



2 | JONAH 1:5-17

OVERBOARD INTO THE DEPTHS!

God sends storms to sanctify his children. Even though we try to outrun him, his purpose of making us like Christ is impossible to resist for the child of God.

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We see the deeds of the Lord, his wondrous works in the depths of the sea. ²⁵ For he speaks, and the winds rise, stirring up the waves. ²⁶ Our ship mounts up to heaven; it goes down to the depths... ²⁸ Then we cried to the Lord in our trouble, and he delivered us from our distress. ²⁹ He makes the storm to be still, and he hushes the waves of the sea. ³⁰ Then we were glad that the waters were quiet, and he brought us to our desired haven. ³¹ Let us thank the Lord for his steadfast love, for his wondrous works to the children of man! — Psalm 107:24-31

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WELCOME: We are glad you are here! Be sure to grab a Welcome Packet if you are visiting with us.

Introduction

When I was a child, growing up in Louisiana, I had the amazing experience of going “tubing” on the Tickfaw River. What could be more fun than riding behind a boat on an innertube at about 15 mph (13 knots)? Imagine riding on an inflatable donut, being towed behind a speedboat. There must have been 20 tubes attached to each other. Various people chose this joyride: little children held by their mamas, teenagers goofing off, and lots and lots of preteens, like myself. **I was a lanky, weak kid**, but I was **fearless when it came to adventure**. My mom was on the shore of the river that day, hobnobbing with other mothers. She might have caught a glimpse of me as the boat launched forward. **This was no lazy river ride**. We were going way faster than I expected which to me meant more fun! But **suddenly, my fun experience literally sunk**. I went **overboard** into the river. Somehow, I was **sucked underneath the web of innertubes**, and this grand expedition became **my grave**. Humans still can't breathe underwater unassisted, so I was in trouble. I struggled to pull myself back up, but I was paralyzed by the force of the water, and **my body was wedged in this deathtrap**. I remember thinking, “This is how I'm going to die.” I miraculously found an opening a tube or two down from my original tube. I clung to the tubes on both sides, desperately **pulled myself up**, and was grateful to breathe that Louisiana air. I got my wind back. With all my might (which wasn't much), I maneuvered and jangled myself through the opening one lanky leg at a time. From that moment on I kept my legs firmly above the water and onto the tubes! Whew. **I escaped an early funeral**.

DOWN, DOWN, DOWN

In our text, Jonah has his own “overboard” experience. Jonah doesn't want to go to Nineveh, the **capital of the ancient Assyrian empire**, which is **modern day Mosul, Iraq**. He goes “**down**” to Joppa. He goes “**down**” three thousand miles away to Tarshish. In our text, he is thrown **down** into the depths of the sea. And then he goes further **down** when a “great fish” swallows him up. He's so close from **going down into Sheol**, the grave, and meeting his Master, but God is not done with Jonah. There is so much God wants to get done in Jonah.

THE MAIN CHARACTER: YAHWEH

In our story, we see the main character, and it's not who we might think. The prophecy of Jonah is not just about the big fish. It's not just about Jonah, the whale, and the deep blue sea. The main

character in Jonah's story is **God**. Every single chapter—in fact, every single verse—speaks of the **grandeur of God, the grace of God, the sovereignty of God**, the **beckoning** of God, the **discipline** of God, and most of all, the compassion, and the mercy of God. Everywhere you look in this tiny piece of ancient historical literature, **God is there**. He's always there. He is right in the middle of every interruption. He's teaching his prophet (and all of us) how to have his heart. **Don't you want the heart of God?**

In the book of Jonah, **everywhere that Jonah goes**, God is following him, and **God is busy demonstrating mercy** and **giving out grace**. We first see sailors repenting and turning to the true God, and then the hardest, baddest people in the world. God is gracious and merciful!

JONAH'S REASONS FOR RUNNING

And then you have **Jonah**. Jonah hears the call of God, and then he runs the other way. Why? Jonah has his reasons.

First, Jonah's comfortable. **Comfort** can numb the heart to God. He's serving God for all the good things. He's comfortable. He's got the "success syndrome" that many of us in the West have. We confuse comfort and success with being right with God. But **when God threatens his comfort, he runs the other way**. When God strips us of our comfort, the idols of our heart are revealed.

Second, Jonah thinks he's better than the Assyrians. **Self-righteousness** numbs our hearts to God. Jonah's on the run because he hates the Assyrians, and he doesn't think they deserve God's grace. He's told to go to the **capital of the Assyrian empire: Nineveh**. These were the meanest, **baddest people on earth**, maybe in the **history** of the world. Do you not know that "God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son" (Jn 3:16)? Put your name in the blank. Now put someone you might think is almost unsavable in that blank. Jonah's success was great in Israel, and he wasn't about to give any thought to the nasty Ninevites. When God says, *I want you to have success with the Assyrians, go to their capital city*, Jonah says, *No way*.

Third, Jonah is **popular** in his country. **Politics** and **popularity** can numb our heart to God. For Jonah, **earthly politics** has replaced a heavenly mindset. **He loved popularity with people more than peace with God**.

There is a **national hatred against the Assyrians**, of which **Nineveh** is the capital. Jonah loves Israel. Granted, the Assyrians want to destroy Israel. He's been a popular, successful prophet in a prosperous, expanding political landscape in his homeland. Jonah's ministry has been all about Israel's expansion, and Assyria, with Nineveh as its capital, is all about the demise of Israel. The Assyrians sack Israel in 722 B.C., less than thirty years after the events of Jonah takes place.

JONAH'S EXCUSES

Jonah was so comfortable preaching to his own people. He didn't want to go near those nasty, pagan, uncivilized Ninevites. **Moses** had his excuses when God called him, "I'm slow of speech!" (Exo 3-4:17). **Adam** said, "It's the woman's fault" (Gen 3:12). **Jeremiah** said, "I'm too young!" (Jer 1:4-8). Remember this: there are no excuses for the child of God. One man told Jesus, "I have married a wife, and therefore I cannot come" (Lk 14:20). Any excuse is a good excuse for the wandering child of God.

If you as God's child don't surrender, **God will chase you down**. **For Moses, he sent a burning bush**. For Jonah, **God interrupted Jonah's placid sea voyage with a ferocious storm**.¹

RUNNING AWAY FROM GOD

¹ Duane A. Garrett, *Explore the Bible: Adult Commentary: Hosea, Amos, Jonah (Winter 2012-13): Revealing the Heart of God* (LifeWay Christian Resources, 2013), 124.

Jonah's not so much running away from Nineveh and the Assyrians, as much as he is **running away from God**. He **doesn't want God's heart**.

Scholars say it might have taken a year to go all the way to Tarshish. It was a place where Jonah could go and hide. It's **so far away** with such a great cost to get there, that it's likely he would never return. He's set aside his prophet's mantle, but God won't let him run too far.

WE CAN'T HIDE FROM GOD

Jonah runs but God won't let him hide. We can try to run, but God will not let any of his children go. **No one can pluck us out of his hand** (Jn 10:28). The point of the story is that **we can't run away from the ever-present God**. Wherever you may be running, he is already there. Jonah is cornered by God in the middle of a storm, breaking up his ship. He has no choice but to ask to be thrown overboard.

Jonah 1:1-17 | Now the word of the Lord came to Jonah the son of Amittai, saying, ²“Arise, go to Nineveh, that great city, and call out against it, for their evil has come up before me.” ³But Jonah rose to flee to Tarshish from the presence of the Lord. He went down to Joppa and found a ship going to Tarshish. So he paid the fare and went down into it, to go with them to Tarshish, away from the presence of the Lord. ⁴But 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. ⁵Then the mariners were afraid, and each cried out to his god. 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 lain down and was fast asleep. ⁶So 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.” ⁷And 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. ⁸Then 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?” ⁹And 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, “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. ¹¹Then 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. ¹²He said to them, “Pick me up and hurl me into the sea; then the sea will quiet down for you, for I know it is because of me that this great tempest has come upon you.” ¹³Nevertheless, the men rowed hard to get back to dry land, but they could not, for the sea grew more and more tempestuous against them. ¹⁴Therefore 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.” ¹⁵So they picked up Jonah and hurled him into the sea, and the sea ceased from its raging. ¹⁶Then the men feared the Lord exceedingly, and they offered a sacrifice to the Lord and made

vows. ¹⁷ And the Lord appointed a great fish to swallow up Jonah. And Jonah was in the belly of the fish three days and three nights.

Why does Jonah (and all of us) have to “go overboard” at times?

Key Thought: God sends storms to sanctify his children. Even though we try to outrun him, his purpose of making us like Christ is impossible to resist for the child of God.

1. GOD SHOWS US HIS POWER (1:4-6)

We've all been in storms. And then we've all been in *storms!* You know, the ones where the **TV weather people are telling you to run** and **hide in your basement**. The ones where the trash can lids blow off and rattle down the street into your neighbor's yard. The ones where **1:00 in the afternoon looks like the middle of the night**—a storm can come fast and furious, and the same is true in our lives. **Jonah was asleep to God's great power**. Look at the storm God sent to Jonah to awaken him.

GOD'S INCREDIBLE POWER HURLED

Jonah had his getaway ship, but God stopped it with a fierce storm. The Lord always controls the weather for his own ends. He controls all the elements. It is not only in the miracles like the passage of the **Red Sea** and the storm on the **Sea of Galilee** that 'the winds and the waves obey him' (Exo 14:21–22; Mt 8:23–27). The storm that tossed Jonah's get-away ship was a '**storm of the Lord**' (Jer 23:19–20).² Jonah can't outrun the presence of God since God is everywhere and controls all things. This was no chance storm. Some people are storm chasers. This was **God's storm that was actually chasing Jonah**.³

Jonah 1:4 | 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.

God deals with his runaway prophet by **hurling a great, tumultuous wind on the Mediterranean Sea**, and a violent storm arises, endangering everyone in the ship.⁴ William Banks writes:

When a person decides to run from the Lord, Satan always provides complete transportation facilities. But of course, God always knows how to **wreck Satan's transportation**. Praise God for that!⁵

Modern meteorology has documented the destructive power rogue waves, tropical cyclones, microbursts, and other weather phenomena that pose unique threats to ships at sea. Jonah's ship cannot contend with God's storm. You see, the storm described in this first chapter of Jonah was different. **This storm is personal. It is of divine origin. God is after Jonah.** John Calvin comments:

² Gordon J. Keddie, *Preacher on the Run: The Meaning of Jonah*, Welwyn Commentary Series (Darlington, England: Evangelical Press, 1986), 28.

³ John Calvin and John Owen, *Commentaries on the Twelve Minor Prophets*, vol. 3 (Bellingham, WA: Logos Bible Software, 2010), 32.

⁴ Rosa Ching Shao, *Jonah (Asia Bible Commentary Series)* (Langham Global Library, 2019), 21.

⁵ William Banks, *Jonah: The Reluctant Prophet* (Chicago: Moody, 1966), 20.

In this very personal storm, Jonah encounters the certain purpose of God, so that being overtaken on the sea, he acknowledged that he had been deceived when he thought that he could flee away from God's presence.⁶ —John Calvin

God corners Jonah with a **supernatural storm** to rescue the prophet from himself. The Lord has a second motive as well: to **demonstrate his power to the pagan sailors** in Jonah's ship.

GOD'S INCREDIBLE POWER FELT

This is no minor storm, but a **divine tempest**. These seasoned mariners are scared for their lives. The crew of the ship on which Jonah sailed was a pagan and international crew because each sailor called out to his own god for safety.⁷

The Mariners Prayed

Jonah 1:5a | Then the mariners were afraid, and each cried out to his god.

The mariners prayed. **The sailors felt God's power and begin praying as they have never prayed before**, calling on any god who can still the chaotic forces of the sea. They feel the power of God even though they don't know him yet. **Jonah wasn't praying**. He was sleeping. God called the Jews to be a blessing to all the nations of the earth (Gen. 12:1-3), but whenever the Jews were out of the will of God, they brought trouble instead of blessing.⁸ Jonah is bringing great trouble to these sailors.

The Mariners Prepared

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

The sailors prepared to save the ship and threw everything overboard they could. **Precious metals, horses and mules, ivory** and expensive foreign rarities had already been tossed. Few things were deemed worth saving with their lives so perilously at stake.⁹ **The only line they appeared unwilling to cross**, in terms of what they were inclined to abandon to the furious waters was **Jonah**. The pagan mariners have more compassion and care for Jonah than he does for them. He knows who brought this storm, but what's he doing?

GOD'S INCREDIBLE POWER IGNORED

Where is Jonah? He's "fast asleep" in the inner part of the ship. The sea is no place to go for peace and quiet. But Jonah was **numbing himself to God's call** and his word. He had turned off and tuned out. His heart was hard enough to sleep through a storm that could take his life.

Jonah 1:5c | But Jonah had gone down into the inner part of the ship and had lain down and was fast asleep.

When they found Jonah, he was sleeping. How could the prophet Jonah be sound asleep in a great storm? You've got to be pretty tired to sleep in a situation like that. **Depression** was also probably a great motivator for **unhealthy rest** for the prophet. **Sin can numb a person**. There he was sound asleep in the hold of the ship. **The boat may have been tossing**, turning, splintering; but

⁶ Calvin and Owen, *Minor Prophets*, 33.

⁷ Duane A. Garrett, *Explore the Bible: Adult Commentary: Hosea, Amos, Jonah (Winter 2012-13): Revealing the Heart of God* (LifeWay Christian Resources, 2013), 124.

⁸ Warren W. Wiersbe, *Be Amazed*, "Be" Commentary Series (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1996), 73.

⁹ James Limburg, *Jonah: A Commentary* (Louisville, KY: Westminster/Knox Press, 1993), 49.

incredibly Jonah was not. He was **unaffected**. That's what sin will do to us. It numbs us. We can get to a point where we don't feel God around us, even though his power is surging.

GOD'S INCREDIBLE POWER ENTREATED

Jonah won't pray to the Lord, so the sailors ask him to entreat the Lord God. **They have to wake Jonah up!** The sailors are afraid, tossing their livelihood out of the ship, while Jonah slumbers on.

Jonah 1:6 | 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."

Jonah's getaway ship was about to be ripped to shreds by the waves of the Mediterranean Sea. As the wayward prophet slept below the deck, the sailors watched the waves of the placid sea rise and fall like a soft blue carpet, but suddenly, the sea came alive. **Like a sleeping giant awakened, the waves grew to over twenty feet high.** God was after his prophet. God is willing to do whatever it takes to keep his covenantal promises to his people: "You will be holy as I the LORD am holy" (Lev 20:26). God is using the sea to contend with Jonah, but Jonah is asleep!

The Pagans Awaken the Prophet

The sailors called out their pagan gods. **I can imagine the captain** making sure everyone is working and praying. And then he sees form of a man sleeping in the bowels of the boat. The man appeared **almost dead**. His body was half submerged in the water that sloshed around him.

"Who are you and why are you sleeping?" We can hear the captain screaming above the shrieking wind. The sailors are **aghast that Jonah is sleeping**. They are almost a mouthpiece for God when they say to him: **"Awake sleeper!"** (1:6). **Jonah somehow seemed impervious to the storm.** He was awakened out of a dead asleep! A lot of Christians need that wakeup call.

I can imagine the **captain taking hold of Jonah, waking him up**, and throwing questions at him. "What are you doing? **How are you not praying, man?** My men call out in fear to **Dagon, to Baal, to Asherah**, to whatever god or goddess they can think of, but you hold tight to the railing by your bed and utter not a single word to your god."¹⁰ Jonah was utterly disoriented. Nothing made sense. The captain continued to scream at Jonah, "Can you pray? If you can do nothing else, pray! Ask your god to help us. Pray to your god. Maybe he will hear you. Maybe he will save us."

The Pagans Entreat the Prophet

Don't miss this: **Jonah fled from the pagans, because he wanted the comfort of popularity and pride.** Now, God's put him in a place where the pagans are begging him to pray to the Lord. He didn't not want to talk to pagans about God in the first place. He certainly didn't want to lead them to faith in the Lord. Now he finds himself talking about God to the exact sort of people he was fleeing.¹¹

The sailors on board the vessel with Jonah were most **likely Phoenicians**, pagans who came from a polytheistic culture. They worshipped a plethora of gods, each of which governed a different aspect of nature and was easily offended. So when trouble arose, like this savage storm on the Mediterranean, these men never knew who had done what to anger a particular deity. That's why "every man cried to his god."¹²

How could Jonah become so hardened? He liked building his own little kingdom in Israel, and now he's called to build God's kingdom. He **turns away from God and loses his anointing**. He

¹⁰ James A. Long, *Jonah: A Tale of Mercy* (Durham, NC: Torchflame Books / Light Messages, 2016), 29.

¹¹ Timothy Keller, *Rediscovering Jonah: The Secret to God's Mercy* (New York: Penguin Publishing Group, 2018), 32-33.

¹² Shirer, *Life Interrupted*, 81.

loses his **zeal**. He loses his **love for the Lord**. I believe I know where Jonah was. **Depressed. Numb. Bitter at the Lord**. He doesn't like the ministry anymore. That's what sin does to a person. But God is good at making a hard heart soft. He takes the heart of stone and makes it a heart of flesh.

God is in control of this storm, and he uses these pagan sailors to awake his sleepy prophet. Jonah can't outrun God. No matter where Jonah goes, God is going to use everyone and everything around him to **bring him back to God. He'll use sailors. He'll use storms**. And God will do the same for you if you are his child. God rides on the wind of the storm. God is riding on the storm in your life. He's guiding it. He's sovereign. God wants us to stop sleeping as Christians. He wants us to awaken to his great power.

2. GOD SHOWS US OUR BACKSLIDING (1:7-10)

What's going on? An **investigation of sorts ensues**. As we see throughout this book, **the pagans have softer hearts** than **Jonah's hard, self-righteous heart**. They tremble at God's storm, while Jonah has to be awakened by the pagan sailors!

OUR BACKSLIDING INVESTIGATED

God uses **pagans to investigate Jonah's backsliding**. He's sovereign! He can use all people and circumstances to carry out his will and reveal the state of his own children's heart. The **sailors get together and devise a plan** to find out who exactly is to blame for their sea voyage disaster.

Jonah 1:7 | 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.

How sad is it that Jonah knows the power of the true and living God but is asleep to it. He's literally "fast asleep" while God is at work. The pagan sailors on the other hand, are out of their minds with fear. They are the ones praying while the prophet of Israel is sleeping on and on. The sailors are hurling cargo as God is hurling a great wind. Such evasive actions are ridiculous when you are dealing with the Lord. The Lord does not want their cargo; he wants the obedience of his prophet Jonah! They don't know this yet, so in fear of death, they keep hurling.

Finally, since Jonah's God is the creator God of land and sea, they decide to call on this God of the storm, and cast lots, and in a way **ask God to identify the guilty party. The lot fell on Jonah**. You know the Bible says that God is even in control of the lot.

Proverbs 16:33 | The lot is cast into the lap, but its every decision is from the LORD.

The captain would have taken **a pouch perhaps of sheep knuckles**—commonly used as dice in the ancient world—and emptied them into his palm. Each one took a sheep bone from the pouch, bleached bright white. But one of them was a brownish color. The captain then went from man to man who reached in and pulled out one of the bones. Each man closed his hand around the unwelcomed prize until all the others had chosen his lot. The captain reached his strong, weathered hand in the pouch to remove the final piece of bone. The sailors and Jonah stared at their closed hands, and then one by one they shifted their gaze to the captain. With a simple gesture, the ship's captain opened his palm to reveal his lot. Each sailor followed his example. There was Jonah, open hand—he had drawn the indicting lot. He was the guilty one. He could hide no longer.

God can even use these lost sailors to get ahold of his prophet. God knows where you live if you know what I mean. That reminds me of this new DNA technology that is very effective in chasing down criminals or in locating parents from those who have been adopted. For years the police couldn't find

this one notorious criminal in California, but DNA profiles from various ancestry websites helped identify the now 72-year-old subject. Authorities had collected the DNA evidence from the 1978 crime scene. And forty-five years later, they found him and put him in jail. God doesn't need DNA to track us down. He made DNA. He knows right where we are. We are foolish if we think we can outwit God.

There is Jonah, surrounded by sailors with lots in their hands. And Jonah is holding the indicting lot. He's the guilty party.

OUR BACKSLIDING DISCOVERED

God was about to reveal himself through **a confession Jonah is forced to make**. The gig is up. He can't just hide and sleep. He's got to tell the truth about who he is. He's about to tell them that he is running from the one true and living God, the Almighty. Listen to this interesting confession. They corner him. "Who are you? Where are you from?" It's fascinating.

Jonah's Faith Discovered

Jonah 1:8-9 | 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?"⁹ 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."

The God of the Red Sea crossing. Jonah knows the power of God. He's confesses to the sailors that he is "a Hebrew." That's a **distinctive term** known throughout the ancient world. People had heard of the Red Sea crossing, and so "Hebrew" meant "to cross or pass over."¹³ Now the sailors are even more disturbed. **You serve the God of the Passover? Your God beat Pharaoh's great armies?**

The God of the heaven and earth. Jonah fears Yahweh, the one true God over all, the God of the Red Sea crossing, he says. All the heathen served local deities, more like little weak men in the sky, but Yahweh is the Creator of the world, Lord of heaven and earth. Jonah clarifies that **Yahweh is not just a local deity** that people worship. He's not an idol. He's "the God of heaven, who made the sea and the dry land" (1:9). Now the sailors clearly infer that flight from *that* God is futile precisely because he is omnipresent, being bound neither to land nor to sea (unlike almost all other ancient Near Eastern deities.¹⁴

Jonah knows the God who can take the roughest seas and calm them in an instant with the words, "Peace! Be still!" (Mk 4:39). Yet he is **sleeping, hiding below the deck**, having **given up on God**. Sometimes it takes a storm to bring us back to our confession: "I am one of the redeemed! God has passed over me! I fear the Lord, the God of heaven and earth, the sea and the dry land."

The Sailors' Fear Demonstrated

Jonah 1:10 | 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.

Notice the **sailors have more faith than Jonah**. They had heard about the God of the Passover. He defeated Pharaoh's army. You can't run from a God who is infinitely powerful and ever-present. "What have you done?" In other words, "Have you lost your mind?"

¹³ James Strong, *Enhanced Strong's Lexicon* (Woodside Bible Fellowship, 1995), *Ibriy* (5680).

¹⁴ Daniel C. Timmer, *A Gracious and Compassionate God: Mission, Salvation and Spirituality in the Book of Jonah*, ed. D. A. Carson, vol. 26, *New Studies in Biblical Theology* (England; Downers Grove, IL: Apollos; InterVarsity Press, 2011), 67.

They had even asked him, "What's your occupation?" He just says, "I'm a Hebrew, and I know the living God." That's enough information for the pagan sailors to be **terrified!** How ironic that the **lost mariners have more fear of the Lord than Jonah, God's prophet.**

You've heard the proverb: "familiarity breeds contempt." Somehow **Jonah had lost his awe of God.** For him it was all words and wit, but no longer any wonder. He lost his fear of God. Even in the midst of the demonstration of God's great power on the sea, Jonah was hopelessly backslidden. The sailors are trembling before the living God, but Jonah is hardened.

3. GOD SHOWS US HIS SALVATION (1:11-17)

It has tradition among the Jews from the earliest times to **read the book of Jonah on the Day of Atonement, Yom Kippur.**

It's interesting that this whole episode turns to bring salvation both to the sailors, who tremble before the Lord and appear to commit their lives to him, and then for Jonah, who even though he is swallowed by a great fish, is sanctified through it. Let's find out what happens next.

THE SANCTIFICATION OF THE BELIEVER

The ship still threatened to break into pieces. The sailors' lives were still at stake. So with their hearts racing and their voices shaking, they yelled with fervor at Jonah over the noise of the tumultuous storm, "What should we do to you that the sea may become calm for us?" They are **tools in God's hands to sanctify Jonah.**

Jonah's Confession

Jonah 1:11-12 | Then they [*the sailors*] said to him [*Jonah*], "What shall we do to you, that the sea may quiet down for us?" For the sea grew more and more tempestuous. ¹² He [*Jonah*] said to them, "Pick me up and hurl me into the sea; then the sea will quiet down for you, for I know it is because of me that this great tempest has come upon you."

"What shall we do with you Jonah?" plead the sailors. Jonah shouts: "Toss me to the sea. Only then will Yahweh bring peace."

The Sailors' Compassion

Jonah 1:13 | 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.

The sailors could not bear to throw a fellow human being overboard. They had far more respect for life than the prophet Jonah did. They tried to row the ship to shore, but the more they tried, the higher the waves became. I can hear the captain, "Our ship is battered but not sunk. She holds, men, she holds, and she will hold. To the oars! We'll make for shore. Perhaps, if we show this Creator God of land and sea that we mean to take his prophet back, he will show us mercy. Row, men, row! Put your backs in it. To the oars! To the oars!"

The Crew's Intercession

Suddenly, an impromptu prayer meeting began, not by the prophet Jonah, but by the sailors.

Jonah 1:14 | 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."

As the sailors began to catch their breath, Jonah heard the strangest thing. He could not make out all of what they were saying, but interspersed among the foreign words, he caught the name "Yahweh." They were calling out to the Lord. These pagan men who from the storm's onset had prayed to their gods were now beseeching the Lord for his favor. They called on the Lord and were assured in their hearts of what they must do.

"Prophet," the captain said to Jonah, "we will do as you say and cast you overboard. May the Lord have mercy on us. I, for one, am convinced that this God of yours is Lord of both land and sea. May he have the same mercy on you that he has had on us."

Jonah must have been trembling. He knew his time had come. He could no longer run from God. He thought he would die with his wife and kids near him, but here he was, in a faraway place, forgotten, and about to be thrown overboard by the touch of the cold, wet, rough hands of these seafaring men.

I can hear the captain pray as he looks toward heaven: "Please, Lord, do not let us die for taking this man's life. Do not hold us accountable for killing an innocent man, for we, Lord, are obeying you. May your will be done."

The Storm's Calm

They ceased Jonah. He didn't fight them.

Jonah 1:15 | So they picked up Jonah and hurled him into the sea, and the sea ceased from its raging.

The captain motioned for the sailors to take hold of Jonah under the arms while another took Jonah's feet. They lifted him up. Jonah closed his eyes, not wanting to see the pained look on the sailors' faces. Jonah felt himself swing backward and then forward, over the rail of the ship. He was suspended for only a moment in midair. Then he felt himself freefalling. They hurled him into the sea. Yet it was not that the prophet fell into the water but that the waves rose up to consume him.

As Jonah disappeared under the surface, the raging wind above immediately became a gentle breeze, and sea ceased its fury and slowed to a calm. The dark clouds that had kept them in perpetual night parted, and the sun beat down upon the faces of the sailors on board the battered ship.

THE SIGN OF JONAH

What does this supposed "death" of Jonah mean? We find out it is a picture of the work of Jesus, and his death, according to our Lord in the New Testament.

Jonah 1:15 | So they picked up Jonah and hurled him into the sea, and the sea ceased from its raging.

Jesus is fond of this book Jonah which would be read in the Jewish tradition as part of the liturgy of **the Day of Atonement**. This is appropriate, since Jesus said that Jonah is a sign of Jesus death and resurrection. In the New Testament, Jesus says how **Jonah is a picture of his death and resurrection**.

In fact, **Jesus himself compared the sea that Jonah was tossed into**, to a grave—Jesus' own grave in fact. Jonah is a picture of Jesus in our text today. When **Jesus would read Jonah, he saw himself** and told others so. Listen to Jesus' teaching on Jonah in Matthew 12.

Matthew 12:40 | For just as Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of the great fish, so will the Son of Man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth.

Just as Jonah would be thrown overboard and into the belly of the fish to **calm the storm of his own sin**, Jesus would be thrown overboard into the abyss to suffer and die for our sin. **How so?** Here we see that Jonah is seen as a **scapegoat**, a **sacrifice**, and a **savior**.

Jonah, a Scapegoat

On the Day of Atonement, the high priest to take two goats and cast lots over them. One goat was singled out to die while the other was driven into the wilderness (Lev 16:8–10).¹⁵ These scapegoats bore the sins of the community and atoned for those sins by death and banishment. **Jonah is a sort of scapegoat too**, but a very imperfect one: his journey into the darkness and his selection by lot to die came with sinful motives. The true scapegoat is Jesus, the Lamb of God who takes away our sin. He freely took the role of both goats—dying for sin and bearing the separation from God that sin brings—to bring us back into the presence of the Father.¹⁶

Jonah, a Sacrifice

The ship's crew saw that they would incur **guilt in the sacrifice** as **they threw Jonah overboard**, and yet to their amazement **they found salvation through the sacrifice**. God's storm ended when Jonah was thrown overboard. As he was sacrificed, the ship's crew was saved. All of this shines a light on how the death of **Christ is a demonstration of God's love for us**. We crucified the Son of God—that's our guilt in the sacrifice. Yet, like Jonah, **Jesus chose to lay down his life for us**—that is our salvation through the sacrifice. There is, of course, this obvious and very great difference between Jonah and Jesus: **Jonah was thrown into the sea on account of his own sins**; Jesus was nailed to the cross on account of your sins and mine. **Jesus had no sins of his own** and therefore was uniquely in a position to offer himself as the sacrifice for our sins.

Bearing your sin and enduring your punishment, Christ was **stretched out on a pole**, suspended between heaven and earth and rejected by both. **Christ went into the eye of the storm and offered himself** as the sacrifice **absorbing the judgment of God**. He endured all that hell is on the cross, so that you would never know what hell is like.¹⁷

Jonah, a Savior

We will see later that Jonah **will prophecy Jesus' resurrection** by coming out of the sea, out of the fish, and onto the dry land. He will make his way to Nineveh and preach **repentance, sparing these hell-deserving sinners**, and granting them **God's gracious covenant love and kindness**. The people there will receive God's salvation. This is the sign of Jonah!

THE SALVATION OF THE LOST

Not only would Jonah be greatly benefited by this storm, but the **lost sailors would come to know the true God** even through the prophet's disobedience. It just goes to show you that salvation is not of any of his leaders. At best we are very imperfect tools. But salvation is of the Lord! Look at how God awakens the sailors to the fact that he is the one true and living God, and there is no other, as these pagan Phoenicians had wrongly thought.

¹⁵ Janet Howe Gaines, *Forgiveness in a Wounded World: Jonah's Dilemma* (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2003), 148.

¹⁶ Iain M. Duguid, *Jonah: Grace for Sinners and Saints* (New Growth Press, 2019), 19.

¹⁷ Colin S. Smith, *Jonah: Navigating a God-centered Life* (Ross-shire, Scotland: Christian Focus Publications, 2012), Kindle edition.

Jonah 1:16 | Then the men feared the LORD exceedingly, and they offered a sacrifice to the LORD and made vows.

Look at the incredible response of the heathen sailors. They turn their hearts to Yahweh. Notice **they are using God's covenant name!**

It turns out Jonah's storm didn't just do him some good; it had a radically beneficial effect on others too. The thunderous rainstorm caused enough fear among the unbelieving to prepare them for a God encounter of their own. **These formerly pagan sailors were now having a worship service**, making vows and dedicating themselves to the Lord God, creator of heaven and earth. But what happens to Jonah? They throw him overboard.

The men on the ship's deck stared at each other, mouths open. The captain cocked his head and lifted an eye to the cloudless sky he had truly never expected to see again. He shifted his gaze to his battered crew and saw that even the hardest of them smiled at their good fortune. **"A sacrifice to the Lord of heaven and earth, the God of Jonah,"** he said in a firm but reverent tone as the deck gently rocked beneath their feet. Perhaps they had saved one last animal, in case they had survived. In celebration of the Lord who had redeemed them, they had their first fellowship meal: a peace offering to the Lord. They slaughtered the animal, maybe a goat or a lamb. The sea was now calm. In great awe and fear and celebration, they gave profound thanks to the Lord who had mercy on them.

THE SOVEREIGNTY OF GOD

Jonah 1:17 | And the LORD appointed a great fish to swallow up Jonah. And Jonah was in the belly of the fish three days and three nights.

Jonah's body hit the water, and suddenly, he plunged downward. It must've felt like thousands of icy fingers were taking hold of his body and pulling him ever downward. He struggled but soon became all the more entangled in seaweed, and testifies, "weeds were wrapped about my head" (2:5). He thrashed about trying to free himself. He needed air. His lungs were burning. His mind was fading to black. "This is it."

Jonah's soul was about to be released to God. He would appear before him at any moment. *"This is the end,"* he must have thought. But something completely strange and unexpected happened. **Jonah felt some creature swallowing him.** His surroundings had suddenly changed. Jonah was contained on all sides by something soft, wet, smelly. He pushed against the confining space. It pressed tightly in on Jonah forcing the little oxygen left in his lungs through his mouth, and then he inhaled expecting his lungs to fill with water, yet somehow, he drew in air. Just when Jonah thought God was finished with him, it was actually just the beginning of a new chapter. **Three days and three nights** he would spend in the belly of the great fish. And it would be a prayer meeting like no other. God had rescued his prophet. In his sovereignty he sent the fish. In his love, he was sanctifying his prophet.

It was **"the LORD" who appointed this fish to swallow up Jonah.** If you've hit rock bottom, you know you are either going to cling to God and grow your faith, or you are going to check out and try to escape. We are called to grow from **"one level of glory to the next."** That took Jonah three days in the belly of the great fish. God knows how long we need at rock bottom to do his work. He knows best, and he wants your best and my best. Here is the comfort: if you belong to the Lord, you are in his good hands. The worst situation you are facing might turn out to draw you closer to God than ever before.

Conclusion

During the summer after my junior year of college, I worked as an iron worker at **National Bullet Proof, near Chicago, Illinois.** We made bullet resistant doors and windows made of steel. That steel came to us cold and hard and flat. We had to put it under an immense amount of pressure to bend

it. At times we would **use 20,000 pounds on a tool and die machine to crush that steel and form it** into what we wanted it to be. We made bullet resistant doors and windows and wall panels.

God is making something far more precious. He crushes us and heats us up in the places he wants to bend us so that when he is done, we will be the exact form he wants us to be—**the image of Christ**. And we will be like those bullet resistant doors and windows. Even if the enemy comes at us, we are bulletproof from the fiery arrow of the enemy. His greatest schemes cannot defeat us, as long as we are in the master's care.

Yes, **God's presses do hurt**. There's pain and deep suffering in many of the trials you are going through. But let God form you in those moments. You may not like being in the belly of the fish, but God is humbling you so that he can use you. For Jonah it meant preaching to the Ninevites. For you, it is the expansion of God's kingdom in some way through evangelism or discipleship or both. But just know that fish has good purposes for you. That fish is going to get you where you need to be for God's kingdom purposes.