

A Terrible Salvation
Jonah 1:11-17

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. 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 is attempting to flee from God only to discover that God is the Lord of the "land and the sea." There is no escape from God.

First: Hesitating to Choose. 12

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."

I've chosen this name for the point because we are all familiar with Elijah's famous challenge to Israel –

"How long will you go limping between two different opinions? If the LORD is God, follow him; but if Baal, then follow him." And the people did not answer him a word." (1 Kings 18:21)

"limping" = HB/hesitating, pass over, skip, dance, to become lame

When we hesitate to love God first and foremost, when we hesitate to choose God over pain, sorrow, etc, we are in fact, dancing around a decision that must be made. And until we make it, we are limping and are lame in life and in our witness.

At some point we have to choose: Is God, God? What does it mean if God is the God of my storm? What does it mean if God is not the God of my storm?

It appears that, once aware of the storm and its potential consequences, Jonah is no longer running from God, understands he cannot run from God and is the source of harm to those around him. But we still don't know if he's 'on board' with God's plan for Nineveh.

What we do know is that once the sailors learn that Jonah is the cause of the storm, they also understand that he is the key to stopping it. Jonah responds that it can be done by throwing him into the sea. Why?

- a) Repentance? - *"I deserve death for disobeying God."*
- b) Anger? - *"I would rather die than go to Nineveh."*

Is he submitting or rebelling? Is he refusing to choose between two terrible fates? We don't know. But our reactions to storms are often not easily discernable. We variegate between anger and submission. And it is an ongoing battle.

What is important is imbedded in Jonah's response –

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."*

There is a sense of responsibility here – for serving as a witness.

Jonah initially refused God because he did not want to evangelize pagans. But he now begins to show concern for pagans.

And the pagans are demonstrating more character than Jonah, God's prophet. He was willing for all of Nineveh to die but they are unwilling to throw Jonah into the sea – 13

And...God has convinced the sailors of what Jonah was unwilling to preach – that God alone is God – 14. And they sacrificed and made vows to God – 16.

"There are no atheists in foxholes." Teana and I actually know a man who accepted Christ in Normandy foxhole and whose profession was true. We don't know if this is a fox-hole conversion for these sailors or a momentary confession that will last only until it appears a greater god has created a greater calamity.

What we do know is that God is willing to bring Jonah and all the sailors on this ship to the precipice of unfathomable depths (no pun intended) in order to secure their salvation.

What we know so far from Jonah is that a bad day, a bad year, a bad decade, doesn't mean that God is against us. It may be the best evidence that he is for us. How long did these sailors fight against the storm? A day. A week? We don't know. What we do know is that God was weaning us from all other gods and defining himself as the only true God so that they would trust the only God who can truly calm the storm.

To do this, God often employs terrible means. Like Jonah, we will all 'break bad' unless God proves himself to be a 'terrible God.'

Second: Our Terrible God. 13-14

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."*

Psalm 47:2 – ESV - *For the LORD, the Most High, is to be feared, a great king over all the earth.*

Psalm 47:2 KJV - *For the LORD most high is terrible; he is a great King over all the earth.*

Psalm 65:5 – ESV - *By awesome deeds you answer us with righteousness, O God of our salvation, the hope of all the ends of the earth and of the farthest seas;*

Psalm 65:5 – KJV - *By terrible things in righteousness wilt thou answer us, O God of our salvation; who art the confidence of all the ends of the earth, and of them that are afar off upon the sea.*

Psalm 99:3 – ESV - *Let them praise your great and awesome name! Holy is he!*

Psalm 99:3 – KJV - *Let them praise thy great and terrible name; for it is holy.*

In our text, God hurls a storm that terrifies the sailors to bring them to verse 14 and Jonah to verse 17

It is, according to Hebrews 10:31, *“a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God”*

ILL - *The Horse and His Boy*. This book is unique in *TCN* series as being the only one where no one from our world enters Narnia; rather, it focuses on two young people, Shasta and Aravis. Shasta is an orphaned slave, miraculously saved as a baby and now seeking the freedom he heard exists in the land of Narnia. Aravis is a girl fleeing a marriage to an old man. Both live in the totalitarian country of Calormen. They are accompanied on their journey by two Talking Horses, Bree and Hwin, who also want to enter Narnia, where they once lived.

At various points along the way, they were chased by lions. The first encounter forced them to meet, as they had started separately and didn't know one another. A second direct encounter made the horses run faster than they thought they could and got them to a place of safety at a hermit's dwelling. Shasta, though bone-weary, was immediately given the task to run to the king of Archenland to inform him of a plot by Calormen to invade his kingdom and all of Narnia. In the end, it was only because they were scared by lions that saved their country and them.

Shasta succeeds in that mission, yet he is in a bad state: physically exhausted and mentally despondent. In that state of mind, he begins to drown in self-pity.

“I think,” said Shasta, *“that I must be the most unfortunate boy that ever lived in the whole world. Everything goes right for everyone except me. . . . And being very tired and having nothing inside him, he felt so sorry for himself that the tears rolled down his cheeks.”*

What put a stop to all of this was a sudden fright. Shasta discovered that someone or somebody was walking beside him. It was pitch dark and he could see nothing. And the Thing (or Person) was going so quietly that he could hardly hear any footfalls. What he could hear was breathing. His invisible companion seemed to breathe on a very large scale, and Shasta got the impression that it was a very large creature. And he had come to notice this breathing so gradually that he had really no idea how long it had been there. It was a horrible shock.

It darted into his mind that he had heard long ago that there were giants in these Northern countries. He bit his lip in terror. But now that he really had something to cry about, he stopped crying.

The Thing (unless it was a person) went on beside him so very quietly that Shasta began to hope that he had only imagined it. But just as he was becoming quite sure of it, there suddenly came a deep, rich sigh out of the darkness beside him. That couldn't be imagination! Anyway, he has felt the hot breath of that sigh on his chilly left hand.

If the horse had been any good – or if he had known how to get any good out of the horse – he would have risked everything on a break away and a wild gallop. But he knew he couldn't make that horse gallop. So he went on at a walking pace and the unseen companion walked and breathed beside him. At last he could bear it no longer.

“Who are you?” he said, barely above a whisper.

“One who has waited long for you to speak,” said the Thing. *Its voice was not loud, but very large and deep.*

“Are you – are you a giant?” asked Shasta.

“You might call me a giant,” said the Large Voice. *“But I am not like the creatures you call giants.”*

“I can't see you at all,” said Shasta, *after staring very hard. Then (for an even more terrible idea*

had come into his head) he said, almost in a scream, "You're not – not something dead, are you? Oh please – please do go away. What harm have I ever done you? Oh, I am the unluckiest person in the whole world."

Once more he felt the warm breath of the Thing on his hand and face. "There," it said, "that is not the breath of a ghost. Tell me your sorrows."

Shasta was a little reassured by the breath: so he told how he had never known his real father or mother and had been brought up sternly by the fisherman. and then he told the story of his escape and how they were chased by lions and forced to swim for their lives; and of all their dangers in Tashbaan and about his night among the Tombs and how the beasts howled at him out of the desert. And he told about the heat and thirst of their desert journey and how they were almost at their goal when another lion chased them and wounded Aravis. And also, how very long it was since had had anything to eat.

"I do not call you unfortunate," said the Large Voice.

"Don't you think it was bad luck to meet so many lions?" said Shasta.

"There was only one lion." said the Voice.

"What on earth do you mean? I've just told you there were at least two lions the first night, and-"

"There was only one, but he was swift of foot."

"How do you know?"

"I was the lion."

And as Shasta gaped with open mouth and said nothing, the Voice continued. "I was the lion who forced you to join with Aravis. I was the cat who comforted you among the houses of the dead. I was the lion who drove the jackals from you as you slept. I was the lion who gave the Horses the new strength of fear for the last mile so that you should reach King Lune in time. And I was the lion you do not remember who pushed the boat in which you lay, a child near death, so that it came to shore where a man sat, wakeful at midnight, to receive you."

"Then it was you who wounded Aravis?"

"It was I."

"But what for?"

"Child," said the Voice, "I am telling you your story, not hers. I tell no one any story but his own."

"Who are you?" asked Shasta.

"Myself," said the Voice, very deep and low so that the earth shook: and again "Myself," loud and clear and gay: and then the third time "Myself," whispered so softly you could hardly hear it, and yet it seemed to come from all around you as if the leaves rustled with it.

Shasta was no longer afraid that the Voice belonged to something that would eat him, nor that it was the voice of a ghost. But a new and different sort of trembling came over him. Yet he felt glad too.

The mist was turning from black to grey and from grey to white. This must have begun to happen some time ago, but while he had been talking to the Thing he had not been noticing anything else. Now, the whiteness around him became a shining whiteness; his eyes began to blink.....

He turned and saw, pacing beside him, taller than a horse, a Lion.....It was from the lion that the light came. No one ever saw anything more terrible or more beautiful.

Luckily Shasta had lived all of his life too far south in Calormen to have heard the tales that were whispered in Tashbaan about a dreadful Narnian demon that appeared in the form of a lion. And of course he knew none of the true stories about Aslan, the great Lion, the son of the Emperor-over-sea, the King above all High Kings in Narnia. But after one glance at the Lion's face he slipped out of the saddle and fell at its feet. He couldn't say anything but then he didn't want to say anything, and he knew he needn't say anything.

The High King above all kings stooped towards him. Its mane, and some strange and solemn perfume that hung about the mane, was all around him. It touched his forehead with its tongue. He lifted his face and their eyes met. Then instantly the pale brightness of the mist and the fiery brightness of the Lion rolled themselves together into a swirling glory and gathered themselves up and disappeared. He was alone with horse on a grassy hillside under a blue sky. And there were birds singing.

- C.S. Lewis in *The Horse and His Boy*

Aslan was willing to terrify Shasta, Bree and Hwin and even hurt Aravis, to save Archenland, and, in the process, save them all.

If Jesus isn't safe, no one is.

But just as Jesus has inherited eternal and infinite forever, we share in that glorious forever. And yet, most often, God makes us afraid to make us glad.

v 5 - *Then the mariners were afraid*

v 10 - *Then the mariners were afraid,*

v 16 - *Then the men feared the LORD exceedingly, and they offered a sacrifice to the LORD and made vows*

PS – It is also God's terror – 3:4 – ““Yet forty days, and Nineveh shall be overthrown!”” that saves Nineveh.

Terror is a demonstration of God's love and grace. Jonah and the sailors are living illustrations of the greater biblical drama; how God saves.

(If nothing else, but there is always something else – the law itself makes us afraid and run to Jesus).

Think of Israel cowering under Sinai –

Exodus 20:18-21 - *Now when all the people saw the thunder and the flashes of lightning and the sound of the trumpet and the mountain smoking, the people were afraid^[d] and trembled, and they stood far off¹⁹ and said to Moses, “You speak to us, and we will listen; but do not let God speak to us, lest we die.”²⁰ Moses said to the people, “Do not fear, for God has come to test you, that the fear of him may be before you, that you may not sin.”²¹ The people stood far off, while Moses drew near to the thick darkness where God was.*

You say, "Yes, but that was the OT God and not Jesus."

Mark 5:35-41 - *On that day, when evening had come, he said to them, "Let us go across to the other side." ³⁶ And leaving the crowd, they took him with them in the boat, just as he was. And other boats were with him. ³⁷ And a great windstorm arose, and the waves were breaking into the boat, so that the boat was already filling. ³⁸ But he was in the stern, asleep on the cushion. And they woke him and said to him, "Teacher, do you not care that we are perishing?" ³⁹ And he awoke and rebuked the wind and said to the sea, "Peace! Be still!" And the wind ceased, and there was a great calm. ⁴⁰ He said to them, "Why are you so afraid? Have you still no faith?" ⁴¹ And they were filled with great fear and said to one another, "Who then is this, that even the wind and the sea obey him?"*

If, at some point in your life, you have not been afraid of Jesus, you haven't met the real God.

...[Jesus] was never regarded as a mere moral teacher. He did not produce that effect on any of the people who actually met Him. He produced mainly three effects: Hatred-Terror-Adoration. There was not a trace of people expressing mild approval.

- C.S. Lewis in *God in the Dock*

Jonah's salvation is a terrible salvation. So is that of the sailors. And Nineveh too.

God causes us to fear him so that we will learn he is the only thing in life to fear. And, once we fear him, all other dread takes its appropriate place.

Are you afraid? You don't fear God enough.

Third: Divine Love. 12

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."*

If one word can be substituted for 'love,' it is the word....substitution. We know that Christ loves us because he substituted himself for us.

Jonah is not the best representation of substitution. We don't know Jonah's motive. But we know God's motive and we have experienced Jesus's love in the cross.

At its core, true love meets the truest need of its beloved at all costs and never without personal cost. Substitution is the definition of divine love.

We see this played out in marriage, in parenthood, in siblings, in a million different ways.

We decrease our time, energy, money, person in order that someone we love may increase.

Jonah was in this storm because he didn't want to preach God's mercy to foreigners. In the end, that is exactly what he does.

It is God's love and mercy, demonstrated through a storm that causes fear, that saves the sailors, Jonah and Nineveh.

IMP: Jonah misread all the circumstances to this point. He thought getting on the ship was God's goodness and running into the storm was God's hatred.

*Judge not the Lord by feeble sense,
But trust him for His grace.
Behind this frowning providence,
He hides a smiling face.*

We fear God because we know how much he loves us.
We know how much he did to save us.
We know how much he will do to keep us saved.
And this causes us to love him all the more.

Conclusion:

At this point Jonah takes up the role of the scapegoat. The sacrifice he makes saves them....Jonah is an example, e.g. of the Christian way....What counts is that this story is in reality the precise imitation of an infinitely vaster story and one which concerns us directly. What Jonah could not do, but his attitude announces, is done by Jesus Christ....Jonah is not Jesus Christ.... But he is one of the long line of types of Jesus, each representing an aspect of what the Son of God will be in totality... [and] if it is true the sacrifice of a man who takes his condemnation can save others around him, then this is far more true when the one sacrificed is the Son of God himself.

- Jacques Ellul

*Bearing shame and scoffing rude,
In my place condemned he stood.*

V 15 – “So they picked up Jonah...” – HB/lifted up

John 12:32 – “...when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all people to myself.”

Nevertheless, Jonah’s death in the sea could not have quieted God’s wrath. Only Jesus’s death could do that.

We must acknowledge God’s terribleness at the cross in order to rightly understand God’s holiness and justice, as well as his love in the cross. No attribute of God is exercised at the expense of another attribute.

Unlike Jonah, who was being punished for his disobedience and hatred toward Assyrians, Jesus was wholly obedient and is loving toward his enemies.

If you read Jonah in isolation, you might get the idea that God terrorizes people for no good reason and even perhaps that God is ill-tempered and vengeful.

But the moment Jonah sacrifices himself, as a forerunner of Jesus, not only are the sailors saved but he is too.....although once again, it is the terror of a fish that saves him.

Community Groups:

Read the text, 1:11-17

- 1 – What specific words or phrases tell you the mood in the ship bound for Tarshish?
- 2 – What are other biblical examples of God using fear to save people?
- 3 – How does God use fear to save us?
- 4 – What “terrible” thing has God done in your life that you would now describe as ‘awesome?’
- 5 – How can we **not** know Jonah’s motive in being thrown overboard?

6 – What are some possible motives? For instance, perhaps he is thinking, he will die, the sailors will be saved but Nineveh won't hear him preach and will be destroyed.

7 – How does the sea change when Jonah is thrown overboard?

8 – How do the sailors change when Jonah is thrown overboard?

9 – How does Jonah's sacrifice (willing or otherwise) reflect on Jesus' sacrifice?

10 – How are Jonah's and Jesus's sacrifices different?

11 – How do we misjudge God in good times? In bad times?

12 – How can experiences, even religious experiences, misguide us?

13 – Read Psalm 119:105. What is the true guide to God and us?

14 – Read these two equations and discuss them:

Behavioral Change – Heart Change = Temporal Change

Heart Change + Behavioral Change = Lasting Change

15 - What if I believed that every storm was sent by the goodness and mercy of God that demonstrated God's love to me and intended some greater good for me? How would that change the way I endured storms?