



*A Systematic Expository Study of the Word of God*

## **JONAH'S MISUNDERSTANDING OF DIVINE MERCY**

### **Jonah 4:1-11**

The whole population of Nineveh had been converted. They turned to the Lord in repentance. The Lord forgave them.

“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” (Jonah 3:10).

But what was the reaction of the man that was used of God to bring such a deliverance? He was unhappy because of what the Lord had done. He staged a protest against the Lord. “But it displeased Jonah exceedingly, and he was very angry ... And God said to Jonah, Doest thou well to be angry? ... And he said, I do well to be angry, even unto death.” Actually, he had been reluctant to preach the gospel to the Ninevites. He appreciated the miraculous deliverance the Lord had given him. But he did not appreciate the divine mercy the Lord had manifested to the Ninevites. Jonah is not alone in this kind of unbecoming, reprehensible and irresponsible behaviour. In the Early Church, the Jews were, like Jonah, unhappy with God's extension of the offer of salvation and privileges of sonship to the Gentiles. They were filled with envy (Acts 13:44-47). They were not happy that the Gentiles received the gospel. We should be very careful that we don't behave like Jonah nor like the religious Jews at the time of Jesus and at the time of the apostles.

## **RESENTMENT FOR THE MULTITUDES CONVERSION**

Jonah 4:1-5; Luke 15:25-32; Matthew 9:9-13; Acts 11:1-18.

Despite their positive and prompt response to his message, Jonah expected the Lord to bring judgment upon the Ninevites. He did not appreciate the mercy, the pardon, the reconciliation, the salvation that came to the Gentiles of the Ninevites. God used Jonah more than He had used any other preacher in history to bring about a national repentance. Yet he complained about divine mercy shown to the Ninevites through his preaching. Jonah suffered from spiritual myopia. He had a myopic vision rather than a missionary vision. Jonah's attitude is symptomatic of the attitude of the Pharisees in Christ's day and in fact of the Jewish believers in the Early Church. The Lord had called Matthew or Levi. He, a publican, had come to the Lord. He had been converted. Then he staged a feast for other publicans to be able to meet with the Lord, hear the message of salvation and get converted too. But what was the attitude of the Pharisees to that? They were not happy but frowned at what they see as the Lord's hobnobbing with sinners. The Lord tried to prove to them that the publicans needed the mercy and the love of the Lord.

Surprisingly, the Jewish believers of the Early Church had the same attitude with Jonah and the sanctimonious Pharisees. In Acts chapter 10, Peter, had as directed by the Lord, gone to preach to the house of Cornelius, a centurion of the Italian band. There, a mighty miracle took place. They were saved, sanctified, filled with the Holy Ghost and baptized in water the same day. You would have thought that this conversion of the Gentiles would have brought joy into the hearts of the Jewish believers. It did not! It took some explanation from Peter before he could get them to accept that what had happened was genuine and right. This same attitude is found in the older brother of the prodigal son. What the father had forgiven, the older brother had not. Sometimes bitterness and resentment can arise in our hearts if a fellow believer, Christian worker or minister who had been under discipline is recalled and given responsibilities and privileges greater than what we think we have. Those who have been faithful all the time, who had never been disciplined but who do not understand the mercy of God may, like the older brother of the prodigal son, begin to murmur and to complain bitterly. Let us be very careful that we don't have the envy, the jealousy, the anger, the negative disposition of Jonah, the Pharisees, the Jewish believers and the older brother in us. We should have the attitude of Jesus not the attitude of Jonah. We should have compassion on everyone and anyone and rescue the perishing.

## REJOICING BECAUSE OF MOMENTARY COMFORT

Jonah 4:6-8; Job 20:4,5; John 6:14,15,24-26,34,35, John 6:60,66.

The Lord raised a gourd to provide Jonah with a momentary comfort. The Lord was trying to teach him some lesson using visual aids. But although he had been teaching other people, he was very slow to learn what the Lord was teaching him. The shelter was necessary to shield him from the scorching heat of the sun and he was glad. But his gladness was, kind of, selfish. That he was happy shows that he values more the material blessings than the spiritual. He was glad for the gift but he was not concerned for the glory of the Giver. Any wonder the joy he derived from the provisions was short-lived - very brief. We must be very careful to evaluate things in the proper way. At the time of Jesus, there were people that followed Jesus because of material blessings. They were happy inasmuch as they were having the material things. "Jesus answered them and said, Verily, verily, I say unto you, Ye seek me, not because ye saw the miracles, but because ye did eat of the loaves, and were filled. Labour not for the meat which perisheth, but for that meat which endureth unto everlasting life, which the Son of man shall give unto you: for him hath God the Father sealed." But they went back from following Him as soon as they realized that they were not going to be given the bread everyday. Many people today behave like these wishy-washy disciples. If the bread is there, if material blessings are coming their way, they seem to be following the Lord. As soon as regular supplies of material things seemed to have ceased coming, they backslide and go back into the world. But we should prize the spiritual things far above the physical and the material.

## REASONS FOR MISSIONARY COMPASSION

Jonah 4:9-11; 2 Peter 3:9; Ezekiel 18:31,32.

The population of Nineveh at this time was estimated at 600,000. God asked Jonah: "Should not I spare Nineveh, that great city?" This shows the attitude of God to soulwinning. Souls are very precious to God. As it was at that time, so it is now. "The Lord is not slack concerning his promise, as some men count slackness; but is longsuffering to us-ward, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance." Many times we pray that the Lord should bring revival and save people who appear to be unreachable. But when God begins to do it, we become too cost-conscious of the outreach programme. We begin to calculate what it is taking us to reach out and save the people. We should be careful to see that we are not preoccupied with ourselves. In his pre-occupation with himself, Jonah did not catch the vision the Lord was showing him. Preoccupation with self makes us lose the evangelistic zeal and missionary vision. It happened to Jonah and it can happen to any preacher, soul-winner or believer. Other people need the gospel as much as we do. The Lord does not have interest in the death of any sinner. The Ninevites got converted. Anybody can get converted. Saul of Tarsus got converted. Many people are getting converted even in places where the door was originally closed to the gospel. Pray that the Lord will use you.

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