

A Cool Wet Summer Series for the Hot and Bothered Christian

JONAH

GODS WAY OR MINE?

Running Ahead of God/ Part 4

Pastor Barry Bruce/ The Gathering July 31, 2011

The Jonah Series part 4

Running Ahead Of God *Jonah 4:1-4, Matthew 6:33, 7:1-5*

Last week at family camp I found some great illustrations for today's final lesson in our study in the book of Jonah. The first illustration concerns Jonah's character and his consequences. Jonah was always running ahead of God. Oh, he heard God calling to him well enough: "Jonah, go to Nineveh", but he ran the other way to Tarsus. He even says in verse one of chapter four that before he ever left home he knew that God would spare Nineveh. He knew God's character and will but Jonah put his plans first! He wanted to do what he wanted even if it was dangerous. And he had the nerve to do it in full view of God's watching eye.

Jonah was like Jackie's little boy, (Gina's grandson) Isaac, on our hiking trip to Heart Rock. There he was, as usual, running ahead of his grandmother. He knew full well that she'd rather him walk with her and hold her hand, but he had his own agenda. And then, he turned around and walked briskly backwards! "I'm walking backwards on the trail", he taunted. "Watch where you are going" his grandma said with nervousness in her voice. "I'm walking backwards on the trail", he sung the words this time in good spirited defiance. Suddenly, before any of us could even utter a word, "poof!" Isaac disappeared! He had walked backwards right into a four foot hole that was just his size. We all gasped for only one second when we realized that he was unhurt but shocked to his senses! His expression was hilarious. "And that is why you do not walk backwards on a mountain trail, Isaac!" I said.

God loves us, but He would rather us hold His hand as we walk the trails of life. When we run ahead we can often get turned around in the process. Like Jonah, some of us even know that we are rebelling against God. Like walking backwards on a mountain trail we sing out our defiance to God in His presence. Like Isaac, We are headed for a hole! Isaac didn't walk backwards again on the hike, but somehow I don't think that lesson will stay with him forever...

Jonah fell into a big fish and got puked up on the shores of Nineveh, but it didn't take him long before he ran ahead of God's will again. Here, we see that he did what God asked (preached to Nineveh) but he is not happy...He'd rather be running backwards! Actually, he said he'd rather be dead! How about you?

Jesus taught us to seek God's kingdom (will) first and then all the things we need will be added to us. When we seek God, and to understand Him and His will, He fulfills us. Jesus also taught us

not to judge others, but to forgive them. Would we want to be judged by God in the same way as we judge others? God asks Jonah: "Have you any right to be angry?" Think about it... Do any of us have a right to be angry with God? The consequences that befall us if we sin against Him? The grace that He pours out on whoever He wills? How can we think we have any rights when we too have sinned against Him so? It is easy for us to see how childish Jonah is in these passages but do we see how childish we are when we are angry with God?

Grace and Wrath *Jonah 4:5-11, Philippians 2:1-11, 12-16*

Another illustration from family camp reminds me of the remaining passages in our study of Jonah. Once again it was on that last days hike to Heart Rock. The trail was shady and the water was refreshingly cold, but waiting for the whole group to taxi to the trailhead was hot and miserable! There was no shade at all at the trailhead where I waited and the sun was blistering hot! Then, like Jonah I saw one lone shrub and I sat in its shade. Like Jonah, I was very happy about that shrub and I thanked God for it.

As I sat under that low shrub I appreciated this passage in Jonah like never before. It was God's grace to me that the little shrub was there and I thanked God for it. **Jonah did not thank God for the vine that shaded him. He took God's grace for granted.** While he did that, one hundred and twenty thousand Ninevites were begging God for His grace and mercy. They could feel the scorching heat of God's impending judgment and they were crying out for "shade." Jonah was a hypocrite. He was spared God's judgment of a watery death by being rescued in the belly of a great fish. He was spared from the blistering heat by the shade of a vine. He wanted God's grace but he didn't appreciate it. He wanted God's grace but he didn't want it extended to the Ninevites. **Do you see yourself in Jonah's attitude? God forgive us!**

God loves us, and He wants us to extend the grace that He gives us to others. He wants us to be a reflection of His grace and mercy, and so He allows us to go through pain so that we might be more understanding of others suffering. This is why God allowed a worm to eat the root of the vine that shaded Jonah. So that he might have empathy for the Ninevites.

Does pain and suffering make you angry? Like Jonah, you have no right to be angry. How can we, who are sinners—worthy of judgment, be angry at God for withholding grace? Shouldn't we expect pain and suffering instead? It is, after all, our just reward for godlessness. Shouldn't we, rather, give God praise for all the good things that He gives and lavish whatever grace we can give upon others? This is what Jesus taught and this is also what the Apostle Paul mimicked in his letter to the Philippians. We are to be like Christ, offering grace and mercy to those who spiritually "do not know their right hand from their left."

God's Way or Mine? *God Said, "No" by Claudia Minden Weisz*

(See back of bulletin) John 3:16

The book of Jonah ends with a rebuke! The prophet is corrected by God, who has the last word. No happy ending or final epilog like... *"and Jonah understood and he repented too. And thus, he served God joyfully all the days of his life."* Nothing like that. Just an open ended rebuke and a question. A question that is intended for you and me as well. "Should I not be concerned?" God asks. **God is deeply concerned for you and me and all peoples on this earth...And He wants we who have received His amazing grace to tell them...no matter how bad it may hurt!**