

January 21, 2024

Jonah 3:1-5; I Corinthians 7:29-31; St. Mark 1:16-20

“Three Things That Cannot Wait”

- I. Repentance
- II. Following
- III. Dealing with Distractions

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Dear Friends in Christ,

The Scriptures say, "For the word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to the division of soul and of spirit, of joints and marrow, and discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart. And no creature is hidden from his sight, but all are naked and exposed to the eyes of him to whom we must give account (Heb.4:12,13)." Do we really think God will submit to our thinking and wants; we who are naked and exposed to Him?

The Scriptures say, "Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path (Ps.119:105)." It's a lamp to keep us from stumbling into pitfalls; mostly the thinking and wants of this world. It's a light that shows the way to eternal life. So, how deeply influenced are we by the latest thinking, manipulation, nonsense and lies pouring out from this world? We see where all this is taking everything.

The Psalmist writes, "How sweet are your words to my taste, sweeter than honey to my mouth! Through your precepts I get understanding; therefore I hate every false way (Ps.119:103,104)." How about us? Are you really counting on this world for uninterrupted happiness - this world that will soon be no more?

I don't know who said it, but I've always liked what it says: "People do not reject the Bible because it contradicts itself. They reject it because it contradicts them." I want to consider with you . . .

THREE THINGS THAT CANNOT WAIT

I. Repentance

The first is repentance. The example is from our Old Testament lesson, Jonah chapter 3: "Then the word of the Lord came to Jonah... 'Arise, go to Ninevah, that great city, and call against it the message that I tell you (v.1,2).'" Ninevah was the capital of the Assyrian Empire. Of Ninevah it has been stated, "Her lies, rape, and sorcery; her prey in thousands slain; her harlotry and witchcraft and the seduction of nations, are all told."

The message God gave to Jonah to proclaim to Ninevah was this: "Yet forty days, and Ninevah shall be overthrown!" We're told, "and the people of Ninevah believed God. They called for a fast and put on sackcloth, from the greatest to the least of them." The "believing" and repentance were swift and genuine. We're told in the 10th verse: "When God saw what they did, how they turned from their evil way, God relented of the disaster that he said he would do to them, and did not do it."

We must note these points: **1)** Ninevah was immediate and sincere in its repentance. **2)** Tragically, they would ultimately return to their blood thirsty passions. **3)** God used the empire of Assyria to take into captivity His Northern Kingdom of Israel in 722 B.C. because of Israel's lust for idolatry and, with it, their immorality and the sacrificing of children. **4)** The Assyrian Empire was destroyed in 612 B.C. by the Babylonians and Chaldeans. **5)** The most important point: The love of God is always there for the repentant heart. As David said. "The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit; a broken and contrite heart, O God, You will not despise (Ps.51:17)." To reject that is certain doom.

Repentance is not something we do once-in-a-while, or is reserved for Sunday mornings in church. It's a constant! It's daily, because we sin daily and must confess, as Paul confessed: "For I know that nothing good dwells in me, that is, in my flesh. For I have the desire to do what is right, but not the ability to carry it out (Rm.7:17,18)." And, as I said to a couple who were members of our church and complained to me, "We're tired of hearing about sin." - I said, "If you're tired of hearing about sin then you're tired of hearing about Jesus." Or, as we're told in our Gospel lesson: "Now after John was arrested, Jesus came into Galilee, proclaiming the Gospel of God and saying, 'The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand, repent and believe in the gospel (Mk.1:14,15).'" We're still in "the time". It will end with our death or Christ's return.

II. Following

The second thing that cannot wait is our following Jesus. Our Gospel lesson goes on to report:

Passing alongside the sea of Galilee, he saw Simon and Andrew the brother of Simon casting a net into the sea, for they were fishermen. And Jesus said to them, "Follow me, and I will make you become fishers of men." And immediately they left their nets and followed him. And going on a little farther, he saw James the son of Zebedee and John his brother, who were in their boat mending nets. And immediately he called them, and they left their father Zebedee in the boat with the hired servants and followed him (vv.16-10).

So, there they were: Every day, hard working, responsible, commercial fishermen. In both cases the adverb "immediately" challenges our thinking. "Immediately" Simon and Andrew left their nets. "Immediately he (Jesus) called" James and John and they left mending their nets and followed Him. They entered "seminary" with their professor, God in the flesh, Jesus.

You see, following Him is an assignment for all His people. We spend a lot of life struggling with who we are, where we're going, what we're getting out of life. Too often, following and serving Him are for someone else. No doubt, most are well acquainted with the words of Jesus, "You are the salt of the earth...(Mt.5:13a)." Salt flavors, preserves. In this case we have the eternal life preserving Gospel of Christ to present to others; salt that gives flavor to real life.

And surely we're aware of these words to us: "You are the light of the world...let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven (Mt.5:15,16)." Dare we ask, "What is my purpose in life?" We have been given His love, forgiveness of every sin and the promise of eternal life through faith in Christ. We want to present that to others.

III. Dealing With Distractions

And that brings us to the third thing that cannot wait: dealing with distractions; from I Corinthians 7:29-31:

This is what I mean, brothers: the appointed time has grown very short. From now on, let those who have wives live as though they had none, and those who mourn as though they were not mourning, and those who rejoice as though they were not rejoicing, and those who buy as though they had no goods, and those who deal with the world as though they had no dealings with it. For the present form of this world is passing away.

I know what most are thinking: Is Paul speaking against marriage and staying married? Not at all. He could also have said, "those who have husbands as though they had none." Consider the other point he made. His words, "For the present form of this world is passing away," impress upon us what is happening to this world. The first disciples of Jesus walked with Him and learned from Him - the Word in the flesh! They heard His words, as we hear it from Scripture: "For the Son of Man is coming at an hour you do not expect (Mt.24:44)." They figured it would be any moment. We had better figure the same thing.

As far as marriage is concerned, it is the hope and prayer that spouses are Christians of like mind and heart. We pray that nothing distracts their walk together with Jesus and the want, together, of the pure word of God.

We live in a world of 24/7 distraction. We live in a world where children are being raised by institutions; where marriage, parenting, fathering are unnecessary. We live in a world that's turning our children into hi-tech zombies; a world that mocks Godliness, excuses itself, and then is stunned by the growing, twisted violence and legalized corruption.

These are the three things that cannot wait - and certainly not for the flesh and blood of this congregation: Daily repentance, growth in the Word of God for following Jesus, and discernment of and avoiding distractions that can destroy the faith. Please listen:

“Immediately after the tribulation of those days (the days through which you and I are now traveling) the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light, and the stars will fall from heaven, and the powers of the heavens will be shaken. Then will appear in heaven the sign of the Son of Man, and then all the tribes of the earth (peoples, cultures, special interest groups, clubs, families; all who have pursued this world) will mourn, and they will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of heaven with power and great glory. And he will send out his angel with a loud trumpet call, and they will gather his elect from the four winds, from one end of heaven to the other (Mt. 24:29-31).”

The Apostles anticipated the quick return of Christ. That was over 2,000 years ago. Are we ready? Right now would be wonderful, beyond comprehension!

Amen.

Pastor Bill Abbott