

A. The LORD Chases His Rebellious Prophet

- i) And the LORD threw a great wind *toward* the sea
 - (1) This great wind became a great tempest *upon* the sea
 - (a) a destructive storm, a terrible storm, a true widow-maker
 - (2) And the ship "reckoned itself" to be broken up
 - (a) -personification of the boat
 - (b) -as if the boat is groaning with every wave and every surge, "I'm breaking up, Captain. I canna' hold it together!"
 - (3) The LORD is the source and power behind this great wind
 - (a) It is His doing and His purpose
 - (b) He is sovereign over the wind and the waves
 - (c) He is bringing this great trauma for a purpose: to get Jonah where He wants him to go

- ii) The Storm Was So Traumatic that the Seasoned Sailors Feared Greatly
 - (1) it takes a lot to make a seasoned sailor fear like this
 - (a) see "Deadliest Catch"
 - (b) so afraid that they started crying out to their gods
 - (i) note also that these men are not passive players in Jonah's story alone.
 - (ii) They are also men who rejected God (at this point) and follow after empty idols (who cannot save them)
 - (iii) Nature, particularly the powerful, reveal God (Rom 1:19) to all men
 - 1. Though they know about God, they do not know God
 - 2. Therefore, they cry out to their own gods
 - (c) not only that truth about sailors in general, but also that Tarshish sailors seemed to take pride in their maritime skills
 - (d) see Ezekiel 27:25ff where the Tarshishites are judged for their trust in their maritime skills and strength of trade across the seas
 - (2) so afraid that they threw their valuable cargo overboard
 - (a) Just as God "threw" the wind upon the sea, so they "threw" their cargo overboard, and will soon "throw" Jonah into the sea (same word for all three)
 - (b) They feared so greatly that they were willing to suffer tremendous monetary loss...this was a serious squall
 - (i) There are no atheists in foxholes
 - (ii) "My Kingdom for a horse" (Richard III in battle)
 - 1. People are willing to give anything for their lives

- iii) Jonah Responds by Going Deeper into the Recesses of the Boat
 - (1) But Jonah went down into the recesses of the boat, laid down, and fell fast asleep
 - (a) The Hebrew is unclear as to the timing of Jonah's descension, but word order seems to imply that Jonah went downstairs after the storm had begun
 - (i) Not only this, but it is also clear that he understood that this storm was well within the authoritative bounds of YHWH
 - (ii) God sent this storm, and Jonah knew it, and he still ran below deck and wearily collapsed
 - (b) "went down"
 - (i) deep down to the darkest part
 - (ii) keeps running from God down to the pit
 - (c) "laid down"
 - (i) exhaustion? tired of running? hopeless?

- (d) "fell fast asleep"
 - (i) word used for extreme sleep, exhaustion or weariness (Judg 4:21), the shellshock of terror that strikes one incommunicable (Ps 76:6)
- (2) Darkness of the pit when we run from God
 - (a) Weariness and fatigue of the soul when we run from God
 - (i) Running and running from the call and command of God lead us downward into deeper and deeper darkness of the soul until we collapse in a ruin of rebel despair
 - (ii)
 - (b) greater and greater despair
 - (i) This despair is shown in his attitude when he's called up out of the recesses of the boat
 - (ii) He would rather die in the darkness than turn toward the light of God through humble repentance
 - 1. Either he is so hard-hearted in hatred toward the Assyrians and in his disdain and bitterness towards God that he would rather die, OR
 - 2. He is so rebellious towards what the LORD wants, that he continues to go down, down, down into the darkness of his own hardened heart
- (3) Even in our rebellion, we cannot outrun the will of God
 - (a) There is a thread of thought that runs in some circles of Christianity that one must "keep himself in the center of God's will" in order to be used of God
 - (b) That may be true except for the pursuing grace of God!!
 - (i) Jonah is not a story of a man who walked in God's will and was used mightily for it
 - (ii) Jonah is a story of a man was used by mightily by God in spite of his unbelief and sin because of God's sovereign grace upon him.
 - 1. Jonah's story is not even that we should avoid foolish decisions (though we should), but rather that when we have strayed through rebellion or ignorance, that we should recognize the grace of God towards us, see Him rightly as sovereign gracious, and respond to that grace with repentant faith that follows Him
 - (c) There is also great comfort in this for the one who struggles against sin, for God does not let go, never gives up, always finishes what He starts, and cannot be held back from bringing His wayward children home. This is the beauty of the doctrine of God's sovereign power.

B. The LORD Chases the Ignorant

- (1) The others on board respond to their fear by crying out to their gods
 - (a) They are not passive players in this story, but active idolaters
 - (b) The amazing thing here is that God is using Jonah *in his rebellious run*, to reveal Himself to these ignorant pagans!
- (2) They find Jonah asleep and are indignant at his lack of religious fervor
 - (a) "Wake up, Sleeper!"
 - (b) They are willing to try any god who can help!
 - (i) Like the Athenians in Acts 17, who made an altar to "an unknown god", just in case
 - (ii) They recognize the limits of their power and that *someone* has power over this storm
 - (iii) At the same time that they know there is a God, the tragedy of natural religion is that they don't know who that God is
- (3) They cast lots and ask Jonah a series of interesting questions
 - (a) Casting lots was a way of determining divine decisions
 - (i) God reaches these pagans where they are, even in their ignorance
 - (ii) God uses such means as they line up with truth
 - 1. Note that Jonah did not disagree with the lots, but readily admitted that he was running from the LORD
 - 2. Even with the lots, and the admission of Jonah, the sailors were wont to throw him into the sea (they are to be commended for this!)
 - (b) The strange questions that they ask:

- (i) To whom does this evil belong?
- (ii) What is your occupation?
- (iii) Where do you come from?
- (iv) What is your country?
- (v) Who are your people?
- (c) Jonah responds by informing them of God's power, but he sees no redemption
 - (i) He tells them his country and people, and lays the blame for the storm at the feet of his God, YHWH
 - (ii) He conspicuously forgets to answer their question of his occupation as prophet
 - 1. He mentions that he worships the LORD (fears Him)
 - 2. He functionally denies that he is a prophet anymore
 - 3. He sees the only way out is death, rather than repentance
 - (iii) Often, when we run from the LORD we lose hope as we get overtaken by our sin
 - 1. We do not want to repent, yet, for that means laying down our own power and humbling ourselves
 - 2. Yet we fail to see the grace of God, so we are left with despair, for God is *only* a wrathful judge who sent this storm to destroy me.
 - 3. Notice that Jonah reveals to them that God is the Creator of all, is very powerful and sovereign, but he does not reveal that God is slow to anger and abounding in compassion (which he clearly understood at this point, acc. to 4:2)
- (4) At hearing of the LORD's sovereignty over the storm, the sailors become VERY AFRAID
 - (a) Even more afraid than their original fear
 - (i) Upon hearing that this god was the One who *made* the land and the sea
 - (ii) Their fear showed an ironic understanding of the LORD whom they did not know with Jonah's running from this God whom he did know
 - (b) Even in their hurling Jonah over the edge of the boat, they do so with trepidation for fear of angering God in case they were wrong
 - (c) Yet, they honor His power and "feared the LORD exceedingly", offered Him sacrifice, making vows.
 - (i) Note also that their sacrifice and vows did not come *before* their salvation from the storm, as a means to pay God off, but came *after* God's work to save them from the storm
 - (ii) This is the way of the gospel: God works to save us, we respond with *grateful* sacrifice
 - (iii) They are looking back at their salvation and giving thanks to the God who saved them
- (5) Here is the God who pursues us in spite of our ignorance!
 - (a) Even though these pagan sailors were ignorant of how YHWH really was, God pursued them by *using the sin of His own prophet* to reveal Himself
 - (b) They didn't learn everything about the LORD, but they knew something more:
 - (i) He is the God of the land *and of the Sea* (this would have been new)
 - (ii) He is more powerful than any of their own gods, for He *created* it all
 - (iii) We don't know what happened to them after this their response showed a deep reverence and a knowledge of where to find out more about YHWH (Hebrews' land)

C. The LORD Chases His Children in Spite of their Despair

- i) Jonah would rather be thrown to the waves than repent and fulfill his commission
 - (1) Some people say that his request to be thrown overboard is an honorable suggestion that he might save the lives of the sailors
 - (2) I disagree, for 2 reasons:
 - (a) He would have volunteered his own story before the casting of lots, if he was at all concerned with the well-being of these men
 - (b) God didn't want his death, God wanted his obedience to carry out the message of hope for Nineveh
- ii) Jonah has ceased to believe that God would take him back

- (1) He believed that what God really wanted was mere vindication, mere punishment, mere condemnation of a rebellious prophet
 - (a) He did not see this storm as the discipline of a father to a son (Heb 12)
 - (b) He saw this trauma as the angry, vicious, and condemning hatred of a spiteful god.
- (2) In his failure to believe in God's goodness towards him and in his failure to see that he could still turn to the LORD he was hopeless
 - (a) He had lost all hope
 - (b) It was better to die at this point
 - (c) It may even be true that he believed that he had to be "sacrificed" to this wrathful God, thus he didn't jump over, but had to be thrown over
- (3) In his despair, he did not even consider the option that he could turn around and fulfill his ministry
 - (a) Ironically, the sailors did!! They tried to row back to land and drop him off
 - (b) Oh, the grace of God! He used these ignorant pagans to lead Jonah to repentance, but his despair and self-centeredness overcame him.
- iii) In spite of his despair and his consequent lack of repentance, God had not stopped chasing Jonah
 - (1) "And the LORD appointed a great fish to swallow up Jonah..."
 - (2) Even in our despair and inability to see the hope of God's goodness, God has not given up on you. He pursues His children and by all means necessary finds the way to bring them to repentance and obedient faith that rescues them from the waters of doom.
 - (a) He still had to spend a few nights inside of a fish (they smell bad enough on the outside!), so this was no party or picnic...it was suffering
 - (b) God seems to use progressive tactics to turn us off of the way of rebellion and sin and onto the way of trusting obedience

D. God Sent His Son to be Thrown to the Waters and to be Swallowed Up for Three Days and Three Nights to Chase Us Down

- i) On the boat, one man was sacrificed to save the souls of the others on the boat.
 - (1) This is an example of substitutionary sacrifice
 - (2) If Jonah had not been thrown over, they all would have been swallowed by the depths of God's judgment
 - (3) As it was, the many were saved through the "death" of the one (Romans 5)
- ii) In the same way, all humanity is under the mighty storm waves of God's judgment and righteous wrath, but one man has "been thrown overboard" into the depths of the curse that we might be saved.
 - (1) Matt 12:38-41 – behold something greater than Jonah is here
 - (2) Rom 8:32 – He who did not spare His own Son, but threw Him over for us all, will He not also receive us with joy when we turn to trust in Him?
- iii) God pursues sinners to make them His own, and He does this by sending His own Son to die our death and be raised to new life that He would impart His Holy Spirit within us to transform us into the likeness of Himself for His glory and for the fullness of our joy
 - (1) Do you realize that God pursues you, O desperate one?! O fearful one? O rebellious one?
 - (2) Look at your God! Look at how shamelessly the Father runs to bring you home! How lovely is the One who loves like this and never gives up on a rebel son, but actively pursues him with loving discipline that brings him to know Him more and more.

'There is joy in Heaven among the angels of God over one sinner that repents' — but it is a joy which, though spreading through the concentric ranks, and reaching to the very circumference of glory, is deepest in the centre. It begins at the throne — the keynote of that song is struck by God Himself." — John MacDuff, *The Thoughts of God*