

Why is Jonah Still in Your Boat?
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GFC – 8-11-19

Awhile back, Pastor Deb and I heard a counselor speaking on enabling addicts and he asked this question: why is Jonah still in your boat? That question gripped me, and I knew I would preach on it someday. Today is that day!

The biblical book of Jonah is a diary of disobedience. It's a record of rebellion. Here's what happened. Jonah was one of the first prophets mentioned in the Bible. He is the first missionary sent to a heathen nation. Jonah 1:1-17 says:

The word of the Lord came to Jonah: "Go to the great city of Nineveh and preach against it, because its wickedness has come up before me." But Jonah ran away from the Lord and headed for Tarshish. He went down to Joppa, where he found a ship bound for that port. After paying the fare, he went aboard and sailed for Tarshish to flee from the Lord.

Then the Lord sent a great wind on the sea, and such a violent storm arose that the ship threatened to break up. All the sailors were afraid and each cried out to his own god. And they threw the cargo into the sea to lighten the ship. But Jonah had gone below deck, where he lay down and fell into a deep sleep. The captain went to him and said, "How can you sleep? Get up and call on your god! Maybe he will take notice of us, and we will not perish."

The sailors asked Jonah, "Tell us, who is responsible for making all this trouble for us? What do you do? Where do you come from? What is your country? From what people are you?" He answered, "I am a Hebrew and I worship the Lord, the God of heaven, who made the sea and the land." This terrified them and they asked, "What have you done?" (They knew he was running away from the Lord, because he had already told them so.)

The sea was getting rougher and rougher. So they asked him, "What should we do to you to make the sea calm down for us?" "Pick me up and throw me into the sea," he replied, "and it will become calm. I know that it is my fault that this great storm has come upon you."

Instead, the men did their best to row back to land. But they could not, for the sea grew even wilder than before. Then they cried to the Lord, "O Lord, please do not let us die for taking this man's life. Do not hold us accountable for killing an innocent man, for you, O Lord, have done as you pleased."

Then they took Jonah and threw him overboard, and the raging sea grew calm. At this the men greatly feared the Lord, and they offered a sacrifice to the Lord and made vows to him. But the Lord provided a great fish to swallow Jonah, and Jonah was inside the fish three days and three nights.

Jonah 2:10-3:2 says:

And the Lord commanded the fish, and it vomited Jonah onto dry land. Then the word of the Lord came to Jonah a second time: "Go to the great city of Nineveh and proclaim to it the message I give you."

I love that: God is a God of second chances! So, Jonah went to Nineveh to preach and the people repented of their sins. As a result, God did not destroy them.

Sounds good, but Jonah got upset with God. Why? Because he knew that if the people repented, God would be merciful and forgive them. Jonah 3:10-4:2 says:

When God saw what they did and how they turned from their evil ways, he had compassion and did not bring upon them the destruction he had threatened. But Jonah was greatly displeased and became angry. He prayed to the Lord, "O Lord, is this not what I said when I was still at home? That is why I was so quick to flee to Tarshish. I knew that you are a gracious and compassionate God, slow to anger and abounding in love, a God who relents from sending calamity."

Notice why Jonah rebelled against God. He was not running from missions or prophesying or preaching. Jonah was running because he wanted the Ninevites destroyed and he knew if they repented, God would show them mercy!

Have you ever done that? Got upset with God because you expected Him to really make somebody pay for what they did and then He shows them mercy? If you have – there may be a little Jonah in you! We want mercy for ourselves, but many times we want judgment for other people!

I could go a lot of different ways with the story of Jonah today. But I want to know: why is Jonah still in your boat? I am addressing two different people with that question: you and somebody you may be enabling.

Let's address you first: here's how you recognize Jonah in you:

Is there any rebellion or unrepentant sin in your life?

Are you running from the call of God on your life?

Are you mad at God for not doing things the way you want?

If any of that is true of you, the consequences will not be good! When Jonah ran away from the Lord, his rebellion caused a storm. And from that point on...it was all downhill. He went down to Tarshish, down into the heart of the ship, down into the sea, down into the belly of the fish. Jonah's life was spiraling down.

You see, once you decide not to follow God there's only 1 way to go... and that's down! A true Christian cannot run from God without God coming after them! He's going to call you back first, but if you keep running, He will design a whale of a situation to get your attention.

But understand this: if you go down, you take others with you! Your sin doesn't just affect you, but others!

The sailors in the story of Jonah were not in a storm they caused. They were in a storm Jonah caused!

Sometimes all it takes is one rebellious, disobedient person to take down a whole shipload of people.

- A person can be in a marital storm because of their spouse's sin.
- A family can be in a financial storm because of one family member's financial irresponsibility.
- A company can be in a storm because of the owner's sin.
- A church can be in a storm because of the pastor's sin.

The consequences of sin do not just impact an individual – but also those who are close to them - their family, friends and co-workers. You can be in a storm of your own making or a storm of someone else's making. But both of those are the results of someone being out of the will of God.

So, why is Jonah still in your boat? You must get ruthless with sin and Satan. 1 Peter 5:8-9 says:

Be self-controlled and alert. Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour. Resist him, standing firm in the faith.

The Bible also tells us to flee from lust, from sexual immorality, from idolatry and from the love of money. So, getting Jonah out of the boat involves both fight and flight! Fight Satan and flee from sin.

Too many of us are okay with Jonah in our boats. Jonah may be a besetting sin or an addiction or a fear or depression. It's different for all of us, but it's whatever is causing the storm we're in. Ultimately, it's Satan. The devil cannot be ignored or tamed. We must resist him in the faith. You must become a lion killer, not a lion tamer.

Some people just want to tame their problems, their addictions. They want to tame it and keep it around. NO! Lions must be killed or they will ultimately kill you. Don't think you can tame your lions. You must chase them and kill them.

Don't think you can keep Jonah in your boat and stay afloat!! That applies to you and it applies to rebellious people who are in your life. I want to switch gears here from talking about the Jonah in you to talking about the Jonah's you allow in your boat.

Let me say that there will always be rebellious people in your life. You can't choose your family or your co-workers, but you can choose your close friends and who you marry. When I say someone is in your boat, I'm talking about who you let get close to you, who is in your inner circle, who you are close friends with.

You must be careful who you let in your boat because you become like the people in your boat! Some of you are thinking, "I'm strong enough to let sinners in my boat." Okay, but 1 Corinthians 15:33-34 says:

Do not be deceived: "Bad company corrupts good morals." Become right-minded and stop sinning, because some people are ignorant about God. I say this to your shame.

Beware of letting Jonah in your boat! If you do, a storm is coming!

How do you recognize a Jonah? Here's some characteristics of a Jonah:

- **They are running from God and headed in the wrong direction**

The Jonah's in your life are the people who didn't really intend to go in your direction; but they are just with you for the ride. If you surround yourself with people who are running from God, mad at God, deceived about God – don't think it won't impact you! It will bring some kind of storm in your life.

That's another characteristic of a Jonah:

- **Storms follow them wherever they go!**

You know what I'm talking about: everything is going fine at home or work until a certain person shows up. They show up and the storm blows in!

We had someone in our family like that. Every time we would go to Tennessee to visit my family, everything would be fine and fun and drama-free and everyone got along – until this one person showed up. It was like the sun went behind a dark cloud when they walked in. You could feel the atmospheric pressure change! You could feel the storm brewing. Before long people were upset and arguing and that person would get upset and leave. Immediately the sun came back out and peace returned to the house. That's a Jonah because when Jonah leaves, the storm leaves with him!

- **Jonah can sleep while you are rowing the boat and fighting the storm**

They cause the storm, yet they do nothing to calm it! You are doing everything you can to calm the storm and they don't even seem to be affected by it! You're crying out to God and rowing as hard as you can, but Jonah's sleeping right through it!

- **Jonah will let you throw your money overboard**

Jonah's are the ones who are always "taking" from the relationship while never making a meaningful contribution. Jonah's will leach off you as long as you let them! They will let you spend all your money and time on them, and they will give you nothing in return. Nothing but trouble, that is! Because of that:

- **They will not jump ship, you must throw them overboard!**

Notice Jonah didn't jump ship, the others had to throw him off! This is very hard for Christians. We sometimes think that love means we must put up with anything! We sometimes even think that we cannot tell anyone "No." This includes children who expect parents to do their science project and co-workers who constantly need your help because they procrastinate. There are also many people who don't want to be responsible to work and pay their own bills. There are others always getting into trouble, but they expect you to bail them out. There are others who are abusive and they expect you to put up with it. It is true that we are commanded to love others. But sometimes the most loving thing to say is "No."

Sometimes, in our effort to help someone out of a crisis, we handicap them in the long run because they never have to face the consequences of their actions. They can stay asleep on the boat while you do all the praying and rowing! And people who want to violate your boundaries will try to make you feel guilty or selfish or unloving if you don't give in to their demands.

They will say things like: "How can you call yourself a Christian? How can you be so selfish?" But really – they are the ones only thinking about themselves and they desire to control you to get their own way! But you need to realize that no one can make you feel guilty without your permission. If you set a boundary and the other person doesn't accept it and withdraws or gets angry, then realize that is about them, not you.

Enabling people to stay in their addiction or other life-controlling problem will only hurt you and them. But when you stop enabling Jonah, you will discover that your Jonah will learn to stop depending on you to get them out of the messes they get themselves into. And you will find the peace and rest that you need, and the opportunity to move into what God is calling you to do.

So – here's some closing lessons on dealing with Jonah's in life:

1- Don't let him on your boat in the first place!

It's always easier to let someone onboard than it is to get them off ship. So many times we allow people into our lives or things into our lives before we fully know if the Lord wants them in our lives.

Beware of letting people into your life and then getting caught up in their drama! Whoever you allow in your boat; remember all their baggage comes with them! We can't blame other people for the storms in our lives when we were the ones who gave them the boarding pass to be in our boats!

2- Don't be in denial about Jonah.

The sailors asked Jonah: "What have you done?" (They knew he was running away from the Lord, because he had already told them so.)

They already knew who he was, but they were in denial. They didn't want to believe it. Listen – when someone shows you who they are – believe them!

3- Don't do all the work while Jonah just sleeps

Don't do what these sailors did, which was just to row harder. There will be no peace until you get Jonah off the boat!

4- Don't pay for Jonah's sin

Jonah needs to pay his own way!

Here's the main thing to remember:

5- Realize God will take care of Jonah!

Once Jonah was out of the boat, he found himself in the place God had prepared for him – the belly of a whale – which ultimately led him back to God's original plan. And when you allow Jonah to remain in your life, you are not helping them, but may be keeping them from what God has prepared for them.

God can't get your Jonah to the place He's prepared for him, if Jonah stays in the boat. We must allow God to deal with Jonah – which means trusting He has a whale waiting for them! Do not worry about Jonah! Just like God had the whale ready to take Jonah to where he should've gone in the first place, God will take care of your Jonah.

It may sound a little harsh. You may be thinking, I can't do that to them. But you need to remember that you did not die for them; Jesus did! You cannot save them; Jesus can.

Keeping them in your boat, allowing them to make you miserable and exhausted, is only hurting both of you. It's time you took a deep breath and said, "Jonah... GET OFF MY BOAT!" You don't have to do it in a mean way. You can do it very lovingly.

The best thing you can do for your Jonah is to love them, pray for them, and then get out of the way and let God handle them. He will do a much better job than we can. In fact, when we get out of the way, God can do miraculous things with both of you AND your Jonah. Besides...it just might mean that your Jonah finally has that encounter with God that they needed to have.

So stop trying to do the Holy Spirit's job today. Step back, take a deep breath, and get Jonah off your boat! The whale is waiting.

And regarding the sin in your own life - always remember: you have someone greater than Jonah in your life!

Jesus said in Matthew 12:41-

The people of Nineveh will stand up against this generation on judgment day and condemn it, for they repented of their sins at the preaching of Jonah. Now someone greater than Jonah is here.

Of course, that someone is Jesus! How is Jesus greater?

- Jonah heard God's call and said, "Not your will but mine."
- But Jesus heard God's call and said, "Not my will but thine."

- Jonah showed no care for the lost.
- But Jesus came to seek and save the lost.

- Jonah was thrown overboard for his own sins.
- But Jesus was thrown overboard for the sins of others.

- Jonah's sacrifice caused the storm at sea to cease.
- But Jesus' sacrifice caused the storm of God's wrath to cease.

- Jonah was swallowed by the great fish that saved him from death.
- But Jesus swallowed sin on the cross to save His people from death.

- God loved the Ninevites enough to send Jonah.
- But God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life.

Here's God's promise to us this morning: when we repent of our sins and turn to God, He will swallow our sins in Christ.

He will not throw us overboard because Christ has already been thrown overboard. He endured the wrath of God for us.

It turns out that when we hurl ourselves into the ocean of God's grace, He is there to save us and set us free!