

Chapter Two

Jonah 1:4-16

Jonah Sank

The last time we were in the Book of Jonah we learned that God called the prophet to preach against the great city of Nineveh. God said “Arise, go” but Jonah said, “No.” And instead of taking the 500 mile trip to Nineveh to do God’s will, Jonah decides to run from God and take a 3,000 mile trip to Tarshish. Here’s a poem that speaks to our obedience or disobedience to God.

To everyone there opens
A way and ways and a way
And the high soul climbs the highway
And the low soul gropes the low
And in between on the misty flats
The rest drift to and fro

But to everyone there opens a highway and a low
And everyone decides the way his soul shall go.¹

Jonah took the low road. In verse 3 we read, “But Jonah arose to flee.” Now as we begin verse 4 we read, “But the LORD.” We can run from God, but we can’t hide.

But the Lord sent out a great wind
on the sea, and there was a mighty
tempest on the sea, so that the ship
was about to be broken up.
(Jonah 1:4)

Jonah thought he was done with God, but God was not done with Jonah. So God hurled a great storm that raged violently. And it is due to Jonah’s rebellion against God that innocent sailors are on the verge of drowning. Often our sins don’t only affect us they can hurt the people around us as well.

And there is no escaping the direct intentional action of God in the storm. Some Christians feel the need to protect God from this kind of action. They don’t like the idea of God sending a destructive storm. They prefer to speak of God

¹ John Oxenham

“allowing” events like storms or misfortune to happen to get our attention. And that is true in one sense. Take the parable of the Prodigal Son as an example. The young man took all of his inheritance and wasted it on parties and friend. Finally, he fell so far in life that he wasn’t even allowed to eat the slop he was feeding the pigs. And that fate brought the son to his senses.

God will allow us to suffer the natural consequences of sin. The New Testament book of Romans tells us that God’s wrath is revealed today by His eventually giving sinners over to their lusts, passions and debased minds. But God sent this storm. And as the Creator He can. Psalm 138:8 tells us that “fire and hail and snow and clouds” and “stormy winds fulfill His Word.” And Jonah’s storm is more that chastisement. It is mercy calling Jonah back to God and His work.

Then the mariners were afraid;
and every man cried out to his god,
and threw the cargo that was in the
ship into the sea, to lighten the load.
But Jonah had gone down into the
lowest parts of the ship, had lain down,
and was fast asleep.
(Jonah 1:5)

These sailors had weathered storms before, but this one scared them to death. You know, in Job 2:4 Satan said, “Skin for skin! Yes, all that a man has he will give for his life.” And that’s what these sailors were doing. They were throwing their cargo overboard—all that would bring them wealth was going into the deep so that the ship would more easily stay afloat.

People do this all the time. They will spend thousands of dollars for their physical well-being while giving little attention to their spiritual well-being. And often it takes a crisis that money can’t fix that brings them to God. And the gracious thing is that God will not cast them away. In fact in Psalm 50:15 God declares, “Call upon Me in the day of trouble; I will deliver you, and you shall glorify Me.”

So the sailors are throwing the cargo overboard with each one praying to his god. And the idea of each man praying to his god seems good to people in our pluralistic society today. After all there are many roads to God. But there is only one problem with this idea. When all is said and done the storm still roared. But what is really sad is that the one man on that ship who knew the God who controls creation is below deck snoring away!

So the captain came to him,

and said to him, "What do you mean, sleeper? Arise, call on your God; perhaps your God will consider us, so that we may not perish."
(Jonah 1:6)

Can you picture the scene? The captain stumbles down below and grabs Jonah and pulls him out of his hammock and yells at him. "Get up! We are going to sink. Don't you have a god you can call on?" The captain's words must have mocked Jonah! Yes, he does have a god—THE God, but he is running away from Him.

There was a challenge here for me as I worked on this sermon. I am not running from God and I do pray, but not for the world as passionately as I should. The world is sinking in sin. There is trouble everywhere. And I need to pray for it. The apostle Paul wrote in 1 Timothy,

Therefore I exhort first of all that supplications, prayers, intercessions, and giving of thanks be made for all men, ² for kings and all who are in authority, that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and reverence.

³ For this is good and acceptable in the sight of God our Savior, ⁴ who desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth. ⁵ For there is one God and one Mediator between God and men, the Man Christ Jesus, ⁶ who gave Himself a ransom for all, to be testified in due time,
(1 Timothy 2:1-6)

We need to pray for our world, for our country, for our neighbors and friends. We need to arise and call on God, "Our Father in heaven, hallowed be Your name. Dear Father, Mighty God, so work in the world, so work in me, that Your name, Your fame is made holy and respected. Help us to lead peaceable lives. Help us to bring others to salvation in Jesus Christ." Think about the unbelievers you know. If you don't pray for them who will?

Meanwhile the sailors rightly believe that someone on board the ship is the reason for the storm. And they cast lots to discover who the problem is.²

And they said to one another,
“Come, let us cast lots, that we may
know for whose cause this trouble
has come upon us.” So they cast lots,
and the lot fell on Jonah. ⁸Then they
said to him, “Please tell us! For whose
cause *is* this trouble upon us? What is
your occupation? And where do you
come from? What is your country?
And of what people are you?”
(Jonah 1:7, 8)

As soon as Jonah was found to be the trouble maker rapid fire questions came from the sailors. And notice the irony here, Jonah is running away from God, because he would not preach to pagans. But here he is doing the very thing! And Jonah told them everything.

So he said to them, “I *am* a Hebrew;
and I fear the LORD, the God of heaven,
who made the sea and the dry *land.*”
¹⁰Then the men were exceedingly
afraid, and said to him, “Why have you
done this?” For the men knew that he
fled from the presence of the LORD,
because he had told them.
(Jonah 1:9, 10)

Jonah is running from God, but he tells these men about the one true God. And an important phrase appears in verse 10. We are told that the sailors were “exceedingly afraid” they were terrified! In verse 5 we were told that they were afraid of the storm. Now they are afraid of Yahweh.

These were men who traveled from port to port on the Mediterranean Sea. They knew about many gods. I am sure they would have known about Yahweh too, because one of their ports was Joppa in Israel. They knew the stories of the miracles, the plagues in Egypt, the Red Sea, the walls of Jericho, they knew of King David and Solomon. It was *THIS* God who was pursuing Jonah!

² God would reveal His will by controlling the lots, perhaps small stones of various colors representing each man. This was not forbidden in Israel: Proverbs 16:33, Acts 1:26

And when the sailors asked, “Why have you done this? Why did you flee from God?” it was a rebuke to the man of God. Had God dealt unkindly with Jonah? Did Jonah find God unworthy of respect? Had he found a more righteous or loving God? Had God been unfaithful to Jonah? If Jonah’s heart was in the right place he would have answered “No” to all of these questions. But Jonah was like so many of us when we sin. Instead of repenting and seeking forgiveness we at first harden our hearts.

Then they said to him, “What shall we do to you that the sea may be calm for us?”—for the sea was growing more tempestuous.
¹² And he said to them, “Pick me up and throw me into the sea; then the sea will become calm for you. For I know that this great tempest *is* because of me.”
(Jonah 1:11, 12)

What a great opportunity for Jonah to lead these men to faith in the one true God. But Jonah is still unwilling to go to Nineveh. He still refuses to do the will of God. He would rather die than preach to the Ninevites. Let me show you another man of God who was on a ship during a great storm. It is the apostle Paul.

Paul was sailing to Rome. He is not running away from God. He is a prisoner for speaking the truth about God and Jesus Christ. And he is on his way to be tried by Caesar. And during a great storm Paul takes control of the crisis and tells everyone what God had told him.

When the south wind blew softly, supposing that they had obtained *their* desire, putting out to sea, they sailed close by Crete. ¹⁴ But not long after, a tempestuous head wind arose, called Euroclydon. ¹⁵ So when the ship was caught, and could not head into the wind, we let *her* drive. ¹⁶ And running under *the shelter* of an island called Clauda, we secured the skiff with difficulty.

¹⁷ When they had taken it on board, they used cables to undergird the ship; and fearing lest they should run aground on the Syrtis Sands, they struck sail and so were driven. ¹⁸ And because we were

exceedingly tempest-tossed, the next day they lightened the ship. ¹⁹ On the third day we threw the ship's tackle overboard with our own hands. ²⁰ Now when neither sun nor stars appeared for many days, and no small tempest beat on us, all hope that we would be saved was finally given up.

²¹ But after long abstinence from food, then Paul stood in the midst of them and said, "Men, you should have listened to me, and not have sailed from Crete and incurred this disaster and loss. ²² And now I urge you to take heart, for there will be no loss of life among you, but only of the ship.

²³ For there stood by me this night an angel of the God to whom I belong and whom I serve, ²⁴ saying, 'Do not be afraid, Paul; you must be brought before Caesar; and indeed God has granted you all those who sail with you.'

²⁵ Therefore take heart, men, for I believe God that it will be just as it was told me.

²⁶ However, we must run aground on a certain island."

(Acts 27:13-26)

Courage like Paul's comes from knowing that what God tells us is true. It comes from knowing that God loves us and cares for us. It comes from faithful obedience that builds godly character. It comes from faith to speak the truth even if no one believes it.

As we return to Jonah, some Bible scholars see a type of Christ in Jonah in that he is willing to sacrifice his life to save the sailors. I do not see that in Jonah. Had Jonah repented and said "I will do the will of God" they would have all been saved. Jonah knows the crew will be safe if he is gone. But he is not sacrificing himself to save them. Jonah is still running from God.

Then they said to him, "What shall we do to you that the sea may be calm for us?"—for the sea was growing more tempestuous.

¹² And he said to them, "Pick me up and throw me into the sea; then the sea will become calm for you. For I know that this great tempest *is* because of me." ¹³ Nevertheless the men rowed hard to return to land, but they could not, for the sea continued to grow more tempestuous against them.
(Jonah 1:11-13)

These pagan sailors dug into the sea with their oars trying to reach shore. And in doing so they are showing more compassion and mercy to Jonah than he is willing to show Nineveh. And then it was they, the sailors, not Jonah who call out to God for grace, mercy and forgiveness. Then they threw the rebellious prophet into the deep.

Therefore they cried out to the LORD and said, "We pray, O LORD, please do not let us perish for this man's life, and do not charge us with innocent blood; for You, O LORD, have done as it pleased You." ¹⁵ So they picked up Jonah and threw him into the sea, and the sea ceased from its raging.
(Jonah 1:14, 15)

Can you imagine the shock and awe in the hearts of these sailors? As Jonah crashed into the sea the storm stopped! What happened next is the climax of chapter 1.

Then the men feared the Lord exceedingly, and offered a sacrifice to the Lord and took vows.
(Jonah 1:16)

These sailors, who had earlier worshipped a variety of false gods, now worship Yahweh, the one true, living God. How ironic all of this is. Jonah runs away from God refusing to go to Nineveh and preach to pagans who may get saved. But in his disobedience these pagan sailors are brought to faith in God.

Jonah is drowning on his way to the bottom of the sea. And Jonah will be rescued from the sea. But I want to talk about the sailors again for a moment. I believe these sailors made a lifelong vow to serve Yahweh. If these sailors had

made their vows during the storm one might call it desperation. But this is not what happened. These men worshipped and made their vows *after* being delivered from the storm.

What does this tell us about God? It tells us that He is merciful, gracious and compassionate. And He desires for all people to be saved. And it tells us one more truth. It's not just that God desires for all people to be saved and then sits back and hopes that they will. No, He pursues those He knows will believe. As Romans 8 tells us those whom God foreknows, He calls. And He can do the work of salvation with the help of His obedient people and we will gain a reward. Or He can save others in spite of us, but then we lose out.

Now, what about Jonah? The good news is that although Jonah wants to run from God, God is running after Jonah. Jonah has given up—God has not. We will see from Jonah's prayer that as he sank into the sea, he felt that all hope for him was gone. But Jonah is in for a huge surprise from a merciful and gracious God who loves even His prodigal children. We may walk away from God, but He has said, "I will never leave you nor forsake you."³

³ Deuteronomy 31:6, 8; Joshua 1:5; Hebrews 13:5