

The Attitude of Jonah By Trey Sullins

Attitudes are a powerful thing. Our attitudes guide how we think about situations in life, and they can even change our behaviors. Controlling our attitudes and training them in righteousness is paramount when it comes to being a Christian. One person who shows us the great dangers of improper attitudes is Jonah. In the small book that accounts his interactions with God we find a man who was struggling within himself to have a righteous attitude. We can learn a great deal from him, and hopefully avoid the same mistakes he made.

Jonah first exhibits a self-centered attitude. The book of Jonah opens with God calling upon him for a great mission. “Arise, go to Nineveh, that great city, and cry out against it; for their wickedness has come up before Me” (Jonah 1:2). Immediately, the very next verse reveals that Jonah ran from God: “But Jonah arose to flee.” It is interesting to note too that Jonah does not even appear to offer an excuse to God, but only runs away. Jonah 1:3 shows us why Jonah did this: “to flee from the presence of the Lord.” Just imagine if God personally called on you to go and do something for Him. Would you run away? It would take a very strong attitude that was more concerned with your own desires in order to do something like this.

Jonah also shows an attitude of anger. In Jonah 4:1 the Bible says, “But it displeased Jonah exceedingly, and he became angry.” This bad attitude was a response to the people of Nineveh repenting (Jonah 3:10). His anger even became so strong that he asked for God to take his life in Jonah 4:3. The source for this great anger seems to be the fact that God had pity on a wicked city when apparently Jonah felt Nineveh did not deserve this. When you put this into perspective you really notice just how ridiculous this attitude was. God asked Jonah to help save people from certain destruction, and then Jonah becomes angry when they are saved from certain destruction! God even asks Jonah in Jonah 4:4, “Is it right for you to be angry?” The obvious answer to this rhetorical question is no!

Jonah should have known to follow God’s commands. Jonah was a prophet of God (2 Kings 14:25). As such he knew God is always right, God is the judge and punisher, and God’s will must be done no matter what. When understood with a proper attitude these simple principles should cause us to cast aside our own opinions and serve God wholly. However, when these principles are viewed with improper attitudes, then we start to behave like Jonah. It is important to remember Jonah spoke directly with God, and yet, still he had such problems controlling himself. Today God speaks to us through His word; therefore, it might seem even easier to ignore our need to follow Him. However, no matter what time we live under we have to be doers of God’s will and live for Him (James 1:22).

Uncontrolled attitudes can destroy a person spiritually. Training and controlling the mind can be one of the most difficult tasks for Christians, but nonetheless it is a necessary one. We must take the great warning that we find in Jonah’s life and learn to be better. We ought to have a mind like Jesus’s who humbled himself even to the point of death in order to serve God’s will (Philippians 2:5-11). When we do this, then our attitudes will be in full control and we will be living righteously. We must all be careful to never let it be said of us, “But (your name here) arose to flee.”