

Turn with me in your Bibles to Jonah chapter 1. Last week we began looking at this account of the prophet Jonah focusing on the call of the Lord and his response to that call. We saw that Jonah fled from the presence of the Lord. This afternoon we continue by seeing how this response of the man of God bore dire consequences not just for himself but for those around him as well. Hear now the Word of our Lord from Jonah chapter 1 beginning at verse 4.

Read Jonah 1:4-10

Pray

Here we see Jonah fleeing from the presence of God, forsaking the calling of the Lord upon him, and running as far away as he can. He has purchased passage on a ship headed to Tarshish, the complete opposite direction from where the Lord had called him to, and for what it seems his plan has been a success. But this prophet on the run will soon come to find out that despite his best efforts, despite what may have at first seemed like a providential providing of the means for his flight, that no matter how hard he tries he cannot escape the reaches of Jehovah. No matter how far he runs, he will soon find out that he cannot hide from the presence of the Lord. The Lord uses this time in the life of His prophet to teach him some very important lessons. He uses Jonah own sin and flight from the calling placed on his life to bring about a mighty display both of His sovereignty and His redemption. Put yourself in the mindset of Jonah for a second. How he must have thought everything that he had devised in his own heart was coming to pass. There had to be a sense of security that he had begun to feel knowing that he was going away, he would be out of the clutches of the Lord, he would be free from the commands God had given him. And yet the Lord would not let this peace of mind that Jonah was finally beginning to feel last for much longer. Remember friends, this account of Jonah is given to us an example. There is so much for us to learn from this prophet and his actions. How often have we found ourselves in the same state as this man of God, disobedient to the commands of the Lord, fleeing from the calling He has placed on our lives, and

finding comfort that for the time being our plans to escape the clutches of the Almighty seem to have been a success. But like with Jonah you must realize that there is no fleeing from the presence of the Lord. Your sin will find you out. And so this is our theme that we will consider this afternoon, that your sin will find you out. We will consider this by looking at three elements to the account of Jonah in our text: first, the storm of the Lord; next, the response of the sailors; and finally, the response of Jonah.

First, let us consider the storm of the Lord. Look with me again at verse 4, “But the Lord sent out a great wind into the sea, and there was a mighty tempest in the sea, so that the ship was like to be broken.” This was no ordinary storm. This was a mighty tempest that was brought forth upon the sea. The waves were crashing against the sides of the ship tossing it to and fro. The winds were howling and the rain was pouring. This was such a mighty storm that we’re told that the ship was like to be broken. There was a great fear that the ship being hurled about by the wind and the waves would utterly destroy it, breaking it into pieces, and causing all who are on board to perish along with it. Most of us have probably never been on a ship during such a great storm, but you can image how utterly terrifying it would be. And we are just normal people. It would be normal that we would tremble with fear during such a thing as this. But these were sailor, trained mariners who spent the majority of their lives on the seas. They surely would have had experience with great storms throughout their many years of seafaring, but we see in verse 5 that even they were afraid. How great must the storm have been for these seasoned veterans of sea to fear for their lives because of the tempest raging all about them. I’ve seen videos of ships in the midst of great storms, swells dozens of feet high crashing on the deck, the boat being thrown around like the bath toys by girls play with. Ive seen the fear in the eyes of the fishermen on those ships, not knowing whether or not the ocean will swallow them whole with the next wave. What a truly terrifying experience this must have been.

As I said, this was no ordinary storm. But what made it extraordinary wasn't merely how great a tempest it was. What made it extraordinary and so great was that it came from the hand of the Lord and contained within it His righteous indignation and judgement upon sin. The God from whom Jonah fled is one in whose presence there is fullness of joy, and at His right hand are pleasures for evermore (Psalm 16:11). Jonah had forsaken that fullness of joy and the pleasures of God for the curse of Jehovah found in Jeremiah 23:19, "Behold, a whirlwind of the Lord is gone forth in fury, even a grievous whirlwind: it shall fall grievously upon the head of the wicked." The text says that the Lord sent out a great wind into the sea. The Hebrew is actually much more emphatic and personal, more precisely translated it would say that the Lord hurled a great wind into the sea. The image given is the Lord throwing this storm out onto the waters, so that there is no mistaken that it came from His hand. Calvin says that Jonah wrote this in order to show "that a tempest arose, not by chance, but by the certain purpose of God, so that being overtaken on the sea, he acknowledged that he had been deceived when he thought that he could flee away from God's presence by passing over the sea." The Lord's righteous judgement was being poured out against His sinning servant, and every howl of the wind and every wave that crashed against the ship was bearing testimony against Jonah's wicked flight from the Lord. Jonah thought that by fleeing Israel he would be free, but instead he sailed right into the waiting fury of the Lord.

Friends, how often do we think the same way as Jonah, that we can simply ignore the Word of the Lord and we will get away with it. Be sure that you cannot escape from God's presence, even if you will not live joyfully in it. Sin brings storms and tempests into the soul, into the family, into churches and nations; it is a disquieting disturbing thing. So often we see terrible things happening around us, great calamities coming our way, even great tempests which threaten to utterly destroy us, and yet we so rarely stop to think about the sins that may be the cause of such acts of God's judgement upon us. Matthew Henry puts it beautifully, "God has many ways of

bringing to light concealed sins and sinners, and making manifest that folly which was thought to be hidden from the eyes of all living.” You cannot run from God. You cannot truly flee from His presence. You may feel as though your descent into sin has been a success at keeping you from standing before the face of God, but you can be assured that He will bring about a righteous judgement against you. You cannot hide from God. Where can you go from His spirit? Or where can you flee from His presence? If you ascend up into heaven, He is there: if you make your bed in hell, behold, He is there. If you take the wings of the morning, and dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea; Even there shall His hand lead you, and His right hand shall hold you. If you say, Surely the darkness shall cover me; even the night shall be light about me. Yea, the darkness hideth not from Him; but the night shineth as the day: the darkness and the light are both alike to Him. Truly, whether in the still small voice of the Spirit residing within you convicting you of your sin, or in the howling of the wind and the crashing of the waves of the Lord’s judgement, all will be brought to light. Your sin will find you out.

So we see this storm raging, threatening to tear the ship apart, and we get insight into the fear that has struck the hearts of these sailor. Let us now turn our attention to consider their response. “Then the mariners were afraid, and cried every man unto his god, and cast forth the wares that were in the ship into the sea, to lighten it of them. But Jonah was gone down into the sides of the ship; and he lay, and was fast asleep. So the shipmaster came to him, and said unto him, What meanest thou, O sleeper? arise, call upon thy God, if so be that God will think upon us, that we perish not. And they said every one to his fellow, Come, and let us cast lots, that we may know for whose cause this evil is upon us. So they cast lots, and the lot fell upon Jonah.” Though they were not responsible for Jonah’s sin, these men were guilty of their own sins and idolatries. God was perfectly just in sending this great tempest as judgement on Jonah and the sailors being caught up in that judgement as well. These mariners understood that this storm was not a normal storm but an

act of divine judgement. They were afraid and they cried out each one to their own gods. They weren't crying out to Jehovah by the guidance of faith, but instead were crying out to their pagan gods out of fear of death. In the midst of their cries they were also tossing overboard the wares that were in the ship. They were doing what good sailors know to do when threatened to be overcome by the sea and that is to lighten the load and discard everything that is not necessary. And remember, this is a merchant ship carrying goods. What they are throwing overboard is likely the very goods they were intending to sell to make a living. These men were willing to literally toss aside their source of income in order to try to ensure their survival.

But in the midst of all of this chaos and turmoil Jonah was nowhere to be seen because he had gone down into the sides of the ship; and he lay, and was fast asleep. Neither the wind and the waves nor the cries of the other men on the ship would awake him from his slumber. Sinclair Ferguson comments, "Now Jonah's ears heard no longer the word of God, or the voice of conscience, but the angry tones of nature, the storms and tempests of heaven, accusing him of his guilt." There was no sign of Jonah being anxious or nervous, but instead he was fast asleep. Perhaps Jonah had experienced many sleepless nights between his hearing the call of the Lord and this fateful night of the storm, and so he finally believed that he had fled far enough away from the presence of the Lord that he could get some rest. How true it is that so often when we are deep in the snares of sin that our sins slumber us to sleep so that we even become as Jonah, deaf to the dangers that surround us and blind to the judgement of the Lord upon us. How loudly must the storm around you rage before you awake from your slumber? How forcefully must the Lord toss you to and fro before you open your eyes and see the peril in front of you? Will it take someone else, a pagan even, to come and awake you so that you too become concerned with the judgement that is at hand? That is what it took for Jonah to awake and come out of his hiding place. "So the shipmaster came to him, and said unto him, What meanest thou, O

sleeper? arise, call upon thy God, if so be that God will think upon us, that we perish not.”

And yet, even then Jonah remained silent. He did not immediately confess his sin and cry out to God in repentance. He did not give the shipmaster an explanation for his slumber nor for why the great tempest had come upon them. He stood there and let these pagan men scramble to figure out what was going on. And in their desperate attempt to figure out what to do they turn to their last resort, something which ought to only be done when one recognizes the hand of God in a situation, and only to be done with soberness and sincerity. “And they said every one to his fellow, Come, and let us cast lots, that we may know for whose cause this evil is upon us. So they cast lots, and the lot fell upon Jonah.” They knew that this storm was the working of the Lord as judgement for someone’s sins, they just didn’t know whose. And so the lots were cast and they fell upon Jonah. The Lord not only displays His sovereignty over the wind and the waves, but even over the lots which were cast. Truly at this point Jonah realized that there was no more running from God. His flight from the presence of the Lord had abruptly come to an end. Why is it that Jonah waited until the last second before acknowledging his guilt before the Lord? Why is it that we oftentimes do the same? If you are in the throes of sin do not wait until the tempest is upon you and you are staring death in the face before you acknowledge your sins unto the Lord. Learn from these pagans who, though they were crying out to false gods, understood that there is a need to confront sin head on and plead with your God for repentance.

But Jonah did wait until the last second to express his repentance, and it came once again as the pagan shipmaster. Finally, let us now consider Jonah’s response, “Then said they unto him, Tell us, we pray thee, for whose cause this evil is upon us; What is thine occupation? and whence comest thou? what is thy country? and of what people art thou? And he said unto them, I am an Hebrew; and I fear the Lord, the God of heaven, which hath made the sea and the

dry land. Then were the men exceedingly afraid, and said unto him. Why hast thou done this? For the men knew that he fled from the presence of the Lord, because he had told them.” They ask him what is the cause of this evil that they are experiencing in the great storm. They knew that he was to blame and they wanted an explanation. They ask him what his occupation is. Was he a sorcerer or a diviner, a practitioner of magic who had cursed them? They ask where he came from and what his country is, wanting to know if his God could aid them since theirs were failing them. And they ask who his people are, in order to know if there is a reason pertaining to his lineage that God would bring about this judgement. They aren’t asking him these question out of anger but out of genuineness because they are out of hope. They know that Jonah is to blame, and so they do what they can to gain answers for why this was happening.

And Jonah responds, “I am an Hebrew; and I fear the Lord, the God of heaven, which hath made the sea and the dry land.” He does not continue down his path of sin, he does not attempt to convince these men that he really isn’t to blame, instead he confesses to these men, but more importantly he confesses to God. He says, “I am an Hebrew.” He proclaims that he is part of the covenant people of God. He does not deny who he is. He does not run from the presence of the Lord any longer. The jig is up. He identifies himself with God’s chosen people, with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, with Moses and Joshua, with David the great king. Surely these men knew of the Hebrews and had heard stories of their great victories over the toughest of enemies. Jonah is identifying with the people who God had saved from the hands of the Egyptians by parting the Red Sea and crashing those waters down upon the pursuing army. He is identifying with his people whose God destroyed the mighty kings of Canaan during the conquest. The sailors knew what it meant when Jonah said he was a Hebrew. They knew the God of the Hebrews and His mighty power. But Jonah doesn’t stop there. He goes on to say, “I fear the Lord, the God of heaven, which hath made the sea and the dry land.” Where previously he had tried to run

away from the presence of the Lord, now he boldly declares that he fears or worships that same God. That is his occupation: a God-fearer. And what he says to describe Jehovah here is so appropriate for the situation at hand. He is the God of heaven, which hath made the sea and dry land. The very sea which at this moment seems to be bent on destroying this ship and all who are on it is ruled by Jonah's God. The very dry land which is the place in which these mariners sought to go in order to reach safety is governed by Jonah's God.

Jonah proclaims the one true God to these men who have just spent so much time pleading with their false gods, and he confesses his sins publicly against the Lord of heaven and earth as is evident in verse 10, "Then were the men exceedingly afraid, and said unto him. Why hast thou done this? For the men knew that he fled from the presence of the Lord, because he had told them." How ironic, or better yet, how providential it is that Jonah fled from the presence of the Lord, forsaking his call to go unto Nineveh and cry out against it because he did not want to see those pagans be granted forgiveness, and here yet we see that Jonah proclaims the true religion unto these pagan men. He knew that Jehovah had not changed. The very same God who he knew would grant repentance unto the Ninevites is the very same God who is proclaimed unto these pagan sailors. Jonah tried everything he could to flee from the call of the Lord on his life, but he ultimately came to realize that he could not do so. So he submitted to the call of the Lord here. Friends, this is a display of true repentance. Jonah fled from the presence of the Lord in order to not have to go and preach to a pagan land because he knew Jehovah is a merciful God and would grant repentance, and here in an act of repentance he does the very thing he was trying to avoid doing by preaching unto these pagan men. Calvin comments, "If then we wish God to approve of our repentance, let us not seek evasions, as for the most part is the case; nor let us extenuate our sins, but by a free confession testify before the whole world what we have deserved."

Brothers and sisters, let this man stand before you as a shining example both of what not to do and precisely what to do. Do not be as Jonah who fled from the calling of God on his life by refusing to proclaim the Word of the Lord to those who are lost and dying in sin. Do not let your sin lull you into a slumber, making you deaf to the roarings of the Lord in calling you unto repentance. Do not wait until the last second to repent of your sins, but instead be quick to bring them before the Lord for He is kind and gracious and merciful and will forgive you of your sins. And when it is necessary to repent of your sins, let your repentance be just as bold, if not more, than the sins you committed. Sins against a brother or a sister must be repented of to them. Public sins must be repented of publicly. As our Standards teach, you must repent of your particular sins particularly. Let your repentance be as Jonah's, a means by which the unbelieving world around you can see the mercy of the Lord on display, and let it be a call for all sinners to come unto Christ. Cry out to your God, confess your sins unto Him, and do not delay, for your sins will find you out.