

Resisting the LORD

Jonah 1:7-17

My guess is that the situation Jonah finds himself in, as we meet him in our passage for this morning, was an unexpected one.

He finds himself on a boat out in the Mediterranean Sea with a bunch of non-Israelite false god worshipping sailors in the middle of a serious storm.

Let's just take a moment to remember how he got there.

He is there because the LORD spoke to him and gave him a command to go to a place called Nineveh.

Nineveh was an important city in the Assyrian Empire, perhaps the largest city in the known world at the time, and it was filled with people who were living with no regard for God and no love for His people.

God tells Jonah to go there and 'cry out' against the evil in that city.

Jonah, though, refuses to go.

Instead he decides to hop on a boat and get far away from the temple of the LORD in Jerusalem.

[How should God respond to that? He could have ended Jonah's life the moment he refused. He could have just let him go and picked someone else, but instead the LORD causes a storm to come upon the sea to stop Jonah in his tracks. It's a scary storm. The sailors who do not know the true God of the Bible are scared and are looking for answers and in our passage this morning **Jonah 1:7-17** they find out Jonah is 'fleeing from the presence of God' and what happens in these verses teaches us some important lessons about resisting the LORD. That is something most of us can relate to. At one time or another we find ourselves saying no to the LORD don't we? Because that is true we would be wise to give our attention to what is said in these verses. I want to briefly highlight three clear lessons from the prophet's experience here. First, we need to see that...]

Point #1 – Running from God is impossible. (Verses 7-9)

No one can escape the reach of the LORD, we can only go as far as He permits.

This storm is a desperate situation for the sailors and they are just grasping at spiritual straws hoping something will work.

That's why they do what they do in **verse 7**.

Casting lots was practiced across many cultures in the ancient world including in Israel.

People would take a variety of objects and throw them, or drop them to the ground, and depending on how they landed it would point to a direction or a person.

In this case the lot falls to Jonah.

What we need to appreciate here is that Jonah already had the answer, he knows this storm is from the LORD, but it is not until the lot is cast that he offers that information.

He is trying to get away from what God wants him to do. He is trying to hide in the boat, but the LORD uses the actions of men who know next to nothing about who God really is to get a confession out of him.

When the lot falls to Jonah, the sailors ask him a number of questions trying to figure out why they are in the situation they are in.

Whose fault is this? What is your occupation? Where are you from? What country? What people?

He answers in **verse 9**.

He calls himself a 'Hebrew' meaning he belongs to the people of Israel.

He says, 'he fears the LORD'.

We should take that phrase to mean that Jonah knows that God is really the One True God and that he has to answer to Him.

This is 'the God of heaven, who made the sea and dry land' meaning He has made everything.

If the LORD has made everything that means He has ultimate power over everything.

When the true God of the universe gives a command over the land or the sea it is obeyed. They are in this situation because the creator of the sea is causing the sea to rage on account of Jonah.

The whole reason Jonah got on the boat was to get away from God's command.

Now the LORD has used a great storm and the casting of lots by idolatrous men to confront Jonah's running away.

He cannot escape the LORD.

[I have seen a video or two of people trying to hide from the police. They run and try and hide behind or underneath something. Meanwhile the police helicopter is over head using infrared vision. The video shows a guy running and trying to hide, but the police can see him the whole time. Every time I see something like that I think, "It's silly to try and hide from the police?"]

How much more foolish is it to try and run away from the LORD?

I am convinced that Jonah already knew that.

I think what he was hoping for was that God will just let him go, but it is clear the LORD has other plans.

I'm sure if I asked for a show of hands asking, "How many of you believe God is omnipresent?" Most hands would go up.

If I ask, "How many believe God is all-powerful?" Most hands would go up.

Here is a tough question, “How often do we act like those things aren’t true?”

[How many times do people try and run away from the LORD? It is pretty common for people to want to live life for themselves. When people who truly belong to Christ try that, the LORD acts to turn us around. We should be thankful for that. The bible says the LORD “disciplines those He loves” Proverbs 3:12. Sometimes though we can be stubborn. That is Jonah here. Now that he has been discovered by the sailors they want to know what to do about the situation. How Jonah responds teaches another lesson about resisting the LORD, it teaches us that...]

Point #2 – People often persist in resisting God. (Verses 10-12)

The default setting of the human heart is to disobey the LORD’s commands and we sometimes keep doing that even though it makes no sense to do so.

Look with me at verse 10.

The men were ‘exceedingly afraid’ because they were totally convinced that this life threatening storm was from the LORD.

Now that they are certain of the cause of their situation, they ask the next most logical question in **verse 11**.

It is really clear to them that the God is doing this because He is unhappy with Jonah running away.

As they look around at the sea they just see things continuing to get worse moment by moment and they are asking is there anything we can do to have the LORD dial this thing down a bit?

Jonah gives his answer in verse 12.

Jonah is very much right when he says ‘it is because of [him] that this great tempest has come’, but is getting tossed overboard to certain death really the only option here?

We’ll see in chapter four that Jonah is well aware of God’s grace and mercy.

He could have simply prayed and said something like, “LORD, I know you have sent this storm on account of me. Please stop the storm and I will go back and travel to Nineveh and do as you have ask me to do.”?

There is nothing here to indicate that he even considers that option.

At this moment he would rather drowned in the sea than do what the LORD has asked.

While that is bad, he at least has some concern for the other men on board the ship.

He is giving them opportunity to show the LORD that they have no agreement with Jonah’s rebellion and that they are willing to be instruments of justice in this matter.

That said, we should not mistake his suggestion for some kind of selfless sacrifice.

It is a continuation of his refusal to obey the LORD's command.
It is like he is saying, "Ok God if you won't let me run away then I'll just die and that will be the end of it."

[How many parents are with us this morning in service? I think most parents have to deal with a child that persists in bad behaviour at times. Just imagine asking your child to clean their room and they say no. You say, "You can clean your room or go to bed without supper!" They reply, "Fine, I'll just starve then!" Really? You would rather starve than clean your room?]

When you put it like that it sounds kind of silly, but that is exactly what Jonah is saying here.

It would be easy to scoff at Jonah and say, "Man this guy is really being ridiculous", but if we are honest with ourselves we will see that it is pretty easy to fall into a similar way of thinking.

I have had many conversations over the years with people about how their life choices are matching up with the Scriptures.

We open up the bible together, read what it says, agree on what it says, and then when it comes time to actually apply it to life they will say, "I'm not doing that!" Or perhaps more commonly, "I'm going to keep doing that I don't care what the bible says."

[Listen there is a big difference between a person striving to obey and falling short (that is all of us), and the person who absolutely refuses to change the course of their life even though they know God is asking them to. What is God to do with the one who persists in rebellion? One thing He could do is give them over to themselves which always leads to destruction. There are a number of examples in the bible where He does that. That is His justice. But there is another way He responds and we can see it here in Jonah's life. We see here that...]

Point #3 – God patiently overcomes the resistance of His people. (Verses 13-17)

When the LORD resolves to accomplish something in someone's life He never gives up until His will is done.

Verse 13 teaches us a crucial lesson about repentance, look there with me.

These sailors hesitate to carry out the solution that Jonah proposes.

They are fully convinced that if they toss Jonah overboard he is going to die so they try to return to land.

Carl Keil points out that the meaning of the Hebrew word translated 'row' here is to 'break through the waves.'

In other words they are trying to 'overcome' the storm of God's making to get back to shore.

The picture is that they are straining against the will of the LORD.

I believe their intentions are good here, they want to spare Jonah's life, but as they strain against the storm what happens?

It says, "...the sea grew more and more tempestuous against them."

Why? Why not just let them return to land to drop off Jonah?

Because the sailors cannot repent for Jonah.

Look, he would rather die than obey and putting him back on land won't help that.

No one can repent for someone else. That is really important to understand.

We can tell people about the greatness of God, we can tell them to turn from their sin and trust Christ, and we should because that is the only hope anyone has before a Holy God, but we can't do that for them.

If they made it to land Jonah's heart would have remained hard towards God's command, so the Lord turns up the storm forcing them to stay out at sea with no other option than to toss Jonah over.

They come to that conclusion in verse 14 and ask that the LORD keep them from guilt in the death of Jonah and then they pick him up and hurl him into the sea.

No look at what is said at **the end of verse 15.**

If there was any doubt about the cause of the storm in that moment it is entirely removed and the sailors respond in **verse 16.**

The description of their fear here is exactly the same as verse 10.

They have experienced the power of the living God in bringing the storm and in commanding the calm.

They know that He holds the power of life and death over them and they respond in worship.

Oh that we would have such a response to His holiness and His grace.

But what of Jonah. We are told in verse 17.

Skeptics are quick to jump on what is said here. Impossible they will cry for all kinds of reasons.

I feel no need whatsoever to try and explain what happens here through what is normally possible in nature.

This brothers and sisters is the LORD exercising His sovereign power over creation to accomplish His will.

The LORD could have spared Jonah's life in many different ways, so why appoint a fish to swallow him?

For one thing it is a mode of transportation. It is a way of delivering him back to land to go where he is supposed to go.

More importantly, the prophet is confined.

There is nowhere for him to go, there is no more ability to flee and neither can he escape God's command through death.

God is holding him there until he yields.

The LORD is overcoming Jonah's resistance to His will.

[Have you ever tried to bend a piece of wood? If the wood is dry it typically snaps if you try and bend it. But if you put the wood in a steam box and allow it time to soak up the moisture and the heat you can bend it into a desired shape without breaking it.]

That is a good picture of what the LORD is doing to Jonah here.

He could have easily broken him, but instead he puts him in a place where he has to reconsider his choices.

He does the same for those of us who belong to Him through faith in Christ.

We can be stubborn at times that is for sure, but the LORD relentlessly works sometimes in ways that are uncomfortable and at times even painful to overcome our resistance.

Romans 8:28 is for real brothers and sisters.

God works in *all things* for the good of those who love Him and are called according to His purpose.

What is that good? To be conformed to the image of His Son.

To have our will reshaped to be more like Jesus.

We can be like Jonah can't we. Sometimes we can find ourselves trying to run from what God wants in our life.

The good news of this passage is that it is impossible to run from the LORD.

That is true even when we persist in resisting because He is patient and He will work to overcome the stubbornness of our hearts until His work is complete.

That is amazing.

Oh that we would have eyes to see this work in our lives and so be filled with the joy of salvation.