

In the Eye of the Storm

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[0 : 00] God's Word says, And they hurled the cargo that was in the ship into the sea to lighten it for them.

But Jonah had gone down into the inner part of the ship and had laid down and was fast asleep. So the captain came to him and said, 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. 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 they fell on Jonah. Then they said to him, Tell us on whose account this evil has come upon us. What is your occupation? Where do you come from?

What is your country? And of what people are you? And 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.

[1 : 25] Then the men were exceedingly afraid and said to him, 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.

Then they said to him, What shall we do to you that the sea may quiet down for us? For the sea grew more and more tempestuous. He said to them, Pick me up and hurl me into the sea.

Then the sea will quiet down for you. For I know that it is because of me that this great tempest has come upon you. Nevertheless, the men rode hard to get back to dry land, but they could not, for the sea grew more and more tempestuous against them.

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.

So they picked up Jonah and hurled him into the sea, and the sea ceased its raging. Then the men feared the Lord exceedingly, and they offered a sacrifice to the Lord, and they made vows.

[2 : 37] May God add a blessing to the reading of his word. Please be seated. To this point, we've gone over Jonah's call. If you remember, we've gone over Jonah's running from that call, and that Jonah is disobeying God's will for his life.

To this point, the only people who really know what is going on between God and Jonah is God and Jonah. This is Jonah's private little sin. This is Jonah's private little turmoil that he is having with God, but as we will soon see, sin has consequences, and those consequences have a way of spilling out and spilling over those who are around us.

We call that the principle of sowing and reaping. Galatians 6, 7 through 8 says, Do not be deceived. God is not mocked. For whatever one sows, that he will also reap.

For the one who sows to his own flesh will from the flesh reap corruption. But to the one who sows to the Spirit will from the Spirit reap eternal life.

There are natural consequences that come as a part of our actions. The world operates under the law of cause and effect.

[4 : 01] There is no way around it. Every time we choose an action, we also choose a consequence that will come as a result to that action. Jonah's choice will not only reap a consequence for himself, but also for those who are around him.

And this still happens today. It's no different today than it was back then. When Christians make a mess of their own lives by disobeying God, they cause a lot of pain to not only themselves, but to those who are around them as well.

But before I continue, I want to remind us all again of the fact, if we're not already aware of it, that none of us is perfect. And that all of us need Jesus.

All of us. So the purpose of this message this morning isn't to make you feel more guilty. The purpose of this message isn't to make you feel worse about yourself necessarily.

The purpose of this message is to make you want sin less and Jesus more. Jonah's disobedience, though private, was about to become public.

[5 : 14] And the consequences of it would affect the lives of the sailors who had played no part in any of this up to this point. Some of you have probably been in a similar situation as those men.

To no fault of your own, you were caught up in somebody else's mess, somebody else's storm that you had no part in making or creating.

Maybe that describes your life right now. As you sit in the pew, maybe you are angry even about it. I hope that you will see that God is sovereign over every circumstance in your life.

You were put in that storm if you're there, if you've been there before, you were put there, or you've been placed there, because that's exactly where God wants you to be.

And God may be doing something as a result of that that is far beyond what you ever could imagine or think possible. Such was the case for these sailors.

[6 : 24] They're caught in this storm. And again, it's not a storm that they created, but it's a storm that was meant to get the attention of Jonah, who was God's wayward prophet, but it was also meant for them because it would result in something that they had not thought of before, which was their own salvation.

These men were saved as a result of this storm. But before we get to them, I want us to focus more on Jonah and what we can learn from him.

And the first thing we see is this, that God will expose the sins that we try and cover up. Verse 4, if you're there in your Bible, look at that again.

And then verse 10, it says that the Lord hurled a great wind upon the sea and that there was a mighty tempest on the sea so that the ship threatened to break up and then go down to verse 10.

The sailors are asking Jonah, what have you done?

For the men knew now that he was fleeing from the presence of the Lord because he had told them. You see, God will expose the sins that we try and cover up.

[7 : 33] This storm was not a result of some kind of coincidence. It wasn't some kind of a freak accident. God caused this thing to happen.

One of the ways that God exposes our sin is through discipline because God knows what's best for us. Because God loves us, he will discipline us when we disobey him.

Hebrews 12, 5-6 says, My son, do not regard lightly the discipline of the Lord, nor be wary when reproved by him, for the Lord disciplines the one he loves and chastises every son whom he receives.

Now here's the thing. This is not a popular message today. People do not want to hear about God being someone who disciplines them.

They can't understand how a loving God would discipline anyone. God, people want, today in the church, more often than not it seems, people want God to be like their genie.

[8 : 45] They want God to be their sidekick. They want God to be their buddy. They want God to be there to help them whenever they want. They want to be able to command God what to do, not to be commanded by God as to what to do.

This morning, in fact, I was walking up to the sanctuary and one of our Sunday school classes was listening to, and I think they were critiquing, a message that they heard. I'm not going to name the pastor, but he's well known and he's preaching to a huge church and what he was telling them basically is that they themselves were gods.

That's a popular message. Who wouldn't want to hear that? But here's the thing. That's not true.

That's far from true. Human beings would be terrible gods.

Absolutely terrible. And preaching that does a lot of damage, not just to those people, but to those around them. You see, we want, more often than not, we want to be the one who is worshipped.

We'd rather God worship us than give our worship to God. That's a great problem. In fact, you just read Romans chapter 1 and you see that one of the worst things that can happen to a person in their life is that God lets them do what they want to do.

[10 : 00] That's one of the worst things that could happen to anyone. So God disciplines us because he loves us. I don't like to be disciplined.

And I don't like to be a disciplinarian. I remember not too long ago, I was doing something and there's some scissors on the counter and Hazel, our two-year-old daughter, was able to reach up there and grab them without my knowing it.

And so I'm busy doing what I'm doing and then I hear her squealing, laughing, having a good time and I look down and what does she have in her hands but these really sharp scissors and she's kind of doing a dance.

She's got this big smile on her face. She was having a great time. Right? So what do I do as her father? Oh, you know, I can't take that away from her. Look how much fun she's having. You know? She would be mad at me if I took those away. What a terrible father I would be if I did that. Right? Of course, I looked at her in horror and I snatched those scissors out of her hand as fast as I could. [11:07] And yes, she didn't like it but you know what? She would like it a lot less if she had to live through the rest of her life with some kind of huge scar as a result of those scissors. You know what I'm saying? We discipline our children because we love them.

Because we know what's right for them. We know what's best for them because we want to protect them. And God is no different with us. Because he loves you, God will discipline you by exposing the sins that you try to cover up.

He doesn't do that to embarrass you. He doesn't do that to try and discourage you. He does it to lead you back to himself so that he can give you something better.

So that he can protect you. We also see that God disciplines us because he loves lost people. He disciplines us to expose our sins because he loves us and he also does it because he loves lost people.

Now think about it. This is a very severe discipline that Jonah is about to undergo. He's going to be swallowed by a fish. This seems almost like the punishment doesn't fit the crime.

[12:24] Why such a severe discipline? You know, I've disobeyed God before but I've never been swallowed by a fish. And there was plenty of times, there was plenty of opportunities the past couple weeks.

As you know, we were out on a cruise. We were out on a ship in the middle of nowhere. God could have tipped that thing on its side. I could have gone off into the ocean and been swallowed by a fish but that didn't happen. Why such a severe discipline for Jonah?

Well, let me tell you why. I think it's because of this. Because the mission that God had given to Jonah was so critical to him. It was so significant to his heart that he was willing to take one of his own guys and put him in a very severe place in order to expose his sins, to rearrange his life so that he will go and do what God's called him to do.

And let me tell you something else. The mission of God is no less critical today for us than it was for Jonah back then. God loved the Ninevites despite the fact that Jonah hated them so much.

And you know, there's a lot of people outside of the walls and the doors of this building and God loves them as much as he loved the people of Nineveh. And the other thing is this, that God has chosen you and I to reach them.

[13:50] There is no plan B. It's us. And it's our calling. But if we try to cover up our sins and then run from God, then we neglect our mission.

And we have in essence said to our neighbors, to our community, to the world, that we don't really care that much about you. That's tragic.

And God won't stand for it. If we run from his call, if we neglect our mission, then I believe, as we see from Scripture, that God will bring discipline in our lives because he loves the lost so much.

So what should you do? Maybe you've heard that and you think, well, I kind of feel like I'm matching Jonah and my life and what's going on right now. Maybe God's calling you to a certain mission.

You know that God has certainly called you to share the gospel and you've been running for that.

So what should you do? Well, the first is this. Instead of waiting for God to expose those sins, you go ahead and expose those sins to God that you've covered up.

[15:08] And know this too. In John 1.9, we have this truth from God that if we confess our sins, no matter how filthy or how dirty we think that they are, that if we confess our sins, that God is faithful to forgive us of all of our sins and to cleanse us from our unrighteousness.

Here's the thing. God knows what you've done and he's not going to be surprised when you expose that sin to him. So the first thing you do is go ahead and just expose that to the Lord, knowing that he will forgive you.

And then pray. Begin with prayer. Begin by praying for your neighbors. Pray for the people that you work with.

Pray for their salvation. And then pray that God would use you to speak his truth into their life. That God would bring you maybe into their storm so that you can be there to be used by him.

And this is what I pray that we as a church that we wouldn't run from God's mission but that we would be running to tell people about the good news of Jesus Christ.

[16:24] Also we see from this text that God has a purpose for the storms that we encounter and that we are dragged into. God sent this storm for two reasons.

The first we saw was to get Jonah's attention by exposing his sin and drawing him back to himself so that he can redirect his course and send him back to the place where he should have been already.

And second, we see that it's to bring the sailors to salvation. Now these men were experienced men. They knew what they were doing.

And being sailors, they were probably very manly. You know, it would be like shaking their hand. It would be like shaking somebody holding a piece of sandpaper. These men's hands were coarse and strong and tough.

These guys knew what they were doing. They were experienced in their field. And surely they had encountered other different kinds of storms in their time sailing on the seas.

[17:23] But they understood that this storm was unlike any other storm that they had ever encountered and the Bible says that they were terrified of it. When we were in Fort Lauderdale, waiting to leave Florida as Irma was a few days on its way to coming there, it was kind of chaos in the airport as you can imagine.

Lots of people trying to flee from that area. And thankfully, we got into our airplane and we were in our airplane and we were ready to go. We're thinking, hey, we're going to get out of here. And praise God and God, we pray that everybody else gets out of here too.

And we pray that this storm would weaken. You know, just lots of prayer. And then we get in the airplane and there's a long line. And we're waiting in the airplane. Okay, this is fine.

And then we're waiting some more. We waited in the airplane on the tarmac for three hours. And we were about 15 minutes away from having to turn around and either start the whole process over again or we don't know what.

But so let me tell you that we were praying for our plane to go. And so finally when it came our time to go, I'd never experienced a takeoff as quickly as that one. And one of the reasons for the delay was there was a storm.

[18:40] And so when we got up into the air, our plane was banking this way and banking that way and moving all over the place trying to avoid the storm, trying to get us to where we needed to go. And it was scary.

And then not only that, once we got out of the storm, we hit all of this turbulence and we hit some pretty hard turbulence. And I'm not an experienced flyer. So I was scared. I was sitting in my seat there, I was praying, and I was looking at the flight attendants.

You know why? Because they know what they were doing. And as long as they were up, though we were hitting turbulence, though they were, and as long as they were giving people their drinks and handing them their peanuts, I knew that we were okay.

And so that whole time I'm looking at their faces, okay, are they just pretending? Are they really okay? And so thankfully, as you can tell, we got here, but that's the thing that we do because when experienced people start to panic, we know that there's reason to panic.

And these sailors were experienced people. And they're starting to panic. There was reason to be terrified of what was going on. Their response to the storm was not typical of the way that most people, or excuse me, their response was typical of the way that most people handle trials in their life.

[19:57] What did they do? Well, first of all, they cried out to their gods. This was the problem. No, they were crying out to gods of their own making. It says in verse 5 that the mariners were afraid and each cried out to his own god.

Commentators believed that they were probably Phoenician, which means that they were polytheistic. They believed in a multitude of different gods. So, you know, hey, pray to the god of heaven. Pray to the god of the sea.

Pray to the god of this or that or the other. They're trying to figure out who have we made mad? And so they're trying to deal with this problem by praying to these different gods. Each man was crying

out to these gods, but here's the problem.

They were not the one true god. They were deaf. They were dumb. They could not hear these men's cries. They were powerless because they did not exist to be able to do anything.

Secondly, we see that they tried to fix the problem on their own. So once that wasn't working, they started to throw the cargo out on the sea to try to lighten the weight of the ship so that it would stay high up on the waves.

[21 : 00] But again, it doesn't work. Now here's the thing that's interesting. Where is Jonah at in all of this? These guys are panicking for their lives.

And where is Jonah at while all this is going on? Well, the rest of verse 5 says that Jonah had gone and down into the inner part of the ship and he was fast asleep. The one guy with the solution to the problem was asleep.

That's a big problem. A lot of people believe that this is a picture of the church today, unfortunately. While we see people in our world, they're panicking.

They know that this world is broken. They know that something needs to be fixed and they're turning to all of these different people or different things to try to fix it. But the one group of people who has the solution, who has the answer is the church.

And too often, to our shame, we are found asleep on the job. And so then they came together and they said, let's cast lots in verses 7 through 8.

[22 : 09] And so again, you see that the lot fell on Jonah. And so they start interrogating him. Where are you from? What are you doing? Where are you going? Who sent you?

They have, these sailors have an intuitive sense that this disaster has come upon them as the result of somebody's sin. They understand that because of the nature of this storm.

The sailors have been dragged into this storm. This supernatural storm that seems so personal in nature. And because of that, they realize that it's supernatural and it must be because of somebody's sin.

They had no idea what was going on between God and Jonah. They didn't know that turmoil that existed. They didn't know about Jonah's private sin. But now, as a result of this storm that God had sent, it was exposed.

In verse 9, they said to him, Jonah said to him, to them, excuse me, finally, I am a Hebrew and I fear the Lord, the God of heaven who made the sea and the dry land. So how would you expect the sailors to respond?

[23 : 21] Right? We finally figured out that it's your sin that's caused this. We finally know what God is responsible for this. You'd think that they would be relieved, wouldn't you?

But they're not. Look at verse 10. It says that they were exceedingly afraid. They were more scared than they were before.

And they were terrified. They were only slightly afraid with the storm that came. Then they began to become very scared. And then finally, their fear escalates.

Why? Because they are becoming aware of the one true God. And they're scared. So they start asking Jonah questions.

They want some answers. They said to him, what shall we do to you that the sea may quiet down for us? Right? Tell us what this God requires so that we can become safe again.

[24 : 25] And now again, you'd think at this point that Jonah would see all that's going on and he'd realize that this storm was being sent by God to him and that all of these men were now, their lives and their families back at home were in jeopardy.

And you'd think that here Jonah would hit the ground on his knees and start praying and start pleading for God's forgiveness. But he doesn't do that.

Instead, he says to them, basically, just pick me up and throw me out into the ocean and God will be fine. This will go away. What is he saying here? He has no idea to this point that God has appointed a fish, that that fish is going to soon pick him up and provide him a passage to Nineveh. He has no idea that that's going on. He's basically saying, you know what, I hate those people in Nineveh so much and I'm so mad at you, God, for all of this that I would rather just die and be over with it.

Send me into the sea. Let me sink to the bottom. Let the fish peck away at my flesh until I'm nothing. He hates them that much.

[25 : 34] And what else is surprising about this is that the sailors don't take that course of action at first. Look at verse 13. Nevertheless, the men rode hard to get back to dry land, but they could not for the sea grew more and more tempestuous against them.

Notice how the sailors are acting. They don't know this God, this one true God, but they are more concerned for Jonah's life than Jonah is for them.

Jonah, who is a prophet of God, is less concerned for their lives than these pagan, unsaved, lost sailors are for him. The sailors are trying to row harder and harder to save Jonah's life, but Jonah could care less, it seems, about their lives.

And let me tell you, it is a sad state of events, in our world, when those who are saved care less for the lost than the lost care for those who are saved.

Through this storm, God revealed himself to these men, and they realized that their only hope of salvation was now to cry out to the one true God. And that's what we see them doing in verses 14 and 15.

[26 : 55] Therefore, they cried out to the Lord using his covenant name, O Lord, let us not perish for this man's life, lay not on his innocent blood for you, O Lord, have done as it pleased you. So they picked up Jonah and they hurled him into the sea, and then we see that the sea ceased its raging.

These men, again, they used the covenant name of the Lord. They were praying for deliverance, and then they afterwards pledged their lives to him by making vows in verse 16.

They were saved by God. And I believe that one day when we go to heaven, we'll meet these men. We'll see these men.

They were saved. Sometimes we get dragged into storms that are not of our own making like these sailors were. But we must never forget that God is sovereign.

There is never a moment when God is not in control. Never. There is nothing that happens outside of God's will.

[27 : 59] So while the storm is raging, you may not be able to see the purpose that God has for you in it, but rest assured that there is a purpose for you to go through that storm that you've been placed in.

Jesus Christ died on a cross. His disciples couldn't imagine a worse thing happening, right? our friend, our Lord.

We've left everything to follow him and now he's dead. They couldn't have imagined a worse thing that could have happened. But guess what happened?

Jesus came back to life. And what they thought was the worst thing that could happen ended up being the best thing that has ever happened. that our sins were atoned for, that we're able to be forgiven, that we're able to be made righteous and have eternal life.

Something had happened to these sailors. They begin by crying out to their own gods, but by the end they are praying and making vows to the one true God.

[29 : 12] What has happened to them? Well, when things get really bad, we see it. when things get really scary, people start getting very religious. You've heard it said there are no atheists in foxholes.

That's true. You remember 9-11? After the attacks of 9-11, those horrific attacks, how many people were coming to the church because they needed answers.

They were seeking something to figure out why is this world that's so terrible, it's so broken, it's so in need of fixing. And they were coming to the church. We've seen it here recently. Have you seen it with the eclipse that happened a few weeks ago?

And then with the hurricanes and the earthquakes and all that is going on in our world right now, people are starting to get worried and fearful. I've seen a lot of passages of scripture pop up on people's Facebook feeds who aren't believers.

And they're looking at passages like Luke chapter 21, verses 25 through 28. And they're scared because they see that this world will one day come to an end.

[30 : 21] And they're looking to the church for the answers. Because things like that have a way of bringing out the truth. Look at Romans 1, 18 through 20 with me. For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men who by their unrighteousness suppress the truth.

For what can be known about God is plain to them because God has shown it to them. For his invisible attributes, namely his eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly perceived ever since the creation of the world and the things that have been made so they are without excuse. What scripture says to us is that God has placed the knowledge of himself inside every single one of us. However, what we choose to do prior to coming to faith in Christ is to try and suppress that truth that God has put inside of us.

We try to hold that truth down. We don't want to believe in God. We don't want God telling us what to do. And so we try to hold all of that down.

It's like trying to hold a beach ball underwater. You ever tried to do that before? It's hard. But eventually it pops up to the surface. And so here we see that the sailors have faced a storm that they could not overcome.

[31 : 38] And finally they are forced to face the reality of the truth that they had for so long suppressed. The truth came to the surface and they chose to accept it and they chose to believe it.

And so here's the big takeaway I want for us to have this morning. When the storm rages don't look to yourself for the solution.

When you are dragged into someone else's storm don't get so angry that you miss your chance to be used by God to point them to Christ for deliverance.

Each of you probably has someone in your life someone you've been praying a long time for their salvation. I know I have people like that in my life and here's one of the other things that I've learned that God has taught me through searching this scripture and preparing this message is this sometimes for people like that what we might need to be doing is praying that God would send a storm their way and also this that in God sending a storm their way that we would be dragged into it too so that we can be there in what they're going through in order to share the gospel with them and point them to Jesus Christ my first day in seminary was an orientation and all of us brand new seminary students we had our coats and our ties on and we were you know this is big time stuff we're doing what God's called us to do right and so we go through orientation

I'll never forget one of our teachers professors came up and this is what he told us he said gentlemen you guys are sinners you guys aren't perfect you guys are being called to a ministry that is immense and if you go into it beginning now with unconfessed sin in your life let me tell you this God will expose that sin that you try to uncover and then he encouraged us he said whatever it is don't wait because we'll find it out eventually don't wait until you've been years in seminary or close to graduation to have that sin exposed you come to us right now and you let us know what's going on in your life and this was his promise to us he said whatever sin you try to cover God will expose but whatever sin you uncover God will cover up how do I know that that's true look at what Jesus has done for us you might be hearing you might think you know what that sounds good pastor [34 : 36] Mike but you don't know the type of sin that I have in my life and I don't but God does and I can tell you that Jesus Christ died for you for your sins no matter how unforgivable you might think that they are I will tell you from what God's word says that God will forgive you and cleanse you of all of it you come to him and you expose that and he will cover you cover you with the blood of his son that was shed on his on the cross and cover you with the righteousness of his son his perfection so that when you having believed that having received Christ as your Lord and Savior God will look at you and he sees a righteous person if you've never made that decision or if you have some sin in your life as a follower of Christ that you have been covering up now's the time to make that decision to one receive Christ as your

Savior or two to expose that sin so that God will cover it up for you so that you can live your life in a way for him that will have an impact on this world that you never thought possible