It's the message, not the messenger

JONAH: WORLD CLASS EVANGELIST

In his day, who was the most effective evangelist—Jesus or Jonah? Most people would instinctively answer “Jesus.” This would be a wrong answer, however. The question was: Who was the most effective evangelist in his day. By the end of His ministry, Jesus had converted only a handful of radicals to His message of love your neighbor as yourself. Jonah, on the other hand, converted 120,000 ordinary men and women from heathenry to God-fearing repentance, all in a single afternoon’s work. Why did God do this with Jonah and—here is an even more disturbing question—why did He cause me to write about it? I believe it was to teach us a lesson about God’s chosen vessels: It’s all about God and not all that much about the vessels.

When God first told him to preach repentance to the Ninevites, Jonah said, “No.” The prophet then spent several weeks devising a daring and ingenious plan of how to keep God from bothering him: He would run away from God in a big boat—a huge wooden boat! That would teach God. God would never find him in such a huge, wooden boat.

Indeed, it took God many, many hours of intense searching to find Jonah; the sea is very big, and sophisticated navigation equipment had not yet been invented. While He was looking, God decided to send a huge storm, just to make things interesting for Jonah. When God did finally locate the reticent prophet, Jonah was dog-paddling for his life in the Mediterranean. The mariners had tossed Jonah overboard at his own request. “God sent this storm because of me,” Jonah had whined. “No sense you guys dying on my account. Give me the old salt water enema—and have a nice day.”

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CGN FUN-FILLED GOSPEL GAME!

Which of the following sayings has the power to persuade people of the love of God?

☐ I am an ordained pastor, so listen up
☐ You are dead in trespasses and sins
☐ This is the hour of decision
☐ It is up to you where you spend eternity
☐ Ours is an angry God
☐ God offers you salvation
☐ Watch this amazing arm gesture
☐ Christ died for our sins

Thanks for playing!
...world class evangelist

(Continued from page 1)

The clever mariner was near death when God sent a giant fish to swallow him. This was the best thing that could have happened to Jonah, because the fish saved his life. You know you’re having a bad day when the best thing that happens to you is you get swallowed by a giant fish.

The fish regurgitated Jonah three days later on the balmy beaches of Nineveh. God again commanded His prophet to preach repentance to Nineveh, and this time the idea made a lot more sense to Jonah. It didn’t mean he had to like it, however. Even after his Sea World adventure, it didn’t mean he had to like it, however. Even after his Sea World adventure, Jonah’s attitude still ranked a little lower than the angels. We know this because we have a record of his exact words as he went about Nineveh doing the Lord’s work. Here is the text of his sermon, in his exact words as he went about Nineveh doing the Lord’s work. Here is the text of his sermon, in its entirety:

“Yet forty days and Nineveh will be overthrown” (Jonah 3:4).

Gospel game answer

Did you take the CGN FUN-FILLED GOSPEL GAME on the previous page? What was your answer? Which saying has the power to persuade people of the love of God? Did you say: “You are dead in trespasses and sins?” I hope not, because that answer would be—WRONG! How can a person dead in trespasses and sins respond to a gospel challenge? Wouldn’t believing in God be the most un-sinning thing a person could do?

Did you guess: “Ours is an angry God?” I’m sorry to hear that. God is now conciliated to the world (2 Cor. 5:19), meaning that He is on friendly, peaceful terms with it. In other words, He’s smiling on everyone. In other words, He’s specifically not angry. Strange that no “evangelist” ever tries this message on other people. Well, few “evangelists” even know it’s true.

Did you guess: “God offers you salvation?” That’s unfortunate. Salvation is a divine achievement, not a human offer. It’s a fact, not a contingency dependent upon human response.

Did you guess: “Watch this amazing arm gesture?” Close! Amazing arm gestures are an important part of effective communication, especially for Italians. Some Italian evangelists (I am not speaking of the Pope) have actually knocked sinners unconscious with a carelessly thrown elbow.

The correct answer is: “Christ died for our sins.” Here is the complete package in five simple words. Being in the past tense, the statement effectually eliminates the idea that sin still stands between you and a righteous God. And the fact that Jesus Christ—the divine Son of God—dealt with these sins, puts failure out of the question. For from that terrible cross, He said: “It is finished!”

Though you may have been a Christian for many years, it is possible that you have just now heard the gospel of Christ.

What a Revelation!

MATTHEW’S REAL NAME WAS LEVI ALPHEUS (see accompanying photo below)

I don’t know what earth-shattering thing you did last month, but I discovered that the disciple Matthew’s real name was Levi Alpheus.

Matthew 9:9 tipped me off: “And Jesus, passing by, perceived a man named Matthew sitting at the tribute office.” As this man was termed Matthew, this must not have been his real name. I found his real name in Mark 2:14— “And, passing along, He perceived Levi of Alpheus, sitting at the tribute office.”

The name Levi Alpheus brought the man down to earth for me. Here was the name he went by in Grade School, when his teacher took roll call:

“Barney Levinson.”

“Here.”

“Levi Alpheus.”

“One.”

One fine day at the tax shack, our Lord chose Levi Alpheus—Levi Alpheus, for heaven’s sake—to one day rule the world.

Wait until you see what He does with Levi’s impetuous classmate, Peter Jonah.

Q&A

How do I know whether or not I’m a member of the body of Christ? I don’t feel called.

Feelings have nothing to do with it. If you believe that Christ died for your sins, then you are a member of the body of Christ. But beware. As simple as this message sounds, Satan has devised doctrines (“doctrines of demons,” 1 Tim. 4:1) to keep you from believing it. Do you believe that Jesus is the son of God, or have you swallowed the Satanic lie that He is God. If the Son is God, then the Son could not have died, because God cannot die. If you believe this, then you don’t believe in the death of Christ.

Do you believe in free will? If so, then you believe it was your belief in Christ (rather than Christ), that delivered you from sin. Do you see now why I say feeling is immaterial? God’s spirit causes people to intellectually assent to right teaching. If you assent to it, then you’re a believer. It’s that simple.
Rants & Stuff

The Apostle Paul says we should not murmur. Therefore, I shall rant (Philippians 2:14).

I’m so powerful right now I could just croak

Bedtime is my favorite time of day because it simulates death. Each night when you pull up the covers, it’s a mini funeral. It is. You’re saying, “Good-by cruel world. Carry on without me for a few hours, you %$#@ oblate spheroid with a *^#!& molten center.”

Well, maybe you don’t say that, exactly. You probably say something much nicer, like, “Good night, friendly world controlled by the prince of darkness.” Even so, I consider “good night” to be a euphemism for the two sentences I just wrote. “Good night” is what we say at funerals. “Good night,” we say to the dead. “See you in the morning,” we say to the terrible-looking corpses. Then we go eat ham sandwiches and potato salad to sustain our own dying frames.

I am apt some days to envy the dead. For instance, I was reading a 1941 Unsearchable Riches magazine the other day, and ran across the following:

Sister Mary Ann Williams of the Lake Worth, Florida, class, passed away November 29. An inspiring funeral message was given by Brother John Clendening. Sister Williams and her daughter, Sister Edith Claxton Grapes, had been regular attendants of this class since 1932, when Brother Loudy first visited there.

Sister Mary Ann Williams, formerly of Lake Worth, Florida, had, for eight years, learned mature truth under the tutelage of none other than Brother Loudy. Thus, she was certainly a member of the body of Christ. Not only this, her daughter was also a sister in faith—speaking of the noble Ms. Grapes. If this was not enough, an inspiring funeral ensued, conducted by none other than Brother John Clendening. (I’ve never heard of him, but I would certainly wish for him to dispense inspirations at my ceremony, were he available. And yet Clendening is most certainly dead himself by this time, as is the noble Sister Grapes.)

Sister Williams finished her course. The next time she opens her eyes, she will be with Christ. In the meantime, she is delivered from the heat of Lake Worth, Florida—not to mention the devilish insects of the area. No more pain, no more disappointment, no more bills, and no more cockroaches in the kitchen for Sister Williams. And if you’re going to die, eight days before Pearl Harbor isn’t a bad time. To have never seen the word “Holocaust” capitalized, or associated “Bataan” with anything but the Philippine peninsula, would be considered, by anyone, a blessing.

Now you know how I can write so powerfully about God. “For when I may be weak, then I am powerful” (2 Cor. 12:10).

Take this verse literally sometime, and see what it does for you.

Paul refused to examine himself

The apostle Paul did the work of God and refused the time-wasting and often debilitating exercise of self-analysis.

“Thus let a man be reckoning with us—as deputies of Christ, and administrators of God’s secrets. Here, furthermore, it is being sought in administrators that any such may be found faithful. Now to me it is the least trifle that I may be being examined by you or by man’s day. But neither am I examining myself. For of nothing am I conscious as to myself, but not by this am I justified. Now He Who is examining me is the Lord.” —1 Cor. 4:1-5

Who had more important work to do than the apostle Paul? And who would require a “cleaner nose” than the administrator of God’s secrets? Paul knew the scrutiny he was under, and yet he wasted no time breaking down and analyzing his actions and motives. He thought his motives were pure, but didn’t trust that they were. That was God’s business. Satan’s business would have been occupying Paul with hours of guilt-provoking introspection. Paul refused to play that game.

Be like Paul. Live the best you can. Look to the future, not the past. Be like Paul, and forget those things that lie behind. Everyone has done bad things. No one’s motives are pure. We are all weak. We have all hurt other people. May we simply acknowledge it, apologize to whomever apologies may be due, trust God, and move on.