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## The Mysteries of God's Grace

Diversions...sometimes God uses them to work out a skilful plan of grace.

My friend Tom, a Christian, committed adultery, was excommunicated and abandoned by his church and left alone, but God used it to humble him.

In his darkest hour he told me, "I feel like I am in the fish's belly like Jonah...wherever the fish goes I go."

When we are young we often think there are set steps up the ladder to success in life or ministry, however there can be diversions or disturbances to our goals. Therefore let's look at how God can respond to life's interruptions. Life can be fine until something happens out of our control or through our mistakes.

I once went into a business venture without a sense of God being with me. Among some good business successes this was a project that couldn't fail, but it became my greatest business failure; however this painful experience became a rung in my ladder of true success. God used it to humble me and teach me.

This is the mystery of His grace.

Let's look at Jonah's journey:

He lived 782-753 BC At the time of Jeroboam II, just after Elisha before Amos & Hosea. Jewish tradition says he was the son of the widow of Zarephath who Elijah raised from the dead.

Jesus confirmed Jonah's existence and meaning of his experience in Mat. 12:39-41  
*But he answered them, "An evil and adulterous generation seeks for a sign, but no sign will be given to it except the sign of the prophet Jonah.*

*40 For just as Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of the great fish, so will the Son of Man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth.*

*41 The men of Nineveh will rise up at the judgment with this generation and condemn it, for they repented at the preaching of Jonah, and behold, something greater than Jonah is here.*

These Pharisees had signs all around, but they wanted a special sign of that Jesus' was

for real. He answered “the sign of Jonah is the only sign you’ll get. Amazing, those three days during Jonah’s disobedience he experienced an insight into what Jesus’ would feel when He lay in the grave.

See Jonah 2: 2-6.

In a future day even the repentant Ninevites will bring the proof of Jesus’ reality.

Anyway, in Jonah’s disobedience he goes in the opposite direction. It was only 500 miles North East to Nineveh, but 2000 miles West to Tarshish (Spain). Away from the presence of the Lord.

Assyrians (Ninevites) were violent people (Saddam Hussein came from near there). If Jonah had obeyed he probably would have been killed.

They are the descendants of Nimrod.

It was a huge city, when excavated in the 19<sup>th</sup> Century after digging through 13 meters of debris the archaeologists found in the city a library containing 22,000 clay tablets of writings including records of creation and the great flood.

Yes Jonah disobeys, leaves the presence of the Lord, but God goes to work to achieve His plan. God uses a storm, casting lots, the sailors, a fish, the Ninevites, a worm and an east wind to work His mysteries of grace.

The storm brings havoc, because of his disobedience.....lost to others (mariners)’ loss of the cargo. When we deflect it bring loss to others.

Jonah goes to sleep...his conscience ceased to work. He had ignored God’s Mission heart.

Desperate sailors wake him; ask him to pray to his God. They even recognised something different about Jonah. Sometimes when a Christian backsides worldly people perceive that they don’t really belong to their world. E.G. Joan a backside young woman at a dance.... an observing psychologist finds her out. Tells her, “You are a stranger to this scene, you really don’t belong here.” She ran from the dance floor and got right with her God.

Then the casting of lots went against Jonah.... God even behind this result.... a method of chance!

He is interrogated... has to reveal himself. He said. “I fear God??”

They found he had fled the Lord’s presence.

The sailors begin to fear God v14-16; are reluctant to do what Jonah knew what had to be done.....he had to lose his life to find it.

He’s now under the waves so the ship is in calm waters. He’s out of sight to all, but God is at work under the waves, and on top sailors find the true God.

Ah! a fish was following the ship...God guides the Whale! It swallows Jonah.

Jonah has a new prayer closet! A new mode of transport without a steering wheel! He is now in circumstances out of his control, wherever God commands the fish that's where he goes. Have you ever been there?

A dark place, but God is there.

He's either going to come out the front or the backend of that fish, it depends on how he responds to God's dealings.

Incredible, Chapter 2 verses 1-6.....His cry becomes attuned prophetically to the cry and feelings of Jesus in the grave.

Finally he is answered by God.....(vs.9) begins to give thanks and resolve to pay what he's vowed. God commands the fish to vomit him up on dry ground.

The Lord comes the second time....arise go; preach what I have given you.

He arose, went the 3 days journey.....500 miles to reflect on his lessons and then told the Ninevities their doom if they don't repent.

Meantime God is preparing Nineveh --- two plagues and a solar eclipse had taken place.

They listen, why? Because Jonah had an awesome testimony and his look and stink proved his case.

Maybe it was a pleasant smell.....Whales vomit makes the finest of scent!

'Ambergris' found as a rock on Morecomb Bch., England by Ken Wilman was worth \$200,000. It makes expensive perfume, spices and medicine.

The Ninevites humbled themselves, cried out to God and repented.

God saw their works, their turning from evil ways and He relented from the disaster. God cares for Gentiles too; even violent ones.

Interruptions can be a springboard to a new life in God.....for me, a driver fainting at the wheel causing his car to veer to the wrong side. This resulted in being crushed, getting a broken back, broken pelvis and a polonium embolism.

Yes, a divine interruption, a diversion from my life goal, but it changed my life and brought me into an awesome life of true fruitfulness in God.

*Job 14: 7-9 "For there is hope for a tree, if it be cut down, that it will sprout again, and that its shoots will not cease. Though its root grow old in the earth, and its stump die in the ground, yet at the scent of water it will bud and put forth branches like a young plant."*

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