Lessons From Jonah

The story of Jonah is one that is very familiar to us. We have heard from a young age about this man who was swallowed by a big fish. However, this story has a lot more to offer than just that. Let us consider a few lessons we can learn from Jonah.

First of all, notice that man cannot escape God's presence. Jonah tried to escape his responsibility before God by running from his presence (Jon. 1:3). He left his hometown, but he could not leave God's presence. God's all-seeing eye followed Jonah as he boarded the ship and fled to Tarshish. Like Jonah, many men today are trying to escape their responsibilities to God. They will be no more successful than was the prophet. God will still hold men accountable to him, regardless of how far they may run from his presence.

Another lesson we learn from the story of Jonah is the meaning of repentance. The book of Jonah shows us the meaning of repentance. The Lord told Jonah, "Arise, go to Nineveh" (Jon. 1:2). In his rebellion against God, Jonah fled to Tarshish. When Jonah repented, the Lord again commanded, "Arise, go to Nineveh" (Jon. 3:2). This time Jonah went to Nineveh. He had a change of heart, and thus changed his actions. We also see the meaning in repentance in those who lived in Nineveh. When Jonah preached in the city of Nineveh saying, "Yet forty days, and Nineveh shall be overthrown" (Jon. 3:4), we find that the people of Nineveh "believed in God, and proclaimed a fast, and put on sackcloth, from the greatest of them even to the least of them" (Jon. 3:5). They as well had a change of heart and repented.

Finally, we learn from Jonah that God loves everyone. Another important lesson taught in the book of Jonah is God's love for the Gentiles. At first, Jonah did not want to see the Gentile enemy of Israel delivered from God's judgment. He desired to see the city of Nineveh destroyed. Therefore, he ran from his mission to call them to repentance. However, God loved the Ninevites and was just as concerned for them as he was for the Israelites. He saw that there were 120,000 innocent infants and young children who would die should judgment fall on the city of Nineveh. He loved them and cared for them.

The book of Jonah indeed offers a lot of lessons for us to learn as Christians. It will serve us well to spend some time reading and studying the book of Jonah to better understand the lessons we learn from this book.