



## **GOD WON'T GIVE UP ON YOU ! – *The story of Jonah***

People often think that the story of Jonah, in the Old Testament, is a fable but it is not the case. Jonah was a prophet who lived in Israel in the 8th century B.C., and whom God called to go to the city of Nineveh to give them a message of repentance.

The book of Jonah begins with these

words: "*Now the word of the Lord came to Jonah the son of Ammittai, saying, arise, go to Nineveh, that great city, and call out against it, for their evil has come up before Me.*"

That « great city » was the largest city on the face of the earth at that time and considerable remnants of Nineveh remain to this day, in the north of modern-day Iraq, next to the city of Mosul, as a testimony to the historicity of the story in the book of Jonah.

It was the capital of the Assyrian empire and its inhabitants were horribly wicked and had a reputation of brutally torturing their enemies, and God wanted them to repent. The Israelites constantly had problems with them and Jonah, who loved his country, would have rather watched these people suffer for their sins and destroyed, than warn them about turning away from their transgressions. Who would want evil people like that to be forgiven?

It was as if God asked a Jewish Rabbi, in 1943, to go to Berlin and tell the Nazis to repent for their evil. Nazi Germany was out to kill all Jews and no Jew in their right mind would have gone there.

Or if God told you to go to some terrorists that have murdered 1000s of people and tell them God is asking them to repent because He wants to forgive them. Would you do it ?

The story in brief is that eventually Jonah jumps aboard a ship bound for Tarshish, the opposite direction, because he really does not want to bring the good news of God's grace to his enemies. On route, the vessel is caught in a terrible storm. The superstitious sailors begin thinking someone on the boat is responsible and they cast lots. Of course they land on Jonah who is thrown overboard and swallowed by a great fish. He lives in its belly for three days and three nights and while there, he seems to have a change of heart and starts praising God. Then the fish vomits him onto dry land.

God speaks to Jonah a second time, *Go to Nineveh*. And this time Jonah obeys; he goes to Nineveh and tells them to repent. And they don't torture him... They repent.

But Jonah isn't happy. He's actually furious that God forgave them and did what He said He would do. In his heart, he was hoping they wouldn't repent and that God would destroy them.

It is not that Jonah refused to go to Nineveh because he was scared or that the task would be difficult but because he knew God's grace would overwhelm Israel's enemy. "*Therefore I fled previously to Tarshish; for I know that You are a gracious and merciful God, slow to anger and abundant in lovingkindness, One who relents from doing harm*" (Jonah 4:2).

Then, God asks a question to Jonah : « *And should not I pity Nineveh, that great city, in which there are more than 120,000 persons who do not know their right hand from their left, and also much cattle? »*

The story of Jonah teaches us that God's mercy is wider and God's grace is greater than all of our sins. Contrary to how some « religious » people describe Him, God is a God of compassion, not of anger, violence and revenge. His heart is broken by men's evil actions on earth, He grieves over people, He weeps over those who are far from Him, over those who are hurting. God is even displaying compassion on those who are undeserving... such as Jonah and Nineveh.

Throughout the whole story, we see the incredible depth of God's love, offering grace and second chances. God has love and patience and mercy for everyone in this story : both for Jonah (a follower with a wayward heart) and for the Assyrians (an evil people).

The book of Jonah is not actually about Jonah or the big fish that swallowed him. It's about God incredible love and his heart for people who deserve his wrath but to whom He wants to give his mercy.

So whenever we come to think that someone is beyond God's love, or that they have committed acts so vile as to be forever separated from God, when we begin to reduce God's response to human sin as judgment without mercy, we need to go back to the book of Jonah.

And God won't give up on you either. He never gives up pursuing, He is patient with each of us. There are no limits to His grace and love.