

Week before Fast - Prophet Jonah and Salvation

Objective:

- ❖ God makes use of everything and all things for the salvation of man.

Memory Verse:

“I long for Your salvation, O Lord and Your law is my delight” (Psalm 119:174)

References:

- ❖ “Contemplations on the Book of Jonah” H. H. Pope Shenouda III
- ❖ “The Book of Jonah” Matthew Henry

Introduction:

A long time elapsed during which men kept away from God and people committed so many sins that they forgot themselves and forgot God their Lord but God did not forget them at all. He was always near them because He desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth. It was not possible for God to come closer to men in a direct way as men invented gods for themselves and their idea about God was deformed so the Lord sent prophets to the children of Israel whom He had chosen to send to the other nations to let them know His holy name. He did not choose them out of prejudice, far be it from God, but He chose them because they were the seed of Abraham who believed in Him and blessed His name. God expected many good things of this people but sorry to say even those people who tasted many tidings worshipped the idols and the people and their prophets needed the Savior. However, when man's sufferings increased and people kept away from God, He insisted on saving them. His love for them remained strong and the Lord's hand was always ready to save them.

Lesson Outline:

I. God saves Jonah

This prophet was characterized by fanaticism, stubbornness and faith heartedness. Like all other people he fled from the Lord when he heard His voice. This reminds us of the verse; “I heard Your voice in the garden, and I was afraid, because I was naked; and I hid myself” (Genesis 3:10). As a prophet of the Jews, he was supposed to be better than others in obeying the commandments of God but if this is the case of the head what will be the case of the other members. Jonah thought that there would be peace for him in Tarshish or at the bottom of the ship although he knew that the Lord fills every place and although he read David's psalm: “Where can I go from Your Spirit?” (Psalm 139:7).

II. How the Lord Saved Jonah

The Lord made use of:

1. Discomfort: the rough sea, the destruction of the gourd (God insisted on fulfilling the message).
2. Tenderness: God was merciful to Jonah when He saved his life and taught him through practical educational examples (such as: the gourd -helping him to complete his mission and finally reproaching him gently).

3. The solid nature: The lesson was for Jonah in:
 - a. Obedience: The storm obeyed the Lord and carried out His purpose and the whale as a ship to carry Jonah to the appointed place and the worm is ordered to devour the tree.
 - b. Ability and Power of God: God is able to do everything and all things obey Him but man is free to obey or disobey.

III. God saves the sailors

The Gentile sailors were better than the prophet who escaped:

1. They prayed to their gods.
2. They prayed with the spirit of fellowship.
3. They believed that the calamity was because of the sin of one of them.
4. They asked Jonah to pray to his God so they were not fanatic.
5. They had a sensitive conscience. They only made sure that Jonah deserved death but they refused to carry out the sentence even after drawing lots.
6. They prayed for forgiveness before they threw him into the sea: “Lay not on us innocent blood”.
7. In this way justice and mercy filled their hearts.
8. They believed in the miraculous power of God.

IV. God saves Nineveh

At last the Lord found the man who would go to Nineveh. He was kind to them as a father who loves His children. The Lord could have punished and frightened them but He was also ready to turn from His anger. Jonah refused to go to those evil people but the Lord accepted their repentance. The Lord was patient with them. Although they were pagans and sinners, the Lord did not abandon them. The Lord does not abandon His children no matter how sinful they are. Theirs was true repentance. They were afraid and cried to the Lord and believed in what Jonah said. The anointed king covered himself with sackcloth and sat in ashes. All the people fasted and humiliated themselves, even animals. The Lord accepts true repentance and the contrite and submissive hearts.

V. Jonah is a symbol of Christ

God sent Jonah to the people of Nineveh so that they might repent and be saved. In the same way the Lord, out of love, chose to be incarnated and become man to die for the world then rise from the dead to grant salvation to those who believe in Him. Throwing Jonah into the sea saved all the sailors of the ship from certain death. In the same way the death of Christ on the cross caused the Salvation of those who believed in Him and saved them from eternal death. Jonah remained inside the belly of the whale three days and three nights then he went out and was alive. In the same way, Christ was buried three days and three nights in the tomb then He rose up from the dead. He was alive and granted us the eternal life. In Jonah’s prayer we find a clear expression of his success in the test of death and rebirth: “Out of the belly of Sheol I cried... I went down to the land whose bars closed upon me forever; yet You did bring up my life from the Pit... O Lord my God” (Jonah 2:2-6). Compare this to the death of the Lord Christ and His resurrection as He says to His disciples: “The Son of man will be delivered to the chief priests and the scribes, and they will condemn Him to death, and deliver Him to the Gentiles... and after three days He will rise” (Mark 10:33,34).

Conclusion:

God has prepared the humanity with many prophets before Him. He also gave different signs and prophecies for the awaited salvation of the world. Those who were attentive and responsive to the fulfillment of the prophecies (Jesus Christ) were saved.

Applications:

- ❖ What is your opinion of casting lots in our life? (The Spirit abides in us and we do not seek any sign from outside).
- ❖ “The Lord has chastened me severely, But He has not given me over to death” (Psalm 118:18). Apply this verse to the story of Jonah.
- ❖ Resist despair so that you may proceed and correct your way of life.
- ❖ Pray the Lord to receive our life and correct it as he likes.
- ❖ Quick obedience that results from the heart to all that the Lord commands us to do having confidence that he is the Loving Father who desires the Salvation of the souls of men.
- ❖ Mention some situations in the life of the holy men of God with whom God used severe punishments so that they might be saved.
- ❖ Mention some situations in which the Lord was merciful to and patient with men.