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BOOK OF JONAH (Part 1) : GOD'S MISSION

Jonah 1:1 The word of the Lord came to Jonah son of Amitai: 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.

(Show Operation Christmas Child Video)

Last week, I wasn't here and by God's grace, I asked Ptr. Fred to preach on Missions and he mentioned that we are salt and light of the world. And he reminded us that we should always be "Mission-Minded"

For the next 3 weeks, we'll talk about the book of Jonah.

STORY : There was an atheist who was trying to make fun of a Christian. The atheist asked the Christian regarding Jonah and the "whale". He asked, "Was it really a whale that swallowed Jonah? How could have Jonah survived that? It's impossible." The Christian replied, "I do not know but I'll ask Jonah when I get to heaven." Then the atheist said to the Christian, "What if Jonah is not in heaven and he's in hell?" Then the Christian replied, "Then you be the one to ask him."

We are all familiar with the story of Jonah. Even if some of us weren't Christians before, we know this story.

Background : Jonah, "yonah" in Hebrew was one of the 12 Minor Prophets in the Old Testament. Please note the reason why they are called the Minor prophets is not because they are less significant than the Major prophets like Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Daniel. It's because of the volume of work.

For example : Book of Jonah is only 4 chapters while Isaiah has 66 chapters

Some people might think it's just a fairy tale shared for children. But this is a real story.

- Our Lord Jesus Christ mentioned it in one of his teachings in while He was here on earth.

Matthew 12:38 Then some of the Pharisees and teachers of the law said to him, “Teacher, we want to see a sign from you.” 39 He answered, “A wicked and adulterous generation

asks for a sign! But none will be given it except the sign of the prophet Jonah. 40 For as Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of a huge fish, so the Son of Man will be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth.

- You can also see him mentioned in the book of Kings where he was a prophet during the reign of King Jeroboam.

2 Kings 14: 25...in accordance with the word of the Lord, the God of Israel, spoken through his servant Jonah son of Amitai, the prophet from Gath Hepher.

26 The Lord had seen how bitterly everyone in Israel, whether slave or free, was suffering; there was no one to help them. 27 And since the Lord had not said he would blot out the name of Israel from under heaven, he saved them by the hand of Jeroboam son of Jehoash.

Same Jonah that was introduced at the start of the book of Jonah.

Jonah 1:1 The word of the Lord came to Jonah son of Amitai:

We'll know more about him later. Although this is the book of Jonah, the central character here is God and thus, we've broken this sermon into three sections and we'll talk about this in the next three Sundays.

THE BOOK OF JONAH

GOD'S MISSION, GOD'S MISSIONARY, GOD'S MERCY

I. GOD'S MISSION

What was God's mission? Save Nineveh.

Jonah 1:1 The word of the Lord came to Jonah son of Amitai: 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

In order to understand why Jonah ran away, we have to know the historical background of Ninevites.

1. **Nineveh was the largest city of the ancient world before the time of Jonah. It was the center of economy, politics and religion around 705-681 BCE.**

Jonah 3:3... Now Nineveh was a very large city; it took three days to go through it.

Now to give you an idea how large the city is (not necessarily in length), it will take 1 day to walk from here in Brampton to Niagara Falls non-stop.

2. **Nineveh is located in modern day Mosul in Iraq. (show map)**

It was such a large city at that time that they rediscovered some archeological ruins in the 1800s

(Show photos)

- One of the protective spirits at Nergal Gate which was in early 1900s
- They rebuilt the Nergal Gate in the 1940s
- Artist rendition of what Nineveh looked during the time of Jonah

3. There were at least 600,000 people living there when Jonah preached

Jonah 4: 11 And should I not have concern for the great city of Nineveh, in which there are more than a hundred and twenty thousand people who cannot tell their right hand from their left—and also many animals?”

Note : This is the only time in the Bible that this term was used.

Some interpretations say that it's figurative in such a way that its people do not know what's right from wrong. But that might not be the case because they immediately repented when Jonah preached so the people there are aware from what's right and wrong. **So common interpretation for this is it describes babies and young children who doesn't have an idea on the difference between their left hand or right hand.** For example : Older children would already know they are right handed or left handed.

So, if there are more than 120,000 young children and then you count the parents that adds up to 360,000 inhabitants. But the people during that time would have more than 1 child, so that's around 600,000 (more like the size of Brampton)

Now whether it's 120k, 360k or 600k, that's still a significant amount of people.

4. Nineveh are Assyrians. They were the superpower of those days.

This is the part you will understand why Jonah didn't want to go and preach to Nineveh.

Quick history lesson :

Remember, how the kingdom of Israel was established. King Saul and then King David and then David's son, King Solomon where Israel was at its highest peak.

(show photo) But when Solomon died, the kingdom was divided into two.

- Jeroboam – ruled the ten tribes in the north (called Kingdom of Israel) – Samaria was its capital
- Rehoboam – ruled the Judah and Benjamin tribes (Kingdom of Judah) – Jerusalem was its capital

Eventually, around 20-30 years after Jonah, the Assyrians captured the northern kingdom of Israel which includes the birthplace of Jonah.

Now, listen carefully, God commanded Jonah to preach AGAINST Nineveh.

WARNING : This part is P.G.

Jonah 1: "Go to the great city of Nineveh and preach against it, because its wickedness has come up before me."

We need to understand that God is omniscient and He knows everything. All of the world is wicked and sinful. But what kind of wickedness that is being mentioned here? The wickedness that he cannot ignore is the wickedness that we do against other people.

Biblical Illustrations :

Remember when Cain killed his brother Abel just because of jealousy, what did the Lord say?

Genesis 4: 10 The Lord said, "What have you done? Listen! Your brother's blood cries out to me from the ground.

With Sodom and Gomorrah, it wasn't just because of homosexuality that the city was destroyed. It's because of its wickedness. Their cruelty against other people, to those who are weaker.

Genesis 18: 20 Then the Lord said, "The outcry against Sodom and Gomorrah is so great and their sin so grievous 21 that I will go down and see if what they have done is as bad as the outcry that has reached me. If not, I will know."

How great is their wickedness? There were two angels that were sent to Sodom and Gomorrah and they planned to spend the night in the square but Lot (the nephew of Abraham) knows what will happen to them if they do that. So he invited them inside his house. And here's what happened?

Genesis 19: 4 Before they had gone to bed, all the men from every part of the city of Sodom—both young and old—surrounded the house. 5 They called to Lot, "Where are the men who came to you tonight? Bring them out to us so that we can have sex with them."

6 Lot went outside to meet them and shut the door behind him 7 and said, "No, my friends. Don't do this wicked thing.

In short, they wanted to gang-rape the guests and then kill them. It's unprovoked.

Note : It's a tactic used for men to rape other men as a tactic of aggression, domination and humiliation. You will still see this today specially in prison.

Lot even offered his own daughters but here's what the people said.

9 "Get out of our way," they replied. "This fellow came here as a foreigner, and now he wants to play the judge! We'll treat you worse than them."

You can see a similar story in Judges 19 where a Levite together with his concubine came to a town in Gibeah and stayed in an old man's house

Judges 19: 20 "You are welcome at my house," the old man said. "Let me supply whatever you need. Only don't spend the night in the square." 21 So he took him into his house and fed his donkeys. After they had washed their feet, they had something to eat and drink.

22 While they were enjoying themselves, some of the wicked men of the city surrounded the house. Pounding on the door, they shouted to the old man who owned the house, "Bring out the man who came to your house so we can have sex with him."

The old man did not come out but the Levite gave away his concubine and they gang-raped her and then killed her.

In the next chapter, it was clear that the intention of the men was to kill him.

Judges 20: 4 So the Levite, the husband of the murdered woman, said, "I and my concubine came to Gibeah in Benjamin to spend the night. 5 During the night the men of Gibeah came after me and surrounded the house, intending to kill me. They raped my concubine, and she died.

In short, wickedness does not care about the dignity or the life of men or women.

That's why the Bible says in Proverbs what God hates.

*Proverbs 6: There are six things the Lord hates,
seven that are detestable to him:*

- 17 haughty eyes,
a lying tongue,
hands that shed innocent blood,*
- 18 a heart that devises wicked schemes,
feet that are quick to rush into evil,*
- 19 a false witness who pours out lies
and a person who stirs up conflict in the community.*

All of this has to do with doing wickedness or bad things against other people.

That's the reason if you see in the New Testament, our Lord Jesus and even in the epistles, God has always emphasized "love one another as I have loved you."

John 13:34 "A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another.

If God hates it if we do evil against others, God loves it when we love one another.

That's why our Lord Jesus said,

John 13:35 By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another."

Now the question is, how wicked are these Assyrians?

Take note : One of their tactics is psychological warfare in order to instill fear to the conquered people. How do they this? By cruel torture. They were very cruel

Here are examples : (show photos)

- They will gouge their eyes and cut their limbs and will let them go and roam around the streets
- Impalement : they use this for mass execution. They will drive the stake into the body under the ribs. The victim's weight caused the stake to go deeper and deeper into the body.
- Flaying : They will skin their captives alive and display it along the walls.

Here's an excerpt from the Annals of Ashurnasirpal - King of the Neo-Assyrian empire who was ruthless and believed he was the representative of Assur, their primary god and was given the mission to conquer the world.

“I built a pillar over against his city gate, and I flayed all the chief men who had revolted, and I covered the pillar with their skins; some I walled up within the pillar, some I impaled upon the pillar on stakes, and others I bound to stakes round about the pillar; many within the border of my own land I flayed, and I spread their skins upon the walls; and I cut off the limbs of the officers, of the royal officers who had rebelled. Ahiababa I took to Nineveh, I flayed him, I spread his skin upon the wall of Nineveh.”

“With the masses of my troops and by my furious battle onset I stormed, I captured the city; 600 of their warriors I put to the sword; 3000 captives I burned with fire; I did not leave a single one among them alive to serve as a hostage. Hulai, their governor, I captured alive. Their corpses I formed into pillars; their young men and maidens I burned in the fire. Hulai, their governor, I flayed, his skin I spread upon the wall of the city of Damdamusa; the city I destroyed, I devastated, I burned with fire. . . .”

“From some I cut off their noses, their ears, and their fingers, of many I put out the eyes. I made one pillar of the living, and another of heads, and I bound their heads to posts round about the city. Their young men and maidens I burned in the fire, the city I destroyed, I devastated, I burned it with fire and consumed it.”

<http://www.professorcampbell.org/sources/ashurnasirpal.html>

That was how wicked the Assyrians were.

Illustration : Now, let me show you an example in recent times, cruelty is lesser but it doesn't lessen its impact.

(Show photo of Isis men with coptic Christians)

They are called “The 21”. This happened February 12, 2015. They were Christians and construction workers working in Libya at that time. 20 of them from Egypt, one was from Ghana. They were captured by ISIS. For days, they were tortured and asked to deny Jesus and revert to Islam but none of them did. So they were marched unto this beach and was videotaped and were asked to recant their faith and they didn’t. And so they beheaded them, not with one swift move but using a knife.

Now on that video while they was an Isis chant in the background, they heard in the video clip while they were being beheaded, some of them were crying out, “Ya Rabb Yesua” which means, “Lord Jesus!”

Now imagine, God has called you to preach the good news to this ISIS people who did this?

There will be hesitation or you wouldn’t even want to do it.

Why? You want justice. You want this people to be rightfully punished!

Now imagine, you are Jonah and God has asked you to warn the Assyrians of their impending judgement.

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.”

Jonah did not want to do it.

And we know what happened which we’ll talk about that next week, when Jonah runs far away from God and then he was caught by a great fish and Jonah repented while he was inside the fish. He was vomited by the fish and then he preached. And you know what happened?

*Jonah 3: 1 Then the word of the Lord came to Jonah a second time: 2 “Go to the great city of Nineveh and proclaim to it the message I give you.”.... 4 Jonah began by going a day’s journey into the city, proclaiming, “**Forty more days and Nineveh will be overthrown.**”*

(Note : the word “overthrow” “hapak” in Hebrew is the same word used by our Lord in Genesis 19: 21 to destroy Sodom and Gomorrah)

*5 **The Ninevites believed God.** A fast was proclaimed, and all of them, from the greatest to the least, put on sackcloth.*

What happened when they repented?

6 When Jonah’s warning reached the king of Nineveh, he rose from his throne, took off his royal robes, covered himself with sackcloth and sat down in the dust. 7 This is the proclamation he issued in Nineveh:

“By the decree of the king and his nobles:

Do not let people or animals, herds or flocks, taste anything; do not let them eat or drink. 8 But let people and animals be covered with sackcloth. Let everyone call urgently on God. Let them give up their evil ways and their violence. 9 Who knows? God may yet relent and with compassion turn from his fierce anger so that we will not perish.”

Illustration: When Chicay and I found she had Stage 3c Ovarian cancer in 2007, I did my research on survival rate. Survival rate is that only 1 women out of 5 survive this cancer on the first 5 years. In short, my wife only has a 20% chance of surviving during that time in the next 5 years. We saw that with the sister of our friend, who died 2 years after finding out she had Stage 3c ovarian cancer. But one time, I was listening to the radio and there was this person who was speaking, (I don't remember if he was a doctor or not) and I can still remember his words,

Quote : “Don't deny the diagnosis but you can defy the prognosis”

This means, the diagnosis is my wife has stage 3c ovarian cancer and the prognosis is she has 20% chance of surviving in the next 5 years.

By God's grace, here she is, cancer-free after 15 years.

The diagnosis for the people of Nineveh is that their wickedness is so severe and the prognosis is that after 40 days, they will be destroyed.

Important : Beloved of God, according to His Word, the diagnosis is that we are all sinners and that no one is good not even one and the prognosis is that we are all deserving of hell. But we can defy the prognosis, not by stubbornness or by setting it aside but by accepting the cure. **What is the cure?**

Romans 6:23 For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.

We need to receive the cure! JESUS CHRIST! He is the only cure!

Now what happened when the people of Nineveh repented?

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.

Was Jonah pleased? Of course not.

Jonah 4:1 But to Jonah this seemed very wrong, and he became angry.

Why was he angry? Two things :

- He knows that Assyria is a threat to his own country Israel which in later times, God will use Assyria to capture Israel.
- The reason why he did not want to go to Nineveh is because he knew who God is.

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.

Illustration: This is an “I knew it” or “sabi na nga ba” moment. That’s the reason why I didn’t want to go because I know you will save them if they repent and put their faith in you.

CONCLUSION : What is the lesson behind all of this?

You want to understand God’s grace? Here it is.

There is no person that has sinned so greatly that is beyond God’s love and mercy.

That’s why you will understand now God’s mission when He says:

John 3:16 For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life.

Jesus did not say, “God so loved the perfect, the moral, the good people (no one’s good anyway)...He loved the “world”... all of us that our Lord Jesus Christ died for our sin.

Why? It’s because as Peter said

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.

But do you know the next verse on this?

10 But the day of the Lord will come like a thief. The heavens will disappear with a roar; the elements will be destroyed by fire, and the earth and everything done in it will be laid bare.

In short, there will be a day of judgement. And God sent His own Son Jesus Christ so we can escape the wrath of God’s judgement.

That’s why when we share the Gospel. Don’t start with “God loves you.”

Start with saying that “We are all sinners and there will be a time of God’s judgement and we need to repent of our sins and believe that the only way we can be saved from this judgement is to believe that God His own Son Jesus Christ to die on the cross as payment for our sins.”

Story: There was this street preacher who went to a barber shop to get his hair cut. The barber in his banter with the preacher said, “Preacher, I see you every day preaching the gospel and I see that a lot of people just walk by and not a lot of people get saved. What’s the use of you preaching the gospel.” The preacher replied, “Barber, I’m looking out the window right now and I see a lot of people that needs a hair cut. What’s the use of you beign a barber if there are still a lot of people with bad hair?” The barber replied, “Well, they see the sign it’s a barber shop and they will only get a hair cut if they enter my barber shop.” The preacher then said, “Precisely, it’s the same with me, my job is to tell people about Jesus but it’s up to them to repent and receive Jesus Christ in order for them to get saved.”

IT IS GOD'S MISSION TO SAVE SINNERS, IT IS OUR MISSION TO SHARE THE GOSPEL TO OTHERS

John 3:16 For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life.

Next week : We'll talk about God's missionary and God's mercy

S.G.D.