

Chapter 18

GOD SHUTS JONAH'S MOUTH

We will look at the subject of "God shuts Jonah's mouth" in chapter 4:9-11.

"Then God said to Jonah, 'Is it right for you to be angry about the plant?' And he said, 'It is right for me to be angry, even to death!' But the Lord said, 'You have had pity on the plant for which you have not labored, nor made it grow, which came up in a night and perished in a night. And should I not pity Nineveh, that great city, in which are more than one hundred and twenty thousand persons who cannot discern between their right hand and their left—and much livestock?'"

We are nearing the end of a long pilgrimage in the book of Jonah. In the last lesson, we left our prophet with the state of mind of welcoming the idea of dying. In verse 4, he asked God to take his life, but God denied his request and restored his hope by giving him the comfort of the plant to shield him from the sun's rays. Then God took that comfort away by means of a worm. He then causes a scorching wind to blow upon Jonah's unprotected body. God's changing providence in the plant, the worm, and the wind, was designed to correct Jonah's sinful, unloving attitude toward God's mercy in sparing the Ninevites from destruction. After having saved the Ninevites from destruction, God not only is setting out to deliver Jonah from a very sinful bondage and a wrong attitude toward other people, but He is going to reveal to Jonah His own great heart of compassion for His creation. In doing so, He will first shut Jonah's mouth and cause him to stand before God in his guilt and shame. Now Jonah is entertaining the thoughts of death once again.

The Apostle Paul makes a statement in Romans 3:19, that we are using for the title of this message, ***"Now we know that whatever the law says, it says to those who are under the law, that every mouth may be stopped, and all the world may become guilty before God."*** This is what God is working toward now in the life of His prophet. He is going to allow Jonah to express his discontentment and anger, and then He is going to bring that bitterness out of Jonah's heart and cause him to be stripped naked, as God reveals to him that His own heart is the very opposite of Jonah's heart. The heart of Jonah is filled with selfishness, and the heart of God is filled with love. Jonah is going to have to stand before God and have, as it were, a window put in the center of his breast for all to see his heart, and also to see a window in the breast of God, where we can look in to see the contrast between these two beings. One filled with the ugliest selfishness within, and the other with beautiful compassionate love.

First, let us look in verse 9 at Jonah's great anger toward God and his desire to die. God said to Jonah, ***"Is it right for you to be angry"*** over the vine or the plant, and he said, "I have a right to be angry even if it kills me." As we begin to look at this passage, we will

see that Jonah's desire to die is an overflow from verse 8 where he stated, "**it is better for me to die than to live.**" The state of mind that Jonah now finds himself, sometimes can be explained by the burden of bodily suffering or mental anguish which becomes so severe that men may wish to escape the pain, even if it means giving up their life. This is what has happened to Jonah. He has become so disappointed with the turn of events in his life, that death seems the only median to obtain relief. So he grows faint as described in verse 8. His hope is gone, and he wishes for death. He even makes the statement that it would be better for him to be dead than to be alive at this time.

We have looked at the explanation of Jonah's state of mind. Now let us look at the sinfulness of this way of thinking. I think it is a providential thing and no accident that in our Sunday School class we have been studying the issue of suicide and assisted suicide or euthanasia, whether or not it is right for a Christian to take his or her own life, or to ask someone else to assist them in taking it. The Bible speaks very clearly to this, that those thoughts, even if they just remain thoughts, or if they are carried forth into actions, are not pleasing to the revealed will of God, but are acts of sinful disobedience unto the Lord. Therefore, it cannot be said in anyway biblically, that if a person takes his life professing to be a child of God, that he is doing so for the glory of God, and that he leaves this life in a state of obedient service to the will of God. It is quite the opposite.

Jonah's attitude reveals an element of murmuring and discontentment within himself. Our circumstances, though, are appointed by the kind and loving providence of God. God's word teaches us, "*Whatever my lot, Thou hast taught me to say, It is well, it is well with my soul*" because we view our circumstances as appointments from God. To wish to escape those circumstances before God's timing to change them, is to wish to avoid the discipline ordained to us by our heavenly Father. A desire to escape the circumstances of life before God's appointed time to change them is an expression of displeasure with the One who has appointed those circumstances for our life. Remember you have heard me say on various occasions, that "our disappointments are God's appointments." Jonah, "you are disappointed at God, but it is God who has appointed these things for you." "**It is appointed for men to die once**" (Hebrews 9:27), and everything in between, from the time of his birth to his death, comes by divine appointment. The believer's pilgrimage should be run patiently and cheerfully even to the end of his journey. We don't just run a part of the way and ask God to take us out of this and give us relief from it. No, we are to persevere unto the end of the journey. We are to give God as much glory in the final lap, if you please, as when the gun sounds for us to take off in the service of God. Jonah's attitude reveals an improper desire for rest and freedom from life's problems. Quite often, I believe that our desires for heaven are selfish and carnal even as believers. We have a tendency to visualize heaven as a time when we shall be released from service and labor.

We have an image of heaven as being a grand retirement program where we shall cease from hard work, be able to retire, and not have to do anything else. We may think that we will float around on a cloud, play a harp, and put our feet in some heavenly stream or river. I fear these are carnal ideas.

It should be the desire of all Christians that we serve God day and night in his holy temple. As a Christian, we should never entertain a desire for a time to come in which you would no longer be a servant of God. Servanthood is that very thing that motivates the believer to live for the glory of God. In fact, those of us who have been made partakers of this divine nature of God, are attracted to the future state of heaven on the grounds that it will afford opportunities for higher and purer forms of service unto God; not less service, but more noble service than what we are doing down here. That is what motivates the servant of God. You that are servants on your secular jobs, hopefully you are in a situation where your desire is to serve and get promoted as a reward. At the beginning of your job, you must obey the boss. Then one day you hope to get to the place whereby you can be the boss. Some may have the tendency to transfer that same scenario to what it will be like in glory. You may think because you worked hard down here on earth, that when you get to heaven, you will be the one in charge, or in the driver's seat. That is a carnal image drawn from the way things are done in the world. Jesus had to continually deal with this thinking in His own disciples. Jesus taught them that this was not the way His kingdom worked. He said (paraphrased), *"This is the way the Gentiles operate in their kingdom, but this is not the way My kingdom works. Greatness in the kingdom is not lording it over others, but it is in humbling oneself and serving others. In turn, that gives great delight and contentment to a servant to be able to be awarded at the end of the day with the statement, you have been a faithful and a good servant."* Look in Matthew 25:20-21a where our Lord gives this parable. **"So he who had received five talents came and brought five other talents, saying, 'Lord, you delivered to me five talents; look, I have gained five more talents besides them.' His lord said to him, 'Well done, good and faithful servant: you were faithful over a few things, I will make you ruler over many things.'"** In other words, "I am pleased with you, my servant; well done. What is your reward for a job performed well in my sight? You have been faithful over a few things. I did not give you great tasks, but some lesser tasks to see how you would handle them, and you have handled them well. You have been faithful in your responsibilities in the role of a servant." Notice that the lord does not say that he is going to make him lord, so he can have people to boss around. Look at what he says. **"I will make you ruler over many things."** You have been faithful over a few things, so I am going to make you faithful over many things. It is a promotion to a greater place of responsibility and honor in service. When we get to glory and hear the words of our Lord, **"well done good and faithful servant,"** He promotes His servants to greater

opportunities and responsibilities of "service." Does that disappoint you? Does that take some of the glitter out of heaven? You say, "but I thought I was going to get to walk on streets of gold and receive many blessings there." Yes, that is true, for that is what glory is, a place of beauty, honor, glory and perfection, but it is a place of perfected servitude where the one who is the most happy will be the one who can serve the most. There will be no people in glory sitting around complaining that nobody else is thinking of them, and doing anything for them. The people in glory will be delighted that they can do for others, and that is what gives them happiness in return. Do you see how Jonah's attitude is sinful? He is consumed with himself. Oh, for that day to soon come. **"Even so come Lord Jesus."** (Revelation 22:20). Lord, promote us into a sphere of higher service for Your honor and glory.

We have looked at the explanation of Jonah's sinful attitude. Now let us look at how one gets corrected of this self-centered attitude. It is found in perfect submission to the holy and revealed will of God. While God has work for us to do here on earth, earth is the best place for us to be. This is where God has you serving, and it is a sinful idea to desire to escape where God has placed us to serve. When He desires us to enter into our heavenly service, He will call us home. But until then, we are to be content in this life below with serving Him in whatever capacity He has placed us. In Philippians 1:21-24 the Apostle states this: "**For to me, to live is Christ**, (that means for me to be alive is to serve Christ; that is the motivating drive of why I am here on earth) **and to die is gain** (that is, I will lose nothing in my service of Christ when I die, but I will actually be promoted, and it will be a gain). **But if I live on in the flesh, this will mean fruit from my labor; yet what I shall choose I cannot tell** (or I am not decided upon). **For I am hard-pressed between the two, having a desire to depart and be with Christ, which is far better** (that is for me). **Nevertheless to remain in the flesh is more needful for you"** (that is, the people whom God placed Paul to minister and to serve.). So you see, Paul's desire is that a state of perfected servitude would be far more desirable for a servant than that of a lesser position. However, Paul is saying that as long as God has ordained for him to serve here on earth, which is better for others, that he is going to be happy and content until the time comes when God calls him into that higher realm of servitude. If you are entertaining ideas of discontentment about life, due to difficulties and stresses in relationships, finances, health issues, and things like this, which cause you to entertain the idea of just going on to glory, wait just a moment. Glory will be a place where there will be no more pain, suffering and death. The book of Revelation is very clear about that, but until God ordains your time to leave, you should find contentment with serving Him in whatever state of circumstances He places you in this life. Jonah, you need correcting. People who entertain thoughts of suicide are thinking of their own selves and not of God's glory and the needs of their fellow man. While a Christian martyr may be praised for

honoring God in his suffering death, there can be no honor given to one who commits a "Christian suicide" to escape pain and stress. In the history of the Christian church, the most noble people, who are held in the highest esteem by believers, are those who have been willing to die a martyr's death and suffer great things. On the other hand, the Christian church has never held in high esteem one of its own who has taken the easy way out and has participated in what some call a Christian suicide. You cannot be obedient to God and ask Him to take your life just because you want a life that is filled with ease and lack of stress and troubles.

I rejoice that heaven is going to be a great improvement over this present state. I also rejoice that heaven is going to be a land in which the curse has been lifted, in which there is no more suffering, sin or death. That is a tremendous comforting thought to the child of God. But until that time comes that God takes us to that place, it can also be very consoling to know and believe that whatever my circumstances are in this life, I am put here to bear witness as a good soldier to the cross of Jesus Christ, and that if I suffer with Him, I shall reign with Him. So that my sufferings, my troubles and trials are not without purpose, they are designed to bring forth that which is pleasing to God.

Now having said that about the glorious concept of heaven to come, I greatly fear that there are many churches today that constantly major on the troubles and trials of this present life. There is also much hymnology to that effect, in which there are troubles and trials here below, so on to heaven we shall go. It is almost like preachers and people are living with the concept of seeking to leave this world. However, this life of service is appointed to us by God. This earthly life is our battle and where we do service for the Master. As God has appointed a particular sphere of service to His angels, so He has also appointed you and me as His chosen people to certain realms of responsibility and service here below. To seek to evade those responsibilities, is almost like becoming a traitor to the army of Christ, or a deserter, if you please. We must stand on the line and do battle in whatever circumstance God has placed us in.

Now look at God's interrogating question of Jonah in verse 9. Jonah, **"is it right for you to be angry"** over the loss of your plant? This is the second time God asks this question to Jonah. The first question is back in verse 4. There the Lord said, **"Is it right for you to be angry?"** In the first question, God was asking him "do you have a right to be angry because I spared Nineveh?" Now he is asking Jonah "do you have a right in being angry over the destructive loss of the plant?" This question is designed to do three things. God is going to reprove Jonah, convince him of his error, and produce a humble and obedient spirit in His prophet. God is asking this question so that He might draw out of Jonah the bitterness that was in his heart, and then to expose him to the most painful, humiliating,

and mortifying truth to which Jonah has been exposed in this entire episode. This will be more humiliating than having to confess his guilt before the sailors on the ship. It will also be more humiliating than being cast into the sea, the terrors in the fish's belly, and confronting the wicked people in Nineveh. What is that truth? Could anything be worse than what Jonah has experienced already? Yes, this is a truth that is more painful than all the other things put together. That truth is that Jonah doesn't love God's creature man as God loves His creature man -- that Jonah doesn't love his neighbor as he loves himself -- that Jonah doesn't love people who are different from him with enough love and compassion to tell them about the truth of God. Jonah doesn't love what God loves. I hope you are shifting your thoughts about a prophet who lived thousands of years ago, to the servant that you are today. Do we love what God loves? Do we love this creature called man with the love that God loves His creature?

You would think a question like that would just totally shut Jonah up. But instead, he burst forth with an angry reply. In verse 9 Jonah responds, ***"It is right for me to be angry, even to death!"*** "I am mad about the loss of my plant, and it is so frustrating, it may even kill me." Here we see the power of uncontrolled passions. Didn't Jonah know better than to strive with his Maker? Didn't Jonah have a conscience that he was in the presence of God? Yes, but his conscience is dulled by his passion.

We may agree with our own conscience about the rightness and wrongness of the matter, but if our wills are determined to act contrary to God's will, and we sear our own consciences, our passions will turn us into hard and calloused people. You may read something in the Bible, and agree that God has set forth your responsibility and duty in this life. Your conscience may even say "Amen, I know that is true," but your passion will not bow to the authority of that command. Your passions will overrule your own conscience so that your conscience becomes insensitive, and you become hardened and uncompassionate. Is that what we want to be? Do you want to be known as a person who is hardened and calloused? If you do not have any concerns about that, I question seriously whether you know the Lord Jesus Christ, a Man who was the most compassionate person who ever walked on the face of this earth. We read on occasion that He looked out over the multitudes and He was moved with compassion as He saw them as sheep scattered and having no shepherd. Our Lord Jesus Christ was not a hard-hearted individual, because He knew what God's will was. He knew what His human conscience was saying, and He was forever ready to do the will of His Heavenly Father. God has now given Jonah this question. "Do you have a right, over the loss of the plant, to be angry?" And rather than thinking and reflecting, Jonah said "I do have a right, even if it kills me." Do you have a right to be angry at God's will today?

We have just considered the power of uncontrolled passion. Now let us look at the sinfulness of it. Jonah replies to God in an adamant harsh manner. Back in verse 4, Jonah was silent and did not answer God when He asked him this question. Now Jonah has lost all patience with God. He says that he not only believes that he has been right all along, but also that God doesn't have the right to take away his desires from this life, and that he will stubbornly hold to that belief, it even if it kills him. In other words, Jonah will go to his grave believing that he is right. Is this really a mere human being talking this way to God? Of course, we never do that, do we? God ordained for this book to be written to reveal to us what goes on in our human hearts. These are the thoughts that we don't want other people to know about. This book could have been written about everyone of us. God could write a book about each one of us and reveal our hidden thoughts and the bouts we have with God such as angry feelings, frustrations, and those confusions. However, we would not want anybody to know about these things. Are we opening up the windows of our hearts? What if I had the capacity to open up your heart and let every emotional thing come out that has been in there from the time you were born? Do you think you would like everyone see it? I would not. That is why Jonah is writing this book. He is revealing some of the most honest things that went on in his life. It is not just about him alone, but it is about you and me in our struggles with indwelling sin and with our relationship with our God. Does not the song writer say there is a tendency to leave the very God whom we love? *"Prone to wander, Lord, I feel it, prone to leave the God I love."* He is being honest. Have you ever entertained a thought about just throwing in the towel, never going back to church, and going out and living like the world? You are not being honest if you say that you have never entertained that idea. If you have done so yet, just wait until God gets your gourd. As long as things are going well in life, you will go to church, and you will serve Him. You will read the Bible and pray a little bit, but let wave after wave of trouble begin to hit you. Then let me put God's stethoscope to your real inner man where we all can hear the beat of your heart. Let what you are really thinking about God be broadcast on a PA system. So, let us be careful of just kicking poor old Jonah and saying this fellow is awful. This fellow is but a reflection of all of us to varying degrees. We have the capacity to argue with God exactly like Jonah is doing right now. This is the sinfulness of arguing with God.

Let us now look at the danger of this uncontrolled passion. When people lose patience with God, and become disappointed with His appointments in this life, they expose themselves to a spirit of self-destruction, and then begin to entertain suicidal thoughts. Disappointments with life's expectations often drive people to suicide. E. B. Pusey, in his *Commentary on Jonah*, says,

Vehement anger, (that is an angry person), leadeth men to long and love to

die, especially if thwarted and unable to remove the hindrance which angers them. For then vehement anger begetteth vehement sorrow, grief, and despondency.

If you find yourself to be an angry person, you must cease from anger, because anger is going to breed sorrow, grief and despondency.

Anger is brought about when we experience disappointments in life, which brings about frustrations due to our inability to remove those things. Then we get angry about those things, and that produces side effects of sorrow, grief and despondency.

Next, look at verses 10 and 11 where God is reasoning with Jonah. Isaiah 1:18 says that God does reason with men. **"Come now, and let us reason together," says the Lord, 'Though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they are red like crimson, they shall be as wool.'**" You have the capacity to think and reason because you have been made in the image of God who does think and reason. Notice how God reasoned with Jonah. The first phrase in verse 10 is, **"But the Lord said."** God began to reason with Jonah when he had shown affection, love and pity for the plant or gourd. It wasn't until Jonah fell in love with the gourd, and then the gourd was destroyed, that God begins to reason with Jonah.

The next phrase in verse 10 tells us with whom God reasons. **"You have had pity."** *"Jonah, you are the man I am talking to, a man of uneven passions and narrow compassions. You showed pity on the gourd, a common and a worthless weed belonging to the plant kingdom. Jonah, you fell in love with a plant, a vegetable, if you please. You, a man of uneven passions, are mad one day and glad the next day. You fell in love and showed compassion toward a gourd and pitied it when it died."*

Now notice how God reasoned with Jonah in verses 10 and 11. **"But the Lord said, 'You have had pity on the plant for which you have not labored, nor made it grow, which came up in a night and perished in a night. And should I not pity Nineveh?'"** For you Bible students, in the Hebrew, the word "pity" and "spare" is the same word used interchangeably. So that we could say, the Lord said to Jonah, *"You would have the gourd spared, but yet you did not want me to spare Nineveh."* Notice how God begins reasoning from the lesser to the greater. He now begins to show Jonah the weakness and the sinfulness of his thinking processes, and He does so by setting forth a comparison between the love and the compassion Jonah had for the gourd, and God's own love and compassion for the creatures in Nineveh. He points out to Jonah that the pity which he had for the gourd was directed to a plant which did not belong to him to begin

with. Notice that he says you did not labor, you did not plant it, you did not set it out, and neither did you fertilize it to make it grow. It wasn't your plant to start with.

Notice also that God points out that Jonah's compassion was limited to a lowly plant in the vegetable kingdom which had but a short life span. It would be here today and gone tomorrow. *"Jonah, reason with me. Stop and consider what you are in love with. You are in love with just one little single plant. You are placing a high value for one little plant in the vegetable kingdom."*

Then in verse 11, God proceeds to show Jonah the love and compassion which He had for His own creatures who lived in Nineveh. ***"And should I not pity Nineveh, that great city, in which are more than one hundred and twenty thousand persons who cannot discern between their right hand and their left—and much livestock?"*** God's pity was upon creatures made in His own image, not just the plant in the vegetable kingdom. The people who lived in Nineveh were the work of God's own hands and of greater number. Perhaps there were a million souls in contrast to a little single weed. Historians tell us that it took one and a half million slave workers eight years to build Nineveh. However, God planted the city by His providence. God brought forth the children and grew the teenagers. God blessed the adults. God brought Nineveh to its greatness. God asked Jonah, *"You would have me destroy the works of my own hands when you did not even want a little weed destroyed? Your compassion, Jonah, for a little temporal plant is nothing compared to my love for a city of human beings who have eternity-bound souls and will spend eternity either in peace or in misery."* God also told Jonah that there were six score thousand children in the City. A score is an increment of twenty, multiplied by six equals one hundred and twenty, placed in front of the number thousand, you come up with one hundred and twenty thousand children who have not contributed to the guilt and the evil of this city. They had done no violent acts or participated in the evil ways of their parents. Their natural inbred corruption or depravity of their natures had not yet manifested itself into actual sins against God's holy law. In fact, they had not even developed enough in their mental growth to know if they were going to be right-handed or left-handed. Thus, they were unable to discern good from evil. God asks Jonah, *"If I destroy those who have willfully and knowingly sinned against a known standard, will not these little ones also suffer, who have not sinned after the similitude of their parents? Is your little temporal plant more valuable than the one hundred twenty thousand who have not contributed to the guilt and corruption of the city?"* In God's reasoning with Jonah, He did not stop with the children. He said, *"Jonah, if you cannot love the lives of human beings and their little ones, can you not at least love the animals that are in the city? There are much cattle there. While they are not moral creatures, they are more noble than the plants. In My law, Jonah, I have taught you that I am a God who cares for oxen. In*

*My law Jonah, I have instructed you how the mother bird is to be cared for with the eggs in her nest. Jonah, now reason with Me. Don't you think that if you, as a creature, can sense a loss in the destruction of a lowly plant, that I, the Creator, can sense a loss in the destruction of many creatures made in My own image and likeness? Jonah, **"Come now, and let us reason together," . . . Though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be as white as snow.**" (Isaiah 1:18). "Jonah, why is your mouth shut and why don't you reply to My reasoning? You now have the opportunity to say that your plant was worth more than all of what I loved in Nineveh." There is no reply coming forth from Jonah. "Jonah, can you love what I love?" Can you love perishing human beings the way I love them? Or Jonah, do you prize your earthly comforts and plans more than the spiritual and moral well-being of your fellow man?" Finally, God said, "Jonah, do you love Me enough to love what I love?"*

In the next lesson, we are going to cover how Jesus asked a similar question to Peter in the New Testament. He asked, "Simon Peter, do you love me?" That question hurt Peter more than anything that had ever happened to the Apostle Peter. He replied, "Well, Lord you know." "Then Peter if you love me, feed my sheep who I love." If you say that you love the Lord, but you are not willing to get involved in the evangelization and the bringing of sheep into the fold, do you really love Him.

The book closes with Jonah's mouth stopped, standing before God in his guilt and shame.

Let me close this lesson with a thought regarding how God reasons with us as to what we love. Do we really love what God loves, or do we have other priorities, and just try to give God's work the "leftovers?" How many of us have our gourds, our nice homes, our automobiles, our clothes, our families, and our jobs? That is what the American people are running helter-skelter about trying to lay hold of. What is happening to the kingdom work? **"Jesus said, But seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you."** (Matthew 6:33). Do we love Christ and what He loves enough to become involved in finding His sheep and feeding and nurturing them, or do we just give the Lord a little tip and say, "well I love you Lord, and to show my love, I will come to church once a week." Is that your little gourd? Is just faithfulness in church attendance all that Christ has a right to ask out of you? We put in hours and hours pursuing out after things which are wilting, dying, and passing away. How many hours do we put in the lives of other people, seeking to share the truth of God with them? This is one of the most painful condemning things that we can ever be exposed to. What is God asking out of us today? He is saying, "*Christian, do you really love what I love, or are you content to set your affections on things here below, and just allow Me to love whatever I want to love? Do you think I have left you here so that you can just continue on in a pain*

free body, that you can live in a house sheltered from the elements, that you can go to the grocery store and the clothing store? Do you think that is your purpose in this world, or have I put you here to love what I love?" When God puts that question before me, I have to bow my head in shame and guilt and say that my priorities have not been a total commitment to the Lordship of Jesus Christ. Robert Murray McCheyne gave his life away and died as a young man in ministering to the Indians. Some people say that he was foolish and wasted his life. Mr. Spurgeon died at age 56. He destroyed his health in his efforts to reach people with the gospel. I challenge us as a church to repent and return to our first love, not to food, clothing and shelter, but to our first love – the kingdom of Christ and His righteousness. Let us pray.