

**PP Jonah: God's Relentless Grace**

**Jonah 2**

**10/31-11/1/2015**

Illus There is a TV show that absolutely pulls me into it, captivates me, and grabs that part deep within me that yearns to be set free... *Mountain Men*

Marty the Alaskan trapper; Rich from Montana who chases mountain lions and bobcats; Tom also from Montana and tough as nails; and my least favorite, Eustace from North Carolina, homesteader

It was actually from Eustace that I saw an interesting lesson about *brokenness*

He and his trusty sidekick Preston were making a canoe to sell to pay back a loan he took

In making the canoe, they had to bend strips of cedar in order to create the curvature necessary, so he started a fire, put a big teakettle of water on it to produce steam, with a pipe off the spout

When steam began pouring from the pipe, he put strip of wood down the pipe until it was steam-heated, pulled it out, and then applied pressure to bend it

The first time, it wasn't steamed long enough and it cracked when pressure was applied

But when steamed enough, they bent, and when the pressure was let up, they retained their shape

Now return to Jonah with me, and see in him an unyielding rebellious heart, refusing to bend to the will of God with the assignment God had for him

God applies pressure in the heat of the storm, the heat of being swallowed by a great fish, to get Jonah to a place of brokenness to be pliable, shape-able to His will

This process of heat-produced pliability is what the bible calls brokenness

**PP** *"God creates out of nothing. Therefore until a man is nothing, God can make nothing out of him."* Martin Luther

Think for a moment with me, have there been times of brokenness in your life?

And if so, whether it was big or small, did they ever come without pain or discomfort?

Brokenness is a multi-event process in our hearts that always involves difficulty and pressure

And as we have seen in this series so far, there is in each of us, this tendency to rebel

Sin is deeper than our actions, it is as deep as our hearts, the center of our beings where our desires and motivations and expectations reside

Sinful actions are not the problem, the heart of rebellion and lack of faith are

It is deep within us that our will is at odds with God's will where we have *no problem with God unless He is an obstacle to what I want*

In a severe but universal way, we can see this rebellious heart in this excerpt from a fictional letter of what an atheist would say to God if he is surprisingly before Him at death

*"I'm not going to kneel or anything if you don't mind. That would kind of be shutting the barn door after the cows have run out, don't you think?... You know, now that the initial shock of being dead is starting to wear off, I find myself getting angry. I'm trying to restrain it, but this whole situation is... absurd. According to most accounts, this is the part where you judge me. Who the [blank] are you to be a moral judge? You're a sadistic, genocidal sex-obsessed tyrant... I was glad that the Bible was a work of-seeming-fiction because the belief that all of the most terrible things in the world were, at the worst, designed by or, at the best, permitted by an all-powerful conscious being was too horrible to not hate. It's oddly refreshing to find that all this time I was*

*outraged at something more tangible...I guess its fitting: humanity's first act of defiance was to want knowledge to be more like you. Then let my last act of defiance be choosing ignorance so that I can be as unlike you as possible...You're going to judge me? On behalf of all that's good and decent in your creation, I judge you. I may have been a willful child, but you were a terrible father...I can't say I'm really inclined to beg for my soul now, given what I said about you knowing me perfectly. Even so, supposing mercy's still an option (and that last rant didn't kill my chances), I guess it's worth a shot. I can't pretend I have any love for you, but no principle is worth being damned over if it can be helped. What shall I say in my defense? I tried to be good without you...So you created us because you desired companionship and love? Well then, you needed me. But I didn't need you. I grew up and took responsibility for my own life. If that really is the greatest crime of all, then there's nothing more I can say. The deck was stacked against me, but honestly, I can't truly say I have any regrets. Heaven, hell, oblivion... your move, God."*<sup>1</sup>

His heart is one of rebelliousness, even-in his imagination-when standing before God Himself  
And his heart is the heart that every single person is born with

**PP** ***"For the mind that is set on the flesh is hostile to God, for it does not submit to God's law; indeed, it cannot."*** **Romans 8:7**

As a result of Adam and Eve's sin, every human being is born with pervasive corruption  
There is no part of any person that is not affected by sin, mind, will, or emotions, rendering them morally unable to do what God has commanded

When God saves someone, He forgives his or her sin, but more deeply and more radically, He gives that person a new heart with a moral capability

**PP** ***"And I will give you a new heart, and a new spirit I will put within you. And I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. And I will put my Spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes and be careful to obey my rules."***

**Ezekiel 36:26-27**

Salvation leaves no person's heart the same as it was, helplessly caught up in rebellion  
Otherwise, it would be similar to putting a new coat of paint on a termite-infested house  
There is a new heart, a new mind, a new engine that powers a new way of life, one that is pleasing to God

And this engine requires the oil of the Holy Spirit, cooled by the water of the Word of God, powered by the divine energy of Christ Himself

**PP** Christian, you can say with Paul, ***"I can do all things through him who strengthens me"***  
**Philippians 4:13**

Yet even though we have a new heart, a new moral capability, there is still this residual opposition in us called the flesh, so easily tempted and so eager to rebel against God  
And sometimes our flesh can, for a season, gain the upper hand and move us to life choices mired in defiance, and God's actions are not those of reprisals but those of joining with us in battle

**PP** ***"Deliverance can come to us only by the defeat of our old life. Safety and peace come only after we have been forced to our knees. God rescues us by breaking us, by shattering our strength and wiping out our resistance."*** A. W. Tozer

And almost invariably, what is necessary is that He leads us into some level of brokenness  
And this is where we find Jonah as he is floating on the storm-tossed Mediterranean Sea

<sup>1</sup> <http://www.atheismresource.com/2010/what-every-atheist-should-say-to-god-if-judgment-day-actually-happens>

**PP** *We are to learn of several key components of brokenness*

**PP 1-He begins to turn vertically**

***“Then Jonah prayed to the LORD his God from the belly of the fish, saying, “I called out to the LORD, out of my distress, and he answered me; out of the belly of Sheol I cried, and you heard my voice.”     Jonah 2:1-2***

Jonah finally prayed, he ***‘called out to the LORD, out of my distress’***

This word ***‘distress’*** is very similar to what we saw a few weeks ago from Psalm 107 in the word ***‘trouble’***

It means *to be in a tight spot, narrow place, a miserable situation*

Jonah’s in the great fish and it is a place of misery, but will it produce the brokenness he needs?

Distress, or misery is not the end goal, it is what moves us toward the goal...brokenness

Prayers of misery do not rise...they echo back on our own ears

Miserable people do not find the reciprocating voice of God’s mercy settling into the soul

**PP** They can’t, because ***“The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit; a broken and contrite heart, O God, you will not despise.”     Psalm 51:17***

It is because generally misery and brokenness are very different from each other

Misery keeps selfish plans and agendas alive while brokenness acknowledges they have burst into pieces and there is nothing you can do to fix it

Misery complains about the situation while brokenness appeals for help

Misery tends to blame others while brokenness accepts responsibility

Misery sees self as a victim or martyr, brokenness sees self as either perpetrator or accomplice

Misery leads to bitterness while brokenness leads to mercy

Jonah had been living with his compass aimed at himself!

He paid his own fare; he was asleep in the ship’s cabin; he didn’t pray in the storm; he gave the solution to have himself thrown into the sea...every one of them evidences of a self-directed life

He didn’t pray on top of the seas, not while he was drowning, but ***‘from the belly of the fish...out of the belly of Sheol’***

His soul began to move away from a rebellious, defiant stance, and turned upward to God

Friends, a miserable person is a self-absorbed person not getting what he wants!

Jonah’s life was falling apart, his best efforts had failed, he was stuck in the belly of the great fish and he finally realized that he was responsible for it, and he turns back to God

**PP 2-A recognition that God’s hand had brought him to this tight place**

***“For you cast me into the deep, into the heart of the seas, and the flood surrounded me; all your waves and your billows passed over me.”     Jonah 2:3***

When we recognize and believe that God is the One Who has cast into the sea of trouble, it is possible to be in the great fish and be at peace

***“For You cast me into the deep”*** is not a whining complaint, but the dawning of hope

King David foolishly, rebelliously, against all counsel took a census to count his army

**PP** *“When you take the census of the people of Israel, then each shall give a ransom for his life to the LORD when you number them, that there be no plague among them when you number them.” Exodus 30:12*

The reason for this is that a man only had the right to count or census what belonged to him. God gave this law to remind all Israel that they, every one of them belonged to Him alone. David, in counting the fighting men from Dan to Beersheba, was in effect claiming them as his own, and putting his confidence in them rather than God.

**PP** God gave him the choice of three punishments and listen to what David chose and why: *“I am in great distress. Let me fall into the hand of the LORD, for His mercy is very great, but do not let me fall into the hand of man.” 1 Chronicles 21:13*

It is better that we fall into the hand of God than any other for great is His mercy. We saw in **1:15** that the sailors threw Jonah into the sea, yet Jonah’s heart has begun to turn vertically, and his eyes are opened to the true hand that threw him in.

Haven’t you ever had the experience of being in that tight place, that trial, that suddenly, with eerie clarity, you could see how the hand of God had been working all along?

Misery clouds the mind and distorts truth, but brokenness begins to clear away the fog and we can see things as they actually are.

So on one level, the sailors physically picked Jonah up and threw him into the water, yet on a much higher level, it was the sovereign hand of God bringing about His perfect plan.

**PP** As Joni Erickson Tada wrote, *‘God permits what He hates to achieve what He loves.’<sup>2</sup>*

Notice how Jonah speaks of the waves and billows: *“all your waves and your billows passed over me.” 2:3*

*Your* waves and *your* billows, not *the* waves and *the* billows.

Think forward to the gospels for a moment, the Sea of Galilee, and a great storm that was swamping the boat that Jesus was sleeping in.

**PP** He was woken up by his terrified disciples, and *“He got up and rebuked the wind and the raging waves. So they ceased, and there was a calm.” Mark 4:24*

This is the power of God, Who, when He commands, the wind and waves cease...immediately. Yet for Jonah, they kept going, washing over him, making him sink.

They belong to God personally, His name is on them, He has sent them for His purpose, and His purpose was to send Jonah to the bottom.

God is the responsible party here...Who threw Jonah into the sea, and Whose waves and billows were sending him to the bottom to what seemed certain death.

This is the marriage that will no longer will float, that is falling apart, that cannot be fixed any longer by the same old cycle of hurt then heal.

*God will no longer allow that dysfunctional marriage be maintained.*

This is the crushing financial collapse that sends a person spiraling into ruin.

*God will no longer allow selfish money management to be an idol in your heart.*

This is the rug out from under you prognosis that defies a lifetime of healthy eating and exercise.

*God will no longer allow the illusion that can add one hour to your life in self-sufficiency persist.*

This is the discovery of the empty bottles in the bottom of the trash can.

*God will no longer allow you to find your refuge in anything but Him.*

He plunges Jonah to the bottom of the Mediterranean and His hands are the waves and billows.

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<sup>2</sup> When God Weeps, Tada and Erickson, p. 84

Yet Jonah has a ways to go before his heart will reach the depth of brokenness he needs  
He's on his way down to the bottom but he isn't there yet, so we'll pick it up on his descent the  
next time we look at Jonah together

Amen

Pray