

*God of the Storm*  
*Jonah 1:1-4*

*Now the word of the LORD came to Jonah the son of Amittai, saying, <sup>2</sup> “Arise, go to Nineveh, that great city, and call out against it, for their evil has come up before me.” <sup>3</sup> But 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. <sup>4</sup> 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.*

- a) Jonah is a prophet of Israel
- b) His primary gift and calling is preaching
- c) But Jonah doesn't want to preach to Nineveh because Assyria is God's enemy and God is merciful (4:2)
- d) Instead of obeying, Jonah tries to run from God

Last week we noted David's realization in Psalm 139 that it is impossible to find refuge from God. The same is now true of Jonah.

This week we're going to see God's response to Jonah's disobedience.

**First: God's Pursuit of Jonah v 4**

Instead of going northeast to Nineveh, Jonah heads south and then west toward the end of the world as Hebrews knew it.

But God is going to prove himself a relentless lover.

*I fled Him, down the nights and down the days;  
I fled Him, down the arches of the years;  
I fled Him, down the labyrinthine ways  
Of my own mind; and in the mist of tears  
I hid from Him, and under running laughter.  
Up vistaed hopes I sped;  
And shot, precipitated,  
Adown Titanic glooms of chasmèd fears,  
From those strong Feet that followed, followed after.  
But with unhurrying chase,  
And unperturbèd pace,  
Deliberate speed, majestic instancy,  
They beat---and a Voice beat  
More instant than the Feet---  
'All things betray thee, who betrayest Me.'  
- The Hound of Heaven by Francis Thompson*

*Hurled* = throwing a spear

1 Samuel 18:11 - *And Saul hurled the spear, for he thought, “I will pin David to the wall.”*

God is pinning Jonah to the ship he chose instead of God.

How many times have we chosen something only to be pinned by it? Paul repeatedly refers to our lives in sin as ‘slavery.’

### Picture of John Newton

ILL – John Newton spent his later teen years at sea before he was conscripted aboard a Royal navy ship in 1744. But Newton rebelled and deserted. He was caught, put in irons, and flogged. His 20-year old lifestyle was so virally lawless that he eventually convinced his superiors to discharge him to a slave ship owned by a Caucasian man whose African wife imprisoned Newton, chaining him to a tree outside of her home in Sierra Leone. He endured that torturous slavery for two years. His situation was so desperate that other African slaves smuggled him food. Thankfully, Newton’s father had not forgotten about him and asked a friend and captain of another ship, to be on the lookout for his son. But after some time of searching, the ship was leaving the coast of Africa when someone spotted smoke from the land. The ship anchored only to discover it was the village where Newton was being held captive.

Read or listen to a condensed version John Newton’s story here -

<https://www.desiringgod.org/messages/john-newton-the-tough-roots-of-his-habitual-tenderness>  
or read Newton’s biography by Jonathan Aitken.

*There's no shadow You won't light up  
Mountain You won't climb up  
Coming after me  
There's no wall You won't kick down  
Lie You won't tear down  
Coming after me  
- Reckless Love*

v 4 - *Great wind* = v 1 – “that great city”

What ‘great city’ has God called you to against all desire and reason? What ‘great city’ has God called you to that makes you doubt God’s sanity or love? You are not alone.

- Sarah endured 25 years of childlessness after God’s promise was given
- Joseph endured decades of slavery and prison before he met his family again
- Moses spent 40 years running from Egypt and another 40 years wandering toward the Promised Land
- Daniel was kidnapped and subjected to a foreign power

How does the writer of Hebrews describe it?

Hebrews 11:35b-40 - *Some were tortured, refusing to accept release, so that they might rise again to a better life. <sup>36</sup> Others suffered mocking and flogging, and even chains and imprisonment. <sup>37</sup> They were stoned, they were sawn in two, they were killed with the sword. They went about in skins of sheep and goats, destitute, afflicted, mistreated— <sup>38</sup> of whom the world was not worthy—wandering about in deserts and mountains, and in dens and caves of the earth. <sup>39</sup> And all these, though commended through their faith, did not receive what was promised, <sup>40</sup> since God had provided something better for us, that apart from us they should not be made perfect.*

Do you believe that? God has “something better” for you than this world?

It’s either a ‘great’ city or a ‘great’ storm. You choose. Sometimes it is difficult to tell the difference, but one is with God, the other is without God.

### Second: Sin’s Storms

Every sin has a storm attached to it. It didn't look like stormy weather when Jonah bought the ticket, but a storm came sure enough. The full effect of our sin may not immediately storm into our lives but the horizon's darkening clouds should provide us with some warning about impending doom.

Every storm doesn't imply sin. That's one of the messages of Job. Even people who live well before the Lord endure storms.

*The Bible does not say that every difficulty is the result of sin  
– but it does teach that every sin will bring you into difficulty*  
- Tim Keller

Even pagan sailors assumed the storm was the result of someone's sin

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."*

- We can't treat our bodies poorly and have good health
- We can't treat people harshly and maintain relationships
- We can't put ourselves first and expect a kind world

Sin is suicide

You as an individual, a couple, a family and we as a church are, like Israel of old, supposed to preview the coming kingdom of God. We are a counter-cultural city set-on-a-hill encouraging others to choose light over darkness.

But no one can violate God's laws without consequences. The storm of sin strains the mast and hull of a ship until it violently breaks apart and is swallowed by the sea.

PS – And it isn't just us who suffer –

1:5-6 - *Then the mariners were afraid, and each cried out to his god. And they hurled [same 'hurled' as in v 4] 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.*

It is often true that those people around us are more troubled by our sin than we are.

Is your sin – your disobedience – your faithlessness to trust God with 'that great city,' drowning your wife, husband, children, family, friends, job, etc?

### **Third: God as a Storm v 4**

<sup>4</sup> *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.*

Israel does have a west coast that is on the Mediterranean Sea but for the most part, Hebrews were not a seafaring people, especially when compared to other nations like the Phoenicians. It may very well have been a Phoenician ship that Jonah boarded because Ezekiel mentions Tarshish as one of their trading posts (27:25).

*"The Lord hurled...a mighty tempest"* = *great rage* – This must have been an unusually potent storm because experienced sailors don't easily respond frantically unless there is real and imminent danger.

v 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.*

There is, in fact, a lot of fear in this first chapter:

v 10 - *Then the men were exceedingly afraid...*

v 16 - *Then the men feared the LORD exceedingly...*

Several commentators make the ship equally fearful, as though it was also a person suffering under the weight of God's wrath

Jason Sasson – translates v 4 as *“The ship expected itself to crack up”*

Albert Barnes – *“the ship thought to be broken up”*

J.H. Steck – the ship became a *“nervous wreck.”*

It is not easy...it is hard to see God in our 'great city' call and equally as hard to see God in our storms. But the sailors thought it (v 6) and Jonah knew it (v 9).

But life is hopeless if we do not see God in our storms. Hope only comes when we acknowledge that God controls all storms. Some commentators translate “the sea” as “that part of the sea” giving weight to God's 'hurling' a storm directly and only at Jonah.

We know that God sends us into storms –

Matthew 14:22-27 - *Immediately he made the disciples get into the boat and go before him to the other side, while he dismissed the crowds. <sup>23</sup> And after he had dismissed the crowds, he went up on the mountain by himself to pray. When evening came, he was there alone, <sup>24</sup> but the boat by this time was a long way from the land, beaten by the waves, for the wind was against them. <sup>25</sup> And in the fourth watch of the night he came to them, walking on the sea. <sup>26</sup> But when the disciples saw him walking on the sea, they were terrified, and said, “It is a ghost!” and they cried out in fear. <sup>27</sup> But immediately Jesus spoke to them, saying, “Take heart; it is I. Do not be afraid.”*

Mark 4:35-41 - *On that day, when evening had come, he said to them, “Let us go across to the other side.” <sup>36</sup> And leaving the crowd, they took him with them in the boat, just as he was. And other boats were with him. <sup>37</sup> And a great windstorm arose, and the waves were breaking into the boat, so that the boat was already filling. <sup>38</sup> 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?” <sup>39</sup> 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. <sup>40</sup> He said to them, “Why are you so afraid? Have you still no faith?” <sup>41</sup> 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?”*

Now we know that God also sends storms to us.

Some people falsely think that God doesn't send storms. But an unaware or impotent God is not our God. That is a charge made against false gods.

1 Kings 18:27 - *“Cry aloud, for he is a god. Either he is musing, or he is relieving himself, or he is on a journey, or perhaps he is asleep and must be awakened.”*

Our God is not:

- a) Musing – *Unaware (Open theism)*
- b) Reliving himself – *Uninvolved (deism)*
- c) On a journey – *Unable (territorial gods)*

d) Asleep – Unconcerned (pagan gods)

Remember what James says about Job as he tried to encourage his suffering readers?

James 5:11 - *Behold, we consider those blessed who remained steadfast. You have heard of the steadfastness of Job, and you have seen the purpose of the Lord, how the Lord is compassionate and merciful.*

The same thing is true of Jonah. He did not see God's love in the call to Nineveh and he does not see God's mercy in this storm.

- Naomi did not see God's mercy in the loss that sent her back to Judah

Ruth 1:20-21 - *“Do not call me Naomi; call me Mara, for the Almighty has dealt very bitterly with me. <sup>21</sup>I went away full, and the LORD has brought me back empty. Why call me Naomi, when the LORD has testified against me and the Almighty has brought calamity upon me?”*

How would you have felt if you were Ruth? Naomi interpreted her upcoming pregnancy as “empty.” But it was, in reality, the fullness of God in the soon-coming Jesus

Colossians 2:9 – *For in him the whole fullness of deity dwells bodily...*

“Oh no, Naomi. God has not dealt bitterly with you. God has highly favored you. But it will take faith to see this severe mercy.”

It's a “great” city or a “great” wind / a “great” God. But the same city that you think is going to kill you, in fact, saves you. But in this case, and often in ours, the salvation (a great fish) is as unexpected as the passionate pursuit.

It is said that William Cowper wrote this hymn just after one of his several failed suicide attempts. His friend and pastor, John Newton published it in a hymn book in 1779, titled, *Conflict: Light Shining out of Darkness* and it was accompanied by the text John 13:7 - *“What I am doing you do not understand now, but afterward you will understand.”*

*God moves in a mysterious way  
His wonders to perform;  
He plants His footsteps in the sea  
And rides upon the storm.*

*Deep in unfathomable mines  
Of never failing skill  
He treasures up His bright designs  
And works His sov'reign will.*

*Ye fearful saints, fresh courage take;  
The clouds ye so much dread  
Are big with mercy and shall break  
In blessings on your head.*

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

*His purposes will ripen fast,  
Unfolding every hour;  
The bud may have a bitter taste.*

*The sun may have a hotter core,  
But sweet will be the flow'r.*

*Blind unbelief is sure to err  
And scan His work in vain;  
God is His own interpreter,  
And He will make it plain.*

*- William Cowper*

### **Conclusion:**

It is not amazing that Jonah did not see God in the storm. Who would have seen God in the cross? Not angels. Not disciples. Not Mary. Everyone missed it because no one imagined God crucifying his own Son.

But that God in that storm brings us to a safe and eternal harbor.

And the cross forms the template for God's work in your life.

### **Community Groups:**

1 – What other places in the Bible did God chase someone?

2 – How did they react to God's pursuit?

Jonah didn't lock the door of his house and hide. He took a boat.

3 – What do you run to when you run from God?

4 – What do you avoid when running from God?

3 – Share a specific time in your life when God pursued you.

4 – Was God's pursuit gentle or harsh?

5 – Read John 13:7. How does time give you a different perspective on life?

6 – Read Ruth 1:20-21. How might you interpret differently what happened to Ruth?

7 – In your own words, redefine the phrase "severe mercy."

8 – What 'great city' (cities) has God called you to in life and you reacted negatively?

9 – How do we know God sent this storm?

10 – What kind of storms has God sent into your life?

11 – How does knowing God is behind the storms of life give us hope?

12 – What does the phrase "all things betray thee, who betrayest Me?" mean?

13 – In Jonah, God proves himself a relentless lover? Whom does God love in this book?

14 – What does James 5:11 tell us about trials?

15 – How do the first six verses of Jonah prepare us for what is coming?

16 – Compare Jonah's response to God's storm versus Jesus's response to the cross?