

May God bless you on His Sabbath day!

The Day of Atonement, or Yom Kippur, coincides with the last of the ten days of Teshuvah, a Hebrew word that simply means repentance. On that day, the book of Jonah is read every year in the afternoon in synagogues around the world. While it may seem out of place to talk about the Day of Atonement at this time of the year, there is an aspect of that day that is not commonly considered and it is a core message of the book of Jonah.

Jonah was a prophet called by God to preach a message of impending destruction to the city of Nineveh. Nineveh was the capital of Assyria and it was huge—it had 120,000 inhabitants and required three days to traverse it. At the time of Jonah, their sins had reached a point where God intended to destroy the city unless they repented. What were their sins?

[TS2009] NAHUM 3:1-3 Woe to the **city [Nineveh] of blood!** All of it is a lie [*hypocrisy*], filled with plunder, the prey is not lacking. 2 The sound of a whip and the sound of rattling wheels, of galloping horses, of jolting chariots, 3 mounted horsemen with **bright sword and glittering spear**, and many wounded, and a mass of dead bodies, and no end of corpses, they stumble over the corpses –

The next verse also mentions whoredom, harlotry, and witchcraft but Nineveh's primary sins were violence (unlike Babylon who is the MOTHER of harlots and abominations¹). Isaiah records² that Assyria was (and will be again) the rod of God's anger against Israel, so the Assyrians had a cruel and vicious streak.

But the story of Jonah is about more than the repentance of Nineveh. It is a story of God's MERCY. In fact, Jonah fled from God because he did *not* want Him to be merciful to Nineveh.

JONAH 3:10-4:3 Then God saw their works, that **they [Nineveh] turned from their evil way; and God relented from the disaster that He had said He would bring upon them**, and He did not do it. 1 But it displeased Jonah exceedingly, and he became angry. 2 So he prayed to the LORD, and said, "**Ah, LORD, was not this what I said when I was still in my country? 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. 3 "Therefore now, O LORD, please take my life from me, for *it is* better for me to die than to live!"

Even after Nineveh repented, Jonah waited outside the city still hoping for its destruction:

JONAH 4:5 So Jonah went out of the city and sat on the east side of the city. There he made himself a shelter and sat under it in the shade, till **he might see what would become of the city**.

Jonah had a difficult time with God being merciful to Nineveh. He had witnessed the violence and destruction wrought by the Assyrians upon the Israelites. But in those days,

¹ Rev. 17:5.

² Isa. 10:5, 24; 30:31.

vengeance upon one's enemies was ostensibly allowed although God was not entirely pleased with bloodshed as He demonstrated by prohibiting David from building the temple³. Perhaps vengeance was tolerated in those days because the Law of God did not expressly forbid it:

LEVITICUS 19:18 '**You shall not take vengeance**, nor bear any grudge **against the children of your people**, but you shall love your neighbor as yourself: I *am* the LORD.

This statute prohibited taking revenge specifically upon other Israelites but did not address vengeance against non-Israelite enemies. Because of this, it appears that the statute in Leviticus 19:18 was interpreted over time to mean:

MATTHEW 5:43 "You have heard that it was said, 'You shall **love your neighbor and hate your enemy**.'

In the next verse, Jesus emphasized loving both neighbors AND enemies. But the reality is that mercy was always a core principle of the Law of God:

MICAH 6:8 He has shown you, O man, what *is* good; and what does the LORD **require of you** but to do justly, **to love mercy**, and to walk humbly with your God?

God REQUIRES mercy from those who have received His mercy. Sadly, some in the *ekklesia* are without mercy. A month rarely goes by when I do not hear of a minister who forbids fellowship with members of other COG organizations because they are not as converted or brags he knows more truth, apparently without any regard to Jesus' warning:

MATTHEW 7:1-2 "[**Condemn**] **not**, that you be not [condemned]. 2 "For **with what judgment you judge, you will be judged**; and with the measure you use, it will be measured back to you.

All should fear and tremble when reading this. Condemnation of anyone brings about a harsh judgment. When it comes from a minister, it also instills similar thoughts and behaviors in those they were given responsibility to nourish in the agape love of God.

But it does not stop there. Some ministers even condemn unconverted people who suffer tragedies or natural disasters or they show complete indifference for Protestants who are martyred in unspeakable ways in various countries. This is a grim reflection of how hardhearted some of the *ekklesia* have become. This is not the message of the parable of the Good Samaritan⁴ or the parable of the Pharisee and the Tax Collector that Jesus told "to some **who trusted in themselves that they were righteous, and despised others**" (Luke 18:9).

Having no mercy for brethren in other organizations or the sufferings of people of the world is nothing less than contempt for God's mercy for their own sins and God has a grave warning for them:

JAMES 2:13 For **judgment is without mercy to the one who has shown no mercy**. Mercy triumphs over judgment.

³ 1 Chr. 22:8; 28:3.

⁴ Luke 10:30-37.

Even though many who suffer are unrepentant sinners, God desires mercy BECAUSE He is, in His time, CALLING them to be a part of His Kingdom:

MATTHEW 9:13 “But go and learn what *this* means: ‘**I [the LORD] desire mercy and not sacrifice.**’ For I did not come to call the righteous, but **sinners, to repentance.**”

The violent and cruel Ninevites repented when they heard God’s warning through Jonah but they will truly repent of their sins in the judgment to come:

LUKE 11:29-30, 32 And while the crowds were thickly gathered together, He [*Jesus Christ*] began to say, “This is an evil generation. It seeks a sign, and no sign will be given to it except the sign of Jonah the prophet. 30 “For as Jonah became a sign to the Ninevites, so also the Son of Man will be to this generation. ... 32 “**The men of Nineveh will rise up in the judgment with this generation and condemn it, for they repented at the preaching of Jonah; and indeed a greater than Jonah is here.**

Nineveh obviously did not turn away from violence and embrace mercy at the preaching of Jonah but they will surely know mercy when they hear Jesus Christ. When Jesus spoke these verses, He was speaking to a crowd that included the scribes and Pharisees⁵. He used the example of Nineveh in contrast with them because they were even more merciless than the cruel Assyrians:

MATTHEW 23:23 “Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you pay tithes of mint and anise and cummin, and have **neglected the weightier matters of the law: justice and mercy** and faith. These you ought to have done, without leaving the others undone.

The whole of chapter 23 is a declaration of the pride of the scribes and Pharisees. In fact, instead of leading people to the kingdom, they actually shut them OUT by their examples of merciless condemnation of others:

MATTHEW 23:12-13 “And whoever exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted. 13 “But woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For **you shut up the kingdom of heaven against men;** for you neither go in *yourselves*, nor do you allow those who are entering to go in.

That is *exactly* what some do today when they forbid fellowship with other organizations or rejoice when devastation and suffering falls upon the unconverted. They are no different from the scribes and Pharisees. Denying mercy to others in the midst of their suffering is utter hypocrisy because they received undeserved mercy for their sins from God:

EPHESIANS 2:4-5 But **God, who is rich in mercy, because of His great love** with which He loved us, 5 **even when we were dead in trespasses,** made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved),

Even if suffering is a punishment from God, the victims have not yet had the veil of blindness⁶ removed! They have not yet received mercy but God WILL offer them mercy:

JOHN 3:16-17 “For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life. 17 “For **God did not send His**

⁵ Matt. 12:38.

⁶ 2 Cor. 3:14-15; 4:3-4.

Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through Him might be saved.

What is the difference between Jonah's desire to see Nineveh destroyed and those of the *ekklesia* who rejoice when 'sinners' suffer? Jonah wanted God to avenge the violence and death perpetrated by Assyria upon his people. Jonah was angry BECAUSE he felt deep mercy toward his own people.

Claiming other brethren are not worthy of fellowship or condemning people who suffer is utterly merciless and it shows contempt for God. I would guess His "thoughts" toward them are not those mentioned in Jeremiah 29: 11. What baffles me is why anyone continues to fellowship with those who are merciless. Those without mercy will NOT receive mercy:

MATTHEW 18:32-34 "Then his master, after he had called him, said to him, 'You wicked servant! I forgave you all that debt because you begged me. 33 **'Should you not also have had compassion [mercy] on your fellow servant, just as I had pity on you?'** 34 "And his master was angry, and delivered him to the torturers until he should pay all that was due to him.

God did not send Jesus Christ to condemn the world. He sacrificed His Son so He can have mercy upon us; therefore, He REQUIRES mercy from us. Those who mercilessly condemn others are *not* following the example and commandments of Jesus and He clearly warns them of the consequences. But what about continuing to associate with those who are merciless? Their words and works can be deceptive and destructive influences:

2 PETER 2:1-3 But there were also false prophets among the people, even as there will be **false teachers among you, who will secretly bring in destructive heresies [false teachings]**, even denying **the Lord who bought them**, and bring on themselves swift destruction. 2 And **many will follow their destructive ways, because of whom the way of truth will be blasphemed**. 3 By covetousness **they will exploit you with deceptive words**; for a long time their judgment has not been idle, and their destruction does not slumber.

Merciless people might think no one sees their works but they are not hidden from God. Regardless of position or organization, Peter warns NOT to follow or fellowship with those that have unfruitful works of darkness:

EPHESIANS 5:11-14 And **have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness**, but rather expose *them*. 12 For it is shameful even to speak of those things which are **done by them in secret**. 13 But all things that are exposed are made manifest by the light, for whatever makes manifest is light. 14 Therefore He says: "**Awake, you who sleep, arise from the dead, and Christ will give you light.**"

Only by God's great mercy will any have salvation, but He only extends it to those who are likewise merciful: "Blessed *are* the merciful, for they shall obtain mercy." (Matt. 5:5).

May God's grace and MERCY be upon you!

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