

A great storm

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- [0 : 0 0] Jonah chapter 1 to 16. Chapter 1 verses 1 to 16. Then the Lord sent a great wind on the sea, and such a violent storm arose that the ship threatened to break up.
- All the sailors were afraid, and each cried out to his own God, and they threw the cargo into the sea to lighten the ship. But Jonah had gone below deck, where he lay down and fell into a deep sleep.
- The captain went to him and said, How can you sleep? Get up and call on your God. Maybe he will take notice of us, so that we may not perish. Then the sailors said to each other, Come, let us cast lots to find out who is responsible for this calamity.
- They cast lots, and the lot fell on Jonah. So they asked him, Tell us, who is responsible for making all this trouble for us? What kind of work do you do? Where do you come from? What is your country?
- From what people are you? He answered, I am the Hebrew, and I worship the Lord, the God of heaven, who made the sea and the dry land. This terrified them, and they asked, What have you done?
- [1 : 3 5] They knew he was running away from the Lord, because he had already told them so. 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?
- Pick me up and throw me into the sea, he replied, and it would become calm. I know that it is my fault that this great storm has come upon you. Instead, the men did their best to row back to land, but they could not, for the sea grew even wilder than before.
- Then they cried out to the Lord, Please, Lord, do not let us die for taking this man's life. Do not hold us accountable for killing an innocent man, for you, Lord, have done as you pleased.
- Then they took Jonah and threw him overboard, and the raging sea grew calm. At this, the men greatly feared the Lord, and they offered a sacrifice to the Lord and made vows to him.
- Thanks, Eamon, so much, and I do invite you to keep that open in front of you, as we spend time in it together.
- [2 : 4 2] One of the books that I was reading during the week about Jonah was one by Tim Keller, and he tells the story of when he met an Irishman in New York by the name of Mike, and Mike had a grown-up son as well by the name of Robert, and Tim Keller speaks about how chatting to Mike, Mike had moved from Ireland to New York and had made a life for himself and for his family by working hard.
- But it was clear from Mike that the reason he was working hard was for the family, for the sake of providing for them. And then as Tim Keller was chatting to the son, to Robert, it turned out that Robert was a lawyer, and that Robert didn't have family, wasn't married, and worked hard as well.
- So he was a lawyer who advocated for those in difficult situations in the city. And what Tim Keller observed is that Robert was living for his work as an end in itself, whereas Mike was living not for his work, but for his family as an end in itself.

And the realization is that both of them were living for different things. And of course, what this highlights for us is that we all live for something. Bob Dylan sang about this many years ago.

Bob Dylan sang, you may be an ambassador to England or France. You may like to gamble. You might like to dance. You may be the heavyweight champion of the world. You might be a socialite with a long string of pearls.

[4 : 20] But you're going to have to serve somebody. Yes, indeed. You're going to have to serve somebody. Well, it may be the devil or it may be the Lord, but you're going to have to serve somebody.

You're going to have to live for somebody. That's the reality because we have been made to serve somebody. Jonah recognizes that in verse 9 of chapter 1.

He says, I'm a Hebrew and I worship the Lord. Or I fear the Lord. This longing to live for him is what this idea of worship means.

You think of what Paul says in 1 Corinthians. Whether you eat or drink or whatever you do, do it all for the glory of God. This is the idea of worshiping God, not just by singing on a Sunday morning, but in all of our lives, worshiping him.

We think of what Paul says in Romans. I urge you, brothers and sisters, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God. This is your true and proper worship.

[5 : 21] And so Jonah says, at least, that he worships the Lord. He lives for God. And so we just want to ask this question this morning of chapter 1 of Jonah. What does it look like to live for God?

What does it look like to worship God? It's a helpful question to ask whether we have lived for God for many years, just as a reminder what it looks like to live for God.

Or whether we're here this morning wondering, why would I want to live for this God, the God revealed in the Bible, revealed in books like Jonah in the Bible.

And so we're going to ask, what does it look like to live for God? What does it look like to worship God? So let's have a look as we ask that question. Verse 1, The word of the Lord came to Jonah, son of Amittai.

Go to the great city of Nineveh and preach against it, because its wickedness has come up before me. Now God tells Jonah to do something. And if you're familiar with the prophets in the Old Testament, usually what happens is that God gives the prophet his word, in the sense of here's the message that I want you to communicate to my people.

[6 : 36] And then the prophet does that. They go and give that word, that message to the people. That's the role of the prophet. That's what a prophet does. It speaks God's word to God's people. But Jonah doesn't do that.

In verse 2, Jonah, or sorry, verse 3, Jonah ran away from the Lord and headed for Tarshish. Now if you're familiar with the geography of it, you'll know that Tarshish is in the exact opposite direction to Nineveh.

So it would be like as if I asked you to go to Kerry, southwest of Ireland, and you went down to Kent Station, bought a ticket, not for Kerry, but for Dublin, and got on the train to Dublin and started heading northeast.

It's clear that by going to Dublin, you have no intention of going to Kerry. And as Jonah goes to Tarshish, it's clear that he's not going to Nineveh.

He's not going to listen to what God says to him to do. And in many ways, Jonah here is very kind of 21st century.

[7 : 39] So the religion of the day for many people, or the worldview of the day is the sovereign self. I'll rule my own life. I will do what I want to do.

And nobody will tell me what way to live or advise me what way to live. And this is reflected in Taylor Swift speaking in New York University.

She said this back in 2020. We are so many things all the time, and I know it can be overwhelming figuring out who to be. I have some good news, she says. It's totally up to you.

And that's the kind of the flavor of the day. It's totally up to us. And surprisingly, Jonah, this man who is supposed to be a prophet of God, decides I'm going to just do what I want to do, rather than what God calls me to do.

In some sense, it's surprising. Maybe it's not so surprising when you realize that the Ninevites were enemies of Israel. They were a very vicious people, incredibly violent people.

[8 : 42] Taking off people's heads was just the start of what they would do to their enemies. And so maybe it's not so surprising that Jonah doesn't see this as a great commission, even though Nineveh is described as a great city, a big city, a significant city.

And so what we see here is Jonah, he says, I worship the Lord. That's what his words say, but his actions, his life, tell us something very, very different.

And so we realize, what does it look like to live for the Lord? Well, saying that you live for the Lord, or that you worship the Lord, is not really enough. It's not less than that.

But it is more than that. What does it look like to live for the Lord? It's more than just saying that we worship the Lord. You realize, as Jonah tries to run from the presence of the Lord, how futile this is.

There's a kind of a humorous irony here that God sends, in verse 4, a great wind on the sea, and such a violent storm arose that the ship threatened to break up.

[9 : 50] Jonah tries to run, but he can't run from God. And God sends this storm in order to hinder Jonah.

This storm is an expression of God's right anger towards Jonah. It's an expression of God's right anger towards Jonah's sin, that he will not do what God calls him to do.

Now, it's more than that, as we'll see in the weeks ahead. But it is that. It's an expression of God's anger at Jonah's sin. Now, as we reflect on that, the fact that Jonah won't do what God calls him to do, and God sends this storm, begs the question, what's the relationship between the storm and the sin?

And again, Tim Keller, I found helpful on this. So he says, and I think it's very wise in how he articulates this, he says that not every storm in our lives is a result of our sin.

And we'll see that later with the sailors. Not every storm is a result of our sin. It could be a result of somebody else's sin. It can be a result of just living in a fallen world. And he's using storm figuratively.

[11 : 01] But every sin has a storm attached to it. Every sin has a storm attached to it. So every sin will have a consequence. And so sometimes it's dramatic and immediate, like God sending this storm in the life of Jonah.

Sometimes it's much more slow brewing. So we don't see the consequences too much further down the line when we reap what we sow. And so what we see here is that God sends this storm so that Jonah hopefully will realize that he is saying he's living for God, but doing something very different.

And that's an important realization for us as we think about what it means to live for God. That saying it is not the same as actually doing it.

And so we can learn from Jonah. As Frank Peters mentioned last week, something along the lines of walking into a garage doesn't make you a car. No more than walking into a church building makes you a Christian.

And so just saying it or going through the motions isn't enough. Our lives are to reflect the truth that we speak. And so what does it look like to live for God, to worship God?

[12 : 24] It looks like more than just saying it. Let's ask the question again. What does it look like to live for God or to worship God? Well, verse 5, all the sailors were afraid and each cried out to his own God.

So now we have these sailors on the ship that Jonah has boarded. This word sailors could be translated from Hebrew as salty ones, which I think is a great translation.

So if these guys sat beside you in Starbucks, you get a waft of the sea air off them. The saltiness of them was woven into the fabric of their clothes and the fabric of their being.

And what it's telling us is that these guys were very comfortable on the sea. Not like me. They were at home on the sea. They were very at ease on the sea, normally speaking.

And that was where their comfort zone was. Much like Mark Twain on the Mississippi. Mark Twain wrote a book called Life on the Mississippi. Spends hundreds of pages detailing what this river is like.

[13 : 29] It's breathtaking to see his knowledge of the river. He says, The chutes were lovely places to steer the boat in. They were deep, except at the head.

The current was gentle under the points. The water was absolutely dead. And the invisible banks so bluff that where the tender willow thickets projected, you could bury your boat's broadside in them as you tore along.

And then you seem to fairly fly. And I have no idea what he's talking about. But what is clear is that he knows the river well. And these guys would have known the sea well.

And yet, they are caught up in this storm that God sends onto the sea, hurls onto the sea. Not because of what they have done. Not because of a mistake they've made, or a foolish thing they've done, or a decision, or as a direct result of their own sin.

But because of what Jonah has done. They are caught up in the consequences of his wrongdoing. He's running from God. And now they're forced to face the consequences.

[14 : 34] And they realize, these capable guys, that they are out of their depth. And I guess part of the wisdom of being a good sailor, like part of the wisdom of being good at anything in life, is knowing where your limits lie.

So I've joked with some of you that I've been doing a bit of DIY on our house. And the thing to know about DIY is where the line is between do-it-yourself and do-it-somebody-else.

Call the experts. And I realize sometimes you only know where that line is once you've crossed it, and you've made the mistake. And then you're like, oh, I should have called somebody else to do this.

These sailors know where the line is between where their comfort zone is, where they're able, and where they're out of their depth. And there's wisdom in that.

It's interesting, the quote that I mentioned from Taylor Swift earlier on about how it's totally up to us in terms of how we live. She goes on to say, I also have some terrifying news.

[15 : 39] It's totally up to you. She realizes that being the boss of our own lives is actually a frightening prospect. And for these sailors, they realize that if they are in this ship on their own, with nobody outside of them to save them, it is a frightening prospect.

And so I wonder for you this morning, where is it in your life that you feel out of your depth? It may be somewhere that you're usually really comfortable.

It may be somewhere that you're usually very capable. And for whatever reason, this morning, this week, you just realize this is beyond me. This is outside of the limit of what I'm able to do.

I cannot get through this on my own. These sailors realized it in this moment. And so they start to try whatever it is that might work to get them through this.

In verse 5, they try a spiritual approach. All the sailors were afraid and each cried out to his own God. Then they try the kind of more practical approach, throwing cargo into the sea.

[16 : 49] In verse 5, they threw the cargo into the sea to lighten the ship so that the ship would ride a bit higher on the waves. So they're just trying anything and everything at this stage. And you realize how dangerous it is that they're willing to throw their cargo into the sea.

And enough cargo that the ship will be lightened. I mean, this is their livelihood. This is what they're going to get paid for transporting. And they're just throwing it into the sea.

And you realize how out of their depth they are, that they will try anything and everything to get them through this. And, you know, we still take this approach.

We do at times. People do at times. Where we will try anything and everything. When we're out of our depth to get us through whatever storm it is that we're facing.

I was watching a program recently where there was a psychologist talking to a lady who was really, really struggling. She had young kids, finding it really hard to keep going.

[17 : 53] And the psychologist, who I have a lot of respect for in a lot of ways, a very kind man, said to her, you need to talk to your mum. You need to bring your mother into your life.

You need to bring your mother into your life. Into the situations that you're facing every day. Now, that would have been fine advice, only for the fact that her mother had passed away three years previously.

And so this psychologist is, whether or not her mother can hear her, or what's actually true here.

But what he's thinking is, whatever works that can get you through, that's what you grab hold of. And just like these sailors, who are grabbing hold of whatever it is that might get them through, that is sometimes the approach that we're tempted to take.

The sailors, they don't know who God is, but they do at least know that they're not God. And that is part of what it means to live for God, to worship God.

[19 : 06] It's been heartbreaking to see in the news over the week, the fires in Los Angeles, and the homes and the businesses and the livelihoods being destroyed.

And it's been a realization that no matter what resources are there, no matter how much skill and expertise on the parts of the fire crew, they just aren't God in that situation.

Yesterday, where they're at is, the one fire is 11% contained, another fire is 15% contained, which means these fires are largely uncontained.

And the reality for them is that they are in way out of their depth. And your heart breaks for them as they face this destruction.

It's interesting, one lady who was interviewed by the name of Denise Doss, 63 years old, said she was anxious to return to her destroyed home. At least, she said, to say goodbye until we can rebuild.

[20 : 19] And then she said, I will let God lead me. Now, I don't know what her understanding of God is, but she understands at least as much as the sailors did.

I am not God. This is beyond me. And I need God to get me through this. And that is part of what it looks like to worship God, to realize that we are not God, and to realize that he is the only one who can get us through life.

So let's ask the question again, what does it look like to live for the Lord? What does it look like to worship him? We've seen it's more than just saying it, like Jonah was. It's realizing that we are not God, like the sailors did.

What next? Well, verse 7, the sailors said to each other, come, let us cast lots to find out who's responsible for this calamity. So these sailors, in a kind of a somewhat superstitious, generally spiritual way, they are trying to determine the divine will, and they take matters into their own hands in the sense of casting lots and trying to figure it all out.

You can imagine as they cast lots from Jonah's perspective, what must it have been like as he's watching this going on, is time slowing down, and is in the back of his mind, he thinking, there's no doubt that this lot is going to fall on me.

[21 : 57] This is my fault, and it is because of what I have done. Maybe he's thinking of something like Proverbs 16.33.

The lot is cast into the lap, but the outcome is from the Lord. I don't know, was that what he was thinking? But what's very apparent is how God is there in this detail in order to direct the sailors to Jonah, that God is personally involved here.

And we see that in the name that Jonah uses of God in verse 9. I worship the Lord, which kind of sounds impersonal, but when Lord is in capital letters, what it's translating for is the personal name of God, Yahweh, that is communicating to his people, I am with you.

I am for you. I am committed to you. And so what these sailors are starting to realize a little bit is that this God that Jonah claims to worship is the God of the little details of our lives.

Jesus says, are not two sparrows sold for a penny? And not one of them will fall to the ground apart from your father. But even the hairs of your head are all numbered.

[23 : 28] Fear not, therefore, you are of more value than many sparrows. This God is the God of little, the little details. And in verse 8, he's the God of all creation.

They grill Jonah lightly in verse 8, tell us who's responsible for making all this trouble for us. What kind of work do you do? Where do you come from? What's your country? From what people are you? This is the last question they ask of him.

What people are you? But it's the first question that he answers. I'm a Hebrew. It's as though he's leading with this. This is my identity. This is the most important thing about me.

And I also worship the Lord, the God of heaven and earth. But the most important thing for Jonah seems to be his ethnicity. However, what he says afterwards is true nonetheless.

That this Lord, this Yahweh, is the God of heaven who made the sea and the dry land. And as he says that, what he is doing is putting a bracket around everything in all of creation.

[24 : 32] The sea and the dry land and everything in between. This God who is so personal to be intimately involved with the details of our lives is also the God who has made everything.

This is the God who is revealed to us in the Bible that he is this powerful that you cannot compartmentalize him.

These sailors, they would have thought, well, you have a God of the mountain, you have a God of the valley, you have a God of this region, that region, the sea, the dry land.

What Jonah is saying to them is you can't compartmentalize the true God like that. He doesn't stay over here while you go over there. Now, even though Jonah was trying to do that, trying to flee from his presence, he couldn't because this is the God of heaven and earth, of earth and dry land.

You can't keep him on the land while you go to sea. You can't keep him in the valleys while you go to the mountain. You can't keep him for Sunday while you go about the rest of your week.

[25 : 43] You can't keep him over here in your quiet time with him while you live how you like the rest of the day. No more than Hamlet can run from Shakespeare, can we run from God.

He's the God of all creation, Jonah says. And the sailors, they're smart guys. They realize straight away the implications of what Jonah has said to them.

Jonah, you're running from a God who is intimately involved in the small details of our lives and who has made all things.

You shouldn't be fleeing from him. You should be falling at his feet in worship. In verse 10, 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.

They realized full well the implications of what Jonah has said even though he himself doesn't seem to realize it. Because they were afraid when there was an impersonal storm as they saw it.

[26 : 46] Because when there's a storm, you just batten down the hatches and you get through. But if this storm is an expression of anger from the God who has made everything, how are we going to deal with that?

How are we going to flee from that? How are we going to escape that? Very different. And so we realize why we would worship the Lord, why we would want to live for him.

What does that look like? Because he is God. He has made everything. He is personal and he is powerful. He is worthy of our worship because of who he is.

And that is what it looks like to live for God, to realize that he is God. That he is intimately involved in the details of our lives and that he has made all things.

Let's ask the question one more time. What does it look like to live for God, to worship God? Verse 11, 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?

[27 : 52] Which is a question that makes absolutely no sense. If you walked up to me and said to me, what can we do to you? If we slap you in the face, will it start raining outside? Of course not. But what they realize is that this storm is an expression of God's displeasure of what Jonah is doing and so there is a problem in the form of Jonah, what do we need to do to you Jonah to calm this down?

Verse 12, Jonah says, pick me up and throw me into the sea and it will become calm. I know that it is my fault that this great storm has come upon you and as he says that I'm not sure whether Jonah thinks at this point I actually deserve death.

I deserve to be thrown overboard or is he thinking, well, you know what, I didn't want to go to Nineveh and I so don't want to go to Nineveh that I prefer to be thrown into the sea and maybe there I'll have some peace from God.

I'm not sure what he's thinking at this point but these sailors they have a better character than Jonah in verse 13 they did their best to row back to land but they could not for the sea grew even wilder than before.

They're so kind, they're so merciful, they're so reluctant to throw Jonah into the sea and yet they realize probably shouting over the noise to one another we've no other choice.

[29 : 19] We've no other option. And so they pray in verse 14 they cried out to the Lord please Lord do not let us die for taking this man's life.

Do not hold us accountable for killing an innocent man for you Lord have done as you pleased and you realize now that these sailors are no longer praying to this God and that God to their own God to gods of their own creation now they're praying to the Lord the one true God something profound has happened in them as they realized that they too should live for God what would it have been like to throw a man into the sea for these sailors they're so kind they're so patient with Jonah they're so compassionate but they're in a situation where they've no other choice they have to throw him in now if you are to throw somebody into the sea probably the way you would do it one guy grabs his legs ankles one guy grabs him under the shoulders or maybe his arms outstretched and you would say one two three and you would let go that's probably how they did it and I don't know did they have their eyes closed as they let go

I don't know did they catch each other's eye and think to themselves we're gonna have to live with this for the rest of our lives this is gonna haunt us or did they catch Jonah's eye as they let go of him I'm not sure we don't know there's the story of a climber by the name of Simon back in the 80s you've probably heard of him who was tethered to another climber and as they were descending from a climb in the Peruvian Andes the other climber fell broke his leg and they were a long way from each other a long rope and Simon after 90 minutes of waiting and thinking that the other guy was after falling to his death made the decision because he couldn't move with this guy hanging at the end of the rope he made the decision I'm gonna have to cut the rope that's the only way

I'm gonna be saved and it must have been a horrific decision to make that's what he did Joe amazingly survived Simon survived amazingly for these sailors as hard as this decision is the minute Jonah hits the water the sea ceases from its raging in verse 15 they took Jonah threw him overboard and the raging sea grew calm and you know that if there's a storm at sea and the wind is blowing that even when the wind dies down the sea takes a long time to calm down but this is like a light switch suddenly turned off as the sea ceases from its raging and as that light switch is turned off a light switch is turned on for the sailors as they come to realize something of who God is and what he is like

Jonah at the start of the story he had been fearless just living however he wanted foolishly fearless and the sailors they had fear that was fear of the storm they were exceedingly afraid or terrified in verse 10 when they realized it was this God of Jonah was behind it but what happens when the storm ceases in verse 16 is that they greatly fear the Lord they greatly fear the Lord but it is fear of a different sort it is not the fear of a storm that is impersonal and irrational and you can't reason with it it is not the fear of a God who can fly off the handle at any moment it's the fear of realizing what they have been saved from it's the fear of realizing the compassion and mercy of God that he has rescued them from this situation through as they see it the death of one man they have all been spared the reverent awe of realizing that they are not going to be lost that they are safe this is the kind of fear that motivates you to live for God because of his great love for you you want to live for him in a way that reflects his character it's not a fear of being rejected or punished or condemned it's a fear of disappointing

[34 : 36] God he has loved me so much I want to give my whole life for him he is my all in all I want to do anything and everything to please this one who has loved me so deeply that is the kind of fear that they are experiencing now as they have been saved from this storm it's like that quote from C.S.

Lewis about the kids playing robbers do you know the one so it's there comes a moment when the children who have been playing at burglars or robbers hush suddenly was that a real footstep in the hall and for these sailors they've been kind of playing around with different types of gods trying whatever works but then they encounter the one true God this one who rescues who hears their cries who has mercy on them who shows them great compassion through the death it seems of this one man and you know it points us to something doesn't it because Jonah wasn't actually innocent and as we'll see spoiler alert for next week he didn't actually die as he was thrown overboard but it points us to one who is innocent and was innocent it points us to

Jesus it points us to Jesus hanging on the cross as dark stormy clouds gathered over Jerusalem that Jesus experienced the storm of God's anger the storm of God's wrath not towards his sin but towards our sin it points us to the fact that God Jesus willingly gave himself over to that storm so that we would be saved from it that we would be rescued from it so that God shows us his great compassion and mercy so that like these sailors we are left in holy fear of him I want to live for him he deserves everything of me I want to worship him and it is as we realize what Jesus has done for us in saving us from what we deserve that we truly can live in worship of God and so let's take a moment to pray and to ask

God to help us to do just that Father for some we need reminder of why we would want to live for you why we would want to worship you Lord help us let this sink deep into our hearts that Father your innocent son Jesus gladly gave himself over to the storm of your right righteous anger at our sin so that we might be saved so that we might be delivered so that we might be rescued and never have to face it Father we rejoice in that and we ask that you'd help us to live in worship of you amen