

Sunday Sermon 012124 Jonah 3:1-5, 10, Mark 1:14-20

Our Real Identity: God's Messenger

There's a saying that humans need to work in order to be healthy and live a long life. However, almost all of our congregation members are retired already, aren't you? Whoever said that has clearly never spent a day in retirement. But today, I want to introduce an occupation that is not eligible for retirement and lasts a lifetime. Sounds healthy, right? It is the job of being God's messenger.

We are all called God's children in faith. As such, we cannot deny or reject anyone who became God's child and is therefore His disciple. By the way, through today's scriptures, I found that a key aspect of being God's disciple is also being His messenger

A North Korean defector family that included a mother, father, and son lost their way in the middle of the night in the inner Mongolian desert. They tried to get near the Mongolian border all night long, but they didn't know where it was. At that moment, they prayed to God just as the pastor they met in Yanbian, China, had taught them. Shortly afterward, a dim light shone from afar. Finding no other hope, they blindly followed the light.

For three hours, they drew towards the light. As they got closer, they saw a mud hut where the shepherd of migratory farm animals slept only once a year. Although the shepherd and the flock had to leave the mud hut the day before, a sheep had just given birth to a lamb, so the shepherd had to stay at the hut for one more night. It was the shepherd's light that provided the guiding light for the North Korean family. They realized that God had divinely prepared the light for them.

When daylight broke, they saw that the Mongolian border was only 5 meters ahead. The son is now a famous musician in South Korea and testifies to the audience about God. Through this harrowing escape, the son was called to be God's messenger and experience God's gift of grace.

Let's examine how God uses His disciples as messengers.

I. God's messenger can be a simple delivery person.

Jonah had to spend three days proclaiming God's message from one end of the city of Nineveh to the other end because it was such a great and densely populated city. To give you perspective on how immense Nineveh was, it took Jonah 3 days to pass through it.

A trained walker can walk about 20–30 miles in a day. I'm sure people walked a lot more back then, so he probably had to walk around 80–90 miles! Jonah walked through it for just one day and cried out, "In forty days, Nineveh will be destroyed!"

The people of Nineveh, including their king, believed God's message, proclaimed a fast, and put on sackcloth. Although Jonah's message was short, it was definitely to the point, and the people in the city genuinely repented to God right away. God saw that the people repented and, as a result, did not punish them as He had said he would.

Let's look at the context and time period to better understand Jonah's role as the messenger of God. Nineveh was the capital city of Assyria and the bitter enemy of Israel because the Assyrians had oppressed Israel for a very long time. Jonah probably yearned that the Ninevites would be completely punished and destroyed by God for their sins.

However, God commanded Jonah to proclaim to them the message of repentance. Scared to enter enemy territory and dissatisfied with God's mercy toward the Ninevites, he disobeyed God and ran away. In response, God rebuked Jonah by putting him in the belly of the big fish and giving him the same command.

Therefore, we see that the work of repentance that happened in Nineveh had nothing to do with Jonah's personality or conscience of faith. He did not have any generosity, sympathy, or patience for the city or its people. He just obeyed God and acted as God's mouthpiece by delivering God's message. However, his role as a delivery person changed the entire course of the great city.

Therefore, let's simply proclaim God's message to the world like Jonah did, and He will take care of the rest. God achieves living work in a world that seems dead. Church, be a witness of Jesus' gospel whenever, wherever, and to whomever you meet.

We may worry about our flaws, inexperience, and worthiness to be used as messengers by God. But we do not become messengers by our own might, but by God's might, love, and mercy.

The apostle Paul tells us, "I solemnly urge you: proclaim the message; be persistent whether the time is favorable or unfavorable" (2 Tim 4:2). And Romans 10:15 says, "The most beautiful feet in the world are those of messengers who bring good news!" The messenger does not speak of what he has accomplished but speaks of what God has accomplished, so it is possible for us to be used as messengers.

II. Receiving the call as a messenger is a gift from God.

Today's scripture from the gospel of Mark introduces how Jesus called four of his disciples. The four former fishermen were casting nets into the sea and were in their boat, mending the nets. Jesus called them, and they left what they were doing and followed him. That is all the explanation that the Bible offers us.

Some people say the reason why these specific four were called disciples was because they were so sincere at their jobs. However, this reasoning is faulty because I saw many ordinary laypersons, pastors, and missionaries who lived as playboys in their former lives. Of course, that was never me. [joke]

The disciples didn't choose Jesus; Jesus chose them. Calling them disciples was a unilateral selection and act by Jesus. The right time had come, so making disciples was urgent, inevitable, and valuable at that time for Jesus. Therefore, being called a messenger and disciple is God's gift, made by His grace.

Whenever he calls us by his messenger or when we are loyal to him by messenger, God always cares for us by his grace. Christians should be encouraged by the gift of His grace, and we can be joyous and empowered by it. Our daily lives and the chance of spreading the gospel as messengers are given to us by the grace of the Lord.

What does it mean for us today that the four fishermen left their boats and nets and followed Jesus? Does it mean giving up our jobs or our families? This indicates that they have taken the master of their lives,

Jesus. From now on, they live by doing what Jesus wants of them, not what they want.

A woman who was working as a pharmacist could not endure deep discord with her husband and killed him by contract. And while she tried to kill her mother-in-law, the crime was discovered. She was sentenced to her death and was cursing and harming herself in her detention center. There was her guard, who was in charge of her and was a devout Buddhist. However, to appease the prisoner's boredom, she inadvertently put a Bible in the prisoner's room.

However, there was a miracle from that time on. Gradually, the death row inmate began to read the Bible, and her behavior began to change for the better. No one taught her the Bible or interpreted it; she only read the book herself. By the way, she realized Jesus, came to believe, cut down on her sleep, and enjoyed reading the Bible.

Unlike before, she shed tears of repentance, cleaned the interior of her cell by herself, and cared for sick fellow prisoners. She learned and sang the gospel songs and confessed her hope to heaven to her colleagues. Her cell, which was like hell in the past, turned into a family where people comforted each other and shared peace. It was another miracle that, after seeing her change, the jailer also came to believe in Jesus.

She read the Bible more than 50 times in detention centers and preached the gospel to a thousand pretrial inmates. She sang the hymn Amazing Grace at the execution site, and after witnessing Jesus in front of the prison director and staff, prosecutor and doctor, pastor, and Buddhist monk who gathered there, she was executed.

378 "Amazing grace! How sweet the sound that saved a wretch like me!
I once was lost but now am found; was blind but now I see.
Yea when this flesh and heart shall fail, and mortal life shall cease; I shall possess, within the veil, a life of joy and peace.
When we've been there ten thousand years, bright shining as the sun,
we've no less days to sing God's praise than when we'd first begun."

Do you believe in God, who makes the Buddhist jailer also the messenger of the gospel? Do you believe in the Creator, who uses the death row inmate who killed her husband as the messenger of Jesus Christ?

I have questions about the decision of the disciples who followed Jesus in today's scripture. How could someone who was so passionate about his job put aside his job and follow Jesus when he called, "Come with me, and I will teach you to catch people?"

But I was able to come to my own conclusion about this. This is because they heard Jesus' calling. The calling not only reached their ears but also shook their souls to wake them up. If a passerby called you, would you immediately follow him? Those who are not interested in Jesus will never hear Jesus' calling.

They had already heard about Jesus and knew Him through John the Baptist. Their hearts were ready to follow Jesus. Referring to John 1:35–42, we can see that they had a spiritual thirst for the Messiah and the kingdom of heaven.

Jesus sometimes calls people who not only do not know him but also reject him as his messengers, but he wants to quickly fulfill the wishes of those who long for him and want to meet him. His calling is not given through human external qualifications but rather through inner spiritual thirst.

Our everlasting and most valuable ID today is that you are the messenger of God's love. I bless you as messengers of God, wishing for and executing upon every opportunity given to you daily. Amen.

*****Reflections and Applications for Today's Sermon:***

1) The sentence below is one of the key contents of my sermon today. Please fill in the blank spaces.

"The messenger of God does not speak of what () has accomplished, but He speaks of what () has accomplished, so it is possible for us to be used as ()."

2) Is there an individual, group, city, or country with whom you would like to share the gospel of Jesus? Express the content of the gospel you will preach in three sentences. Let's pray for those souls for a week and practice delivering the gospel.

3) How would you respond if Jesus invited you today, "Come with me, and I will teach you to catch people?" Why?

*Answer to Question 1): he or she, God, messengers

