

Jonah 1:4-16

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[0:00] With the arrival of summer now upon us, we enter into the season of short-term missions trips.

One of our daughters, Joanna, landed in Brazil yesterday with her husband leading a team of about 18 over a 10-day period.

They are all enthusiastically engaged in setting their sights on gospel work there. And it's rooted in a Christian conviction, these trips that Christians often take all around the globe.

Namely, that the gospel of Jesus is good and that God has committed it to the furthest extent of all the nations.

And that His people are the ones who are delivering the message. How complimentary was the prayer of the Mulhollans this morning when they prayed that God has seen fit to rely on us to bring His blessing to this neighborhood.

[1:17] What is true in that sentence is true for Christians concerning the entire world. To this, then, we find the prophet Jonah to be a complete anomaly.

When we left him two weeks ago, he was on the run. He had been asked by God in the opening three verses to go on what might be considered a short-term missions trip.

He was to go some 600 miles north and east into a different country. And not only a country, but into the capital city.

Into the context that created the culture of the entire world. That was his calling. But he never got on the plane.

And it wasn't because his passport didn't come through or his visa wasn't in the mail. He simply picked up himself, packed his bags, hired a ship, and headed off in the opposite direction.

[2:33] And so, when we left him last, that's where he was. And we pose the question, what happens when God's own representatives, who He relies on to bring blessing to the world, who are given an assignment for Him, actually decide to reject God and turn their backs on Him?

Today's text gives us a partial answer. What happens when God's people fail to enter into, in this book, God's great cities and bring His blessing?

In partial answer, those who rebel against God will nevertheless be made, not of any account of their own, but they will be made, in some measure, an instrument to be useful to God.

And, all the while, their own disobedience will be held accountable before God. In principle, then, rebellion against God brings at least two things.

His mercy, in spite of us, and His justice, down upon us.

[4:13] Jonah's rebellion. And the present-day churches, as well. First thing that happens, when God's people decide, intentionally, to reject God's Word, is, havoc is wreaked upon those around them.

You know, there's an interesting thing. People who reject God often think, well, it's between me and God. I got some issues with God. I'm not walking with Him, and He's aware of it, and I'm aware of it. Well, we're all aware of it. But it's between me and God. No. God's people, who are chosen instruments to bring blessing to the world, when they live in rebellion to the world, create havoc upon those who are in the world.

Take a look at verses 4 to 7. But the Lord hurled a great wind upon the sea, and there was a mighty tempest upon the sea, so that the ship threatened to break up.

Then the mariners were afraid, and each one cried out to his God. And they hurled the cargo that was in the ship into the sea to lighten it for them.

[5:36] But Jonah had gone down into the inner part of the ship, and had lain down and was fast asleep. So the captain came and said to him, What do you mean, you sleeper? Arise, call out to your God.

Perhaps the God will give a thought to us that we may not perish. What a first movement in the text. Notice how it is demonstrating that the seafaring men who were innocent of Jonah's rebellion were now caught up in the wake of God's wrath that was coming upon him.

Their lives are in danger. So many ironies there for the Christian community. Well, I've got a thing with God, and he and I are not going on together right now.

By the way, have you seen what's going on all around me? Is God really present in all of this? South side of Chicago mayhem?

[6:42] Well, could it be that we're the very cause of it on occasion? Certainly was the case here. And look at what the citizens on that ship did to combat their fear.

They begin to pray. I mean, put it this way. When your life is threatened, it tends to make everyone religious. This is a bad way for us.

If there is a God in the heavens, and that is the result of what's coming upon us, get me out of this. In fact, they probably were saying, you know what?

To their own particular gods, because in that world there would have been many gods, they began to pray to their God, you get me out of this. I'm coming back to you.

I've got something for you. I'll make sacrifices to you. I'll live in light of you. And so those pleas began to be raised.

[7:51] But the truth of the matter is this. Where God's people rebel, others are carried away into their wake. Not only do they pray, but they work hard.

Verse 5, of course, says that when they were afraid, they cried out to their God. And then it goes on. Their pagan prayers are accompanied by hard work.

And they hurled the cargo that was in the ship into the sea to lighten it for them. There's this every indication here that they did everything they could to secure their own welfare.

In fact, the little phrase there that begins to speak about Jonah, who was asleep, it's a sense that he was asleep in the deepest part of the internal hold of the ship.

Someone probably came upon him looking for any cargo down in the deep recesses and there he is, asleep in the belly of the ship, avoiding God's call upon his life.

[9:03] This is the image of complete escape. There is a sleep that the Lord gives to the righteous, his beloved.

And there is a sleep that the rebellious seek that he will not permit. Jonah's in one of those sleeps. You know the kind of sleep when you know what has to be done, you know what should be done, you know what you're called upon to do, and yet you would just escape it all.

That's Jonah. Because in that unconscious state, that is the great escape. I think of God's call to the nations, to the great cities.

And the question of whether the church over the centuries has assented to that call and put their back to work and made their prayers known.

[10:16] Or to what extent are we corporately guilty of and individually in danger of being asleep at the wheel?

Interesting to me, what comes next, verse 6, the captain came to him.

You can almost envision the story. Sailor comes up and goes, you, just, you know, the place is rocking on the waves. You are not going to believe what's down there in the depth of the ship.

The guy who hired the ship. The captain finds him. And what a call this is. See it there, verse 6? He says to him, What do you mean, you sleeper?

Arise! Call out! To your God! God uses the citizens of the ship to actually pronounce judgment on his own prophet with the very words that he had called them to action to in verses 1 and 2.

[11:25] The very words. He had come, the word of the Lord came to Jonah, verse 2, Arise! Go to Nineveh! And now, the one whose life is threatened, because of his rebellion, looks at him and says, You have got to be kidding me.

The world is falling apart. It's going to hell in a handbasket. And you live your life as if you do not care. Arise and go!

We're all rising! We're all going! What are you doing? What a rebuke! It isn't just the word of the Lord that speaks to those who are following God but living in rebellion to Him.

Well, the very citizens around us could say the same thing. In other words, the world says, Hey, all hands on deck.

Go to your God if you want to go to your God. And I hope He'll listen to you. But we need all hands on deck. What a great word to the church in the present hour.

[12:45] What a great word to the individual who for too long has resisted God's call. Well, that's what happens when God's people reject God's word.

We create havoc upon innocent bystanders who get caught in the wake. they fear their own circumstances.

What happens then in 7 to 10 is interesting. This notion that the narrator continues in in regard to their fear gets accentuated by the end.

They will move here in this movement from fearing their circumstances because of God's people's own rebellion to learning to fear God's people because they're the cause of their circumstances.

Do you see it there? The sailors' fear is going to be enlarged when they determine the cause of their trouble. Verse 7, they set out to find the cause and they said to one another, come, let us cast lots that we may know on whose account this evil has come upon us.

[14:06] So they cast lots and the lot fell to Jonah. Now I've read when we cast lots we normally think of who got the short straw.

I don't really know how they did it here. If they did it in terms of what some writers might think they might have had a pair of dice on deck and the dice would have been covered half of them with just black and then the other half of the sides are white and they would roll and if two blacks came up until two blacks came up on someone that would mean in a sense no, not this one.

and they began to roll perhaps calling each person forward and they roll and roll and finally it comes to Jonah and two whites come up yes, this is the one on who this evil has come.

They cast lots which is met notice by what I would call the calloused confession of a loser. They said to one another tell us on whose account this evil has come upon us what is your occupation where do you come from what is your country what people are you that's a staccato like questions coming in other words you got something you got something to say as they're holding on for dear life and he says I'm a Hebrew and here's the phrase that I find astounding and I fear the Lord the God of heaven who made the sea and the dry land you fear the Lord?

they were they were afraid of their circumstances and he has this almost this kind of counterfeited faith that's able to navigate in the world in a way that says well I I fear the Lord actually the one who made the seas and the heavens it's an indication of the callous nature of his own heart this is how far he has gone God's word comes to him he is he is he's easily able to walk away from it and he's equally able to confess that he's living under it it's the condition of his heart it's true isn't it when we begin to reject God's word when we do speak of him it only indicates how hard our heart can at times be then the men verse 10 were exceedingly afraid do you see how their fear is moving

[17:08] I mean what do you and look what they say what is this you have done for the men knew that he was fleeing from the presence of the Lord because he told them he basically said look I'm one of these people who follows God and to be quite honest with you I got tired of God and he said go northwest and I've gone southeast and I've got no plans of going back and they say what is this that you have done it's almost this livid cry that's not fair what are you doing you know that you're fleeing from the voice of the living God and we are all in jeopardy because of it you've got to be kidding me well that rebuke lands and then you see the third movement and I want you to see how fear has moved in the text did you pick it up in verse 4 they were afraid of their circumstances by verse 10 they're afraid that they found the cause of this is the inactivity and the rebellion of those who claim to be following

God and notice how the whole text will end in verse 16 they will move all the way from a fear of their circumstances to a fear of the Lord how does that happen well it happens in this third movement

this is what God does when his people rebel they said to him well what shall we do to you that the sea may quiet down for us for the sea grew more and more tempestuous and he said to them pick me up and hurl me into the sea and the sea will quiet down for you for I know it is because of me that this great tempest has come upon you nevertheless the men rode hard to get back to dry land but they could not for the sea grew more and more tempestuous against them Jonah is aware that the world's needs will only be met when God's justice is likewise met he's the guilty one he knows he's the guilty one he knows that God is after him and he's aware that when

God's justice falls upon him he will therefore be the means by which God's mercy rests upon them so interesting to me that this is what he says rather than crying out you know that he's a sinner and making his own vows to God in other words you see here the heart of a man who's willing to look into the face of God and say so be it I understand that you're a God of justice if this takes my life to live in rebellion to you so be it because I'm not going I mean for some people they find this kind of an individual almost hard to understand I mean are you kidding me there are people whose hearts are that hard absolutely all kinds of us may be willing to look God in the eye recognizing that justice must come and say have at it because I'm done well they didn't feel that way look what happens to them verse 13 nevertheless the men rode hard to get back to dry land there's some indication here that they must not have been too far out of

Joppa they're trying to get back to the very place they set sail from they're trying to get back to dry land but they could not for the sea grew more and more tempestuous against them God was not going to allow Jonah to merely get on land justice must be served let me put it this way what happens when you rebel against God's call upon your life one you're going to create a nightmare for people around you two you are often the cause of nightmares swirling because of you and three God will put an end to it by bringing down his wrath upon you God will say enough from you and at this point the sailors amaze me they now here they are the ones who need a word from God go to work on behalf of God's rebellious prophet they're like wow we were here trying to save ourselves now we're going to try to save you anyway their heart is more open to the needs of the rebellious prophet than his heart is to his own need they've rebuked him by their voice now they rebuke him by their action they are working now to save his life but God will have none of that and so eventually they leave off their human effort to save this rebellious prophet and they throw their hands into the air and they make a prayer to

God saying that we're going to obey your word we know we've got one in our boat whose face is set like a flint against you and they say oh Lord let us not perish for this man's life like according to the teaching of Jonah's God he the innocent can go and the guilty are punished let us who are innocent not be punished for the guilt of this guy don't take down this ship for this son at least not all of it and then they go on and pray and lay not on us innocent blood oh Lord in other words if we've got this wrong if we're all mistaken and even he's mistaken and the storm is not a consequence of his own rebellion we don't want to be responsible for innocent blood we're not trying to get rid of him in that way he's not some kind of sacrifice for us they actually acknowledged finally oh

[24:52] Lord you have done as pleased you so they picked up Jonah and hurled him into the sea and the sea ceased from its raging then the men feared the Lord exceedingly and they offered a sacrifice to the Lord and made vows most likely found their way back to Joppa got off that boat the way I've gotten off a plane sometime coming back from some great city of the world and almost kissed the ground and they kissed the ground and they went to the nearest temple they could find I doubt maybe they didn't even take time to go to a temple they just they they said that guy was an idiot I can't believe we got out of there and we are going to thank his

God for letting us go and holding him accountable and they completed their vows and notice they feared the Lord God has a way of getting attention the attention of people that he wants to be merciful toward in this sense even these sailors their life fell apart there was a circumstance that made them willing to sit up and take notice they cried out and they learned to fear the Lord more than their circumstances more than the cause of their trouble and they learned to call out to the Lord in fear and what happened to Jonah well this is all we had in the text we can say that God is true he looks out for the innocent and he will not clear the guilty

I am I am hesitant in in this text to merely say oh isn't this a wonderful picture of the gospel that there's a substitutionary atonement that's made on behalf of the citizens of the world no my

understanding of the gospel is that the innocent willingly lays down his life for the guilty in this text it is the guilty who is forced to give up his life for the innocent and so where is the gospel here well if you're tracking with me and you like me count yourself to be one of God's people and you know what it is to at times reject his word to do life in your way know this his justice will be met and it has been met in

Christ who is the innocent one took on our guilt that we though guilty might be made righteous psalm 88 many of the psalms are picked up by the christian teaching as declaring something that is fulfilled in jesus and in psalm 88 we find the lord the psalmist saying god of my salvation i cry out day and night before you let my prayer become before you incline your ear to me your wrath verse 16 has swept over me your dreadful assaults destroy me they surround me like a flood all day long they close in on me together and that is a depiction of what jesus takes on the cross the very floods the very torrents the very waters of the guilty though innocent and this is the one to whom all jonahs must flee or i should say run toward and the point for many of us today is to recognize this god has given us a great calling to arise and go into the great cities to put our back to work to be part of the solution and to proclaim the glory of his name and if we resist we will create havoc around us we will be responsible for many of the dilemmas that surround us and god's justice will be meted out upon us oh thanks be to god that repentance!

or that forgiveness can be found in the innocent one who died for us let me put it this way we are stupid to think we can run from god he will put an end to it may the end of it be found in the wrath that he poured out on his son that you might arise and go back to work for the glory of his name if you resist god the strong winds of life will come upon you they will be god's winds he will chase you down he will bring you to justice or to his son and either way he will not clear the guilty our heavenly father we read this book and we we think of our own lives and how often we can just be asleep in the hull of the ship because we don't want to follow you we think even in our own lips on how we can feign obedience to you we think of our own hearts in regard to how we can obstinately stand against you and we think finally of your son who can take your justice for us when

[32:10] I think that God his son not sparing sent him to die I scarce can take it in that on the cross my burden gladly bearing he bled and died to take away my sin then sings my soul my savior God to thee how great thou art how great thou art help me help us to arise and go and live joyfully under your call in Christ's name amen