

Sometimes we Christians make a pretty big mistake in our thinking about the activity of God.

Our mistake, is we expect those who are most **like** Christians – maybe those who are a little bit religious – maybe those who come from a good family – maybe those who seem to have good morals and are pillars of the community - ... we expect **these** sorts of people to be the ones who are most likely to respond to the gospel... And that's a mistake, because who knows what God is going to do in people's lives.

And a truth of the gospel, is that often, it has been those who have been most **desperate** who, find faith in Christ, while those who are most comfortable and basically happy with their lives, and seem to have everything all together, often reject Him....

It is often, those who know they are broken and wounded and sorely in need of a saviour, who receive Christ, while those who are filled with pride and self assurance, come to a conclusion that they have **no** need for a saviour.

*And I know, there have been times, when I have had to chasten myself, because I've met somebody, and I've really come to like them – they're lovely people, but they're not Christians, and I've thought "Oh wow, God won't have to do much in these people's lives – they almost live as Christians now" ...*

And I have had to chasten myself, because in doing this, I have judged some as unworthy and unlikely to be saved, and others as "Yep, you're the ones that God would want..."

God, have mercy on me, for in my mind, favouring some over others... Maybe you've done the same thing.

The Lord our God, is sovereign, and The Lord chooses whom He will... and sometimes it'll be the most unlikely of candidates.

We saw it in this morning's reading, the religious elite, rejected Christ, while a despised Canaanite woman – a race that had been excluded from all that was known to be holy – excluded from the temple – excluded from the sacrifice – even excluded from contact, by those who would call themselves “God's People”- this woman, was the one who was shown to be a woman of faith.

The Canaanite woman was at the end of herself. She was desperate, and in her desperation, she became a woman of faith, in the Lord Jesus Christ.

Where as the religious elite, well they just had hard hearts. They wanted another sign from Jesus. Isn't that incredible. With all the miracles that Jesus had performed – the blind made to see, the mute made to talk, the deaf made to hear, the crippled made to walk, the feeding of the multitudes – isn't it incredible, that after all of this, the Pharisees and the Sadducees, still had the hide to test Jesus, by asking Him for a sign...

They didn't need another sign – they needed a jackhammer to break up the concrete in their hearts. ... You see, there is no cure for hardness of heart, other than for it to be broken, ready for it to be lovingly put back together by God.

Jesus said, “you want a sign...” “<sup>4</sup> **An evil and adulterous generation seeks for a sign, but no sign will be given to it except the sign of Jonah.**”

... What is that? What is the sign of Jonah? Well, earlier on, in Matthew 12, Jesus said <sup>40</sup> **... just as Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of the great fish, so will the Son of Man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth.** , So the death and the resurrection of Jesus Christ, was to be a sign. And that’s true. If you don’t believe in the resurrection of Jesus Christ, well you’re not a man or woman of faith. **Romans 10:<sup>9</sup> ... , if you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved.**

The resurrection of Jesus Christ, is not an optional extra for a Christian. And so the resurrection is a sign for us to believe in... (And I hope you do believe in it).

But I think there is another sign of Jonah here, that Jesus is talking about. When you know the story of Jonah, and know it well, and know its context, and how it was used, the sign of Jonah, gathers to it, a whole ‘nother meaning..., and here it is

There once was a time, from around the years of 800BC – 600BC, when God’s chosen people – the people of Israel – had become a perversion – a stain on the fabric of the world. They had taken on all of the **worst** practices of all of their

neighbours around them –idolatry; and child sacrifice; and worship of the Baals... They had become a people who were greedy and selfish. They lied; they cheated; they stole. They murdered; they went into prostitutes; they committed adultery...

And God warned them through His prophets. Over and over again, He sent prophet after prophet after prophet, with exactly the same message: Repent...

Repent, because there's going to come a time when it's too late to repent. Repent, or I am going to send nations in to conquer you, and capture you, and enslave you. And so this message came year after year, for over 200 years...

And which prophet do you think they listened to? Not a one.

They were so full of themselves, they said “We’re the chosen ones. We’re the descendants of Abraham. God will never bring **us** to ruin...” And they gathered around themselves, false prophets who would agree with them... No – you don’t have to change you’re ways – God’s going to save you – you’re going to have peace and prosperity and blessing... But of course God didn’t save them from their enemies, because He had sent their enemies. He sent their enemies to punish Israel, and to teach them a lesson. And in the year 586BC, Jerusalem fell.

Now, at the same time as all of this was happening, God sent **one** prophet – one single prophet (a very reluctant prophet) – to Nineveh. Nineveh was a foreign city in the nation of Assyria (one of their enemies)... And before Jonah even got through the city, the king heard about it, and the whole city, repented in sackcloth and ashes.

In less than a day, the message to repent, was heard and heeded, by the godless Assyrians, and for 200 years, God's chosen people ignored Him.

And the whole point of the story of Jonah (which I believe is true), is satire... Do you know what "satire" is? Satire is *the use of humour, irony, exaggeration, or ridicule to expose and criticize people's stupidity or vices*<sup>1</sup> – And God sent Jonah to Nineveh, to ridicule and expose Israel's stupidity, in failing to repent, when prophet after prophet had come to them... It was God's way of making His point to Israel... God's people refused to repent, and were obliterated, while the godless city of Nineveh, heard the message once, believed the word of God, and repented.

And so, the sign of Jonah, was "You have been told by God to repent – don't presume upon being the chosen people" – do it. Only this time, it wasn't Jonah who delivered the message – it was the Son of God, Himself.

And it was happening, all over again. God's chosen people rejected Jesus Christ, while the godless Canaanites, received Him.... The sign of Jonah, all over again...

Friends, our generation also receives the sign of Jonah... The God who created the heavens and the earth, says "Repent"...

The Lord Jesus Christ, who has been raised from the dead, calls us to believe – to have faith in Him... And it's not just those who we feel "are near to God", who will respond – it's those who heed Him. It is those who are desperate.

It's not your station in life – it's not your pedigree – it's not how beautiful or wonderful you are, or how smart you are... -  
- It's how desperate you are – It's how desperate you are for God. And none of us are worthy of Him, until we're at the end of ourselves...

I believe the challenge for us this morning, is two-fold.

Firstly, don't ever limit God. Don't judge in your mind "So-and-so's far from God – they're never going to come to faith"... Don't limit God like that. You share the good news of Jesus Christ with everyone.

And I believe the second challenge for us this morning, is "Do we presume upon **our** position with God?" Are we so confident in our **own** righteousness, that we don't give glory to God for His salvation in Christ? – Is your joy in the Lord Jesus Christ, something that is still fresh – renewed every day, or has it grown old and stale?

Maintain your desperation for Christ. Don't ever let yourself start thinking "Phew. I've made it... - I've got it all together now." Yearn to know Christ, deeper and deeper, every day...

Amen.

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<sup>i</sup> OSX dictionary - apple