

The Fathers Heart: Part 2, The Fathers Heart For His Enemies

March 6th, 2022

Read Jonah 2-4:1 What's Your Definition of Provision?

- *“Now **the Lord provided** a huge fish to swallow Jonah, and Jonah was in the belly of the fish three days and three nights. From inside the fish Jonah prayed to the Lord his God.”*
(Jonah 1:17-2:1)
- **Question:** *What is your definition of provision?*
 - Naturally, we like to think of provision in terms of the blessings God. The “good things”.
 - And those are great! I would actually argue that God’s provisions are always “blessings” (if understood correctly). However, sometimes God provides **challenges** too. We need to broaden our perspective.
 - As Job said, *“...shall we accept good from God, **and not trouble?**”* **(Job 2:10)**
 - In the case of Jonah, God PROVIDED... **a whale**.
- We need to zoom out for a moment before going any further, and we need to look again at the purpose of disciple and hardship. This ties into what we discussed last week.
- The book of James says,
- *“**Consider it pure joy, my brothers, and sisters, whenever you face trials of many kinds, because you know that the testing of your faith produces perseverance. Let perseverance finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything.**”* **(James 1:2-4)**
- Trials comes in “many kinds”. Not every trial is “discipline” (a result of sin in your life... although some are). Some are simply a result of living in a broken world... suffering is just part of that. But here is something that Scripture teaches regardless ... **all trials provide an opportunity for us to grow**. All trials can be beneficial.
 - *“...the testing of your faith **produces** perseverance...”* **(James 1:3)**
 - God is interested in **PRODUCING** fruit in our lives. The abundant life (as many western Christians seek) includes trials... **“Abundant”**, sort of like *“not lacking anything”* (as mentioned above) ...
 - Have you perhaps gone through a trial, and despite the pain in the moment you are able to look back and see how God used it to produce good in your life? Many people know this passage to be true by experience!
- But there is a warning here, and we can see it in the book of Jonah – something that worries me. **Suffering is not a guaranteed method to bring people closer to God**. In fact, some people will turn away from God (or harden their hearts) because of trials. *Perhaps you have seen this too?*
 - Maybe you’ve seen a friend, or a family member go through a trial and come out bitter, angry, and cold. Perhaps even some of you have been there (ARE there...)?
- To be honest, I am concerned by how I’ve seen my own soul respond to recent hardships. How about you?
 - **Matthew 24:9-13**

While a great many of the most passionate followers of Jesus that I know (or read about) have all walked through very tough times and came out better, *it is not a guarantee that YOU will*. I have been

studying many of the passages in scripture on the subject of suffering, and they all say that God CAN use suffering to grow us – but they never *promise* to have that effect. In fact, there is a stipulation.

👉 How will you **RESPOND**?

- To quote Lecrae, will you choose **bitter or better**? *Thick skin, soft heart? Thin skin, hard heart?*
- If you were going to remember one thing from what I said this morning, this would be a good one. **Do not count on trials to GROW your character. Count on trials to REVEAL your character.**
- I, and I suspect others, have had a “romanticised” view of future suffering. (i.e., Bonhoeffer, Wormbrand, Ten Boom) ...
- ***“Endure hardship as discipline; God is treating you as his children. For what children are not disciplined by their father? If you are not disciplined—and everyone undergoes discipline—then you are not legitimate, not true sons and daughters at all. Moreover, we have all had human fathers who disciplined us, and we respected them for it. How much more should we submit to the Father of spirits and live! They disciplined us for a little while as they thought best; but God disciplines us for our good, in order that we may share in his holiness. No discipline seems pleasant at the time, but painful. Later on, however, it produces a harvest of righteousness and peace for those who have been trained by it.” (Hebrews 12:7-11)***
 - **“Endure hardship as discipline...”** here is an invitation to endure ANY trial we go through. In the moment we like to ask, is this discipline? Is this judgement? It’s not a bad question (I certainly want to repent of sin if its causing separation from God in my life), but the bottom line is, either way we can use hardship to grow. Repent if there is sin, and regardless, turn to God. Cling to him.
 - **“No discipline seems pleasant at the time, but painful.”** We don’t have to fake a smile.
 - **“... for those who have been trained by it.”** Again I say, our response matters! But it’s NOT A GAURENTEE. In the same way, you can get yourself the most exercise equipment, but that won’t guarantee you’ll use it.
- **Back to Jonah...** How did our favorite asparagus (another VT reference...) respond?

A. Repentance is more than a quick “sorry” ...

- Jonah Chapter 2... He cries out to God! Amazing, right? Problem solved?
- ***“From inside the fish Jonah prayed to the Lord his God. He said: “In my distress I called to the Lord, and he answered me... When my life was ebbing away, I remembered you, Lord, and my prayer rose to you, to your holy temple. “Those who cling to worthless idols turn away from God’s love for them. 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.’” (Jonah 2:1-2,7-9)***
 - This is what we had been waiting for in Chapter 1. Finally Jonah has turned towards God in repentance. And we should be happy about that.
 - But that is not where the story ends. As we find out, Jonah is still holding on to something... the discipline has only gone “skin deep” I guess you could say. His agenda and God’s agenda still don’t line up.... **DESPITE THE BEAUTIFUL PRAYER...**
- **Regardless, what happens?**
 - Jon. 2:10, ***“And the Lord commanded the fish, and it vomited Jonah onto dry land.”***

- **At this point, we are expecting to see a faithful prophet from here on out.**
: Parents, it's like going on a long car ride with your kids. You have that first incident where you pull over the car and explain (kindly) that we aren't going to tolerate fighting, arguing, and screaming the entire trip, so it better end now. But we all know... there is still many miles ahead, and the rowdiness isn't over.
- He's had his first warning... and he has said his sorry.
- *Then the word of the Lord came to Jonah a second time: "Go to the great city of Nineveh and proclaim to it the message I give you." Jonah obeyed the word of the Lord and went to Nineveh. Now Nineveh was a very large city; it took three days to go through it. Jonah began by going a day's journey into the city, proclaiming, "Forty more days and Nineveh will be overthrown." (Jonah 3:1-4)*
- Now again, I don't know what you pictured... but I always imagined that Jonah got puked up right at the gates of Nineveh and was now joyfully ready to deliver the message.
 - To be clear, Jonah DID obey the Lord and go to Nineveh, that's great! But try to envision this...
 - We don't know where the whale spat him up... perhaps Joppa, where he originally set sail maybe? This still leaves a **550 mile journey** (about a months travel) to get there.
 - Meaning that God didn't circumvent the walk for him. ("Grace and effort are not opposites, grace and earning are" Dallas Willard). God forgives us the moment we call out to him, but that doesn't mean he eliminates all our challenges.
 - Also, judging by the text, I don't think Jonah was suddenly "joyful" about going to Nineveh. It simply says that he obeyed.
 - **[arms crossed obedience]** ... "Forty days sucka's... then you're doomed."
 - **And guess what?! The city RESPONDS** 🤔😬 Mass repentance breaks out! Are you seeing the humor in this book??

B. God Continues to Work... DESPITE US

- **How often do we think, "God needs us?"** Am I right? Now, of course we wouldn't say that (out loud), but sometimes we feel that in our hearts, don't we? Perhaps God needs us to...
 - **"save" that person/group of people... or to be that "go to" friend or family member. Or to be the cell leader, worship leader, business owner, fill in the blank... And so often, we think that our words/strategies will make the difference.**
 - We tend to think that the number of words, or the eloquence of our words will make the difference.
 - We often tend to think that things will happen when our giftedness is maximized... But have we stopped to consider – God works DESPITE us. Despite our weakness, bad attitudes, and even sinfulness?
 - Even with a good attitude, its still a wonder that God can use anyone to accomplish his will!
 - **TRUTH:** God doesn't *need* us... He WANTS us. He wants to partner with us! 🤖
 - *I thank Christ Jesus our Lord, who has given me strength, that he **considered me trustworthy**, appointing me to his service. (1 Timothy 1:12)*
 - **TRUTH:** Making an impact doesn't rest on *our* ability... but HIS!
 - *"But he said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, **for my power is made perfect in weakness.**" Therefore I will boast all the more gladly about my weaknesses,*

so that Christ's power may rest on me. That is why, for Christ's sake, I delight in weaknesses, in insults, in hardships, in persecutions, in difficulties. For when I am weak, then I am strong." (2 Corinthians 12:9-11)

- As in the case of Jonah, he hardly says a thing and now suddenly this entire city is cut to the heart. That's **DESPITE** him.
- **To a prophet, isn't this what you long to see?**
 - Which brings us to the final point...

C. The Fathers Heart Towards His Enemies...

- Jonah's response *yet again* baffles us... He is **ANGRY**.
- We've been talking about how God's plan and Jonah's plan did not align. Jonah isn't on the same page with God... not even the same book! **We are about to see that clearly.**
- *"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. But to Jonah this seemed very wrong, and he became angry. 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. Now, Lord, take away my life, for it is better for me to die than to live.""* (Jonah 3:10, 4:1-3)
- **Here we see that Jonah is angry that God is going to forgive his enemies.** Instead of Nineveh getting what it deserves, the predictable is happening (according to Jonah... THE PROPHET), and God is going to relent from sending judgement.
- **It was this fact that caused Jonah to flee from God.** It was this thought that likely plagued him like a pebble caught in his Birkenstock the whole month long journey to Nineveh! He just knew that this was how God would respond... forgiveness. This greatly upset him.
 - **Maybe for Jonah...** *it was the thought of His God being played as the fool...* Maybe Jonah couldn't stand the thought of Ninevites tarnishing Gods glory. They say a quick sorry and now they get away scot-free.
- **Regardless:** What's are the obvious take aways for us?

1. The Fathers Heart Loves His Enemies... enough to die for them.

- "But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us." (Romans 5:8)*
- Jonah reminds me of the disciples. They too were perplexed by Jesus when he said that he was going to die. It was Peter who even **rebuked** Jesus.
- This didn't line up with how they expected Messiah to act... Surely this was not right!
- And while on that cross, hanging from nails, the savior of the world cried out, "Father, FORGIVE THEM." He died there for the sake of his enemies.
- That is the Fathers Heart, on display for the World to see!**

2. When we find ourselves disagreeing with God... assume we are wrong, not Him.

- "But to Jonah this seemed very wrong, and he became angry..." (Jonah 4:1)*
- I couldn't get this line out of my head as I prepared the ending...*

- c. Isn't it ironic that Jonah couldn't grapple with how a holy God could forgive the wicked... while today we can't grapple with how a loving God could judge. Both concepts ARE PERPLEXING!
- d. **What do we do when we find ourselves perplexed by God, or even angry at him when we don't get it...?**
 - i. Maybe you've been hurt... how could God forgive *them*? Or expect me to forgive them after what they done?
 - ii. Or you wrestle with passages of Scripture that speak of a Holy God judging sin... and you can't seem to wrap your head around it.
 - iii. Or you are in a storm, and you ask "Where is God!? Why is he allowing this to happen?"
 - iv. **Again... what do we do when we find ourselves perplexed by God?**
- e. We must choose the road of humility. We must let God be God and accept that we aren't.
- f. Grasping his heart only comes from time in his presence, and ultimately when we arrive in heaven.
- g. When something doesn't sit right with us, we shouldn't assume we are right. That was Jonah's issue, and it is so often ours too.

The book of Jonah ends with a **CLIFFHANGER**. Have you noticed? We don't know what happened to him afterwards... we don't know where his story finished. I am optimistically hopeful that Jonah came to his senses and the journey of repentance lead him on. Seeing as we have this book and seeing as the details within point out the faults of Jonah so clearly... with vivid description... it leads me to *hope* that Jonah did repent after all... and passed his story on for the benefit of others.

- But I have no doubt that the reason why Jonah ends so abruptly is so that everyone who stumbles upon this great little treasure would come to the end of the book and find themselves staring into the mirror.
- **Do you have any bitterness in your heart? Towards God, yourself, or others?**