

WHEN LIFE SEEMS TO SWALLOW YOU WHOLE - Thoughts on God's Will from the Book of Jonah - Part two
Sunday , July 5th - 6:30 p.m. Pastor Don Horban, Cedarview Community Church, Newmarket, ON

Jonah 1:6-16 - "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." [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. [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?" [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." [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. [11] 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. [12] He 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." [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. [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." [15] So they picked up Jonah and hurled him into the sea, and the sea ceased from its raging. [16] Then the men feared the Lord exceedingly, and they offered a sacrifice to the Lord and made vows."

Last week we began our study with Jonah running from God's call. He was disappointed with God because God was more gracious to the pagan Ninevites than Jonah's sense of justice would allow. And isn't it nice to study those flaws in the heart of Jonah rather than our own? Today the story unfolds in more detail:

- 1) **THERE IS NO RUNNING FROM THE EYE OF GOD** - He has many angles. The wind, waves, sailors, and fish were all used to bring Jonah back to God. Probably Jonah never realized these were all manifestations of God's **grace** in his fugitive flight, but they were.

And there's another way these all point to God's grace. Remember this account of God's tireless persistence if you have an unsaved friend or loved one. Never write them off. God has ways to get into their skins you haven't thought of yet.

- 2) **MANY ARE AFFECTED WHEN ONE PERSON SINS** - This is so often missed, but it's incredibly important. Think for a moment what Jonah's sin meant to other ships in the area when the storm hit. What about the loss of income to many families in the trading business because of the cargo thrown overboard? What about the fear and agony of the sailors on the boat with Jonah?

We will see in a few minutes how God, in His wisdom, can work even these things for His glory. But the point right now is **the effects of sin are just as real as the sin itself**. Sin isn't just a **religious** thing. It's our world's number one pain producer. Children are hurt when parents sin. Churches are hurt when Christians sin. Think of David's dead son because of his father's adultery. Think of Achan's dead family because of the stolen gold. There is a long, pointed list of this in the Scriptures.

If this seems unfair, consider its opposite truth. With equal ripple effect many reap blessing when God's people forsake their sin - **2 Chronicles 7:14** - "....if my people who are called by my name humble themselves, and pray and seek my face and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven and will forgive their sin and heal their land."

- 3) **DURING THE STORM JONAH WAS THE COOLEST MAN ON BOARD** - This is all the more striking because he was the cause of all the trouble. He was the guilty party. Yet the terrified sailors had to come and wake him up. As sin settles into the heart it causes blindness. The capacity to care about the important diminishes. The Bible says it's like walking in the dark.

You can see this truth all through the Bible. The men who provoked the flood were calm and relaxed while Noah worked so hard on the ark. The people of Sodom were horsing around while Lot tried to warn them of God's anger. ***Between sin and repentance (if repentance comes) there is frequently a period of dullness.*** The individual doesn't see what's happening in his own life. This calls for tremendous ***patience*** and ***persistence*** in the witness of the faithful.

- 4) **THERE IS FREQUENTLY A BETTER REASON THAN WE THINK TO THE STORMS THAT COME INTO SOME LIVES** - God ***sends*** some storms. He is far too loving to just let people sleep through their sin and rebellion. Sometimes he takes away our false sense of comfort and security.

Look at **verse 5** - ***"Then 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."***

Have you ever considered God's loving witness to the ***other*** sailors with Jonah on that ship? Their false god's were exposed. They were forced to come to terms with the impotence of their religious practices. That's what storms do. They boil life down to basics. They reveal leaks. They strip away the distractions of routine circumstances and false comforts. When the storms hit the false gods will be the first to scam.

How different from **Romans 8:28-39** - ***"And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose. [29] For those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, in order that he might be the firstborn among many brothers. [30] And those whom he predestined he also called, and those whom he called he also justified, and those whom he justified he also glorified. [31] What then shall we say to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us? [32] He who did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all, how will he not also with him graciously give us all things? [33] Who shall bring any charge against God's elect? It is God who justifies. [34] Who is to condemn? Christ Jesus is the one who died—more than that, who was raised—who is at the right hand of God, who indeed is interceding for us. [35] Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or danger, or sword? [36] As it is written, 'For your sake we are being killed all the day long; we are regarded as sheep to be slaughtered.' [37] No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. [38] For I am sure that neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers, [39] nor height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord."***

- 5) **SEE HOW PEOPLE COME TO THEMSELVES** - Up until now Jonah has been a phony - a prophet of Israel running from God. We almost feel our own hearts exposed when he says he *fears* God but then doesn't *obey* Him - **Jonah 1:9** - "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 world is full of that kind of religious devotion. In God's eyes it is always empty and worse, fraudulent. Only the storm and the fish make Jonah stop and think. Here is the real explanation for the storm and the fish. Because God cares so deeply about the lost still needing saving light He can't allow that kind of inconsistent, impotent Christian witness stand uncorrected. There is simply too much at stake.

The kind of reflection Jonah experienced in the depths of the sea is meant to be repeated in our own practice at the only corporate religious ceremony Jesus commanded. Picking up on Jesus' instructions about the Lord's Supper, Paul said we were to *reflect repeatedly* on the congruency of our beliefs with our actions every time we came to the Lord's table:

1 Corinthians 11:28-32 - "Let a person examine himself, then, and so eat of the bread and drink of the cup. [29] For anyone who eats and drinks without discerning the body eats and drinks judgment on himself. [30] That is why many of you are weak and ill, and some have died. [31] But if we judged ourselves truly, we would not be judged. [32] But when we are judged by the Lord, we are disciplined so that we may not be condemned along with the world."

These words come closer to the theology of the book of Jonah than many realize. We are to examine *ourselves* so we don't experience the "*discipline*" of the Lord. It is never his first choice to send storm or trial. These are only the last line of His teaching grace in our lives, "*so that we may not be condemned along with the world*"(32).

- 6) **WHAT A CLEAR PICTURE OF THE WISDOM AND LOVE OF GOD**

Look at **verses 13-16** - "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. [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.' [15] So they picked up Jonah and hurled him into the sea, and the sea ceased from its raging. [16] Then the men feared the Lord exceedingly, and they offered a sacrifice to the Lord and made vows."

These are amazing words. Jonah is running from his *missionary* call. But he is only crashing his *own* life, not the purpose of *God*. This is always the case. God is reaching these sailors through Jonah's rebellion. They have long given up calling on *their* gods. They are now, albeit for selfish reasons, calling on *Jonah's* God.

Long before God reaches *Jonah's* stubborn heart, He reaches into the darkened understanding of these sailors. God is good - *really* good - at what He does.