Jesus’ word...

- Tim Chester

Questions:

Jonah goes a day’s journey into the city – how does that inform us as we seek to reach into our community with the hope of the gospel?

How does Jonah’s experience in Nineveh inform and encourage us as to who is doing the work in God’s mission to the world?

Jesus said, “The harvest is plentiful, but the workers are few...” Do you believe that the harvest is plentiful? If so, how does a plentiful harvest compel us into the mission of God?

Passage: Luke 15:1-7

“.....the most powerful and sustaining motive in God’s mission is “JOY.” - Dr. Steve Childers

This week we are considering how we get to share in the Lord’s joy and experience true blessing by serving and supporting His mission. In Luke 15:1-7, Jesus reveals to us His incredible heart for the lost. When He describes the process of God reaching a sinner, He uses the word JOY several times. Despite anyone’s sinful past, Jesus demonstrated that He would receive AND eat with those who came to Him in humble faith. This was His JOY. When this bothered the pharisees, Jesus then shared the parable of the lost sheep, and in that parable, Jesus refers several times to experiencing Joy when finding His lost sheep.

Questions:

Why does God experience joy when someone comes to Him in repentance? What does this teach you about God’s heart?

When you’ve served the Lord in different ways, has it left you frustrated or joyful? Why?

Passage: Acts 2:42-47

“The early church did more than make converts; they also made disciples.” - Warren Wiersbe

Discipleship, which means the process of growing as a true follower of Jesus, is radically demonstrated in Acts 2:42-47. These new believers were devoting themselves to the disciples’ teachings, fellowship, and prayer. They were even selling their possessions to meet one another’s needs! I don’t know about you, but this last part is much more challenging for me. Why? Because selfishness comes naturally to me. I like my stuff. It makes me feel comfortable and secure.

But scripture invites us to experience true blessing. When we take part in His mission, our “stuff” becomes less important. These early believers were not grumbling about this kind of discipleship – they were overjoyed. Scripture says that their hearts were “glad and generous” and they were “praising God and having favor with all people.”

Questions:

Do you think the discipleship we see in this passage still applies to the church today?

Does this kind of discipleship seem scary, frustrating, or exciting for you? Why?

What parts of discipleship do you think the Lord is calling you to grow in? And if you did, do you think it would increase your joy or diminish it?

Passage: Jonah 4

Jonah tells the people of Nineveh to repent. When they did repent, it says that God relented of His judgment and extended them mercy. This should elicit a joyful response. But for Jonah, it brought anger. Why the anger? Ninevah, being the capital of Assyria, contained people who were once the brutal enemies of Israel. Jonah was very aware of this and didn't want them to have God's mercy. He wanted them to face God's wrath.

Maybe we struggle with being more like Jonah than we want to admit. When people insult us or God, is my response to ask God to forgive them or is it anger? Does it lead to an apathy to share the Gospel with them? By God's grace, may He shape in us a heart for the lost and not one of anger or indifference.

Questions:

What people in your life are the hardest for you to love? Do you pray for them to repent, or do you more often wish they faced God's judgment?

What truth was God trying to show through the plant?

Do you regularly pray for your "enemies"? If you did, how might it change your attitude towards them? How might this impact your joy in life?

Passage: 1 Thessalonians 2:19-20

"I cannot even imagine where I would be today were it not for that handful of friends who have given me a heart full of joy."
- Chuck Swindoll

The words in 1 Thessalonians 2:19-20 truly humble me. Paul asks a simple question: where does our hope, joy, and boasting come from? Where is it rooted? For me, an honest heart inventory would reveal that it's too often rooted in earthly circumstances: things like my health, my finances, my reputation— you know, the "visible" wins that the world might deem as respectable. The Apostle Paul says something different that challenges all of us. Our hope and joy can only be found in Jesus – and he invites us into the joy of making Him known to others.

Questions:

Where are you tempted to try and find joy outside of Jesus? Has it led to blessings for you, or frustration, anger, or sadness?

How would your attitude change towards serving the Lord if your hopes and joys were found in the people of God and their spiritual growth? How might it change how you view success in this life?

Sunday, October 6, 2024

Jonah 4

Notes:

Israel as a “kingdom of priests” is Israel committed to the extension throughout the world of the ministry of Yahweh’s presence...a kingdom not run by politicians depending upon strength and connivance but by priests depending on faith in Yahweh, a servant nation instead of a ruling nation.

– John I. Durham

Questions:

How does chapter four reveal the deeper truths of Jonah’s heart? Why did he not want to go to Nineveh?

How might your heart be similar to the heart of Jonah?

How does God continue to show His grace to Jonah in this chapter?

Why does the book of Jonah end with a question?

Is there evidence in your life that God cares for the hundreds of thousands around us “who don’t know their right hand from their left?”

