

A GREAT STORM – Main Reading: **Jonah** 1:4-16

Last week, we left off as Jonah was boarding a ship that was setting sail for Tarshish.

As he laid his head down that night, he might've thought he had **stalled** God's plan.

Maybe he thought that God was gonna let him get **away** with this...

Maybe, he looked at his circumstances, and thought:

“If God really wanted me to Nineveh, why was I able to find and afford getting on this ship?”

I'm sure that Jonah was tempted to trust his circumstances over God's instructions.

And you have been tempted to do the same thing...Maybe you've thought:

“If God didn't want me to shoplift, how come there are all these stores with terrible security?”

Or, “If God doesn't want me to be jealous, how come he gives other people nice things?”

But we can't look at our **experiences** *alone* to determine what's **true** or the best course of **action**.

We need to view our experience, memory, and circumstance in light of God's word. **Psalm** 119:105

Once you use the light, *then* you can *rightly* interpret the course of your life.

[Charles Spurgeon had a friend with a bit of an anger problem. From time to time, this friend would throw things out of frustration. “What struck me...” Spurgeon said, “was not that he got angry, but that whenever he was angry there was always something closely to throw.” But it would be wrong for his friend, or any of us, to blame God by saying: “*How come every time I get angry, there's always a rock to throw or a wall to punch?*” The fact that God places us in certain situations doesn't change our responsibility to do what is right.]

Now, let's jump back into this episode in *Jonah's* life.

**v. 4 — “But the LORD hurled a great wind upon the sea,
and there was a mighty tempest...so that the ship threatened to break up.”**

This was no *ordinary* storm...These mariners were used to the occasional **hurricane**, tidal wave, cyclone, typhoon, tropical storm, or 90 mph winds...

No doubt about it—they had lived to tell the stories of *terrible* **storms** in the past...

But this was *way beyond* anything they had *ever* seen before.

And this verse tells us why: *The LORD sent this storm.*

This was **not** a natural storm, but a *supernatural* one, because God was behind it.

Now, in one sense, God sends and/or allows *all* storms...**Job** 37:11-12

But *this* one He sent with a purpose—to get Jonah’s attention.

Notice how when God told Jonah to go to Nineveh, he resisted.

But when God sent a **storm**, the storm *immediately* went.

Everything in nature obeys God *perfectly*. **Psalm** 147:15-18

Except the human race—we are the one aspect of creation that *loves* to **rebel**...

So, mark that down....Remember that Noah’s **dove** was well-behaved.

This out-of-control storm was *totally* under God’s **control**.

And yet, God’s servant, Jonah, was **wayward**.

He was *so* disobedient—*so* out of touch and focused on running away—that

God had to take *drastic* **measures** to get Jonah’s attention.

A storm that was *breaking* the ship—and it wasn’t a *cheap* boat either...

A cargo ship from that time period and that location was elaborate and *expertly* crafted.

These men had *probably* **built** the ship themselves, spending hours fastening boards together, sealing the cracks, but now it was turning into **splinters** right before their eyes.

v. 5 — “Then the mariners were afraid, and each cried out to his god...they hurled the cargo...into the sea...But Jonah had gone down into the inner part of the ship and had lain down...fast asleep.”

The sailors knew this wasn’t a typical storm—there had to be some a god behind it...

So, they each called out to a few of their **idols**, but received *no* help.

Taking matters into their own hands, they began throwing everything into the sea.

Now, being a **cargo** ship, this boat made money by **delivering** goods to far off lands.

It was the Amazon, FedEx, and UPS of its day.

The only way these sailors made money is by making sure the items arrived in the *right* place.

But, this was *such a catastrophic* storm, that the sailors threw the packages into the water.
This was their *one* way of making money, but this was a last resort kind of situation...

And while the storm was intended to be a **wake-up** call to Jonah,
we find him **sleeping** at the bottom of the boat.

But don't worry...even though Jonah is *sound asleep*,
God has the *undivided* attention of his shipmates.

**v. 6 — So the captain came and said to him, “What do you mean, you sleeper?
Arise, call out to your god! Perhaps the god will give a thought to us, that we may not perish.”**

In order to get Jonah's attention, God used one of these unbelievers.

Sailors are *notoriously* rough-around-the-edges (**swearing**), plus they worshiped **false gods**.

But these men were quick to give God their attention compared to Jonah...

What a shame...perhaps there are times when non-Christians seem to
outdo us in **loving** our neighbor or doing other Christlike things...

The captain finds Jonah, and he is *stunned* that anyone could be *or would be*
sleeping in a moment like this—talk about a heavy sleeper!

[the Septuagint (Greek version of the Old Testament) implies that Jonah was loudly snoring!]

In his sleep, he hears a voice shouting: **“Arise...call out!”**

This was *hauntingly similar* to the words of God in the first verse of this book.

But *this* time it was the captain...And God was using him to get Jonah's attention.

And there are times in *our own* lives where, whether we are running away or not,
God may use **others** to steer us in the right direction.

Now, maybe Jonah was **sleeping** because he was *exhausted* from running away.

Or, maybe he slept like a baby because he thought he had *actually* managed to pull this off...

Or it could have been that Jonah was so out of touch with God that this situation had
no bearing on his sleep schedule.

I wonder how many times the word of God is preached to us, only to find that we are sleeping?
Or that a warning from God occurs in our life and we are dozing off?

v. 7 — “And they said to one another, ‘Come, let us cast lots, that we may know on whose account this evil has come upon us.’ So they cast lots, and the lot fell on Jonah.”

They cast **lots**—something that we see mentioned or happening in the Bible 21 times.

It was *basically* an ancient form of rolling **dice**.

This seems like a pretty pagan way to make a decision—almost like using a magic 8 ball...

But *surprisingly*, casting lots was **not** forbidden in Israel.

(And in Acts 1, Jesus’ disciples prayed and cast lots to determine Judas’ replacement.)

On rare occasions—again *only* 21 times in recorded history—casting lots was recommended.

Proverbs 16:33

That being said, the New Testament pattern for us to know God’s **will** and make **decisions** is this:

For one, *several* passages come right out and say “*This is the will of God:*”

- **Ephesians 5:15-21** – it is God’s will for us to be wise, filled with the Spirit, sing hymns of praise together, not get drunk, and to be grateful.
- **1 Thessalonians 4:3-8** – to be **set apart** from sin—*especially* sexual ones.
- **1 Peter 2:13-15** – to be **good citizens** and live godly while the world watches.
- **1 Peter 4:19** – to **suffer** for the Christian faith.
- **2 Peter 3:9** – for every person **repent** and come back to Him.

James 5 tells us to pray and ask for **wisdom** to make good decisions.

And there are more vague verses about knowing and doing God’s will. **Romans 12:1-2** [explain]

v. 8 — “Then they said to him, ‘Tell us on whose account this evil has come upon us. What is your occupation? And where do you come from? What is your country? And of what people are you?’

5 questions one after the other...these men wanted a *good* explanation for this disaster.

v. 9-10 — And he said... ‘I am a Hebrew...I fear the LORD, the God of heaven, who made the sea and the dry land.’ Then the men were exceedingly afraid and said... ‘What is this that you have done!’ For the men knew that he was fleeing from the presence of the LORD, because he had told them.”

Here, *finally*, after *all* his running and *all* his disobedience, Jonah is forced to confess who He is.

I can *only* imagine how *badly* Jonah must’ve been **embarrassed**.

Have you experienced a similar situation?

QUESTION : *Have you ever publicly committed a sin and, later on, had to admit that you were a Christian to those who witnessed it?*

(Maybe you had an outburst of anger in a public place and had to apologize to the people within earshot).

Well, Jonah knew this type of awkward situation better than anyone...

He was committing a terrible sin, but eventually, he had to come out and say:

“I’m a Hebrew, and I believe in Yahweh.”

When push comes to shove, and a Christian is backed into a corner, they *will* confess *“I serve the Lord.”*

Now, it didn’t matter how far away Jonah sailed, *everybody* had heard stories of Yahweh’s power...

(10 plagues, Red Sea, Walls of Jericho, David and Goliath).

So, *now*, it *all* made sense to them...this *powerful* storm has the *most powerful* God behind it.

These sailors knew that if there was *one* God **not** to mess with, it was **Yahweh**.

And yet Jonah had done so, and all these sailors could say was:

מַה־זֹּאת עָשִׂיתָ – **mah-zōt ’ā-sî-tā**; – *why* have you done this?!

v. 11-12 — “Then they said to him, ‘What shall we do to you, that the sea may quiet down for us?’...He said to them, ‘Pick me up and hurl me into the sea...for I know it is because of me that this great tempest has come upon you.’

There’s so much for us to gather from this *little* back-and-forth between Jonah and his shipmates.

But here’s the crux of the matter: sin *demand*s a **sacrifice**.

These sailors understood that when you do something wrong, a **punishment** is *required*.

And so, Jonah **volunteers**, since this whole thing was *his* fault anyways.

Here, Jonah is *still* trying to run away from God.

He'd rather **die** than go to Nineveh. So, here's his chance and he takes it.

In the process, he figures: *"I'll save these sailors some trouble and I'll get out of my responsibility."*

But I bet that deep down, Jonah had to have been *terrified*.

Surely, he thought that his time as a **prophet** was over...

But, even worse, he *probably* thought that his time as a **child** of God was over too.

Where, there is no **obedience**, there is no **assurance**. 1 **John** 2:3

v. 13 — "Nevertheless, the men rowed hard to get back to dry land, but they could not, for the sea grew more and more tempestuous against them."

Before throwing Jonah overboard, and *probably* **killing** him in the process, these sailors wanted to give it *one last* try in their *own* strength...

This boat, their livelihood and their income was falling apart all around them, so they tried harder and *harder*—they rowed and rowed *and* rowed...

You see what's going on here? This is an important picture for us...

When our lives are **shipwrecked** from sin, the answer is **not** to try harder.

I hear so many sermons that *"Oh, the church needs to love more, serve more, do more!"*

But that stuff won't get us anywhere...

Sure, we'll be a **charity** that meets people's physical needs, but we won't have much to solve their *greatest*, spiritual need.

Trying harder won't get a boat of sinners anywhere....
instead, they *needed* a sacrifice—we *need* a Savior.

v. 14 — "Therefore they called out to the LORD, "O LORD, let us not perish for this man's life, and lay not on us innocent blood, for you, O LORD, have done as it pleased you."

The last thing these men wanted to do was make God *even* angrier by killing one of His followers.

They were hesitant to send Jonah overboard to drown—how nice of them?

In this one act, the sailors show more concern for *one* person—**Jonah**—than Jonah did about *hundreds of thousands* of **Ninevites**...

And the sailors did *another* good thing...recognized God's authority. **Psalm** 135:6

v. 15 — “So they picked up Jonah and hurled him into the sea, and the sea ceased from its raging.”

Jonah being **thrown** in was the *only* thing that could calm this storm.

And Jesus dying on the cross was the *only* thing that could calm God's wrath toward sinners. **Hebrews** 10:12

v. 16 — “Then the men feared the LORD exceedingly, and...offered a sacrifice...and made vows.”

Here we see this mini **revival** on the boat.

Strangely enough, after all this big, *raging storm* and their lives being in *incredible danger*—once all of that was put to a stop, *that's* when the *real fear* kicked in...

These men realized that Jonah's God was *all-powerful*, and they could no longer be in His presence without fearing for their lives and for their **souls**.

When you come in contact with God in this way, it is inevitable that you realize how *good* God is and how *bad* you are.

Let's look at the ending to *another miraculous* story that took place on the water: **Luke** 5:6-9

Peter cried out to God, **confessing** his sin—just like these sailors did.

So, I think, when we get to Heaven, we *will* meet *these sailors*!

Here are the main takeaways from what we've read tonight:

While Jonah made a choice to run away from Nineveh, God was using that choice to reach across the globe and save this group of sailors way out in the Mediterranean.

While the storm we read about tonight probably seemed like the worst thing that had ever happened to the sailors, God was using it to make the best thing—their salvation—happen.

So, I'll ask you:

QUESTION : *What, in your life, seems like a negative situation, but God might be using it to accomplish something amazing?*

[Nanny's recent cancer experience]