

Focusing on the Gourd

By David H. Snyder

The Biblical account of the prophet Jonah is very familiar to many of us. Recently, I was again reading through the Book of Jonah and God reminded me that much of Jonah's life applies to missions in the twenty-first century.



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Just as Jonah was commanded to "Go" to Nineveh and declare God's message (Jonah 1:2), we have been commanded to "Go" into all the world, and preach the gospel (Mark 16:15). In response to God's command, many today are following the example of Jonah by running from

God's call for their lives. They have settled down into a place where they are comfortable and have fallen asleep (Jonah 1:3-6). Although Jonah was disobedient, the Lord gave him a second chance. After a life-changing experience in the belly of a whale, Jonah was again commanded by God to preach to the people of Nineveh (Jonah 1:17-3:2). As Jonah proclaimed God's Word, the Ninevite people repented and God's wrath was abated. If the story of Jonah concluded with chapter three, there would be a "happy ending." However, the fourth and final chapter of the book records the prophet's negative reaction to God's mercy on the Ninevites.

The Bible tells us the salvation of Nineveh *displeased Jonah exceedingly, and he was very angry* (Jonah 4:1). After going out of the city, Jonah became *exceeding glad* because of a gourd God had prepared to give him for shade from the intense heat

of the sun (Jonah 4:6). However, God also prepared *a worm when the morning rose the next day, and it smote the gourd that it withered* (Jonah 4:7). As a result, Jonah fainted because of the extreme elements and *wished in himself to die* (Jonah 4:8). The last three verses of the book of Jonah are revealing and convicting:

And God said to Jonah, Doest thou well to be angry for the gourd? And he said, I do well to be angry, even unto death. Then said the Lord, Thou hast had pity on the gourd, for the which thou hast not laboured, neither madest it grow; which came up in a night, and perished in a night: And should not I spare Nineveh, that great city, wherein are more than sixscore thousand persons that cannot discern between their right hand and their left hand; and also much cattle (Jonah 4:9-11)?

Instead of focusing on *God*, Jonah was focusing on a *gourd*. To say it another way, Jonah was more concerned about being *shaded from heat* than he was about the Ninevites being *saved from hell*.

It is sad to think how many Christians today are focusing on a gourd rather than God. Gourds come in all shapes and sizes. Some are in the shape of a house while others have leather interiors and chrome wheels. There are shiny, coin-shaped gourds that are often held onto very tightly. Some gourds cannot be seen with the eye but are feelings and attitudes that are deeply rooted

in a heart. Gourds can even take the form of close family members or friends. Jonah's focus was on his own comfort and selfish desires. This

is quite the opposite of the example seen in the life of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. In obedience to the will of the Heavenly Father, Jesus set aside His own comfort and came to this earth. While here, He did not live a comfortable life but was *a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief* (Isaiah 53:3). After experiencing the excruciating pain and agony of a Roman crucifixion, Jesus died and was buried in a borrowed tomb. Three days later, He defeated death and rose triumphant from the grave. Considering all Christ did for us, it is only

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reasonable that we forsake all and focus completely on Him.

God will often send gourds into our lives to help relieve some of the heat we are experiencing. However, there are other times when God prepares a worm to purify us in a refining fire. Either way, we must keep our eyes on God and not the gourd. We must be able to rejoice in both the gourd and the worm, being assured that God's plan is always best (Romans 8:28). Just as God was concerned about every person in Nineveh, He is concerned about every person in the entire world. It is obvious His command to "Go" has not changed. Therefore, the question that must be answered is "Will we follow the example of Jonah or the example of Jesus?" **W**

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I am so thankful for those who have followed the example of our Lord rather than the example of Jonah. Throughout this magazine there are several illustrations of those who have set aside their own comfort in order to obey the command of God. As a result of their obedience, many lost souls have repented of their sins and turned to Christ.