

"Jonah: The way God speaks to us"

There is an interesting story in the Bible and one of the book is Jonah. It is like a fairy tale for children. Therefore, we think Jonah is a fictional character.

But Jonah is the person who really existed. The second King 14:23-25 recorded about him. ²³In the fifteenth year of Amaziah son of Joash king of Judah, Jeroboam son of Jehoash king of Israel became king in Samaria, and he reigned forty-one years. ²⁴He did evil in the eyes of the LORD and did not turn away from any of the sins of Jeroboam son of Nebat, which he had caused Israel to commit. ²⁵He was the one who restored the boundaries of Israel from Lebo Hamath to the Dead Sea, in accordance with the word of the LORD, the God of Israel, spoken through his servant Jonah son of Amittai, the prophet from Gath Hopher (2 Kings 14:23-25).

This record mentions the name of the King at that time and the length of his regime, and also mentioned about Jonah's hometown and his father's name. Therefore, it is clearly proved that Jonah was existed.

I will explain a little bit about the summary of the book of Jonah. The book begins with; **1** The word of the LORD came to Jonah son of Amittai: ²"Go to the great city of Nineveh and preach against it, because its wickedness has come up before me."

Jonah is a Jew. He was told by God to go to the capital of Assyria, Nineveh which is the enemy of Israel, and because of their sins, God want Jonah proclaim they will be overthrown. Needless to say, Assyria and Nineveh existed as a real ancient nation and capital in our history.

There is an Iraqi now where Assyria used to be, and the Nineveh is the place, we call today Mosul which we heard often in News. Yes, Mosul used to be the territory of ICS. So, what Jonah was told by God was like the rabbi of Jews goes to Mosul today and proclaim them "repent". Now we understand what was the

mission of Jonah.

Therefore, Jonah did not want to go to Nineveh but take a ship and headed for Tarshish which is the opposite direction from Nineveh. But ⁴Then the LORD sent a great wind on the sea (Jonah 1:4), and the ship threatened to break up and the sailors faced the risk of their life.

So, they cast lots to find out who is responsible for this calamity and the lot fell on Jonah. Then they took Jonah and threw him overboard. The Bible said ¹⁷Now the LORD provided a huge fish to swallow Jonah (Jonah 1:17). Jonah was in the belly of the fish three days and three nights and God told the fish to vomit (Jonah 1:17).

We all have fate of death. The day is coming to me. I accept the fact but I do not want to die by eating animals. I do not want to pass out by biting bear or lion. It is too painful for me. The fish swallow Jonah. It is not bite but swallow, he was lucky because his body was not injured. He could survive as long as he still has his body without any injured, and the fish vomited Jonah onto dry land.

When we heard about this kind of story, we say "oh this is fiction. It was just made up", but Jesus Christ was talking about Jonah like this.

³⁹ "A wicked and adulterous generation asks for a sign! But none will be given it except the sign of the prophet Jonah. ⁴⁰ For as Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of a huge fish, so the Son of Man will be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth. ⁴¹ The men of Nineveh will stand up at the judgment with this generation and condemn it; for they repented at the preaching of Jonah, and now something greater than Jonah is here (Matthew 12:39-41).

Jesus talked about Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of fish with a-matter-of-fact attitude. He did not say that was a fiction but he was talking about it as the things really happened, and he talked about he will be also three days and three nights in the heart of the earth.

Jonah shouted with grateful praise in the belly of fish, he said I will sacrifice to you. What I have vowed I will make good. I will say, 'Salvation comes from the LORD.'" (Jonah 2:9). He repents and show his willingness to go to Nineveh in the belly of the fish, and he actually went there and proclaimed "it will be destroyed after forty days".

When the people of Ninevites heard about that message, they all believed God and they fast from the greatest to the least, and when God saw what they did and how they turned from their evil ways, he relented and did not bring on them the destruction he had threatened. But Jonah upset and complain the generous of God. ² "Isn't this what I said, LORD, when I was still at home? That is what I tried to forestall by fleeing to Tarshish. I knew that you are a gracious and compassionate God, slow to anger and abounding in love, a God who relents from sending calamity. ³ Now, LORD, take away my life, for it is better for me to die than to live." (Jonah 4:2-3).

Jonah was wishing the destruction of his enemy, but they repented and God forgive them with His grace and mercy. Jonah was discouraged, angry and desperate.

Jonah had gone out and sat down at a place east of the city. There he made himself a shelter, sat in its shade and waited to see what would happen to the city. ⁶ **Then the LORD God provided a leafy plant and made it grow up over Jonah to give shade for his head to ease his discomfort,** and Jonah was very happy about the plant (Jonah 4:6), ⁷ **But at dawn the next day God provided a worm, which chewed the plant so that it withered.** ⁸ **When the sun rose, God provided a scorching east wind, and the sun blazed on Jonah's head so that he grew faint** (Jonah 4:7-8). So, he wanted to die, and said, **"It would be better for me to die than to live."** (Jonah 4:7-8). **"I'm so angry I wish I were dead."** (Jonah4:9).

God told him, "Is it right for you to be angry about the plant?" but Jonah said "I'm so angry I wish I were dead.", and then this book is closed with the words of God like this;¹⁰ **But the LORD said, "You have been concerned about this plant, though**

you did not tend it or make it grow. It sprang up overnight and died overnight.¹¹ And should I not have concern for the great city of Nineveh, in which there are more than a hundred and twenty thousand people who cannot tell their right hand from their left—and also many animals?" (Jonah 4:10-11).

We had focus the prophet Amos and Hosea last two Sunday. They are prophet of Israel and the Bible is the story of God and the people of Israel. Therefore, it is focused to the Israel, especially in the Old Testament. The OT was especially writing about the salvation of Israel.

If we look at the Bible like this, we, gentiles feel it is not fair and feel God is not related with us. But even though it seems Israel is the center of the other nations and people in the Bible, but the book of Jonah indicates the message that will be connected to God' future plan.

It is the fact that God' grace and mercy is pour not only Israel but also every person. Therefore, the book of Jonah is very unique and show the grace of God in the coming age of New Testament. This is the theme of the book of Jonah, and Jonah was there for this.

As we know, Jonah is a prophet. His mission is to listen the words of God, and tell the words to the people at the place and the time God told him, but, he did not want to go there and headed to different direction. Clearly it is not what God want him to do. This was happened by our free will. God gives us the choice to follow Him or not. Jonah, even though he is a prophet, he did not follow God's words.

The book of Jonah mentions the words of God to Jonah five times. Today's message title is "God speak to us in this way". God speaks us through His words and also, he speaks us through the things happen to us. God speak to us through His works.

When Jonah took a ship, which headed to different direction from Nineveh, ⁴**Then the LORD sent a great wind on the sea** (Jonah 1:4), and, they found the

cause of the storm is Jonah, so Jonah was throw into the sea, and ¹⁷ **Now the LORD provided a huge fish to swallow Jonah** (Jonah 1:17). Jonah repent in the belly of the fish where he was not expected, and there is the Lord behind all these things. God did not speak by His words, but He speak to him through His works.

God spoke him through the storm and the fish, and Jonah realized in the berry of fish where he cannot move and useless any of his strength in the darkness.

And the fish vomited Jonah to the ground, and he headed to Nineveh, and proclaimed the words God gave to him. He finally accomplished his mission, and by hearing Jonah's warning, the Ninevites repent and saved from their destruction. Jonah disappointed to see their repentance and made a shelter and waited to see what would happen to the city. God works to him at that time.

⁶ **Then the LORD God provided a leafy plant and made it grow up over Jonah to give shade for his head to ease his discomfort, and Jonah was very happy about the plant** (Jonah 4:6). ⁷ **But at dawn the next day God provided a worm, which chewed the plant so that it withered.** ⁸ **When the sun rose, God provided a scorching east wind, and the sun blazed on Jonah's head so that he grew faint** (Jonah 4:8).

When Jonah did not listen and follow God' words, what God did to Jonah? He did not speak to him, but He speak to him by through his situations. Now, we find God speak to us through the situation we are facing. God want us to realize His thoughts by the situation we are placed.

But we also need to understand which is what the things happen around us is not all His works. When we throw the ball in the sky, the ball will fall. When we touched the fire, we will be burned. If we drink the poison, our body will get weak, because this is the natural law. Many of the things happens around us is consist of Cause and Result, and because of that we sometime have to face the situation which we do not want to. These are not what God's intentional works to us.

But also, we need to know God works for us to realize the something important

and something beneficial for us. We know more about God and find our mind through these His works.

Jesus was asked by his disciples about the signs of the end of the world and he responded, false messiahs and false prophets will appear and heaven and earth will be shaken, and after that he said; ²⁸ "Now learn this lesson from the fig tree: As soon as its twigs get tender and its leaves come out, you know that summer is near. ²⁹ Even so, when you see these things happening, you know that it is near, right at the door. ³⁰ Truly I tell you, this generation will certainly not pass away until all these things have happened. ³¹ Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will never pass away (Mark 13:28-31).

Jesus said "Do not miss the things happened before you, and know what is going to be happen when you see these incident". Jesus tells us think about the meaning of the incident which is happening in our world.

Our Christian faith is based on the Bible. We respect the Bible as our guideline of our life. We believe Heaven and earth will pass away, but His words will never pass away. This promise will not decline forever. We are taught and direct our life by the words of God.

But at the same time, we also listen God's message through the incident happening around us and our experience. As soon as twigs get tender and its leaves come out, as we know that summer is near, if the things we are not expected happen, we will try to listen His message from that.

Jonah did not listen God's words at the temple in Jerusalem, but he prayed and repent in the belly of the fish. He gets angry when the tree was withered and said take his life! And his complain withdraw the words of God which shines the future of this world.

Dear brothers and sisters, we always facing so many things and we glad and we sad. It is ok if it is glad, but if that is hardship or trial, we are broken and desperate. If it is good news, we glad, feel happiness and think it is the best

moment of our life, but if that is hardship and trial, we sad, feel unhappiness and think it is the worst moment of our life.

Usually, we feel these good and bad with our emotion, but what We have seen in the book of Jonah is God is working behind these things and want us to realize something important, something beneficial for us.

It is big challenge when we cannot do as we are wishing and hoping, but don't you think there is God' work out there? When we walk our way as we are wishing, if unexpected storm come to us, God might ask you to think about your way, but if we still hanging our wish and move on our way, Like Jonah was swallowed by fish and lost all his freedom, we also might down into the same situation. We are blessed if we realize God' plan and thought when we are in the midst of unexpected situation.

Probably, Jonah is the person who could not control his anger. He gets mad when he cannot do as he wants to, and wish his death soon, but God use his imperfect character and speak to us about His truth.

God included His message in the incidents we are experiencing. God will wait until we notice and realize His message. Love is not the forced one, but it gives us the freedom. The disciple of Jesus, Peter experienced so many situation in good and bad, and realize the truth and he wrote about it.

¹² Dear friends, do not be surprised at the fiery ordeal that has come on you to test you, as though something strange were happening to you.¹³ But rejoice inasmuch as you participate in the sufferings of Christ, so that you may be overjoyed when his glory is revealed (1 Peter 4:12-13).

Peter said do not be surprised at the fiery ordeal that has come on you to test you, as though something strange were happening to you. Because God speaks to us in that trial and through the trial, God want us to realize something important for us.

I pray like this sometime; God, may you speak to them through the things they are seeing and hearing every day. May they find the greatness of you in these

things. God speaks to you by not only His words but also by the things happen to us every day. God's thoughts are hiding in that situations.

Dear Lord, may we will not be surprised at the fiery ordeal that has come on us to test us, as though something strange were happening to us. You teach us your will through the things happen to us. May we can listen from you, and when we listen, may we will return to your will. Our purpose of life is not live as we are wishing but to know the Lord though our life.

It was good for me to be afflicted so that I might learn your decrees (Psalm 119:71).

I will tell you again. We wish to have our life filled with our dreams and the dreams come true, but sometimes God has different thoughts for us. He wants us to know Him through our life, that is our ultimate purpose of our life, and when we think about this, we realize everything happens to our life give us the opportunity to reach that purpose. Let's pray.

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