

JONAH: RUNAWAY PROPHET
THE PROBLEM WITH MERCY

Monday, July 13

Reading: Jonah 4:1-2

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.*

Like an M. Night Shyamalan movie, the book of Jonah has a twist ending. In Sunday School, we often end the story of Jonah with Nineveh's repentance. I even saw one children's cartoon that ends with the Ninevites thanking Jonah and the prophet happy that they repented. That is the way the story should have happened. But it does not!

Jonah has a serious problem with God! He believes that God's staying the destruction of Nineveh is wrong and evil. His anger stems from several problems. First, he has a theological problem. He knew YAHWEH (LORD in the NIV) is the covenant God of Israel. In ancient days, every nation believed their particular deity looked out for THEIR country's interests and protection. Jonah assumed this was true of Israel's God as well. So how could He forgive Israel's worst enemy?

Jonah also had a heart problem. Finally, we see where Jonah's heart has been all along. He knew that YAHWEH was compassionate and merciful. And now his worst fears have come true – God had shown mercy to Jonah's enemies because of their repentance. This outcome was why Jonah had run away in the first place!

It amazes me that Jonah's hard heart had not changed! God had saved him from drowning in the sea and sustained him in the belly of the fish. He had heard and answered his prayer for deliverance, even though Jonah did not deserve any of it! God had shown His disobedient prophet such mercy. Yet Jonah was not willing to share God's mercy with others. He was not willing to rejoice when his enemies turned to God. Jonah did not understand the meaning of mercy!

What is mercy? Mercy is NOT getting what you deserve. This was certainly true of Nineveh! The Hebrew root term comes from the word womb. It is like a mother's supreme love for her children. It reveals God's compassionate, loving heart! If we do not understand mercy, then we will never be able to grasp salvation.

Jonah's biggest problem was that he wanted his way! He tried to put God in a little box and control Him. But when God doesn't respond the way Jonah wants, he is furious (the Hebrew literally means 'to burn with anger').

What do you do when you don't get your own way? Sadly, many people in churches today are just like Jonah. Watch out if they don't get what they want or things don't work out to their liking! They try to put God in a box and make Him do what they want. But God will not be manipulated or controlled. The words of Proverbs 3:3-7 are the starting place to let go of your way to follow God's way:

Let love and faithfulness never leave you; bind them around your neck, write them on the tablet of your heart. Then you will win favor and a good name in the sight of God and man. Trust in the LORD with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways submit to Him, and He will make your paths straight. Do not be wise in your own eyes; fear the LORD and shun evil.