

## **PP Jonah: God's Relentless Grace**

**Jonah 1:4-16**

**10/17-18/2015**

Illus Many years ago there was a boy that was born into a Christian family and for the first 6 years of his life, he was loved and was taught the truths of the gospel. But both of his parents died and he was sent to live with his relatives where he was abused, and ridiculed for his interest in Christ. He eventually escaped them by joining the navy where his life went downhill. He became a brawler and eventually a deserter and fled to one of the worst areas of Africa. He went there, in his own words, *'to sin his fill'*. He fell in with a Portuguese slave trader where his life reached its lowest point. At times he was made to eat off the floor on his hands and knees. He escaped that trader only to get attached to yet another one as the first mate of the ship. He stole the ship's whiskey and got so drunk that he fell over board the ship and would have drowned if an officer had not harpooned his thigh and pulled him back onto the ship, creating such a wound that years later he could still put his hand into the fist-sized opening. Later, he came face to face with death as a storm began to fill the ship's hold with water. For days he helped work the pumps, but he resigned himself that he would sink with the ship and drown. He began to cry out to God, shouting out verses of the Bible he had long thought forgotten from his childhood. And as he remembered them, he was miraculously born again. He left the evil business of slavery and began to preach the gospel and write songs about the grace of God. You are familiar with John Newton's most famous work: *"Amazing grace! How sweet the sound, That saved a wretch like me! I once was lost, but now am found, Was blind, but now I see."*

Life's storms can be terrifying, but they always serve God's purposes  
 Hold that in your minds as I catch you up on what we've seen so far in the book of Jonah  
 Jonah received an assignment from God to go preach to Nineveh, but he didn't want them saved  
 So he submitted his resignation letter by boarding a ship to Tarshish across the Mediterranean  
 God pursues his rebellious prophet and we are invited to watch what He does

### **PP 1-God sent this storm**

***"But the LORD hurled a great wind upon the sea, and there was a mighty tempest on the sea, so that the ship threatened to break up." 1:4***

I want you to notice very simply that God did not *allow* this storm to happen, He *made* it happen  
 He threw this storm like a Major League fastball, hurling a great wind upon the sea  
 The ship was on the Mediterranean Sea, an inland sea of 969,100 sq. miles of water  
 It's 2500 miles wide and almost 17,000 feet deep at its deepest point  
 Christians often try to protect God sheltering Him from responsibility when hard times come  
 But the truth is-and it's what we see here-sometimes God is the one who sends life's storms  
 The Lord disciplines the ones He loves, He is treating us like His children  
 Storms create turbulence, they wrest control from us, they begin a movement deep within us  
 They can blow fierce and quickly pass, or sometimes last a long time and we wonder if we'll  
     make it through  
 But God has a purpose in them, and He would either *have you come*, or *have you go*

### **PP 2-God sent this storm to save the sailors**

You've heard it said that there are no atheists in a foxhole, fear moves us to worship  
 Storms tend to do two things in our lives and the first is this: they move us to God for help  
 The ancient world was polytheistic, poly meaning *many* like a polygon has many sides

**PP** Israel was a monotheistic nation: ***"Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one."*** Deuteronomy 6:4

It did for these sailors: ***"Then the mariners were afraid and each cried out to his god."*** 1:5

The sailors on this ship each had their own god they worshiped

And the storm put a fear in them that moved to run to these gods

Yet God's intention isn't to send these sailors running into the arms of another god

It is his intention to prove their gods false and powerless

Despite their prayers and appeals, their gods were not answering, in fact we read that ***'the sea grew more and more tempestuous'*** 1:13

So they do what every worshiper of a false god has to do, they try to save themselves

***"they hurled the cargo that was in the ship into the sea to lighten it for them."*** Jonah 1:5

Isn't it interesting that only in Christianity does salvation depend entirely on God?

Every religion apart from Christianity is built on a system of works

**PP** In Hinduism, to be free from the law of karma one has to be lovingly devoted to any of the Hindu gods or goddesses (330 million to choose from); grow in knowledge through meditation; and be dedicated to various rites and ceremonies

**PP** In Buddhism, you have countless rebirths called reincarnations, and to end them like the Buddha did, one has to end all cravings and purify your heart by blowing out the flame of desire through meditations and self-discipline

**PP** In Islam, one must worship the one God Allah by following five religious duties: 1. Belief that Allah is the only god and Muhammad messenger; 2. perform five daily prayers; 3. fast throughout the month of Ramadan; 4. giving to the poor; 5. Pilgrimage once in one's lifetime to worship at a shrine in Mecca. Their hope is that their recorded good deeds exceed their bad ones, yet at the end, Allah reserves the right to send the deceased wherever he pleases: heaven or hell

Only in Christianity does one's salvation depend on what God has done, not what we have done

Look at verse 16 and see the salvation that a storm can bring: ***"Then the men feared the LORD exceedingly, and they offered a sacrifice to the LORD and made vows."*** 1:16

Notice the order here for it is critical: they feared God, they offered a sacrifice, they made vows  
 Only Christianity can put it in that order: they were saved, they worshiped, they committed their lives

Pagan religion goes like this: offer a sacrifice, commit your life, then hope to be saved

Storms can move unbelievers to the God Who can save them

### **PP 3-God sent this storm to expose His prophet**

Not only do storms move us to God for salvation, they also expose what is hidden in our hearts  
 Hurricane Sandy washed up 57 love letters written during WWII from Dorothy Fallon to a man named Lynn Farham

Storms wash up all sorts of debris that has been lying hidden on the bottom of the ocean

Storms in life do the same, as our hearts are laid open and what was inside is now made visible

**PP** *“Blows that wound cleanse away evil; strokes make clean the innermost parts.”*

**Proverbs 20:30**

Up above, unbelieving sailors are running to their mute gods while down below, Jonah slept  
That point alone is convicting, for people all around us are running to gods that can never help  
them, but so many in the church are asleep, doing and saying nothing to help them  
When is the last time Christian, that you told that coworker, friend, neighbor how to be saved?  
Do you know that each year, Jews, on their holiest day of the year, Yom Kippur, read the book  
of Jonah?

To be reminded that no one can escape the arm of God, and no one is beyond His mercy  
And they often end the reading by together saying, ‘We are Jonah’

It is perhaps true that there is no prophet of God more relatable than Jonah, the Peter of the OT

*“But Jonah had gone down into the inner part of the ship and had lain down and was fast asleep. 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.”* **Jonah 1:5-6**

*‘Jonah, Our gods aren’t helping, so get up and try yours’*

He hauls Jonah up to the deck, and Jonah begins to do...nothing!

He doesn’t pray, He doesn’t call out to Yahweh, the LORD, he will not talk with God

A Christian with secret sin will find it impossible to have intimate fellowship with God in prayer

Trying to pray when holding on to rebellion, or sin, is like being in an echo chamber hearing God  
tell you over and over, repent, let it go, come back to Him

He can’t pray, he doesn’t pray

Yet the storm worsens so the sailors conclude that someone has angered a god and they cast lots

**PP** *‘lots’* were sticks of varying length (short straw), flat stones painted different colors (flip a  
coin), or pieces of bone thrown like dice, believed to be controlled by a god

Not much different from flipping a coin or throwing dice to pick something or someone

**PP** *“The lot is cast into the lap, but its every decision is from the LORD.”* **Proverbs 16:33**

God is utterly sovereign, even over sticks, stones, and pieces of bone, and they implicate Jonah

Someone said *a coincidence is a miracle for which God chooses to remain anonymous*

And the questions begin coming: *“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?”* **Jonah 1:8**

God’s relentless grace was not punishing Jonah, it was exposing him to lead him back to Him  
Spurgeon once said that *God never lets His children sin successfully*

A few weeks ago, hackers released millions of users’ account information from the online  
adultery site, Ashley Madison

One of them was a well-known Christian leader, who confessed he had been on that site

**PP** *“First, I felt the grace of fear. Second, I felt the grace of shame. The grace of God’s  
judgment bore its fruit, and by His grace I repented of my sin. By His grace, I have also  
received His forgiveness, the outworking of His love. Prophetic providence had done its  
good office. Jesus died for this sin, but there are still earthly consequences.”*

The moment God exposed Jonah was the beginning of hope for the prophet and sailors

**PP 4-God sent this storm to reveal the gospel story**

There is in the story of Jonah hints of a greater story to come, one that centers on another Person sent by God to preach good news, whose name is Jesus Christ

Both Jonah and Jesus were asleep on a boat in a storm

The great fish and the tomb the places where both Jonah and Jesus laid for 3 days and nights

As the sacrifice of Jonah was necessary to save the sailors from the storm, the sacrifice of Jesus was necessary to save all humanity from the storms of God's wrath poured out on sin

While there are many similarities between Jonah and Jesus, there are more contrasts

Jonah confessed, ***'I know it is because of me that this great tempest has come upon you'*** (12) while Jesus had committed no sin

Jonah was thrown into the sea, but Jesus willingly went to the cross

Jonah will not die in the sea, yet Jesus would die on that cross

**PP** Yet Jesus Himself invites this comparison, ***"...something greater than Jonah is here."***  
**Matthew 12:41**

Jonah confessed and the sailors asked, ***'What shall we do to you, that the sea may quiet down for us?'*** 11

His answer, ***"Pick me up and hurl me into the sea; then the sea will quiet down for you"*** 12

One must die for the many to live and suddenly the death of Jesus Christ snaps into focus

But deep in the hearts of people is the humanistic effort to save themselves

They ***"rowed hard to get back to dry land, but they could not, for the sea grew more and more tempestuous against them."*** 1:13

Simply put, we cannot save ourselves from the storm of God's wrath against sin

Rebelliousness and sin provokes the wrath of God and let me tell you the chief reason why

I used to be a counselor in a psychiatric center working with teens and children and I was privy of course to the family history

Nothing would make me more furious than to see the abuse of a parent on their child and the incredible damage it had created

Multiply that exponentially and you begin to understand and appreciate God's attitude to sin

He created us to be happy in communion with Him, and every person has rebelled against Him and in doing so taken away both that communion and their true joy

The entire bible is about God's rescue plan to bring people back into relationship with Him by forgiving sin, and restoring what was to be

**PP** That rises within the heart of our God: ***"O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the city that kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to it! How often would I have gathered your children together as a hen gathers her brood under her wings, and you were not willing!"*** **Matthew 23:37**

God hates the rebellion in the hearts of people, He loathes the hurt and pain that it causes

So the Triune God-Father, Son, Spirit-planned from before the world was created, that Jesus would be cast into the sea of divine wrath, one death for many

If you thought Christianity was just a religion of rules and regulations, then you have yet to meet the God Who gave His own life to save the ones He created....love and grace

The sailors didn't want to anger the Lord even more by killing His prophet, ***"O LORD, let us not perish for this man's life, and lay not on us innocent blood"*** **Jonah 1:14**

So different from that Jewish riot yelling for Pilate to have Christ crucified: ***"And all the people answered, 'His blood be on us and on our children!'"*** **Matthew 27:25**

They picked Jonah up and hurled him overboard, '*and the sea ceased from its raging.*' 15

Let me close by bringing you back to storms: they either move you to *come or go*

You may be like one of those sailors, and God is saying come to Him for salvation, and that storm in your life is to get you moving

Or you may be a believer asleep in the hold, running from God in disobedience, not wanting what God has told you to do

That storm in life is meant to expose you from hiding, and get you to go and get back on the mission He has given you

Amen

Pray