

THE MONDAY MEMO

Written on the Holland America Zaandam Cruise Ship Somewhere in the Waters off the Canadian Coast Issue 211

This is a first for **The Monday Memo**. I am not only writing **The Memo** onboard a cruise ship, but later I will send it from the ship's Internet café. We left port yesterday and I am writing this before I enjoy tonight's formal dining event. I am on board escorting a group with the Presbyterian theologian R. C. Sproul, who is a fantastic teacher. It doesn't get any better than this, until I do my own cruise later next month. ☺

So what can I write that is appropriate to being on a ship cruising toward Alaska? I thought about Noah, but that would be too easy and obvious. People have been talking today about getting up at 5:30 tomorrow morning to whale watch, so that gave me the idea of doing a quick purpose profile on the Old Testament prophet Jonah.

NOWHERE TO RUN, NOWHERE TO HIDE

Jonah is an interesting study. Jonah had a clear understanding of what he was supposed to do, but he tried to run the other way. When the ship he was on encountered problems, the sailors determined to find out what the problem was:

Then the sailors said to each other, "Come, let us cast lots to find out who is responsible for this calamity." They cast lots and the lot fell on Jonah. So they asked him, "Tell us, who is responsible for making all this trouble for us? What do you do? Where do you come from? What is your country? From what people are you?" He answered, "I am a Hebrew and I worship the LORD, the God of heaven, who made the sea and the land." This terrified them and they asked, "What have you done?" (They knew he was running away from the LORD, because he had already told them so.) The sea was getting rougher and rougher. So they asked him, "What should we do to you to make the sea calm down for us?" (Jonah 1:7-11).

I wonder if you have run into any rough seas lately? I mean have the winds of life been blowing against you? Then I would advise you to determine whether you are running from your purpose. It's easy to allow the concerns for money, acceptance, or professional success sidetrack you from the main issue of life and that's your purpose—the will of God for you. Jonah was an honest person with God and others. He didn't try to hide the fact that he didn't want to fulfill his purpose. And he was equally honest with what the ship had to do for the conditions to return to normal.

GO WITH THE FLOW.

The sailors asked what they should do to make the sea calm down.

"Pick me up and throw me into the sea," he replied, "and it will become calm. I know that it is my fault that this great storm has come upon you." Instead, the men did their best to row back to land. But they could not, for the sea grew even wilder than before. Then they cried to the LORD, "O LORD, please do not let us die for taking this man's life. Do not hold us accountable for killing an innocent man, for you, O LORD, have done as you

pleased." Then they took Jonah and threw him overboard, and the raging sea grew calm. At this the men greatly feared the LORD, and they offered a sacrifice to the LORD and made vows to him (Jonah 1:12-16).

In his honesty, Jonah told the men that he was running and that, if they wanted any chance of surviving, they needed to pitch him overboard at their earliest convenience. The sailors rejected this advice and tried their best to find refuge. And there may be some people colluding with you to keep you from fulfilling your purpose. They may be telling you that you must be responsible, must make a living or that you have time to fulfill your purpose later in life. But they will find out what Jonah's associates found out: there is one way for conditions to be optimal and that's for everyone to find and fulfill their purpose. As soon as they threw Jonah into the sea, conditions returned to normal and all the sailors all worshipped.

But as bizarre as this sounds, Jonah got back on track by going with the flow. He submitted to the stormy conditions in faith, knowing that God had something for him to do. He got back on track, so to speak, by submitting to the storm instead of fighting it. You may also find that your way out of your storm is to submit to the storm, recognizing that it has come not to blow you off course but to get you back on track.

So what about you? Are you in a storm? Are you resisting the storm? Do you need to submit to it instead? I urge you to ask the Lord if your adverse conditions are due to any resistance on your part to your purpose. If you discover this is the case, then I urge you this week to throw yourself overboard as you pursue your purpose with passion and resolve. I urge you to have a great week; I plan on having one myself.

THE MONDAY MEMO

From the desk of Dr. John Stanko- Issue 212

Greetings once again, and I wish all my American readers a Happy Fourth of July. It's good to be back home, even if it's only for a few days. I got home from Alaska Saturday night and I head to Kenya on Tuesday for a two-week tour with some students. Since I will be in transit next week, there will be no **Monday Memo** again until Monday, July 18. And if you can help me financially over the next few weeks, I ask that you please see the end of this **Memo**.

I had a retreat of sorts this past week as I cruised Alaska. I had some questions that I put before the Lord, seeking answers. I am still seeking, but in the meantime, I spent considerable time studying Psalm 119. I would like to share some thoughts with you from that psalm this week.

Psalm 119 is a psalm about the word of God. It is of note that this psalm (the longest of the 150 psalms) is in the exact middle of the Bible, which always speaks to me that the Word should be the central point of our study and service. Two things struck me as I read that psalm this week. The first was that the writer of the psalm included many prayers in his song. The second was that the writer was in a lot of trouble due to his commitment and loyalty to God's word.

LET'S SAY SOME PRAYERS.

I have always said that if you're going to pray—and I know that you do—then you should make the inspired prayers in the Bible part of your prayer life. I took the time to identify all the prayers

in Psalm 119 this past week (I found 68 of them) and wrote them out in my journal. Then I made it a daily exercise to recite those prayers. Some of those prayers include statements like:

- Remove from me scorn and contempt, for I keep your statutes (verse 22).
- I am laid low in the dust; preserve my life according to your word (verse 25).
- My soul is weary with sorrow; strengthen me according to your word (verse 28).
- Turn my heart toward your statutes and not toward selfish gain (verse 36).
- Deal with your servant according to your love and teach me your decrees (verse 124).
- I am your servant; give me discernment that I may understand your statutes (verse 125).
- It is time for you to act, O LORD; your law is being broken (verse 126).

If you would like a list of all the prayers in Psalm 119, along with other Bible prayers that I pray regularly, you can go to http://www.purposequest.com/bible_studies.htm and access the list. Or write me with the word “prayers” in the subject box and I will send you a copy. These prayers struck me as very urgent, which caused me to see that the psalmist was in some kind of trouble as he prayed. This mighty man of the word was being harassed and pressured by the arrogant and by the pressures of trying to live a biblical life. I thought that perhaps these prayers could help you as you face your own pressure from whatever source as you seek to a purpose person.

NOT AN ENEMY IN THE WORLD UNTIL . . .

As I have written many times, your enemies don't appear until you start to clarify and fulfill your purpose. There are many biblical examples that prove this to be true. Joseph had his dreams and then his brothers plotted to kill him. Moses was at peace in Egypt until he began to deliver his people. David lived in obscurity until he was anointed king. Then Saul, the king in power, spent many years trying to kill David. And Jesus hadn't an enemy in the world until He preached a sermon and healed on the Sabbath. Then men plotted how to kill Him. These men had no enemies until they became serious about purpose, serious about doing the will of God as He revealed it to them.

So how about you? Are you a person of purpose? Do you want to see the sick healed, the ignorant educated, the poor fed, the chaos ordered or the problems solved? If you do, then I know, without meeting or talking with you, that you have enemies. In fact, I would go so far as to say that your enemies are serving you notice that you're doing something right where purpose is concerned. Perhaps you are discouraged about your progress or have run into opposition that you weren't expecting. Maybe the opposition is coming from those who are close to you. And perhaps your enemies are those within you—discouragement, despair, doubt and confusion. If you are facing enemies—not matter what the source—it's time to pray, just like the psalmist did. I urge you this week to read Psalm 119 and pray along with the writer. Try to sense his dilemma and let him help you with yours. Say the prayers in Psalm 119 out loud and call out to God to help you as you seek to do His will. Do this every day this week and don't stop until you sense a

breakthrough, or at least until you are encouraged again in your purpose or the pursuit thereof. Have a great week and remember: You won't hear from me again for two weeks.

THE MONDAY MEMO

Written in Eldoret, Kenya and Sent From Nairobi by John W. Stanko - Issue 213

I'm back! After a two-week tour with some U.S. students here in Kenya, I am back in Nairobi ready for the trip home. People always ask me why I come to Africa so often. "What is it that you do there?" they ask. It's not a matter of what I do or have to give when I come to Africa; it's a matter of what I receive. I want to thank all my Kenyan friends and family who helped make this trip so special for the students and me. I hope to be back in October so we can continue the PurposeQuest work that has taken root here.

When I wrote two weeks ago, we looked at the prayers in Psalm 119, which many of you requested or downloaded from my website. Those prayers were written by a man in trouble—someone who took a stand for God's word and was then afflicted for his righteousness. I went on to point out a pattern I have written about on many occasions: Your enemies don't really appear until you begin to pursue or fulfill your purpose. Of course, Jesus was no exception to this. For the first 30 years of His life, Jesus didn't have an enemy in the world. Then He preached and healed on the Sabbath and, from then on, men plotted to kill Him. This week I want to look at another aspect of the opposition that Jesus received when He began to fulfill His purpose, which was to seek and save the lost sheep of the house of Israel. You may want to read Matthew 4:1-11 before you proceed.

THREE TEMPTATIONS

Before Jesus entered public ministry, he fasted and prayed for 40 days. At the end of the 40 days, the devil came to tempt Him three times. The first temptation was to turn the stones into bread. The second was to throw Himself off the pinnacle of the Temple. And the third was to make a devilish deal. Let's look at each one and see how Jesus responded, and what we can learn concerning our own purpose opposition.

1. **Serve the suffering.** Here the devil tried to get Jesus to do something good for the good of mankind. Jesus was hungry and I'm sure that the thought of bread at that point was attractive, but turning one stone to one loaf would have been enough to feed Jesus. The devil wanted Him to go beyond that. And you may be tempted with the same thing. There are many good things you could do that would help the world and its suffering inhabitants. But you aren't to do just anything as you serve God and His creation. Your purpose is your assignment—nothing more, nothing less. How did Jesus respond to the devil? He stated that man doesn't live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God. Your purpose is the word for your life from God. It is that which will sustain you in times of trial and will keep you focused when men, women and their causes cry out for your attention, time and money. Don't be diverted to something that is important but not part of your purpose assignment.
2. **Make a public display.** The devil wanted Jesus to jump off the Temple so that God the Father could save Him. Then people would notice and God would

supposedly be glorified. This would also “force” the Father to fulfill His word, which Satan misquoted to Jesus (see Psalm 91:11). If God gives you a public ministry or one that attracts attention from others, that’s all well and good. But if not, then your purpose isn’t any less important than the most public figure in the kingdom of God (whoever that may be!). Don’t take the attitude that you are less important than someone else who is in the limelight. Serve God, trust Him for your place and purpose and don’t subtly tell God He made a mistake by giving you the purpose that you have. Don’t put God to the test by expecting Him to bless something you do that is outside of your given purpose. I tried to be a pastor, assuming it was what God wanted me to do. It was not and God never did bless my efforts. God isn’t committed to bless whatever you do; only whatever you do that is according to His will.

3. **Don’t settle for small results.** This third temptation was related to the second. The second temptation was to make a public display; the third was to make a public display that would affect a lot of people and nations. Your purpose may have you working with ten students, a group of elderly people or a certain group of people with a certain ethnic background or handicap. You don’t have to touch the nations to be pleasing to God. You can stay in your village or town, stay among your own people or go to a people group of whom no one is aware. My point is that you don’t judge the importance of your purpose by the number of people you work with or help. Base your purpose on God’s will and trust Him for the results. God doesn’t call you to be successful by any human standard; but He does want you to be faithful. Jesus didn’t minister to the whole world; just Israel. He didn’t minister to all Israel; just Galilee. Jesus didn’t minister to all Galilee; just Capernaum and the surrounding villages. He didn’t minister to all Capernaum; just to the lost sheep of the house of Israel who were there. The devil was telling Jesus, “You can’t really serve God unless you expand your territory and I can help.” But your purpose isn’t about serving people or their needs; it’s about serving God.

Whether your purpose brings you notoriety or obscurity, it’s important to God. Whether your purpose touches many or a few is irrelevant. Stop comparing yourself to others and your purpose to the purpose God gave them. If your assignment is to care for one person, you are as important as the person who cares for thousands. I urge you this week to search your heart and see if you are being tempted with any of three temptations listed above. If you are, then settle to do what God wants you to do—no more and no less. After all, if God is pleased to assign your purpose, shouldn’t you be pleased to carry it out? Have a great week!

THE MONDAY MEMO

From the desk of John W. Stanko Issue 214

I don’t feel like writing a Monday Memo today. But instead of taking this week off, I think I’ll take next week off when my family and I are in Alaska for the PurposeQuest cruise. So there will be no **Monday Memo** next week while we are on holiday. If you can’t get along without a Memo, then you can go to my website and read a back issue.

Last week, we looked at the temptations Jesus encountered as He began to fulfill His purpose. (These temptations are found in Matthew 4:1-11.) I made the point that your opponents often don't show up until you determine to clarity and fulfill your purpose. It was interesting to me that I ran across three references to these temptations this week in unrelated material that I was studying. I found that too much of a coincidence, so I decided to write about those temptations again today.

I FOUND A TREASURE.

This week I found a treasure on the Internet. Years ago I came across some commentaries on the first five books of the Bible written by an Irish preacher, Bible expositor and author named C. H. Mackintosh. They were tremendous and played a large role in my desire to study the Word in seminary. A few years later, I found three of the five volumes in a used bookstore, but was never able to find the other two. This week I was studying Jacob and decided to do an Internet search to see if I could find those missing books by Mackintosh. Not only did I find the missing volumes for my library (which I ordered from a bookstore in England), but I also found all the commentaries and many more essays and articles written by Mackintosh at <http://www.stempublishing.com/authors/mackintosh/>. And of course, all those are free to anyone interested. I would recommend them to you for your own personal study.

While studying Jacob's life in the Mackintosh commentary on Genesis, I found the following insight concerning the three temptations. Rather than summarize what he wrote, I thought I would quote it verbatim (I added all the Bible references in case you want to study them for yourself; they are in bold type):

Now, nothing can be more truly blessed than the position of hanging in child-like dependence upon God, and being entirely content to wait for His time. True, it will involve trial; but the renewed mind learns some of its deepest lessons, and enjoys some of its sweetest experiences, while waiting on the Lord; and the more pressing the temptation to take ourselves out of His hands, the richer will be the blessing of leaving ourselves there. It is so exceedingly sweet to find ourselves wholly dependent upon one who finds infinite joy in blessing us. It is only those who have tasted, in any little measure, the reality of this wondrous position that can at all appreciate it.

The only one who ever occupied it perfectly and uninterruptedly was the Lord Jesus Himself. He was ever dependent upon God, and utterly rejected every proposal of the enemy to be anything else. His language was, "In thee do I put my trust;" (**Psalm 7:1 and 16:1**) and again, "I was cast upon thee from the womb" (**Psalm 22:10**). Hence, when tempted by the devil to make an effort to satisfy His hunger, His reply was, "It is written, Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God" (**Deuteronomy 8:3**). When tempted to cast Himself from the pinnacle of the temple, His reply was, "It is written again, Thou shalt not tempt the Lord thy God" (**Deuteronomy 6:16**). When tempted to take the kingdoms of the world from the hand of another than God, and by doing homage to another than Him, His reply was, "It is written, Thou shalt worship the Lord thy God, and him only shalt thou serve" (**Deuteronomy 10:20**).

In a word, nothing could allure the perfect man from the place of absolute dependence upon God. True, it was God's purpose to sustain His Son (**Psalm 91:12**); it was His purpose that He should suddenly come to His temple (see **Malachi 3:1**); it was His purpose to give Him the kingdoms of this world (see **Psalm 2:8**); but this was the very

reason why the Lord Jesus would simply and uninterruptedly wait on God for the accomplishment of His purpose, in His own time, and in His own way. He did not set about accomplishing His own ends. He left Himself thoroughly at God's disposal. He would only eat when God gave Him bread; He would only enter the temple when sent of God; He will ascend the throne when God appoints the time. "Sit thou at my right hand, *until I make thy foes thy footstool*" (**Psalm 110:1**).

AND SO?

And so the last sentence struck me as very significant: "He left Himself thoroughly at God's disposal. He would only eat when God gave Him bread; He would only enter the temple when sent of God; He will ascend the throne when God appoints the time. 'Sit thou at my right hand, *until I make thy foes thy footstool*' (**Psalm 110:1**)." These last few months have been lean financially, but I saw in this quote that lean times are from Him to teach me something that abundance can't teach. When I need bread, He will give it to me. And I was reminded once again that the battle isn't mine to fight, but God's. I do what I can do, but ultimately I am totally dependent on Him, which is a good place to be.

I recommend that you read Matthew 4:1-11 along with the above quote every day this week. You may want to go back and read last week's **Memo**. Then enter your thoughts and impressions in your journal. What bread has God given you to eat recently? Where is God sending you? What temptations are you facing as a person of purpose? And how can Jesus' temptations help you face your own? In fact, your assignment is to continue this study for the next two weeks until I write again after the Alaska cruise. Have a great two weeks!

THE MONDAY MEMO

From the desk of John W. Stanko - Issue 215

The great Northwest adventure is history! We returned from the PurposeQuest Alaska cruise last night, and what a grand time everyone had! We ate like kings, saw breathtaking scenery, had great times of fellowship, spent time as a families and, perhaps best of all, talked about purpose. I have been to Alaska seven times and I never get tired of the wilderness scenes and towns, the glaciers and the wildlife. And to combine that with purpose meetings is an added blessing. It was so good that I think I will sponsor another cruise next year. If you are interested in going, please send me an email with the word "Alaska" in the subject box, and I will keep you informed as the 2006 cruise develops.

I had a good week seeking the Lord and thinking about the future, which is another benefit of a week away on a cruise ship. I won't share all that I saw and heard, but I would like to share one insight that I had while reading. It involves a well-known verse that I found I had misinterpreted for more than 30 years! So I thought I would "confess" the error of my ways in this week's Memo and relate my more accurate insight to your purpose quest. (Read on, for it's not often that a Bible teacher admits to any sort of error or misinterpretation.)

BOY, WAS I WRONG!

So what verse have I misinterpreted? It's found in Matthew 16:18 and is part of what Jesus said when Peter had the revelation that Jesus was the Messiah. In that verse, Jesus told Peter, "And I

tell you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of Hades will not overcome it.” That’s a pretty simple verse (so I thought) and may be wondering how I could have misinterpreted its meaning. The gist of my error was in seeing that verse as primarily an *offensive* and not a *defensive* posture. I had always thought that the gates of hell would attack the Church and individual believers, but would be unsuccessful according to Jesus’ promise. I had pointed out that many people interpreted this verse to mean that the gates of hell would not even attempt to prevail, and had urged people to see that the promise was for victory in battle, not freedom from battle. But I had seen this verse to mean that hell would attack and the Church would successfully repel the attacks.

Then I began to think about what a gate is. In Jesus’ time, a gate was the way in and out of the city through the city walls. The walls were there to protect the city and the gates would be opened in times of peace and closed in times of war or danger. So a gate isn’t an offensive weapon or strategy, but a defensive one. Gates were there to keep enemies out and not to attack enemies. I also thought of the verses in Psalms, which state: “Lift up your heads, O you gates; be lifted up, you ancient doors, that the King of glory may come in. Who is this King of glory? The LORD strong and mighty, the LORD mighty in battle” (Psalm 24:7-8).

So when Jesus said that the gates of hell would not prevail, He was referring to the fact that the church, armed with salvation and purpose, would attack the gates of hell, bringing with them the name of Jesus, “the Lord mighty in battle.” So I was wrong! Jesus was saying that the gates of hell would not be able to overcome the attack of the Church as they assaulted the kingdom of darkness. I had seen hell as the aggressor and the Church as the defender. In fact, I had the roles reversed.

GATES OF PURPOSE

Your purpose is your gate to fulfillment and success in the will of God. And we have defined fulfillment and success in one word—and that word is *joy*! But there are enemies blocking your purpose entranceway, and those enemies aren’t an indication you are doing anything wrong but rather are on the correct path. Those enemies are trying to control your gates, the gates to your purpose destination. Don’t expect those enemies to lie down and offer no resistance. You have probably encountered opposition as you seek purpose; or you may be further along, encountering opposition as you express your purpose. Wherever you are in your PurposeQuest, continue to press forward. Don’t give up or be discouraged. No one has ever achieved anything great for God without overcoming tremendous obstacles. If nothing else, this week, determine in your heart that you will be aggressive and take your attack to the gates of hell if necessary, knowing that they cannot stand before a man or woman of godly purpose. And as you do that, I know you will find renewed hope and strength, and that will lead to a great week!