

Intro

Ever been caught in the wrong place at the wrong time, and it seemed like it was going to be the worst thing ever; but then it turned out to be the best thing that happened to you? That’s how these sailors in our story probably felt. They were just going about their business and suddenly found themselves caught up in the crossfire between God and his fleeing prophet. Verses 1-3 give us the context. God commissioned Jonah to be a messenger to the wicked Ninevites, to warn them that judgment would come. But Jonah flees. He boards a ship heading in the opposite direction, in order to flee from God’s presence, and from his responsibility. But then in verse 4 God pursues the prophet with a great wind. God will not be thwarted in his desire to extend mercy to the gentiles. Look at verse 4, this mighty tempest becomes so bad that the ship is in danger of being destroyed. The lives of these pagans, and the prophet, hang in the balance. Today we pick up the story at verse 5, and we follow 3 headings:

Fear

Terror

Submission

4 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.

1. FEAR

5 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.

These were most likely experienced sailors. But when this particular storm whips up, they become afraid! But they fear, not God, but the storm that God has sent. These pagans, in their desperation, cry out to their gods. No doubt there were many deities represented among the sailors, and each cries out to the god that he thinks might be able to help them in their hour of need.

And in their intensely distressing situation they must act, they must do their best to save themselves. And so they start throwing, or hurling, their cargo into the sea.

But what is God's fleeing prophet doing? In contrast to these active sailors, he is entirely passive. The sailors, on the one hand, fear, they cry out, and they hurl cargo; but the prophet goes down, he lies down, and he falls into a deep sleep. This continues the descent begun in verse 3 where Jonah went down to Joppa and then down into the ship. It's really a picture of his spiritual descent away from God.

Jonah goes down, lays down, and sleeps. And this isn't just a light snooze either. He was in a deep sleep. Maybe if you're a deep sleeper you might tell people you wouldn't get woken up if a freight train passed by. That's the idea here. Jonah is sleeping through God's storm of judgment.

But while he's asleep the crew is desperately trying to save themselves. The irony here is that the heavy cargo wasn't the problem on the ship, it was the weight of the prophet's rebellion. It wasn't a physical problem, but a spiritual one.

The first lesson we can learn here is that rebellion against God, you see, doesn't always mean that your conscience is pricked. You may very well live in rebellion against God for quite some time without ever feeling sorry for your sin. But sin causes us to drift further and further from God. And all too often, as is the case here, it is dangerous for both ourselves and those around us.

Are there sins in your life that you're hanging onto and you haven't repented of? Maybe you haven't been confessing your sins to God on a regular basis for a while, simply because your heart is hard towards God. Ask God to wake you up! Ask Christ to have mercy on you. Believe that your heavenly Father is able, more than able, to restore you.

Next, verse 6, 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."

The captain knows this is no time to be passive. "Wake up, Jonah, are you nuts? Don't you realize we are perishing!?" Ironically, these same two words, "Arise, call out!," are the same as when God called Jonah in verse 2. Call out, just **perhaps** your god will save us!

Isn't this what we often see happen in our world? People may not call out to God until times of great distress. People in our society like to be atheists, until a great catastrophe happens—an earthquake, a category 5 hurricane, a tragedy like 9/11. Then suddenly people desperately pray. And their hope is, **perhaps** God will help. "Maybe" he will give a thought to us and we won't die.

I want to tell you something, if you don't know Jesus Christ today, let me warn you, you don't want a "maybe." Don't wait for the storms of life to come before you cry out to God. Come to Christ Now! When your soul hangs in the balance between heaven and hell, you don't want a "**maybe**." It's as simple as this, put your faith in Christ's finished work on the cross. At Calvary you will find assurance. "Perhaps" Christ can save you? "Maybe" he will think about you? There is no "perhaps."*Only if you believe in Jesus you will find a Savior who is

absolutely faithful and a Father who will hold you in his hands. Trust in him, every single day, and you can have the assurance that you have an inheritance in heaven which is guaranteed!

The captain of the ship tells Jonah to pray. But Jonah appears to be passive. So the sailors take matters into their own hands once again.

7 And they said to one another, "Come, let us cast lots, that we may know for whose cause this trouble has come upon us."

Lots were commonly recognized and used by both Israelites as well as many pagans to determine an answer from the deity. They were possibly rocks of different colors, and depending on how they fell, they would determine a positive or negative answer. The sailors are eager to determine whose fault the storm was. It was common, you see, in the ancient near East to view a storm as being a form of judgment from a deity.

So they cast lots, (and what do you know) the lot fell on Jonah.

Busted! Jonah is singled out. We've got the culprit. Where oh Jonah, did you think you could hide from God's presence? God in his sovereignty controls the lot. And now Jonah has to explain himself.

8 Then 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?"

The questions come in rapid fire. You can sense the urgency. If the sailors can just quickly figure out who Jonah is, and what he has been up to that might have provoked the gods to chase him down, then maybe there will be a way of appeasing the deity who is upset. They may have thought it was Baal the great Canaanite storm god. Or maybe Yam, the god of the sea? But these pagans are in for the shock of their life.

2. TERROR

*9 So he said to them, "I am a Hebrew; **and I fear** Yahweh, the God of heaven, who made the sea and the **dry land.**"*

This profound statement answers all the sailor's questions.

All this time the sailors have been crying out to their host of gods. But they got it hopelessly wrong! There is only one God of sea and dry land, his name is The LORD, the God of heaven. Jonah **knows** that God is the only God; he is the creator. He **knew** it, yet he fled.

Maybe you remember how in the creation account of Genesis 1 God separates the heavens above from the earth below; then he gathers the waters together and creates earth. The first he calls the "sea," and the other he calls "dry land." These are the two surfaces of the earth: water and land. Jonah is in effect saying, "I serve the Sovereign God who made everything." Psalm 95 says, "the LORD is a great God, and a great King above all gods...the sea is his, for he made it, and his hands formed the dry land."

And Jonah says, "I fear this God. It is Yahweh, the creator God of heaven, that I am in the service of." And yet Jonah's actions in this chapter would make it seem as though this is little more than an intellectual confession.

Jonah's actions throughout this whole text make us question the viability of the statement. These poor sailors are perishing and Jonah hasn't done a thing to help them out.

But this may not be unlike some of us. Let me ask you: what do you **know** about God? You see, it is not enough for us to merely acknowledge God. Your actions must show that you do truly fear God. Would you say to your friends, your co-workers, your family, "Yeah, I'm a Christian." Do you show it by your actions; by what you say to them? Do you show it by having compassion on the sinners around you who are perishing? The Bible teaches that if you love God you will also love those around you. Let us not merely profess God verbally, but let us love others as Christ himself has also loved us.

*Vs 10 **Then 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.*

The sailors have now heard of God. And they fear greatly! In vs 5 the storm scared them. But **the creator of heaven and earth terrifies them!** I dare say these pagan mariners respond in a more appropriate manner to their first hearing of God than countless others. Too many people too easily try to brush off God. It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God. And these men are terrified.

The sailor's question here isn't as much looking for information as it is an exclamation of astonishment. "You know the only true God and you dare to disobey him?" It's one thing to mess with creation; it's an entirely different matter to mess with the creator!

But might it be that all too often we have too low a view of God? Are you still struck by the awesomeness and the power of God?

Isaiah says in chapter 66, “Thus says the LORD: ‘Heaven is my throne, and the earth is my footstool;...all these things my hand has made, and so all these things came to be, declares the LORD. But this is the one to whom I will look: he who is humble and contrite in spirit and trembles at my word.’” The sailors in the boat are beginning to understand just how small they are before the true God.

So, God had sent the storm to chase his delinquent prophet, because he was determined to warn the Assyrians of judgment. Jonah didn’t want to bring the gospel to the gentiles. But ironically God won’t wait until Jonah makes it to the Assyrians before he has him tell others about who he is. And so the narrator has shown us how the sailors feared the storm, and then how they were terrified at the God of the storm. Now we will see their submission.

3. SUBMISSION

(Jonah has told them about God. But he is still passive. So they ask him)

11 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.

The situation is becoming more urgent. Lives are at stake! “Jonah, we are under God’s wrath! How can we be saved?”

What do you do when you come to hear that you have been created by God almighty, and that you are sitting under his judgment? What do you when you realize that you are going to perish in your sins? You cry out, “How can I be saved?”

Jonah says to the men:

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 becomes both his own judge and the witness who condemns him. He picks his own punishment and admits to his crime. He can at least see that God’s justice has caught up to him. And now he’s ready to die.

Verse 13 continues: Nevertheless the men rowed hard to return to land, but they could not, for the sea continued to grow more tempestuous against them.

You would think at this point, Jonah, now might be a good time to cry out to God! Don’t you know God is merciful. God can save you, as well as the pagans who have been caught in the crossfire of God’s wrath because of your disobedience. But Jonah is strangely silent. Instead, the sailors appear to have more of a moral backbone than the prophet. The sailors try to leave the raging sea and return to the dry land. If you look at the next verse you see why: they don’t want to invite more wrath from Jonah’s God by innocently spilling blood.

The irony is that Jonah wants the wicked Assyrians to just die in their sins and spend eternity in hell. But then these pagans throw Jonah a lifeline. Who deserves to be rescued more? Neither. No one deserves grace anymore than another.

So the men row diligently. This word for “rowing” can be used for digging through a wall. It’s tough labor with slow progress. It can also be used to speak of someone digging down to Sheol. One commentator suggests that it’s almost as if the sailors, who are attempting to return to dry land, are simply digging a hole into death. Their own works are futile. God opposes their actions. He hems them in, and increases the storm. They cannot save themselves.

And so they surrender and cry out to the LORD and say...

14 (Therefore they cried out to the LORD and said), “We pray, O Yahweh, please do not let us perish for this man’s life, and do not charge us with innocent blood; for You, O Yahweh, have done as it pleased You.”

Think about it, in verse 5 the captain of the ship desperately urges Jonah to cry out to his god, maybe this god will give a thought to them. But the author is silent as to whether Jonah actually calls out to God. But now, for the first time in their lives, **these pagan seafarers address the living God.** They have no other hope in all the world. Their gods didn’t pan out. Their own efforts are utterly futile. They cannot save themselves. They are completely stripped of any form of false religion and any pretenses of self-help. They are up against the wall, and they cry out to God for mercy!

“Oh LORD, save us! You do what you please.” They realize God is in control. These men have come to see what the Psalmist confesses in Psalm 135, “Whatever the LORD pleases, he does, in heaven and on earth, in the seas and all deeps.” No earthly power stands before this God. And other gods are nothing but dumb and blind. Do you see it: **The sailors turn to the only one who is able to bring salvation!**

Verse 15 continues, So they picked up Jonah and threw him into the sea, and the sea ceased from its raging.

It was God who first hurled the storm in verse 4 and the storm is not stopped until Jonah himself is hurled into the sea.

Jonah fled the presence of God, but God has chastened him in his anger. When the storm stopped raging it was a sign that God’s wrath had subsided. The word here for raging is used to refer either to human anger or divine anger. This is the only time it is applied to a non-living object: the sea. So really, God simply manifested his just wrath through the storm. And he has done as he pleases—He has chased down his fleeing servant.

Are we surprised? David exclaims in Psalm 139, “You know when I sit down and when I rise up...where shall I go from your Spirit? Or where shall I flee from your presence? (If I ascend to heaven, you are there! If I make my bed in Sheol, you are there!) If I take the wings of the morning and dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea, even there your hand shall lead me.”

Where could Jonah go from God’s presence? The lesson for you and I is that when Christ commissions us to go forth and serve him, just as the Father himself sent the Son to seek and to save our souls, don’t run. Jonah’s journey brought him down, down, down, away from God. The Bible over and over again says, fix your eyes, and your mind, and your heart upwards! Up, to Christ on that cross. Up to Jesus sitting in heaven. Up to the sky where Christ will return in robes of white, in glory and brightness. It’s only in the strength of Christ’s might that you can bring the gospel to others.

How did these gentiles respond?

*16 **Then the men feared the LORD exceedingly, and offered a sacrifice to the LORD and took vows.***

The men feared exceedingly:

This is the second time these exact words are used. This is the fourth time “fear” is used. But now what is the object of the sailor’s fear? It is God himself!

The author shows us a progression in the narrative. In verse 5 the sailors are afraid of the storm. They’re afraid of the created order. In verse 9 Jonah claims to fear God (though his actions suggest it is only an intellectual confession). The sailors are then terrified at the idea that this new God they have just met is the one who sent the storm. But now in verse 16 these men surrender, no longer to their vain gods, no longer to their own works, they no longer fear the created order, but **they surrender their lives to the Creator of the universe. And they worship him and dedicate their lives to this God!** They don’t fear God like he is some mighty ogre in the sky. They fear him and submit to him as their maker and their God. The Psalmist declares in Psalm 116 (13-14; 17-18) “I will lift up the cup of salvation and call on the name of the LORD, I will pay my vows to the LORD in the presence of all his people...I will offer to you the sacrifice of thanksgiving and call on the name of the LORD. I will pay my vow to the LORD in the presence of all his people.”

The sailors see this great storm suddenly changed, to a great calm... **Who could this God be?** This God is clearly more powerful than all their false deities. Jonah himself will confess in the next chapter that all who “pay regard to vain idols forsake their hope of steadfast love.” This God is the only one who was able to save these sailors. He is the only one who is able to save you! And only God can forgive you of your sins.

Dear friends, there was once a man. His name is Jesus, he came from heaven to earth to be the Messiah. The gospel writer Luke, in chapter 8 of his book, tells us that one time this Jesus was crossing a lake with his disciples when a windstorm whipped up. Jesus had fallen asleep, the boat was in danger of being sunk, and the disciples were terrified. Now I'm not suggesting there is a 1 to 1 correlation with Jonah chapter 1. But there are important similarities. What happens is that the disciples, in their fear, wake Jesus, and this Jesus rebukes the wind and the raging waves. When the men in the boat see his great power they are afraid, they marvel, and they ask, "Who then is this, that he commands even winds and water, and they obey him?" The answer is, he is the one who is fully God and fully man. He is the Savior of the world. Matthew tells us of another time when Jesus stills a storm. And afterwards the men in the boat worship him and exclaim, "**Truly you are the Son of God.**" Someone greater than Jonah has come. Are you trusting in other gods, other idols, other religions? Are you trusting in your own works to save you? Only Jesus is able to save you. Trust in him! Cry out to him for salvation! He is faithful to save!

Conclusion:

As we conclude:

This part of the Jonah story ends. In pursuing his prophet God has saved the pagan sailors. They are on their way. They have a new start on life, a new direction. They are headed to heaven. They have found there is no "maybe" in God's mercy, if you will but cry out to him and submit yourself to him.

Jonah also has a new direction. God turned him around. Jonah will survive. And he will go to the Assyrians because God is determined to warn them of judgment.

As we look at this narrative of Jonah at sea we find that he is passive almost the entire time. He does not act as though he fears God. He doesn't help the sailors hurl the cargo overboard. He doesn't pray. He doesn't cry out, "Lord have mercy on me I am a sinner! Have mercy on these men who are with me! Save us O LORD!" The narrator paints him as almost entirely passive. These pagans were perishing, and the one who could tell them how to be saved is silent.

Two brief thoughts: Are you compassionate?

Let me ask you, what do you see as you look at the world in which God has placed you? Do you see people playing soccer, building structures, walking their dogs, raising their kids? This is of course part of the reality. But do you see people who are under God's wrath and who are perishing? Does the plight of the pagans instill compassion in your heart?

There was an atheist who once said this, “I’ve always said that I don’t respect people who don’t proselytize (evangelize)...if you believe that there’s a heaven and a hell, and people could be going to hell or not getting eternal life, and you think that it’s not really worth telling them this because it would make it socially awkward...how much do you have to hate somebody to not (evangelize)?...I mean, if I believed beyond the shadow of a doubt, that a truck was coming at you, and you didn’t believe that truck was bearing down on you, there is a certain point where I tackle you. And this is more important than that.”

This is from an atheist.

Remember what God did when he saw the plight men and women who were perishing. He sent his only beloved Son, to seek and to save sinners. Jonah would rather be thrown overboard and go to his death so that he didn’t have to go to Nineveh. Jesus faithfully went to his death, so that you could have life. He was rejected and despised for you, beaten, mocked, and brutally crucified on a cross. But he rose again to give you life and he sent his gospel message out into the world so that you could be saved. Do you have compassion on the lost?

Secondly, are you involved in the great commission? Remember that evangelism exists because worship doesn’t. We have the good news of salvation. I urge you to pray for those who are lost, and to look for opportunities to speak to and show the love of Christ to others.

We might not go to Africa or China, but we can minister to those around us. It may be as simple as going to the old folks at the old age home and spending time with them and telling them about Jesus. It could be more intentional conversations with unbelieving friends or family. It’s easy to be passive, just to have regular conversations with people at work, or school, or soccer. Be intentional about speaking of Christ’s kingdom and the gospel.

And if you are doing these things, let me encourage you. Your reward is in heaven. Think of how heaven rejoices when one sinner comes to Christ.

God says through Isaiah in Isa. 65:1-3, “I was ready to be sought by those who did not ask for me; I was ready to be found by those who did not seek me. I said, ‘Here I am, here I am,’ to a nation that was not called by my name (that did not call upon my name). [I spread out my hands all the day to a rebellious people, who walk in a way that is not good, following their own devices; a people who provoke me to my face continually.”]