**“God of Mercy: Preserved, Not Punished”**

**Jonah 1:17-2:9; Rom. 8:31-39; Heb. 12:6-7**

(notes based on the sermon by Pastor Steve Massey, Hayden Bible Church, 5/23/21)

 Jonah went AWOL: he departed from his duty without permission. His marching orders had been quite clear: go to Nineveh and cry out against it. But he was indifferent to the perishing, isolating himself from them. But Jonah was no Judas. He was not an apostate or a deserter. God sent the storm not to punish Jonah, but to preserve him. Maybe this study applies to YOU. Is there evidence in your life that you are a follower of Jesus, or do you find yourself in a time of waywardness? Take heart! God does not punish his runaway people…

He preserves them. (Q1)

 I’ve had times in my life where the word “backslidden” would aptly describe me. How about you? If it also describes you, this need not be the end of your story. It wasn’t for Jonah. Jonah was AWOL, but he wasn’t a deserter; he was a backslider, not an apostate. Notice that in 2:1 and 2:6 Jonah prayed to the Lord ***his*** God. Flight from God does not remove a true disciple’s faith in God. R.C. Sproul said, “A Christian can fall radically and seriously, but not fully and finally.” Your salvation is not dependent on your perseverance in obedience; your salvation is dependent on Jesus Christ. (Q2)

 Aren’t you glad that God included Peter in the Bible? Even though Jesus knew that Peter would deny Him, He prayed that Peter’s faith should not fail. In effect, He was saying, “You belong to me! Nothing will snatch you out of My hand.” (see Luke 22:31-32) Perseverance has to do with faith in Christ, not performance for Christ.

 Most of us pray day and night for our wayward children and grandchildren. Guess what? Jesus is praying for them, too! I think these two verses are instructive here: 1Peter 1:3-5 and Phil. 1:6. Our saved loved ones are “kept by the power of God” and what God began in them, He will bring to completion. It may take harsh discipline, even physical death, but God will do whatever is required to set them right. Wayward disciples are disciplined by God in mercy, not discarded by God in wrath.

 Don’t misread your trials: they could be good, they could be bad [relate Chinese parable here]. God’s chastening is actually a privilege. Charles Stanley said, “Trials are God’s tools to test your faith in His ability.” (Q3) Sure, being cast in the sea and swallowed by a fish doesn’t feel so good. But it can actually be a blessing. How about you? Are you swallowed up in depression? Discontentment? Physical suffering? Are you swallowed up by bad finances or broken relationships? What is God teaching you? Is it forcing you to draw closer to Him and to depend on Him? The belly of a fish is not a fun place. It hurts deeply to feel irrelevant, to have no influence, to feel sick all the time, to feel powerless… Are you in the belly of a fish for preserving discipline? What is God saying to you? (Q4) (Q5)

 The truth is, we humans are prone to wander. Thankfully, as God preserves His people through discipline, He prepares His people for future usefulness. God’s commands are not to be taken lightly. God is determined to have His will carried out. His chastening is a gift of love. God’s own may run away from His will, but they will never outrun His love for them. God’s discipline awakens His people to their dependence on Him. We are being prepared, not just preserved. GOD IS NOT DONE WITH US YET! (Q6)

**QUESTIONS:**

1. What is the difference between punishment and preservation?
2. Does this mean you don’t need to obey God’s commands? Of course not. Explain.
3. In your own words, give a couple of reasons God lets you go through trials.
4. Why do you think we sometimes have to sink so low before we remember God?
5. Why do you think God left Jonah in the belly of the fish for 3 days and 3 nights?
6. How will you apply this lesson this week?

 “The Solid Rock” (Edward Mote)

1. My hope is built on nothing less
Than Jesus’ blood and righteousness;
I dare not trust the sweetest frame,
But wholly lean on Jesus’ name.
	* Refrain:
	On Christ, the solid Rock, I stand;
	All other ground is sinking sand,
	All other ground is sinking sand.
2. When darkness veils His lovely face,
I rest on His unchanging grace;
In every high and stormy gale,
My anchor holds within the veil.
3. His oath, His covenant, His blood
Support me in the whelming flood;
When all around my soul gives way,
He then is all my hope and stay.
4. When He shall come with trumpet sound,
Oh, may I then in Him be found;
Dressed in His righteousness alone,
Faultless to stand before the throne.