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BOOK OF JONAH (Part 4) : GOD’S MERCY

Jonah 1:1 The word of the Lord came to Jonah son of Amittai: 2 “Go to the great city of Nineveh and preach against it, because its wickedness has come up before me.”

3 But Jonah ran away from the Lord

Jonah 1:17 Now the Lord provided a huge fish to swallow Jonah, and Jonah was in the belly of the fish three days and three nights.

Story :

So there were three pastors who went to Saudi Arabia in order to smuggle Bibles. One was an American pastor. The other was an English pastor. And the other one was a Filipino pastor. The American pastor was bullying the Filipino pastor because he was small and can’t speak good English.

Eventually, all the three pastors got caught and they were all sentenced to death. But after some appeal, their sentences were reduced to 20 lashes each.

As they were about to be whipped, the prince announced, “It’s my wife’s birthday and I’m feeling merciful today, you are granted one wish before you are whipped at your back”

So the English pastor was first in line. After thinking what he would wish for, he said, “Please tie a pillow to my back” It was done but after 10 lashes, the whip had shredded the pillow and so it was of no use on the next ten. After the punishment the English pastor had to be carried away bleeding and crying in pain.

It was now the American pastor’s turn, so he thought about his wish and he thought if after only 10 lashes, the pillow ripped and so he thought, two pillows would protect his back. And so he said his wish, “Please tie two pillows at my back.” And so two pillows were tied at the American pastor’s back. True to form, he got 20 lashes and two pillows protected him from bleeding and he pretended that he got hurt but really he wasn’t.

So now, it was the Filipino pastor’s turn. The prince saw he was a Filipino and said, “My nanny was a Filipina and I loved my nanny, and so I will be merciful today and grant you two wishes instead of one before you get whipped.”

The Filipino pastor thought very hard and said, “My first wish, instead of giving me 20 lashes, give me 100 lashes.” The prince was surprised and so he asked what his second wish was. The Filipino pastor replied, “Tie the American pastor at my back.”

We love it when justice is finally meted out after an injustice is done to us and to people close to our hearts.

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Last week, **we ended after Jonah rebelled and repented, he had a relapse when God** showed mercy to the people of Nineveh after they humbled themselves to the Lord.

So today, we will finish the series on Jonah by God’s grace after talking about

I. GOD’S MISSION – save Nineveh

II. **GOD'S MISSIONARY** – we looked Jonah's rebellion, repentance and replapse

Today, we will look at

III. **GOD'S MERCY**

Before we do this, let us distinguish the difference between grace and mercy.

- Mercy is not receiving punishment we deserve.
- Grace is receiving a gift or favor we do not deserve.

Example of Mercy and Grace.

You are caught beating speeding and beating the red light. The cop stops you. By law, you should be given a ticket. But you asked for mercy because you were late to your son's soccer game. The cop had compassion on you and did not give you a ticket – that's mercy!

But then he said, I'll accompany you to the game to make sure you are safe. So he got into his police car, turned on his siren and you followed him. And then both of you watched the game, and he even bought some hotdogs and softdrinks for you to enjoy together. That's grace!

The Book of Jonah is dripping with God's Mercy.

- Chances that he gives us
- Close by to those who ask for it
- Compassion to those he gives it to

I. **GOD'S MERCY IS ABOUT SECOND CHANCES**

STORY : When I was growing up my father worked abroad in the Middle East most of those years. So the one who was disciplining me was my eldest brother. One time, he caught me disobeying my mom for the second time and so he said to me in our language, "Nakakadalawa ka na ha... pangatlo yari ka na sa akin." (You have already done that twice, the third time, you'll get it from me.)

God's mercy doesn't only give us 1 or 2 or 3 chances. He gives us a million chances to come back to him. I'll show it to you later.

First let's look at Jonah

- **God commanded him to go to Nineveh.**

3 But Jonah ran away from the Lord

Right there and then, God could have punished him by this act of rebellion. But then he allowed him to ride the ship. While on that ship,

4 Then the Lord sent a great wind on the sea, and such a violent storm arose that the ship threatened to break up.

He knew it was God who was doing it.

10 This terrified them and they asked, “What have you done?” (They knew he was running away from the Lord, because he (Jonah) had already told them so.)

Still he continued to not relent. So they asked him

11 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?”

Instead of saying, “don’t worry, I will ask the Lord’s forgiveness and obey what he wants me to do.” he asked them

12 “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.”

He’s rather die than obey the Lord.

15 Then they took Jonah and threw him overboard, and the raging sea grew calm.

Now instead of letting Jonah die,

17 Now the Lord provided a huge fish to swallow Jonah,

And that’s when he repented while he was in the belly of the fish.

Did it stop there? Yes, he went to Nineveh and preached but when he saw the Ninevites repented, Jonah got angry at God and even asked God to take away his life.

Jonah 4: 3 Now, Lord, take away my life, for it is better for me to die than to live.”

4 But the Lord replied, “Is it right for you to be angry?”

Then we all know the rest of the story, he did not take away his life. He patiently showed him through the plant that grew overnight on why he did not destroy the Ninevites.

In his book, Rediscovering Jonah by Timothy Keller, he quotes Jacques Ellul

Quote : Often we give people the impression that “after every conversion everything is rosy, there are no more problems, one is automatically in tune with God’s will...” On the contrary, “Paul speaks of two men battling in him, (the old man and the new man) Jonah shows it too... we continue to be sinners (Galatians 5:17; Ephesians 4:22-24). Of course, we cannot use this to justify bad behaviour, but we can take the deepest comfort in seeing “that God knows the totality of the human heart... that this does not exhaust God’s love and patience, that he continues to take this rebellious child by the hand.” – Jacques Ellul, “The Judgement of Jonah”

God could have given up on Jonah, but God appointed difficult situations in his life like the storm, being inside the fish, the plant, the taking away of the plant, the scorching heat in order Jonah to understand and trust Him.

*Hebrews 12: 6... because the Lord disciplines the one he loves,
and he chastens everyone he accepts as his son."*

7 Endure hardship as discipline; God is treating you as his children. For what children are not disciplined by their father?

What is the purpose of the disciplining? Is it because He's just mad at us? No according to the context of Hebrews, IT'S TO FULLY TRUST IN HIM.

Logic : If you're trusting God, you're not sinning. And if you're not trusting God, then you're in sin.

Romans 4:23 and everything that does not come from faith is sin.

I mentioned earlier that God gives us a million chances.

Let's see this. Do you think God has the right to destroy us whenever we sin? Then why doesn't it happen?

Lamentations 3:22 It is of the LORD'S mercies that we are not consumed, because his compassions fail not (KJV)

That word mercies is the word "chesed" ... KJV translates this in many forms in the Old Testament like *kindness, goodness or lovingkindness* but for this particular section they used the word "mercy". The reason why we are not destroyed whenever we have lustful thoughts or judgemental attitude towards others or lies that we say... **IT'S BECAUSE HE GIVES US A MILLION CHANCES to get back to Him.**

But note, as the Bible says,

Romans 2:4 Or do you show contempt for the riches of his kindness, forbearance and patience, not realizing that God's kindness is intended to lead you to repentance?

2 Peter 3:9 The Lord is not slow in keeping his promise, as some understand slowness. Instead he is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance.

As the Bible says :

Deuteronomy 6:16 Do not put the Lord your God to the test as you did at Massah.

Mushroom Soup Illustration : One of the things that I cook during Christmas Eve is my homemade mushroom soup. One of the ingredients that I put there is cream. I put the cream and then put it in medium heat. But one time, I forgot to watch over it because I was watching TV, and you know what happens to cream when it's heated, it boils over and then I just saw my mushroom soup spilling on top of the stove.

It's like with our Lord, yes, He is merciful and gives us a million chances but do not test Him and just say, "Anyway, God will understand." Or "does God even know", like the mushroom soup, His patience will boil over and we don't want that to happen.

That's why the Bible says in 1 John 1:9

1 John 1:9 If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness.

Which brings us to this...

II. GOD'S MERCY IS CLOSE BY

Again, let's look again at the book of Jonah.

Let's look at what happened at the end of his prayer inside the fish.

He knew he was about to die inside that fish (verse 7)

*7 "When my life was ebbing away,
I remembered you, Lord,*

And that's the time, he made the realization

*Jonah 2: 9 But I, with shouts of grateful praise,
will sacrifice to you.
What I have vowed I will make good.
I will say, 'Salvation comes from the Lord.'"*

10 And the Lord commanded the fish, and it vomited Jonah onto dry land.

When Jonah went back to the Lord, God's mercy was there.

Look at the Ninevites, when they humbled themselves before the Almighty God.

Jonah 3: 10 When God saw what they did and how they turned from their evil ways, he relented and did not bring on them the destruction he had threatened.

God's mercy is close by. Why?

Ezekiel 33:11 Say to them, 'As surely as I live, declares the Sovereign LORD, I take no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but rather that they turn from their ways and live.

What does God delight in?

Micah 7:18 Who is a God like you, who pardons sin and forgives the transgression of the remnant of his inheritance? You do not stay angry forever but delight to show mercy.

Biblical Illustration:

Remember the Prodigal Son? Just like Jonah, he rebelled and went far away from his father.

But after experiencing pain and hardship, he realized, how far he is from his father. Let's see again what happened.

Luke 15: 17 "When he came to his senses, he said, 'How many of my father's hired servants have food to spare, and here I am starving to death! 18 I will set out and go back to my father and say to him: Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you. 19 I am no longer worthy to be called your son; make me like one of your hired servants.' 20 So he got up and went to his father.

And we all know what happened.

"But while he was still a long way off, his father saw him and was filled with compassion for him; he ran to his son, threw his arms around him and kissed him.

When we repent, the mercy of God is close by. In fact, God is the one WHO RUNS TO US....WOW!

That's why the Bible says:

James 4:8 Come close to God, and God will come close to you. (NLT)

God's mercy is so close by that when you turn back towards God, He is there.

Quote : If a 1000 steps separate you from Christ, He has taken 999. Walk in His direction. He is waiting. – Max Lucado

III. GOD'S MERCY IS BECAUSE OF HIS COMPASSION.

Jonah knew about this when it comes to God.

Jonah 4: 2 He prayed to the Lord, "Isn't this what I said, Lord, when I was still at home? That is what I tried to forestall by fleeing to Tarshish. I knew that you are a gracious and compassionate God, slow to anger and abounding in love, a God who relents from sending calamity.

And God confirmed with Jonah on the reason for His mercy was His compassion.

Jonah 4:11 Should I not also have compassion on Nineveh, the great city in which there are more than 120,000 people, who do not know the difference between their right hand and their left, as well as many animals?" (NASB)

That's what Jeremiah said earlier

Lamentations 3:22 It is of the LORD'S mercies that we are not consumed, because his compassions fail not.

So the question is: What is compassion?

Etymology : compassion "rakham" from the womb, from the bowels –

People believe that emotions comes from the gut.

Even the root word for Rakham "raham" means to love deeply.

Sometimes, we think of God as distant who doesn't care about us.

Study : B.B. Warfield a Princeton theologian, a century ago did a study and then wrote a book on "The Emotional Life of Our Lord." The most typical statement when it comes to our Lord showing his emotion is the phrase

"...he was moved with compassion" (Mat 9:36; 14:14; 15:32; Mar 1:41;6:34; 8:2; Luke 7:13;10:33; 15:20)

We see this, when he knew people were hungry literally and spiritually or when He saw sick people, or when He saw people crying because of death or when they are grieving, OUR LORD WAS MOVED WITH COMPASSION.

That word "compassion" in Greek

Etymology : compassion "splanchnizomai" – to be moved in the gut. (it's the seat of love and pity)

APPLICATION : When we are in pain emotionally or physically or when we are struggling, our Lord Jesus is also affected emotionally. He is in pain with us. He is crying with us.

That's who our God is.

Illustration : Mica, Chicay and I were talking around the dining table and we talked about how Islam spread rapidly. Muhammad who was the founder waged 86 military campaigns. Even today, that's how Islam is being spread, by conquest...by fear. But Jesus never waged war Himself. In fact, His disciples did not wage war, they were even martyred. But how did Christianity spread. **Christianity conquered the world with love and compassion.**

That's why Charles Spurgeon wrote :

Quote : When I thought God was hard, I found it easy to sin; but when I found God so kind, so good, so overflowing with compassion, I smote upon my breast to think that I could ever have rebelled against One who loved me so, and sought my good. – Charles Spurgeon

And that was how God was winning over Jonah...not with His anger but with His love,patience and His compassion.

CONCLUSION :

When Jonah was running away, it was God who chased Him. When Jonah was being angry with God, it was God who was patiently showing the reason behind His mercy towards the Ninevites and it was because of His compassion.

The story of Jonah is the story of the entire Bible.

And what is that story?

The Bible is not the story of man chasing after God...it's the story of God chasing man.

He's chasing us not because He wants to punish us. He's chasing us because He wants us to be with Him. Remember, people do not go to hell because God wants us to go to hell. People go there because they have rejected God's offer of forgiveness through His Son Jesus Christ.

Imagine this, we are the ones who has offended, rebelled and sinned against Him and yet He still was the one who made a way to come back to Him by giving His own Son Jesus Christ to die on the cross to pay for our sins.

Why did He do that? Because the same with compassion, He passionately loves us. Proof?

*John 3:16 For God **so loved** the world, that **He gave his Only Son**, that **whoever believes in Him should not perish but have eternal life.***

What kind of love is that? It's too much...it's too much.

ILLUSTRATION : This week my wife shared with me that she was really intrigued with the life of Jonah. Upon reading and re-reading the entire book of Jonah, I said earlier that the story of Jonah is about God chasing man and that's the story of the entire Bible. The reason this book resonates with a lot of you because this is also your story. God is chasing you.

I remember Noel, who had a different faith before and then became a Jehovah's witness, God had to bring him and Fiel into Canada to know who truly Jesus is and yet after a few years had to go through a difficult sickness, wanted to die, already, and yet God saved Him and now God is continuously using him in His Kingdom. Noel is Jonah. God chased him.

I remember Kuya Tony, drunkard, full of pride, was wiped out almost financially, had to take a missionary's car to breakdown in front of his shop for the Gospel to be shared with him and Ate Amie, God also had to bring him to Canada, had a heart bypass and still serving the Lord. Kuya Tony is Jonah. God chased him.

I remember Oca, even became an NPA, an actual rebel and then God has used his wife Weng to bring him here to Canada and then to hear the gospel over and over and over again to truly believe that Jesus Christ is truly Lord and Saviour. Oca is Jonah. God chased him.

All of us here, we weren't the ones who chased God. It was God who chased us and still chasing us. And this is why JESUS GETS THE GLORY. It's because we weren't the ones who won Him over. He was the one who conquered us....with His love.

**SUMMONS : So how do we react to Jesus chasing us?
SURRENDER TO HIM.**

And once we surrender to Him,

The last verse in Psalm 23 says :

Psalm 23:5 Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life and I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever. (KJV)

Etymology : shall follow me “radap” pursue... harass... chase... run after...

Like Jonah, we will have some relapse, but God’s goodness and mercy continue to pursue us all the days of our life and we will continuously need to surrender everything to Him. Until truly one day, we will be with Jesus’s forever.

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