

*It is more profitable to know Jesus than to know about Him.*

**Weekly Edition – July 22, 2016**

Jonah – Chapter 1 – part 11

**The Storm Gets Rougher**

*<sup>9</sup> He answered, "I am a Hebrew and I worship the Lord, the God of heaven, who made the sea and the dry land."*

*<sup>10</sup> 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.)*

*<sup>11</sup> 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?"*

**Three Reflections on Today's Text**

**First Consideration: What have you done?**

- 1) "What have you done?" The words are the first clear hint of accusation.
- 2) "What have you done?" is the question that God asks Eve after the first sin. (Genesis 3:13) It is what God asks Cain after the first murder. (Genesis 4:10) It is what Jacob asks Laban when Laban cheated him (Genesis 29:25) and it is what Laban asks Jacob in return when Jacob sneaks away. (Genesis 31:26) It is what the people demand of Samson when he gets them in trouble with their overlords. (Judges 15:11) It is the question the prophet Samuel put before Saul when he learned that Saul had committed sacrilege. (1 Samuel 13:11)
- 3) In asking the question, the people on the boat are done beating around the bush. This is no longer a polite inquiry, but an announcement of Jonah's guilt together with a demand that he provide an explanation for his actions.
- 4) But Jonah once more withdraws in silence, the prophet refusing to speak. It reminds us of our Lord, Jesus, who also refused to speak when pressed by Pilate: <sup>3</sup> *The chief priests accused Him of many things.* <sup>4</sup> *So again Pilate asked Him, "Aren't You going to answer? See how many things they are accusing You of."* <sup>5</sup> *But Jesus still made no reply, and Pilate was amazed.* (Mark 15:3-5)
- 5) Jonah has no explanation to give for his actions. He knows in his heart that his disobedience in the cause of all this anguish, but he refuses to step up and be accountable for his actions. He resumes his silence, just like when the captain had asked him earlier "What's with you, sleeping?" and Jonah offered no reply. He cannot justify what he is doing; there is no excuse for his actions.

**Application:** It is ironic, isn't it? We tend to get quiet with God when we deliberately stray from Him. When we know we are going in the wrong direction, but throw caution to the wind anyway, the last person we want to be in conversation with is the Lord, our God. What is my experience of giving God the "cold shoulder" or "silent treatment?" What is it that usually brings me back home? When I do return, what qualities of God are most amply available to me?

**Jonah**

*One of the Twelve Prophets*

1. The Word of the Lord
2. Jonah's mission
3. Jonah flees
4. The storm
5. The great fish
6. Three days in the belly
7. Jonah delivered
8. Nineveh repents
9. Jonah pouts
10. The gourd
11. God's mercy

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### **Second Consideration: They Already Knew**

- 1) They already knew. Up until now, we had no idea. But now we know. The narrator has withheld this important piece of information until just now, so we might have the missing puzzle piece just at this point – at the moment when the people on the boat “get it” – so that we might “get it” with them. So how exactly does this piece of the puzzle fit?
- 2) The information inserted here and now disrupts our expectations. Shouldn't this information about Jonah fleeing from the face of the Lord be precisely what the sailor's inquiry uncovers? But it turns out, they already know. So what information was uncovered by the casting of lots to identify Jonah's guilt? And what new piece of information has Jonah given them such that their fear is now sent to extremes?
- 3) The people on the boat do not know the LORD. They had heard the LORD's name when Jonah told them he was running away from him, but they had no context for that information then. It was just the name of another god, one among many that the sailors worshipped. Each had their own. None seemed particularly more powerful or mighty than another. No reason to suppose that Jonah's God is a big deal.
- 4) Yet now, as Jonah reveals to them that his God is the God of the heavens, the God who made the sea and dry land – the sailors realize that they are dealing with an altogether different God – the God of gods even!
- 5) That is why when the storm came up, even though they all knew Jonah was fleeing from his God, no one made the connection. The lots falling upon Jonah gave them the first clue. But at that point it may have been that the lots merely pointed to Jonah as being the only person on board not calling out to his God. Next is Jonah's testimony about the particular God from whom he is fleeing. And now the narrator inserts this piece of the puzzle – it is the LORD from whom Jonah is fleeing, and while these sailors don't know this God, they certainly can see that this God is powerful and mighty – indeed a force to be feared and reckoned with.
- 6) They finally put two and two together, as the judgment of the lots is sealed by Jonah's confession. Now they realize for the first time *which* God they are dealing with – the God of Jonah whose name is the LORD. Now they have every reason to believe Jonah is telling the truth when he says that the God he is running from is no less than the God of heaven, who made the sea and dry land. It is a high and mighty God behind this great storm and they suddenly realize that they are in even greater mortal danger than they would have imagined.
- 7) The narrator does not make any effort to prove the LORD is God, or that he exists, or any such musing. We simply get, right from the beginning of the story that God is: He exists. He is the most real thing in the world. This is not the usual philosophic sort of proof for the existence of God, yet it is a moment of deep understanding and genuine intelligence. It is a moment of emotional maturity – here is the big reveal: the most important insight of your life or mine can come to us in a moment of great fear.
- 8) The sailors believe what Jonah tells them simply because of the magnitude of his guilt. Jonah isn't bragging about his God; he is making a confession. Had he been bragging the sailors could have dismissed his claims about his God, but Jonah is confessing that it is the LORD; it is God of heaven and earth against whom he has sinned. With the great storm giving them every reason to believe in the greatness of Jonah's guilt, the sailors now have every reason to believe in the greatness of his God.
- 9) This realization now thrusts the sailors into Jonah's religion in a way that none of them would typically go in a pluralistic religious society. Each to their own and everyone to themselves, but now their very survival depends on these sailors trying to reconcile Jonah to his God. Ironically, the only reason Jonah's testimony about his God is so powerful to these non-believing Gentiles is because he is such a screw-up.

**Application:** Our most powerful private witness of our faith to non-believer is most often the stories of our own screw-ups, the things we made a mess of, the people we have injured, the injustices we have dealt to others – the most personal powerful testimony about God's love comes on account of being loved despite being such a broken sinner. How open and free am I with my testimony for what God has done for me? Do I remain silent?

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### Third Consideration: The Logic of Redemption

- 1) And they said to him, "What shall we do with you, so the sea will be calm for us?" It is no longer a question of what have you done, but the focal point shifts to what the sailors need to do about it. They honestly don't know, and the last thing they want to do is further provoke Jonah's God, especially as the already fierce storm takes on haunting new dimensions.
- 2) So they put the question to Jonah – hoping that he will offer some insight – that he might speak a word from the LORD, who they have learned, is hurling this great storm at them. Ironically, now these unbelievers are eager to hear a word from the God of heaven and earth from the lips of a prophet whose only job is to speak on behalf of God. Yet on account of his fleeing from God, it is the only thing Jonah has yet to do.
- 3) The sailors get that Jonah is not only the cause of the evil that causes this great storm that has come upon them, but also their only lifeline to the terrifying power behind it all. So Jonah holds the key to their future as well as his own. He must tell them what to do.
- 4) The narrator tells us at this point that the storm is whipping up in intensity and hence the sailors must now press with greater urgency – time is short. We need an answer now!
- 5) The storm is the LORD's way of impressing upon them their utter dependence on the word of the LORD. It forces them to consult Jonah, the prophet of the LORD, for instruction about how to propitiate (i.e. to make favorably inclined; appease; conciliate) this great and angry God. At first it was Jonah's guilt that caused them to believe in the LORD, now it is the storm that teaches them to believe in the word of the LORD.

**Application:** It is almost always the storms of life that turn us to the LORD and His word. We seem to be willing to try every other option first, and only turn to Jesus when we have exhausted all the other options. The storms seem to empty us of every shred of self-reliance to the point where we can only cry out in desperation. What are the most memorable stormy moments in the storyline of my faith walk? How did those stormy events change my walk with the Lord? Am I in the middle of some storm right now?

### Contemplative Corner

*(Thought for the Week)*

Father, we rejoice in the gifts of love we have received from the heart of Jesus, Your Son. Open our hearts to share His life and continue to bless us with His love. Open our hearts and minds to receive all of the wonder of love we are able to bear. We ask this through our Lord, Jesus Christ, Your Son.