



NEW LIFE

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"For the Word of God and for the testimony of Jesus Christ" (Rev 1:9)

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My dear readers,

GOD'S MERCY REVEALED IN THE BOOK OF JONAH

God's Mercy to Disobedient Believers

Jonah is a picture of believers who disobey God's commandments. Because of God's mercy they are not left to degenerate in their own disobedience but are chastised by God, until they are brought back to the path of obedience. God's chastisement may be painful at times, but it testifies to His mercy and love toward His children (Hebrews 12:5,6).

Dear Reader, have you been an obedient child of God? When God directs you to do something, do you do it willingly? Or do you evade your Christian responsibilities or find a way to excuse yourself? I hope you do not. What commandments has God given to you to obey? To love Him with your heart; To honour the Lord in your place of work or study, to love and edify one another in church, To bring the lost to the saving knowledge of Christ, To live lives that are holy and righteous in an ungodly world. Have you been obeying all these commandments, or only those that you do not mind obeying? It is not for you to pick and choose which commands you wish to obey. Do not be like Jonah who rebelled at God's call and ran away from a commandment he did not like to obey.

Jonah took a ship from Joppa that was bound for Tarshish which is 2,000 miles west, in Spain (Jonah 1:3). There are two possible reasons why he did this: Firstly, Assyria was notorious for being a great and terrible conqueror. Their cruelty to defeated nations had become well-known. Jonah may have believed that such a country did not deserve any mercy at all, and so did not want to go there. But God wanted to teach him what it means to show mercy even to those who are his enemies and not hate them (cf. Matthew 5:44).

Another reason why Jonah refused to go to Nineveh is that perhaps like most Jews of his time he was thinking that the Jews were the only chosen people of God, the ones to receive His special attention, and therefore Gentiles were outside of the scope of God's mercy. But this narrow view of Gentiles does not take into account the fact that the promise God had made to Abraham includes blessings for all the families of the earth (Genesis 12:3). This means that Gentiles are included in the scope of God's mercy.

Whatever reasons Jonah had, he tried to run away from God by taking a ship to...

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Tarshish. At this point, the Lord could easily have given up on him and sent another prophet to preach at Nineveh. But He chose instead to retrieve this rebellious prophet out of his disobedience, and rehabilitate him back into service. Let us see now how God showed mercy to Jonah:

According to 1:4 – *"the Lord sent out a great wind into the sea, and there was a mighty tempest in the sea."* The Lord's control of the winds and waves reminds us of His complete lordship and power over nature. Whenever you find yourself at the mercy of the elements or of circumstances that are beyond your control, always remember to call upon the One who controls them.

After being thrown overboard Jonah was totally surrounded by water and swept down to the sea bed by strong currents (2:5,6). Have you ever been in a terrible crisis like this with absolutely no hope of deliverance? In such a situation remember to seek God's help in prayer. As for Jonah, he could do nothing but to cry out to God for mercy. Jonah must have realised that since he was going against God's will, he had absolutely no right to expect any deliverance from God. In his desperate condition the only thing he could rely on was for God whom he had offended to show him mercy. And God heard Jonah's drowning prayer and mercifully spared his life. This time God used was a great fish (1:17) to save Jonah from drowning in the sea.

God commanded a fish to seek Jonah from the ocean depths, swallow him, keep him alive for three days and three nights in his belly, and then to swim to the shore to vomit him out (2:10). Like the winds and waves, the fishes of the sea and all aquatic animals are always ready to do God's bidding. Later on we will see that even a plant and a worm are ready to do whatever God wills.

What a complete contrast all these creatures are, to Jonah who was so unwilling to do God's will! Isn't it ironical that it is man, the highest creature of all that often proves to be the disobedient one? And oftentimes it is not only man that proves to be disobedient, but one of God's own dear children who does this. Is this not something to be most ashamed of, if you have not been obeying the Lord? It is precisely in this fact that God's mercy becomes even more amazing to us. Time and time again He bears with our follies and sins, and spares us from receiving the just punishment we deserve. How great and wonderful is His mercy toward us!

God's Mercy to the World of Sinners

Nineveh was the centre of idolatrous worship of the goddess Ishtar and the god Nebo. At that time it was the largest city in Assyria with a population of 600,000 people and probably many more living in its suburbs. It took Jonah a whole day's journey to walk from the outskirts of the city to the city center.

The Lord could have brought judgment upon the Ninevites when they were ripe for it, without any warning. However He gave them the opportunity to repent by sending a prophet to warn them of His coming judgment. They were given 40 days to repent before God's judgment would fall upon them. This reminds us that even now, God's mercy is being shown to the whole world by allowing it to continue until this day. Christ could have descended to judge the world a long time ago. But the world...

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has been given more time to hear the Gospel and turn to Him in repentance.

Dear Reader, please do not take this mercy and patience of God for granted. Romans 2:4 tells us that the goodness, forbearance and longsuffering of God must lead you to repentance! You must respond now to God's mercy in the same way that the people of Nineveh did— *"So the people of Nineveh believed God, and proclaimed a fast, and put on sackcloth, from the greatest of them even to the least of them."* (3:5) As the prophet Jonah preached, his words took immediate effect and the people in fear came to repent before God. The king of Nineveh did this, and even animals were made to participate in the city-wide repentance!

What made the Ninevites so willing to repent? Some Bible scholars believe that they may have gone through some events that had prepared them to receive this message: According to historical records, the city had experienced a serious plague that killed many people. Two years after the plague a total eclipse of the sun took place, and in those days such an occurrence would strike terror in the hearts of men because they did not know what it is. These two events may have helped to prepare the Ninevites for Jonah's arrival.

The news about how Jonah had been miraculously delivered by the great fish might also have helped to prepare their hearts. His body may have borne the scars of that experience. But the most important reason why the Ninevites repented so readily, was God's own power to bring them to repentance as they heard the Word being preached to them (Acts 11:18; John 6:44). Here is another evidence of God's mercy to sinners. Not only does He warn them to repent, He also works in their hearts to enable them to respond with true repentance.

A third way in which God's mercy was manifested to them was in sparing the people from the coming destruction. This is highlighted in 3:10 – *"And God saw their works, that they turned from their evil way; and God repented of the evil, that He had said that He would do unto them; and He did it not."* We can imagine the weeping and crying of the people turning into gladness and rejoicing as they praised God for the mercy He had shown to them!

God's Great Mercy, Compared with Man's Lack of Mercy

While the whole city of Nineveh was rejoicing and thankful to God for His mercy, there was one lone person who was not rejoicing – Jonah. He was not only unwilling to rejoice over the repentance of the Ninevites, he was also displeased and angry (4:1). In v.3 he even said to God – *"O Lord, take, I beseech thee, my life from me: for it is better for me to die than to live."* Here we find the main reason for Jonah's strange response – It was his self-centredness. He was most unhappy that God had not fulfilled the word he had brought to Nineveh. He thought that he had now lost all credibility as a prophet because the destruction he foretold had not materialised.

This was a serious matter to him because a prophet's credibility was established only when the things he predicted were fulfilled (cf. Deuteronomy 18:22). Jonah may have felt that after this the Ninevites would never believe what he preached anymore. But his response revealed a profound lack of mercy for sinners. He was so caught up in his self-centred view of things that he could not see beyond himself.

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He could not see the miracle of revival that God had wrought among the people. The only thing he could see was that he had lost his credibility as a prophet. And it is for this same reason that we too often suffer from a profound lack of mercy – because we focus so much on ourselves. When we are interested mostly in our own concerns, and hardly in the concerns of others, then we need to learn the lesson that Jonah now learned from the Lord.

The fact that he received such a lesson is yet another evidence of God's mercy! At this point God could have executed judgment on Jonah for being so unreasonable in his response, but He did not. Instead, He chose to show him mercy again! Like a loving father patiently instructing his rebellious child, the Lord taught Jonah a lovely object lesson on His love and care for precious souls. The first thing God used to teach Jonah this lesson was a giant plant (4:6) that grew up with amazing speed and provided some cooling shade for Jonah. That was a real help to him because the mean daily maximum temperature in Nineveh is about 44 degrees.

The second thing that God used was a worm to destroy the gourd (4:7), after Jonah had enjoyed the shade for just one day. The amazing thing about this worm is the speed with which it destroyed the plant: God sent it at the onset of dawn (6 am), and by the time the sun was up in the sky (8-10 am), the plant was completely gone.

The third thing that God used was a hot east wind (4:8). This phenomenon is known in that region as a *sirocco* and would cause the temperature to rise 9-12 degrees C above the average temperature. It became so hot that Jonah felt faint and became quite upset that the lovely shade he had enjoyed was gone. He was sorry that the worm had destroyed his nice plant. This was exactly what God wanted to achieve because it provided a clear contrast between Jonah's pity and God's mercy.

And so, God said to Jonah in v.10,11 – *"Thou hast had pity on the gourd, for the which thou hast not laboured, neither madest it grow; which came up in a night, and perished in a night And should not I spare Nineveh, that great city, wherein are more than sixscore thousand persons that cannot discern between their right hand and their left hand; and also much cattle?"* The Lord showed Jonah how utterly unreasonable he was – to feel so sorry over the loss of a mere plant, but to have no qualms at all about the loss of thousands of precious lives that would have resulted from the destruction of Nineveh! The 120,000 persons who cannot tell their right hand from their left is probably a reference to young children or infants, all of whom would have perished if the city had been destroyed.

The truth that we must grasp from this is that: Although God must bring judgment upon sinners He does not take any delight in seeing any of His creatures destroyed. He does not take delight in seeing sinners perish, but rather in seeing them turn from their wicked ways and receiving eternal life (cf. Ezekiel 33:11).

Dear Reader, this then is the pattern of God's mercy, and we should strive to emulate it: A mercy that is ready to mourn over the loss of lives; a mercy that moves us to feel for the plight of people around us, and to do whatever we can to help them. And let us not forget that if God had not shown such mercy to us, we would have perished in our sins a long time ago.

Our Daily Walk
Daily Meditations and a Prayer for Each Day
By F.B. Meyer
4 February 2007

SPRING UP, O WELL!

Revelation 22:17 "And the Spirit and the bride say, Come. And let him that heareth say, Come. And let him that is athirst come. And whosoever will, let him take the water of life freely."

TRUE religion is the union of the Spirit of God with the human spirit and this is effected in and through Jesus Christ. "He that is joined unto the Lord is one Spirit." Jesus is the Mediator between God and man. He reveals the Father, unites us with the Father, and comes with the Father to make His home with us (Joh 14:21-23).

Continuing our thought in yesterday's reading, it is thus that our religious life becomes a springing-fountain. The woman spoke of "the well," our Lord of "the spring in the well." She spoke of the fatigue of drawing-up, He of the rising-up. With too many, religion is not spontaneous, but derived. They must have religious services, or a rousing preacher, or books of religious stimulants. We all profit by outside helps, but we must not depend upon them. Learn the habit of being still before God, till His love rises yearningly and earnestly within you.

Whatever impedes the uprising of the Fountain must be abandoned. A curious thing once happened at a training college. The house was full of students, when suddenly the entire water-supply failed. After every effort had been made to trace the failure, a plumber was sent for, who went at once to the junction between the main supply and the house-pipe. On opening this a big toad was discovered, which had filled the orifice and made it impossible for the water to pass through. It had come in as a tiny tadpole, had lodged in the joint, living on the water, until, full-grown, it sealed the passage.

Something like this may happen in our lives. Hidden sin may grow within, unchecked, until it chokes the incoming love of God. Jesus knew that in the woman's heart there was unconfessed sin, which blocked her reception of the Living Water. In mercy, He uncovered the evil thing, the obstacle was removed, and the Fountain of Life immediately arose. She ceased her arguments, and became a disciple. She forgot her prejudices, and leaving behind the water-pot, started off to the town, telling everyone she met that at last she had found the Messiah. Presently she returned with the whole town behind her, and Jesus knew that harvest-time had arrived!

PRAYER – O Saviour of men! I am nothing better than common earthenware; but may I be cleansed and purified, and then filled with Thy heavenly treasure. Dip me deep into the water of life, and give refreshment through me to many parched and weary hearts. AMEN.

WELCOME TO NEW LIFE B-P CHURCH LONDON

CHURCH THEME: WALK IN THE NEWNESS OF LIFE (Romans 6:4)

Our **worship services** begin promptly at **11.00 am and 4.00 pm**.

Please stay back for Bible Study and fellowship lunch after the morning worship and for tea after the evening service. Do invite your friends to come to Church.

Worship Services			WELCOME
Morning	Today: 04 /02/2007	Next Week:11 /02/2007	We extend a warm welcome to all worshippers this Lord's Day. We welcome Rev & Mrs Graham Harrison and Carl to our morning worship service last week.
<i>Chairman:</i>	Seetoh Yoong Chiang	John Poh	
<i>Speaker:</i>	Pr Mok Chee Cheong	Pr Mok Chee Cheong	
<i>Message:</i>	Is Submission to God a Matter of Choice?	Religion or Saving Faith?	
<i>Text:</i>	James 4:7	Romans 9:30-33	
<i>Organist:</i>	Yanning	Anthony	
Evening			NEWS/ANNOUNCEMENTS
<i>Chairman:</i>	Jonathan Kim	Seetoh Yoong Chiang	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Basic Bible Knowledge (BBK): The BBK classes will commence today after the morning worship service. Those who are interested, please assemble at the side hall. As a reminder, these classes are meant to prepare those who wish to seek baptism, reaffirmation of faith or transfer of membership. • Family Worship: Family worship for the month of February will be held at the home of Evelyn. For those who interested to come, please see Pr Mok. Also, for those who like to open their homes for family worship for the months of March and April, please contact Pr. Mok. • Church Easter Camp: This will take place between 6 to 9 April. The speaker will be Rev Jack Sin (Maranatha B-P Church, Singapore). More details will be provided at a later date. • Chinese New Year Carry-In Lunch – 18 February: For those who would like to contribute a dish, please inform Daniel.
<i>Speaker:</i>	Pr Mok Chee Cheong	Pr Mok Chee Cheong	
<i>Message:</i>	The Names of God – Jehovah Shammah	The Names of God – Jehovah Rohi	
<i>Text:</i>	Ezekiel 48:35	Psalms 23:1	
<i>Pianist:</i>	Feng Qian	Anthony	
Other Duties			
	Today: 04/02/2007	Next Week: 11/02/2007	
<i>Ushers</i>	Jonathan/Evelyn	Wah Soon/Joyce	
<i>Sunday Sch:</i>	Esmeralda	Yanning	
<i>Lunch:</i>	Maureen	Constance	
<i>Washing-up:</i>	Volunteers	Volunteers	
<i>Bible Study:</i>	BBK	BBK	
Appointments of the Week			
Fri 9 Feb	7.00 pm	Young Adults Fellowship: Led by Esmeralda	
Sat 10 Feb	4.00 pm	Prayer Meeting & Bible Study: Spkr/C'man: Jonathan	
<u>Last Week's Worship Service Collections</u>			
Offering: £277.96		Lunch: £44.60	
<h2 style="text-decoration: underline;">Memory Verse</h2>			
<i>Previous Week (Jan07 Wk 3): Matthew 22:37-39</i>			
Jesus said unto him, Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind. This is the first and great commandment. And the second is like unto it, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself.			
<i>This Week (Feb07 Wk 1): 1 Peter 5:6-7</i>			
Humble yourselves therefore under the mighty hand of God, that he may exalt you in due time: Casting all your care upon him; for he careth for you.			