

Jonah 1:4-16

Jonah: Man On The Run
Don't Resist God

In December, FBI agent John Wellman was fined \$1,000 for an October incident in which he was charged with disobeying traffic signs in Keokuk County, Iowa. While trying to locate a man in an investigation, Wellman ignored the directions of a construction crew to drive along the shoulder of the road and instead circumvented barricades and continued to drive on the pavement. Minutes later, he drove his car into 6 inches of freshly poured cement set out to resurface the road, resulting in a \$70,000 expense to the state.

Sometimes not listening can have some pretty messy consequences!

As we saw last week in our introduction to the book of Jonah, Jonah was a man who was on the run from God. We saw that we are all like Jonah in so many ways because as the Word of the Lord came to Jonah to tell him to go to Nineveh, the Word of the Lord has come to us in the Bible to give us clear cut commands for our lives.

Jonah was obedient to God as long as God's will was compatible with what he wanted to do. But as soon as God asked Jonah to do something that didn't fit in with Jonah's plans and desires he rebelled and tried to run from God.

Now as we left Jonah last week he was boarding a ship and sailing off towards Tarshish, in Spain, rather than going the other direction to preach to the people of Nineveh.

If you'll recall we saw how God had called Jonah to go to Nineveh and then verse 3 said, "*But*, Jonah rose up to flee."

"*But*" is a terrible word when it comes to our response to God's Word, but all too often it is part of our vocabulary.

We say, "I'll believe in Jesus Christ as my Savior. I'll go to church on Sundays, I'll study my Bible occasionally, I might even speak to some one else about their salvation if the opportunity presents itself. But..." and then you fill in the blank.

But - I'll never become a totally devoted follower of Christ.

But - I'll never give up my sheltered surroundings to go on the mission field.

But - I'll never submit to my husband.

But - Ill never obey my parents and honor them, and the list goes on and on.

Jonah said, "but" and we say "but", but now notice in verse 4 of Jonah Chapter 1, that God has a "but" of his own. God deals with disobedience in our life in whatever way is necessary.

Turn to Jonah 1 pg 816 read vs 4

Hebrew is a very expressive, picturesque language and literally verse 4 says that Jehovah flung a great wind into the sea. You get the idea that God's doing a toss! God was setting the stage to accomplish his purpose through Jonah. This storm was no accident. It wasn't just a freak occurrence. God hurled out this great storm and it was so severe that the ship in which Jonah was traveling was in danger of breaking up.

Isn't it interesting, the great lengths to which an omnipotent God will go to teach us a lesson? All through this book 3 things stand out:

1. The rebellious nature of people.
2. The sovereign power of God.
3. The love and grace of God.

Jonah is rebelling, God could have gotten his message of impending judgment to Nineveh through somebody else. God's not limited. He could have used any means he saw fit.

But instead God worked in Jonah's life, not only to accomplish his purpose for the Ninevites, but also to put Jonah back on the path of joy and blessing.

There was a time in Jonah's life when he was serving God. There was a time in Jonah's life when he knew what it meant to live in obedience to God. The greatest joy you'll ever know is walking day by day with God.

But now Jonah had figured that God had gone too far in asking him to preach to a nation that was Israel's sworn enemy. Jonah was running, but not only was he running from the purpose of God, but he was also running from the blessing of God and that's the last thing that God wants for our lives.

God wants to bless us more than we will ever realize and therefore what He does He does for our good, even though we don't always see it at the time.

I want you to notice though, up until this point God had permitted Jonah to carry out his plan. God has quietly permitted him to succeed and there's a good chance that Jonah thought he was getting away with something. God hasn't interfered to stop any one of the successive steps he has taken.

Jonah's been allowed to thoroughly make up his mind. He's been permitted to travel miles to the coast of Israel to Joppa. He's found a ship and been permitted to get on. In fact, apparently the weather was even good because the sailor's thought it was safe to set sail.

Jonah may have thought to himself, "You know this disobedience isn't as bad as I thought. What's really changed What's it really cost me?"

And often times we just stick our toes in the water. We just kind of ease into disobedience and because the house doesn't burn down, or we don't get fired from their job, we assume that everything is OK.

But in a real and literal way this was just the calm before the storm for Jonah. See, God can afford to wait. He's got plenty of time. But His delay doesn't mean he's not aware of what your up to, it's merely a demonstration of his patience.

But when the storm comes, watch out! God deals with disobedience in a our life in whatever way is necessary. And so at this point the storm was raging and...

vs. 5 (read)

Our sin always affects others.

Jonah wasn't the only one out there in that storm that had been "hurled" by God. There were mariners on the ship. The Hebrew word translated "mariner" is actually from the Hebrew term for "salt". These were "old salts" out on this ship. The crew was a bunch of experienced sailors and they knew enough to know that something big was up.

They knew this was no ordinary storm. They had set sail in clear weather and now the sea was a raging torrent.

It took a lot to scare a sailor. This is their element. These men were scared.

The majority of the sailing in these days was done by the Phoenicians. The Phoenicians

were polytheists. They believed in many gods and so they called a pagan prayer meeting and each man called on his god.

Not only that but they threw the cargo out of the ship so that it would be lighter and more buoyant and not as likely to sink.

This is their cargo. When they get to where they're going and they don't have any cargo they're in trouble.

When you and I run from God other people always get caught in the shrapnel.

There's no way around it. It may be a husband, it may be a wife, it may be children, it may be friends, but there's no such thing as the effects of sin just falling on one person.

But now notice while those people around the one who is disobedient are in turmoil, sin very often has the opposite effect on the sinner.

The sailors were afraid, they prayed to their gods - but Jonah, probably half out of exhaustion and half out of relief - was asleep in his cabin.

And verse 6 tells us (read 6)

Whenever we sin, our big concern is us. Whether it's stealing, lying, cheating, adultery, bitterness, an unforgiving attitude - whatever the manifestation of sin - it is always directed towards self. And the more we think about ourselves, the less concerned we are with others.

And you can watch it in the lives of people who rebel against God. How self-centered they become.

Even the pagans called on their gods, but not Jonah. In fact the whole time he was in that ship he never prayed. He didn't pray until he got down in the belly of the fish.

I think, at this point, Jonah didn't really care if they all went down. Jonah was to the place where he didn't care about his own life.

And he didn't seem to care about anyone else's either.

What a picture of the church today. While the storms are raging, society is on the verge of totally breaking up, people all around are perishing, and half the time we're oblivious.

There's a lost and dying world outside those doors. There's a society that realizes it's in trouble. People are afraid. They go to their gods, whatever they might be, for answers. But their gods of materialism and religion and power can't help them.

We're the ones who are supposed to have the answer. The answer is Jesus Christ.

And yet churches are full of sleeping Christians who are hardened through the deceitfulness of sin and they are not even aware of what is going on around them.

The sin of a Christian has tremendous effects. Not only will it bring hardness and self-centeredness into your life but it will just blow your testimony before the world.

For some reason, the New King James Version translators have the captain telling Jonah to call on his God, and they spelled God with a capital "G".

Reading over that you might think that the captain somehow recognized that Jonah worshipped the true God. The "Capital G" God in opposition to their "small g" gods. But actually there's no capital letters in Hebrew - whether your going to capitalize the word God or not is completely determined by the context. Here is should definitely not be capitalized.

The weren't saying call upon your *YHVH*, your true and mighty God, they were just saying call upon your *elohim*, which means "god" or even "gods."

Here was one of God's chosen people, an Israelite, prophet, a mouth piece for God and nobody every knew it. They couldn't tell Jonah from anybody else in that ship. He just blended right in.

What a rebuke. A pagan had to tell God's prophet to pray. An unbelieving man had to tell Jonah to call on God when Jonah should have been telling him to call on God.

Well by this point the storm is raging, the sailors are frightened out of their wits. They're experienced on the sea but they haven't seen anything like this before and in their paganism, believing that someone must have done something wrong to incur the wrath of their god upon them they cast lots to see who the guilty party could be. It was at this moment that Jonah arrived from below deck.

Read vs 7

Nothing in life ever really happens by chance. So when the lot was cast, the lot inevitably singled out Jonah.

Proverbs 16:33 says, *"The lot is cast into the lap, But its every decision is from the LORD."*

In this case, the lot was something like a pair of dice, made from the ankle bone of a sheep.

A man, who in those days normally wore a long garment, would squat down and spread his knees. and the dice were cast into the lap and God determined the outcome. Donald Grey Barnhouse paraphrased that verse "man throws the dice, but it is God who makes the spots come up."

And just as God superintended the storm, He superintended the lot to fall on Jonah.

Well this evoked a flurry of questions from the sailors and in verse 8 we read probably what's only part of the questions actually asked.

Read verse 8

James Boice points out how ironic this situation really is. Jonah had run away from God and was in this difficult situation simply because he refused to obey God and preach to pagans. But there he was in spite of himself, about to preach to pagans.

Its even possible that there might be a man or two from Nineveh among those sailors. God was about to show that his purpose will always be accomplished. Even if he chooses to do it by someone who is obstinately disobedient.

Sin has a devastating effect on our lives. It hardens us till we're insensitive to the needs of others and we care only about ourselves.

It destroys our testimony. It stifles our worship. It affects our witness.

Look what happened to these guys:

First these men were in total despair because they thought they were facing death and Jonah kept silent and didn't' confess his sin and give them the message they needed to hear.

And then they must have become terribly confused because look how Jonah answers their questions:

Read 9 & 10.

Jonah gives them the whole ball of wax.

He tells them that he fears (the LORD in all caps) that's YHVH, the god of heaven, who made the seas (they needed a god who was in control the sea just then) and the dry land (the place where they all would like to be).

And then he tells them "I'm a prophet. God had sent me to preach a message of judgment to the Ninevites but I refused, I'm running away because I don't want to obey God.

Now look how they respond to that. "Why have you done this?" The Hebrew literally says "What is this that you have done?"

They're saying, "What in the world have you done Jonah? We can't believe it."

Isn't it amazing when we run from God how stupid we can be? Everybody else can see it but us.

Later on we look back and say, "I can't believe I did that." Or "I can't believe I got into that relationship."

Persistent, rebellious sin in the life of a Christian only causes confusion to the people around them. It's like one man said, the culture around us looks at us in amazement and asks:

If the Bible is really God's word - why do you spend so little time reading it?

If the message of the gospel is really the only way to heaven - why do you keep it to yourself?

If the Christian life is so powerful, why are you so weak?

If prayer moves mountains, why do you spend so little time praying?

If Christ changes a life, why do I see your old self so often?

If Christ gives peace, then why are you so upset and anxious?

If Christ gives joy, then why are you always walking around grumbling about life and defeated?

If our life contradicts what we profess to believe it brings confusion into the minds of those around us..

“Why have you done this?”

When we begin to chose our way over God’s way.

When we refuse to obey him in the areas that He’s clearly shown us in the Bible we should be asking ourselves the same question: Just why have you done this?

We need to ask ourselves - has God failed me? Have I found a better friend? Have I found something more authoritative than the Bible. Have I found out that God’s unfaithful? Have I found that God discourages His people?

Has the world been better to me than God? Has it been more full and satisfying? Have I forgotten what its like to walk in the wonder of fellowship with Him?

Man, you press that question and force yourself to give an honest answer and it’ll drive you back to confess your sin and get back onto fellowship with God every time.

Unfortunately, Jonah wasn’t ready to be that honest yet.

But at this point he had been forced into a testimony about Jehovah his God. And verse 10 says, “then the men were exceedingly afraid.”

In verse 5 we were told that they were afraid of the storm, but now after Jonah’s coerced testimony they were exceedingly afraid, apparently more afraid then they were of the storm itself.

Why? You know what I believe? These men knew about Jonah’s God. They were sailors. They traveled from port to port in the Mediterranean Sea and knew about lots of gods.

They had heard about the Hebrew Creator God Jehovah. He was the God who had brought down the plagues upon Egypt. He had parted the waters of the Red Sea and then closed them to destroy Pharaohs army. He led his people for 40 years in the wilderness with a pillar of fire by night and a pillar of cloud by day. He had given them manna to eat and water from a rock. He’d leveled the walls of Jericho and caused the sun to stand still at Gibeon.

This was the great and mighty God of the Hebrews they had heard so much about and now hear they were in the midst of a seething, boiling storm that had apparently been caused by this mighty God. No wonder they were exceedingly afraid.

In desperation they asked in verse 11

Since Jonah was a prophet of this God they figured He'd know what His God wanted so the men quizzed him.

"What do we do Jonah"

- I. *God Deals With Disobedience In Our Life In Whatever Way Necessary*
- II. *Our Sin Always Affects Others*
- III. *God Can Get The Job Done With or Without Our Cooperation*

So he says vs. 12

That's surprising isn't it? You would have thought that by this time Jonah would have come to his senses and said, "Its obvious what God wants me to do!"

"God wants me to go to Nineveh, and we won't be safe until I do. Turn the boat around - let's go back then the storm will stop."

I believe if Jonah would have said that, the storm would have not only have stopped but they would have had a howling tailwind that would have jetted them back to Joppa in record time.

But Jonah didn't say that. Instead he said, "Throw me in the water."

Now Jonah didn't know that God had prepared a great fish to swallow him up. Jonah said throw me in the water because Jonah was willing to die rather than do God's will.

Jonah, in his disobedience, didn't know it but God is able to get the job with or without our cooperation.

God had purposed to reach out to the Gentiles through Jonah. Jonah had determined not to reach out to Gentiles, as long as he could preach to Jews he was fine but no Gentiles. Jonah was steeped in bigotry.

But now look what happens. Verse 13

In the Hebrew literally says, “the men digged to bring it to land.” You get the picture of these sailors digging into the water with the oars trying to save themselves and Jonah too.

I believe that God purposely gave us this information because he wanted us to see a contrast between the people around us and a disobedient believer. It's not supposed to be this way and yet so often it is.

Jonah was willing to let the entire pagan city of Nineveh be destroyed. Remember God said go and preach a message of judgment and Jonah refused to go because he knew how gracious God was and he didn't want the Ninevites to turn to God and God show them mercy.

He was content to let them perish because they were his country's enemies and he'd just as soon be rid of them.

But now here we have a group of pagan idolaters (just like the Ninevites) who do all that they can to spare Jonah.

They didn't know it but God's will at this point is that Jonah go into the sea and so they row and they toil but they can't get the ship to budge.

See Jonah hasn't been brought to a place of repentance yet. Jonah hasn't confessed his sins to God and gotten back into the place of blessing and obedience and so there's no way these sailors could get to the land with Jonah in that ship.

Finally, in desperation they cry unto God, verse 14, and say - **Read 14 & 15.**

As quickly as this unexpected storm had come up it was gone. Jonah hit the water, went down under the waves and suddenly they were left standing on a ship gently rocking on a calm sea.

This reminds us of a similar incident about a ship and a storm that would take place 700 years later. In the gospels we read about Jesus asleep in a boat traveling across the sea of Galilee with his disciples. A storm came up then too, only this time the sleeper was sleeping because of His confidence in God.

But the disciples didn't share that confidence and so they woke up Jesus and said, "Master, don't you care that we perish."

And Jesus stood up and rebuked the wind and the sea and instantly it was calm. And Mark tells us that the disciples feared exceedingly and said "What manner of man is this that even the wind and the sea obey him?"

If you've ever seen a storm at sea, long after the wind has stopped, the sea keeps churning and the waves tossing but in this case it all immediately stopped and the disciples feared.

Well that's exactly what happened to the sailors on board this ship.

Read vs. 16

In verse 16 we read for the 3rd time that these men feared.

The first time they feared the storm. The second time they feared Jonah's God as a powerful god among many gods.

But this time they feared YHWH and they offered a sacrifice unto Him and made vows.

In an ironic way God was already accomplishing his purpose in spite of his prophets stubborn rebellion.

I believe these men became believers at this point.

They feared the Lord.

They offered a sacrifice.

They made vows.

Again in verse 16 we find capital "LORD". This showed that the one they feared was Jehovah, the covenant God of Israel. Elohim was the common Semitic name for God. Elohim could refer to anybody's God. But when you spoke of YHWH (or Jehovah) you were talking about the God of the Bible. The true and living God.

Now I'm sure these guys had prayed to their gods on many occasions. But they never saw their gods do anything like what they had just witnessed.

They had heard the stories about the God of Israel before but now they had had a first hand demonstration of His power, and they feared Him. Not only in the sense of terror but they had a reverence and a respect for this God of action.

This 2nd thing they did was offer a sacrifice to Jehovah. In a true sense they were worshipping Him.

And then the 3rd thing is they made vows. And remember this was after the storm had ceased. This was after the danger had passed. If they had made their vows in the midst of the storm it wouldn't have been so impressive.

People in trouble will promise God anything if He'll get them out but 98% of the time they forget about their promises once they're safe. That's known as a fox hole conversion.

But these men were safe, the storm was gone, they were on calm seas and they made the vows to God as believers.

They were convicted, converted and consecrated all in one shot.

They began the chapter calling out to the pagan gods - they ended the chapter acknowledging the God of Israel and worshipping Him.

But you know the real focus through here isn't on these sailors. Actually they're just the supporting cast. The main character is Jonah and the sailors who we never hear about again, are merely there for 2 reasons.

1. To show us that God can do what He wants to do and His purpose isn't thwarted by man.
2. They provide a sharp contrast with Jonah.

A storm that was sufficient to turn hardened pagans away from their idolatry and to the true and living God wasn't sufficient to turn a hardened man back to the God that he once loved and served.

I don't know how that grabs you, but it frightens me. It frightens me to know there is a path that I could take which leads away from God.

And I could take it of my own choosing, God would not immediately bring Judgment or correction into my life and there's a good chance that if I tried hard enough I could justify my actions every step of the way just as I'm sure Jonah did.

And every time I take a step out that path I'd become just a little bit harder, a little bit

more calloused, a little bit more insensitive to the things of God, a little bit more self-centered.

And even though God might use me in spite of myself, and things might happen that keep others fooled, people might even become believers because of me, I'd still be on my way down and one day God would have to intervene in power and judgment to try to bring me back to the path of blessing I once enjoyed.

I have to admit I know what it's like to be in that situation. I know what it's like to be a Jonah. It's an awful thing and it breaks my heart when I see other people heading off in that direction.

You know what the key is to all of this? Never walk by feeling. Never let circumstances be your guide. But live by the clear dictates of the Word of God.

If you do, you'll never make an excuse for your sin because the Bible doesn't give you that liberty.

If you do, you'll never mistake an opportunity to go off in the wrong direction as the leading of God because God's Word is a light unto your path and a lamp unto your feet.

If you do, you won't stray off that path of blessing that God has designed for all His children. But you'll realize with the Psalmist David, that in God's presence is the fullness of joy.

Perhaps you are with us today and you're not a believer. Oh you have a god like the mariners, but he's not the God of the Bible. The God of the Bible is not only all powerful, but He's holy. He always punishes sin. That puts us in a precarious position because we're all sinners. But the good news of the Bible is that 2000 years ago the Son of God, Jesus Christ, took our punishment for us.

And today, all who will believe that what Jesus did He did for them personally will receive God's forgiveness and become His child born into His family. Do you know Him?