

Jonah Disobedience
Jonah 1:1-16
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There are many stories about villains such as Joker, Maleficent, MadMax, inception etc., from the villain point-of-view. When the villain becomes the main character of the story, we call it anti-hero. Antiheroes usually interesting, but it is not easy to craft it. One of the hardest things to create antihero story is audience engagement, to make audience to pick a side, and tie their emotion to the story. Audience is brought into a dilemma, how can audience who is naturally on the good side be brought to the villain who is supposedly evil. This dilemma makes antihero story interesting. Antihero stories resolve the dilemma usually in either of two ways: to make the anti-hero progresses from being bad to being God, or to convince the audience that anti-hero is not evil but actually good. Even a villain can be the hero.

The story of Jonah is not an anti-hero story, but an anti-villain story. When Israelite read the story of Jonah, he is the hero, but in the story Jonah, Jonah proved himself to be the villain. Israelite said so, because first of all Jonah was not a false prophet. At that time most Israelite was baal worshiper, but Jonah was one of the faithful remnants who worship the Lord. There were many false prophets who preached about peace and prosperity, but they did not receive this message from the Lord. Jonah was actually the legitimate prophet of the Lord. Although the story of Jonah can be seen as disobedience story, Israelite could sympathize with Jonah perfectly.

If God would offer salvation to the most evil people to your religion, would you disagree with Lord. If you disagree with God, do you have the gut to actually disobey God? Jonah did it. Jonah has this nationalistic principle, and disobeyed God in the most dramatic way. Deep down Israelite respected Jonah as the hero.

But Jonah was not a hero, he is a disobedient prophet. Among the many prophets of God, Jonah is the only one who disobeyed. The closest example of prophet disobedience is Moses, when he struck the rock twice. But he did it as he is so frustrated with the Israelites, not frustrated to God. Moses has rightly so, in fact God Himself frustrated with the Israelites. He just struck the rock once more than what God instructed him to do. For the error which seems so small, the great prophet was punished heavily so he could not enter the promised land in his lifetime, instead, he was sentenced to death in the wilderness.

If Moses was punished so heavily for such a minute error, what about Jonah? God commanded Jonah to arise and go to Niniveh. Jonah did arise but not going to Niniveh. Instead, he went to Joppa, which was a gentile port in a gentile country, aboard a gentile boat, with gentile sailors towards Tarshish, a gentile city. There is no doubt about Jonah intention, as Jonah 1:3 said that Jonah was fleeing from the presence of the Lord. Jonah received and understood God command perfectly, but Jonah want nothing to do with the plan of salvation.

Sometimes the hardest parts of the Bible, is the easiest to understand, so easy that we cannot turn aside to avoid it. The ten commandments, the sermon on the mount, the

betrayal of the apostles, these are the hardest part, they are hard because we precisely understand it but don't want to do it. What we do instead is flee from God. To flee from the omnipresent God, the God who is everywhere, is ultimately futile.

Psalm 139 says that we cannot outrun God. Jonah would have known this psalm very well, so why did he do something irrational by fleeing from the almighty God. Because behind this irrational action stands irrational desire, it was sin, where disobedience makes more sense than obedience. Sin told Jonah, that Jonah was right, and God was wrong. Sin is by nature irrational. Jonah pretends that he could run away from God, Jonah deceived himself. All this thing is just convenient irrationality.

Sometimes we also like Jonah, in sinful desire, we are challenged in all sides, by the word of God, by the holy spirit, by the conscience of ourselves and of others. So, what do we do? We shut down our thoughts, put away the bible, keep our prayer short, not thinking much about what we say, distance away from the church, especially from brothers and sisters who reminds us of God.

Sometimes life is smooth and easy when we disobey God. Jonah may have been relieved when seeing the ship at Jappa leaving for Tarshish. Back then, it is rare to find a right ship going to right place, there only few months in a year, when the sea is calm, and ships can sail. Jonah may think that God understand his difficulty and provided him with an escape. Disobedience is like riding a broken car. The only broken car can move is when it is rolling down the hill. One of the biggest punishments that God can give is make someone succeed in disobedience. The right way to gauge God's will is God's word. If you obey God's word, then you are in the right path.

If Jonah really succeeded in fleeing to Tarshish, it would mean that God had completely forsaken him. But the Lord is a merciful God. He brought a great wind into the sea and threw the ship into a terrible storm. God sometimes sends us troubles to bless us.

The gentile sailors immediately recognised that the storm was unnatural. They were experienced mariners; they had seen many storms. In polytheistic pagan, they immediately began to pray, but the storm did not die down. They became more and more helpless, they started throwing the cargo into the sea, they were not thinking about making money. The sea water was filling up the ship very quickly. They prayed to their gods, but none of these gods help. Then they found Jonah sleeping at the bottom of the ship, how Jonah can still sleep in such situation. Because shutting down Jonah senses brought him some comfort while fleeing from the presence of the omnipresent God. The storm outside ship was nowhere near as terrible as the storm of his heart.

These sailors reminded us of the people around us who do not know God. World is very confusing for them, suddenly there are pandemics, after that financial crisis, then rumours of wars. In the society there absent of ethical standard, in university, educators deconstructing meanings, in political, people were being polarized to the extreme. These people are like the sailors, when they see the storm threatening to break the ship. They asked each other and found deafening silence. Their world view cannot give them satisfactory answer. But we do. We know how the world came to be. We can explain how

the world ended up in such a terrible mess. But most importantly we know the Way, the Truth, and the Life who will get us out from this mess.

When you recognise that you have the worldview that can explain the world from the beginning to the end, then you can understand your prophetic role in this unbelieving world. Are we eager to fill the extential void with God's truth? Are we indifferent to the spiritual crisis? Make no mistake, when you received the word of God, you are in a sense a prophet of God. When looking at the people of the world who are panicking in storm of life, will you open your mouth and interpret the storm for them? Most importantly, will you point them to the One who calm the storm?

For Jonah, he was definitely indifferent, he had the true worldview that God was behind the storm. As Israelite, he could tell the truth to the sailors, but he didn't. As the prophet of God, Jonah has direct access to the Lord. He could have prayed to God, but he didn't. When the captain woke Jonah up and ask him to pray to God, Jonah remained silent. Jonah didn't pray to God as he was fleeing from the presence of God. If Jonah prayed to God, God would have asked him about his disobedience. In fact, captain's command was very similar to God's command, 1 Jonah 6: "Arise and called out to your God". It is ironic that a prophet of God has to be told by a gentile. Still Jonah rejected his prophetic role.

In confusion, the sailor proposed to cast a lot, and the lot fall on Jonah by God's providence. Immediately the sailors bombarded Jonah with questions. Jonah gave them an honest and important answer that he was fleeing from God who made that sea. When Jonah mentioned the "sea", all the sailors possibly perplexed, you are running away from God who made the sea, and you dare sail into the sea? The sailors knew that Jonah was the problem, and God was behind the storm.

The sailors asked Jonah what should they do? At this point Jonah could have said, bring me back to Japha, because the Lord wants me to go to Niniveh. But Jonah didn't say that, because he determined to never obey God so as to not preaching to the people of Niniveh. Jonah answered every question except one "what is your occupation?" Jonah didn't want to obey, he didn't one to prophecy.

But Jonah knew another way out, that way is death. He thought if he died, storm would calm down and save the sailor. Choosing between Niniveh salvation and his own death, Jonah chose death. He thought that death was his victory against God. How can you threaten a man who doesn't fear death? So, Jonah told the sailor to throw him into the sea, because the sea is after his life. But the sailors didn't immediately throw Jonah, instead they tried to row back to the land. At this point, the gentiles proved themselves to be more righteous than Jonah. But they failed to reach the shore, and the storm became more terrible. So, the last thing they can do is to throw Jonah into the sea. Before they did that they pray to God for mercy. How ironic is this, that gentiles should pray to God on behalf on an Israelite prophet. On this point too, the gentiles proved themselves more righteous than Jonah.

After that they threw Jonah overboard and the sea calmed down immediately. Before Jonah explained the storm, they didn't know the Lord. But as soon as they knew, they asked what should we do? Their knowledge of God directed them straightway their obedience to God. They also made sacrifice and made vows to the Lord, promising to worship Him. They saw the storm, and immediately understood that they need mercy. Indeed, the book Jonah is about God's mercy.

This book is not only about God's mercy to Nineveh, or to the sailors, but also to Jonah. After the sailors threw him, what awaited him was not death, but instead mouth of big fish. God could have sent another prophet, but He sent a big fish, big enough to swallow Jonah in whole, and keep him alive in fish belly. If you think that Jonah was stubborn enough, God was even more stubborn.

Jonah in many ways was a failed prophet, he disobeyed God, and put others in life-threatening position. But God had been merciful to him, speaking to him thru so many things, thru the sailors, thru the storm, thru the fish. Every time reminding him of God's mercy. Because God determined to save Jonah too.

Jonah was a failed prophet, but how different would Jesus, the better and greater Jonah be. Jonah was willing to die to disobey God, Jesus was willing to die to obey God, to the point of death, even to die on the cross. Jonah slept thru the storm because he is running away from God, but Jesus slept thru the storm because He was with God. By symbolic death as Jonah thrown into the sea, the sailors were saved from temporary judgement, but by death of Jesus, we sinners are saved from the eternal punishment.

Who are we in the story of Jonah? We are the gentile sailors, who needed a prophet who can reveal God to us, who needed a Priest who sacrifice for our sin, in fact sacrificing Himself for our sins. Lucky for us, God didn't send Jonah to us, God sends the greater and better Jonah, Jesus Christ who came to save sinners like us.

Will you come to God and see your life as it is interpreted by the One who made the sea and dry land? Would you realise your problems, as sins and suffering of this world, including your sins, and to realise that God has sent Jesus Christ to solve the problem of sin and to die to you? Are you willing to come to this better and greater Jonah and to worship Him, as God who saved you from the storm? Would you receive him now?

How great is the blessing for us to ever receive Christ, an unfailing Jonah, who died for our sins, and after three days rose for our righteousness? Let us remember that saviour and let us love Christ forever more.