

Jonah #1: Even A Graders Sometimes Make Mistakes : Jonah 1:1-3

It was Terry Scoby-Smith who first introduced me to the concept of **spiritual A graders**. Believers who, by virtue of their elevated position as leaders are, maybe, just a little above the mistakes and the struggles that lesser Christians fall foul of so often.

The Bible however, proves again and again that in **reality such a concept is entirely unfounded**. That it doesn't matter how long you have been a Christian, how much knowledge you have, or how greatly you are revered by others, **you are as subject to making mistakes** as the next person.

This is aptly shown in the story of Jonah. If you turn to Jonah chapter 1 and verse 1 in your Bibles you will read this:

The word of the LORD came to Jonah son of Amittai; and if you have a reference Bible you will notice that you are given in your margin another reference **to turn to in 2 Kings 14:25**, where we discover that this Jonah **was in fact a Prophet of the Lord to Israel.**

Indeed, we are further told that this Jonah had **been used by God** to prophecy a major victory for the Nation of Israel that had then come to pass. **2 Kings 14:25** speaking about Israel's king, Jeroboam II states:-

He was the one who restored the boundaries of Israel from Lebo^[a] Hamath to the Sea of the Arabah,^[b] in accordance with the word of the LORD, the God of Israel, spoken through his servant Jonah son of Amittai, the prophet from Gath Hopher.

So Jonah was a proven prophet who had tremendous respect in the eyes of the king and the people. **He had predicted** a time when Israel would be strong again. **When** it's people would be prosperous, it's boundaries strong, and nations such as **Assyria would be too weak to be a threat**. And it had happened, and **Jonah would have become a spiritual hero.**

But what the king and the people and **Jonah had forgotten**, was that it had happened simply because of **God's Grace and mercy towards them.**

That is what verses 26-27 go on to state:-

The LORD had seen how bitterly everyone in Israel, whether slave or free, was suffering; there was no one to help them. ²⁷ And since the LORD had not said

he would blot out the name of Israel from under heaven, he saved them by the hand of Jeroboam son of Jehoash.

They had forgotten God's grace. They had begun to think that they were better than others. **That** they had got to their present safe position because they were strong. **They** were powerful. They were worthy of their blessings, and consequently Israel had **begun to gloat** over her new-found power.

One commentator states that

"Because she was relieved of foreign pressures—as Jonah had prophesied—she felt jealously complacent about her favoured status with God. She focused her religion on expectations of the 'day of the Lord' when God's darkness would engulf the other nations, leaving Israel to bask in His light."

So you can see that Jonah was no run of the mill worshipper of God. **He wasn't a beginner.** He was a proven and respected prophet with the runs on the board as far as doing what God wanted him to do was concerned.

But then God asked him to do something that Jonah didn't want to do. **Jonah 1:2** says:-

"Go to the great city of Nineveh and preach against it, because its wickedness has come up before me."

Ninevah was the capital of Assyria, that old enemy of Israel. **They** had shown themselves in the past to be a cruel and horrible people.

At this point in time they weren't so strong, and the **Israelites** were hoping that they would be amongst the first nations that the Lord would destroy. **Destroy them without warning or chance of escape.**

And when God told Jonah to go and preach against it he knew that God was giving Nineveh a second chance. **And if the people took** it then they would be spared and God might just give them the favour and compassion **that only Israel should enjoy.**

So rather than obey God, Jonah put all his energy into becoming a fugitive from God. **Jonah 1:3 says:-**

But Jonah ran away from the LORD and headed for Tarshish. He went down to Joppa, where he found a ship bound for that port. After paying the fare, he went aboard and sailed for Tarshish to flee from the LORD.

Here we find a conflict of wills between what God wanted and what Jonah wanted. **God's heart** was for the people of Nineveh. **Jonah** was happy to leave things as they were.

When he decided to run from God's call, he was not simply running from a nice idea God had for him. **He was trying** to escape from doing **a most important assignment**. **He was trying to stand** in the way of God's dream being fulfilled!

He made a mistake. A wrong decision. Because he just did not realize **how important proclaiming God's word** to the heathen Assyrians was to God.

Today is the beginning of our month of Missionary emphasis and it is the **best time for us to check out** where we stand as far as God's heart is concerned, regarding the matter of sharing His Word with others.

Whether we realize how important **it is to God** that we care about others rather than just ourselves.

Have we become so comfortable with our favoured position of grace that we too have little thought for those who have yet to even hear about God's mercy?

Are we also, in some sense, fugitives from God's will as Jonah was, for there is no doubt according to the Bible that it is not His will that any should perish.

For sure we might not be on the run as Jonah was but perhaps like Jonah, **we are happy to spend our money** for tickets that take us away from God's will, **but slow to give so that the Word** of God can go forth to the Nations.

Or maybe we need to hear His call into some sort of service from a different perspective. **Not just** as something that could be a burden but as **something God** cares about more than our comfort. **He wants us to be involved in some way in sharing the good news with others.**

We will return to Jonah's story again over the next few weeks, but for today we

- **need to learn from his mistake;**
- **need to see that even if we do respond badly to God** He still offers us **a second chance;**

and especially we

- need to **recognize anew that God's greatest desire** is for people everywhere to **hear about His forgiveness and love**, and He **wants us to take that desire on board**, and to **give it the** same priority that He does.

One writer talks about the sharing of such good news with the whole world as God's number one dream, and then goes on to say:-

God is looking for people who will make His dream their utmost priority! People who will do everything it takes to make it happen. They are consumed with a passion to do everything they can to make His dream a reality while they are on this earth! Will you dare to live God's dream?