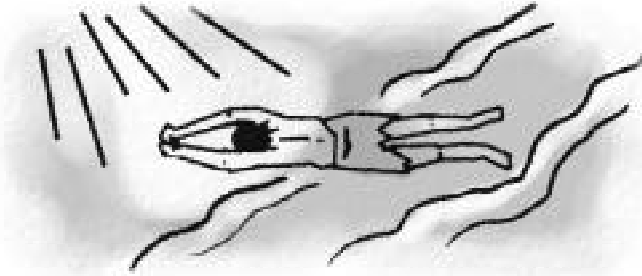


Second Chances



Sabbath Afternoon

IT'S HARD TO IMAGINE THAT so much has happened so far in Jonah (and we've covered only two chapters and even did so somewhat sparingly). Of the many points brought out, perhaps one of the most important is this: The same God who was working in Jonah is the same God who is working in our lives today. Our trials, adventures, and experiences might not be as dramatic, our call might not be as intense, but God's concern and love for Jonah is no different from His concern and love for us. If only we had the faith to believe that! Look what the Lord did for Jonah, all in order to bring the reluctant prophet to where He wanted him to be. Will He not do as much for us, if that's what it takes (let's hope, though, that it doesn't take that much)?

What we see here, in Jonah, is a unique expression of what we see all through the Scriptures—God's amazing grace working upon hearts open to receive it, even if it takes a bit of prodding along the way.

THE WEEK AT A GLANCE: How did Jonah get out of the fish? Why did God give him a second chance? How do we see God's grace expressed in this story?

MEMORY TEXT: "O Lord, Thou hast searched me and known me! Thou knowest when I sit down and when I rise up; thou discernest my thoughts from afar. Thou searchest out my path and my lying down, and art acquainted with all my ways" (Psalm 139:1, 2, RSV).

*Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, November 15.

THE “WORD” REAPPEARS.

“And the Lord spake unto the fish, and it vomited out Jonah upon the dry land” (Jon. 2:10).

Many translations of the above text miss a certain nuance in the language. Translated in a moral literal fashion, the verse reads, “And the Lord said to the fish, and it vomited out Jonah.” The phrase “and the Lord [or God] said” is exceedingly common throughout the Bible.

All through the Genesis Creation account, for example, there is the phrase “and God said.” *“And God said, Let there be light. . . .”* *“And God said, Let there be a firmament. . . .”* *“And God said, Let the earth bring forth grass. . . .”* and so forth (see Genesis 1). In Jonah, we have the same verbal form used in a manner that, again, shows the Lord’s power over His creation. Indeed, if He could speak the world and nature into existence, there’s no question He can control it, too, as we’ve seen all through the first few chapters of Jonah.

Read Jonah 3:1. What do we see in this text, that reflects what we’ve seen in Jonah 1:1?

Here, too, we see God’s actions manifested through His “word.” Look up these verses and see how the “word” of the Lord appears in the Bible: Psalms 33:6; 107:19, 20; Isaiah 55:10, 11. These texts show how God carries out His will on the earth. It is through His “word” that He gets things done on the earth.

There is an ancient Jewish translation of the Bible into Aramaic called the Targums, which was highly influential in the synagogues. Look at how closely it relates the “word of the Lord” with the Lord Himself: The Bible says, “God created man” (Gen. 1:27); the Targums translates it, “And the Word of the Lord created man.” The Bible says, “And it repented the Lord that he had made man on the earth” (Gen. 6:6, 7); the Targums translates it, “And it repented the Lord that through His Word He made man on the earth.” The Bible says that Abraham “believed in the Lord” (Gen. 15:6); according to the Targums, Abraham “believed in the Word of the Lord.” There are many other examples, as well.

Concepts like “the word of God” are hard for us to understand completely. The important point is that God is at work in this world. He still manifests His power here, and the greatest manifestation of that was through Jesus, the Word. What comfort do we get from the fact that we are not alone, not abandoned, not left to our own devices in this harsh, sinful planet?

SECOND CHANCES.

Jonah is back where he started from. In the Hebrew, the first words of chapter 3 are almost an exact repetition of the opening words in chapter 1. Jonah is given a second chance, despite his initial disobedience. He deliberately and stubbornly rebelled against God. The marvel is that his actions are not enough to make God turn His back on him. It should cause great wonder in our thinking that, despite his rebellion, God still calls Jonah another time. The God of the Bible is the God of *second chances*. He doesn't just dismiss Jonah in his petulant disobedience. However, this aspect of God's grace is not rare or unusual.

Whom else has God offered a second chance to? Gen. 22:1-10.

“God had called Abraham to be the father of the faithful, and his life was to stand as an example of faith to succeeding generations. But his faith had not been perfect. He had shown distrust of God in concealing the fact that Sarah was his wife, and again in his marriage with Hagar. That he might reach the highest standard, God subjected him to another test.”—Ellen G. White, *Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 147.

Who else got another chance? Gen. 28:10-22.

“Threatened with death by the wrath of Esau, Jacob went out from his father's home a fugitive. . . .

“The evening of the second day found him far away from his father's tents. He felt that he was an outcast, and he knew that all this trouble had been brought upon him by his own wrong course. The darkness of despair pressed upon his soul, and he hardly dared to pray. But he was so utterly lonely that he felt the need of protection from God as he had never felt it before. With weeping and deep humiliation he confessed his sin, and entreated for some evidence that he was not utterly forsaken. . . .

“But God did not forsake Jacob. His mercy was still extended to His erring, distrustful servant. The Lord compassionately revealed just what Jacob needed—a Saviour.”—Ellen G. White, *Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 183. And thus God gave Jacob the vision of the heavenly ladder filled with angels.

How many times in your own life has the Lord given you “second chances”? How is confession and repentance an expression of the second chances we've been given, again and again?

THE GIFT OF GOD.

No question, this picture of God, as presented here in the Old Testament, reveals a great deal about His divine character. Our God is a forgiving God, a pardoning God, a God of love and mercy. The whole plan of salvation rests upon the idea of forgiveness, of us having done something terrible, deserving of death, and yet God, through Christ, offering us life.

Look up these texts. What are they all basically saying about us, about our nature, about our characters, and about our deeds? Isa. 53:6; 64:6; Jer. 17:9; Rom. 3:23; 5:12?

As we look around in the world, who can deny the truthfulness of these Bible texts? In fact, we don't have to look around; looking inside ourselves is more than enough.

Yet, what we see with Jonah, with God giving him another chance, is a small object lesson of what God has done for the whole human race because of Jesus on the cross. Through Him, we have all been given a second chance at life; we have all been given the opportunity to receive for ourselves the glorious redemption that Christ offers the world.

Read carefully and prayerfully Ephesians 2:1-10. How do these verses encapsulate the essence of what was written above? As you read, notice how the words *sins, dead, trespasses, disobedience, lust, flesh, and wrath* are used to describe us, our actions, and our character. In contrast, what words are used in those verses to describe the Lord, His actions, and His character?

Take a look at your own life. In what ways can you see yourself mirrored in those verses written by Paul? Trace in your own mind where you once were and where the Lord has now taken you. Compare yourself with Jonah, at least as we see him so far. What parallels can you see?

SECOND CHANCES AGAIN.

Notice the title of this week's lesson. It's not called "Second Chance" but "Second Chances." And with good reason. Though the book of Jonah presents him as being given a second chance, in reality, who of us doesn't need more than a second chance? If all we had was *a* second chance, as opposed to *many* second chances, who would be saved?

Read 1 John 1:8–2:1. How do these verses exemplify the idea that we, even as followers of Christ, need more than one "second chance"? To whom are these words addressed? Believers or non-believers? What point does John make about the actions of those to whom he is writing? Focus carefully on verse 8 (the Greek verb *have* appears in the present tense).

Can any of us seriously claim that once we accepted Christ and were given a chance to start over, we never had to go back to the Cross and ask for forgiveness again? This doesn't mean that each time we sin we are lost; it means only that we need to be forgiven more than once.

Indeed, if we are honest with ourselves, we have to admit God has been even more gracious and forgiving with us than the two times we have seen in Jonah's life. And when we aren't so focused on the sins of others and the work God needs to do in their lives, we become more sensitive to just how many times God has given grace to us.

"Jesus knows the circumstances of every soul. You may say, I am sinful, very sinful. You may be; but the worse you are, the more you need Jesus. He turns no weeping, contrite one away. He does not tell to any all that He might reveal, but He bids every trembling soul take courage. Freely will He pardon all who come to Him for forgiveness and restoration."—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, p. 568.

When we are honest enough with ourselves to recall how God has brought us up out of the pits we have dug for ourselves, we can better appreciate God's grace to His recalcitrant prophet Jonah.

Go back to 1 John, the verses we looked at today. Then read 1 John 2:3-6. How do you understand the relationship, the balance, between these two blocks of text, one stressing the reality of sin in our lives, the other stressing the need for obedience to the law?

ANOTHER TRY.

The “word of the Lord” came to Jonah again. What did He say to him? Jon. 3:2.

The divine directive, “Up! Go to the great city of Nineveh,” is identical with the first one God gave Jonah before his amazing adventure in the Mediterranean Sea. Nineveh is still the metropolis God wants him to reach. He will not be frustrated by the impudence of His prophet.

What is Jonah’s response this time? Jon. 3:3.

As in chapter 1, Jonah went. But this time, instead of trying to “flee . . . from the presence of the Lord,” he obeys “according to the word of the Lord.” Notice how the text describes what happened to Jonah next (Jon. 3:3, 4). Jonah is told to go, and the next thing we know, he’s there. No mention is made of the long journey Jonah would have had to make. This is in direct contrast to his initial travels in the first two chapters. Instead, our attention is now taken immediately to the city of Nineveh. There was a reason for the description of Jonah’s first journey: It exposed the nature of Jonah’s rebellion against God. But now that Jonah obeys, the journey is not important to detail.

How is Nineveh described? Jon. 3:3.

As in Jonah 1:2, Nineveh is again described as a great city. (The literal meaning of the phrase is: “a great city to God.”) And indeed, it was large and important by the standards of the time. We can also be sure that Nineveh is “great” to God in light of all the trouble He takes to get Jonah there! The size of Nineveh is suggested by the final phrase in verse 3: “three days’ journey.” The words in the original language read more literally as “a walk of three days.” Such a designation in ancient records can suggest a day’s journey in from the suburbs, one day for business, and one day for the return. This interpretation fits well with verse 4.

God commissions a Hebrew prophet to go to the capital city of Assyria, taking a message of judgment. At a time when Israelites were no doubt praying that the Assyrians might be destroyed, God is extending a hand of mercy to them. What’s the message for us? (See Matt. 5:44; Luke 6:27, 35.)

FURTHER STUDY: Ellen G. White, “Our Duty to the World,” in *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 6, pp. 273–280; “Our Work,” vol. 8, pp. 9–12; “The Commission,” pp. 14–18.

Wake up, wake up, my brethren and sisters, and enter the fields in America that have never been worked. After you have given something for foreign fields, do not think your duty done. There is a work to be done in foreign fields, but there is a work to be done in America that is just as important. In the cities of America there are people of almost every language. These need the light that God has given to His church.”—Ellen G. White, *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 8, p. 36.

“While plans are being carried out to warn the inhabitants of various nations in distant lands, much must be done in behalf of the foreigners who have come to the shores of our own land. The souls in China are no more precious than the souls within the shadow of our doors. God’s people are to labor faithfully in distant lands, as His providence may open the way; and they are also to fulfil their duty toward the foreigners of various nationalities in the cities and villages and country districts close by.”—Ellen G. White, *Christian Service*, p. 199.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1. Look up other texts in the Bible in which the phrase the “word of the Lord” is found. Examples are Genesis 15:1, Numbers 36:5, Psalm 33:4, Isaiah 1:10, and 2:3. In many cases, you can replace that phrase with the name “Jesus,” and it makes perfect theological sense. What important truth does this teach us?
2. The Bible teaches that we can be given many chances, even after we blow it. However, we must remember that God is not mocked; those who presume upon the grace of God are in danger of facing the wrath of God. At what point can we step beyond the bounds of forgiveness? Obviously, we can, because there will be professed Christians who are lost (Matt. 7:22). When this happens, is it because God has changed His mind about us, or does it happen because we’ve become so hard in our sin that we no longer turn back to God for forgiveness? Discuss your understanding of this process; be prepared to talk about it in class.

SUMMARY: Jonah is given a much-needed second chance. Who, among us, can’t relate?



I'll Kill That Teacher!

Peter Sinagpulo

An epidemic of German measles struck the isolated Manobo village in the mountains of southern Philippines. Already two babies had died, and many more children were sick. These people are not vaccinated against childhood diseases, because their villages are too isolated, too dangerous and too difficult to hike to. The nearest hospital was a day's hike down the mountain, and my student-missionary partner and I had no medicines to help the sick ones.

We went from one hut to another, praying and offering what help we could. In one hut we found a baby lying on a mat, gasping for breath. The family had gathered to watch, weep, and wait for death.

We had no medicines, but we offered to pray. We wet a small towel and bathed the baby, then we asked God to heal the child. The father stared silently at us, his face crowded with worry and puzzlement. "How can a wet towel heal our baby?" he asked, agitated.

We explained that it could help bring down the baby's fever. We prepared to leave, sure that God would answer our prayer. We shook hands with the family members, but the father refused and stared at us coldly.

"What is wrong, sir?" I asked. But he said nothing. We felt sure that if the child died, the father would blame us.

We had barely reached our cottage when somebody ran toward us. "Sir! Sir! The father is very angry. He knows that the wet towel is not medicine, and he has threatened to kill you both!"

We entered our cottage and knelt to pray once more. "Lord, our Great Physician, there is nothing else we can do to save the baby. Please spare her life as well as ours. Amen." We claimed promises of God's protection, then we prepared for bed.

Through the spaces between the boards of our hut, we saw something move. Figures silhouetted in the moonlight walked toward our hut. It was the family of the sick baby. They walked past our cottage toward a relative's hut, but the father kept staring at our cottage. All was quiet again, and we fell asleep.

The next morning someone knocked at our door. It was the baby's father. This time his face wore a smile, and in his hand he carried some sweet potatoes. "Thank you, teacher," he said. "My baby is well now!"

We pray that the father and others in this village will learn to love and trust the Great Healer whom we worship.

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