

Jonah 1:9-17 'The Runaway Prophet Part 2!'

Last time we entered into Jonah's life, Jonah's world. That prophet who had taught and preached to the 10 tribes of the northern Kingdom of Israel under Jeroboam II for 20 odd years. During which time God gave those tribes a time of great security and prosperity. And yet during that same time of tremendous blessing what was Israel's response? It was one of immense idolatry and immorality, where every perversion abounded! Well clearly, this is Australia today, isn't it? A time of tremendous blessing and freedoms and yet also absolute perversion and idolatry. So in fact God said, *'Well Jonah, Israel won't listen, so go to Nineveh. Yes go to the great city of Nineveh. That murdering pillaging, butcherous people, whose cruelty is unequalled in all the world. Preach repent, lest they feel the full weight of My coming Wrath. Their wickedness and evil have risen up to Me so go, travel 800 kilometres northeast to Nineveh and proclaim it's pending doom!'*

But as we saw, Jonah wouldn't go. And it wasn't because of the distance, he had set off on a journey six times as long in the opposite direction. And it wasn't because of the fierce nature of the people, no. He actually gives his reason for running away himself. In Jonah 3:10-4:2 we read: "When God saw what they did and how they turned from their evil ways, he had compassion and did not bring upon them the destruction he had threatened. But Jonah was greatly displeased and became angry. He prayed to the Lord, O Lord, is this not what I said when I was still at home? That is why I was so quick to flee to Tarshish. I knew that you are a gracious and compassionate God, slow to anger and abounding in love, a God who relents from sending calamity."

So Jonah wouldn't go, because God shows mercy upon the Sinner! He thought, *'Those people don't deserve mercy. Over my dead body will I go and preach Your Wrath to them O God, only to have You forgive them. I will not do it and you can't make me.'* So he thought that if he headed for the ends of the earth God wouldn't find him, and he could escape his duty. Well he was wrong!

In Psalm 139:1-12 we read "O Lord, you have searched me and you know me. You know when I sit and when I rise; you perceive my thoughts from afar. You discern my going out and my lying down; you are familiar with all my ways. Before a word is on my tongue you know it completely, O Lord. You hem me in, behind and before; you have laid your hand upon me. Such knowledge is too wonderful for me, too lofty for me to attain. Where can I go from your Spirit? Where can I flee from your presence? If I go up to the heavens, you are there; if I make my bed in the depths, you are there. If I rise on the wings of the dawn, if I settle on the far side of the sea, even there your hand will guide me, your right hand will hold me fast. If I say, surely the darkness will hide me and the light become night around me, even the darkness will not be dark to you; the night will shine like the day, for darkness is as light to you."

And just as well these things are true, or surely Jonah would have perished! Yes like we ourselves can, Jonah had a plan, but God sent a great storm. And I said, those storms of life which come upon us, come not by chance or bad luck, they come by the Hand of God! Yes He bends us and even breaks us at times so that we will return to Him, and seek Him out. Just like Jonah before us He wakes us up out of that deep sleep of self-sufficiency. If we've been silent He may make us stand up and declare who we are. Psalm 51:15: "O Lord open my lips and I will declare your praise." Yes, sometimes God uses dramatic storms to get our attention and if we don't pay heed to Him, He may well increase the intensity of those storms!

Well in effect the straws are drawn and Jonah draws the short straw. V8: "Tell us who is responsible for making all this trouble for us? What do you do? Where do you come from? What is your country? From what people are you?"

And now we pick up the text in Jonah 1:9-17. 'Jonah The Runaway Prophet Part 2'. Mercy In The Midst Of God's Wrath! Yes "Tell us" who the heck you really are Jonah, the men say. You see prior to this he had in a sense hidden who he was. But now with the waves crashing over the ship and with everyone holding on for dear life, he would be forced to speak up. As I said last time, it seems as though God has to drag His testimony out of us at times. But if He must, then He will! "Who are you Jonah?" v9: "He said; I am a Hebrew and I worship the Lord the God of heaven, who made the sea and the land."

So in the midst of the fury of God's Own storm these words ring out: "I am a Hebrew." I don't bow down to statues or stones. I worship the Lord, the God of heaven who made the sea and the land and everything in them. Romans 1:18-20: "The wrath of God is being revealed from heaven against all the godlessness and wickedness of men who suppress the truth by their wickedness, since what may be known about God is plain to them, because God has made it plain to them. For since the creation of the world God's invisible qualities, his eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made, so that men are without excuse."

So friends, when storms and droughts, floods and fires, earthquakes or tsunami's rage, we should see the Hand of God. Not some chance meeting of evolutionary coincidences and theories, but the Almighty Hand of the Creator of the Universe! And notice, that at the proclamation of the One True God in the midst of these sailor`s idols, "they were terrified." But why is this do you think? Well simple. They realised that not only were they in danger from the storm, (those elements of which were created by Jonah`s God) but more fearful than that, they were in danger of falling into the Hands of that One who had made them all of those things! Because if such a storm was sent upon one of this God`s own, what would be waiting for them at His Hand who knew him not? Yes: "This terrified them."

Hebrews 10:30-31: "For we know him who said, it is mine to avenge I will repay. And again the Lord will judge his people. It is a dreadful thing to fall into the hands of the living God." And you see, this dread has filled these men with terror! But it is not so today is it? And why do you think this is? Well perhaps it's because the real God of the Bible is not preached today by so many. Perhaps this God before us in Jonah, is not the God who is held out to others today! "They asked what have you done? They knew he was running away from the Lord because he had already told them. Yes what have you done?" Why did you involve us in this battle between yourself and your God?

And now friends, in v11-12, I believe we have one of those lessons that when learned and adhered to, we have one of those characteristics which distinguishes Christians from the rest of the world. And it is the taking ownership of our fault and sin! But first let's return to the scene. There is this storm of even supernatural proportions sent by God to put a stop to Jonah`s rebellious journey. The men have "thrown out the cargo," they have all "cried out to their false gods" but of course to no avail. They have "cast lots" to see who is the cause of all of this trouble, Jonah gets the short straw: "Who are you, what have you done? Why have you brought all this trouble on us" by involving us in this dispute between yourself and Your God? The very One who even made the sea which is about to swallow us alive? v11: "The sea was getting rougher and rougher." How rough did it get? Well we can only imagine. Perhaps it was similar to that Sydney to Hobart yacht race many years ago when helicopters were nearly being knocked out of the sky by 100 foot waves as they tried to rescue the

people. Anyway, in the midst of this life threatening turmoil they ask him: "What should we do to you to make the sea calm down for us?"

Now I have been in some scary moments in the ocean while surfing, and have even been caught in a small boat while fishing off Burrill Lake Bommie with my Dad when a southerly squall hit when I was a small boy, that was frightening. But I don't believe we can even begin to comprehend what was taking place at this time in Jonah's life on that ship. As they ask him, Come on Jonah give us a clue, since you are the cause of all of this trouble. "What must we do" to make this God of yours withdraw His anger? We want to live! Well if I am Jonah here, my answer would go something like this: *We need to get back to shore. Come on boys put in the big ones we can do it, I'll pitch in!* But do you see? That would not be taking ownership of the situation which he is the cause of. No that would not be an acknowledgment and repentance of his sin, that would be sidestepping it. But what he does say is extraordinary. v12: "Pick me up and throw me into the sea," he replied, "and it will become calm."

Brothers and sisters, can we even begin to imagine the tremendous courage which it took to get these words out, right at that moment with the ship being torn apart? I don't care what kind of hero you are, when the storm is raging the last place you want to be is in the water. That is why when there is a shipwreck the survivors do all that they can to cling to some piece of wreckage, because it gives them some sense of security and hope of staying afloat long enough, to be rescued or washed up on the shore somewhere. That's if the sharks don't get you first! "Pick me up and throw me in" he says.

In John 15:13 we read: "Jesus said; Greater love hath no man than this, that he lay down his life for his friends." Was this love? I don't know, perhaps so. Certainly it was an act of self-sacrifice. Being prepared to give one's own life to save another, even a stranger. So perhaps we do need to call this an act of love. The love for strangers, who through this selfless act may even have become brothers. I believe they have! But definitely, it was the act of a repentant heart. The act of a man who had taken ownership of his foolish and sinful actions. Yes it was an act of God's grace and mercy working in Jonah's life. Beloved when we do this, when we take ownership of our foolish words and actions, (particularly when it is toward another brother or sister in Christ) it is always with pain and tears. Yes when we've hurt someone who we truly love and care about, (not that not even be our intention) it takes God's grace and mercy to heal that pain.

Though Jonah was not among friends or family, certainly he was the cause of these present sufferings: "Pick me up and throw me into the sea, he replied and it will become calm. (and there are the words) I know that it is my fault that this great storm has come upon you." Beloved, it is indeed a heavy burden to carry knowing that we are the cause of another person's pain and suffering. And it takes great courage to humbly confess these things before those that we've hurt and ask them for forgiveness. But for Jonah, (although he has been forced into it) with courage he does indeed take ownership of his sin! "Throw me in." v13: "Instead, the men did their best to row back to land. But they could not, for the storm grew even wilder than before." And look at the miraculous thing which happens. v13: "Then they cried to the Lord." So only moments before they were bowing down and calling out to their false gods but now, "They are crying out to the Lord."

Now was this a case of any port in a storm will do? Or was this like the thief on the cross who moments before had hurled insults at Jesus, but then it was: "Jesus, Remember Me when you come into your Kingdom?" We can't say whether or not these men's souls were changed for eternity that day, but certainly, their ideas as to who was truly God were rocked to the core! And as I mentioned before, personally I believe, they were won for Christ that day: "O Lord, please do not let us die for taking this man's life. Do not hold us accountable for killing an innocent man, for you, O Lord have

done as you pleased." Wow, what a prayer. "O Lord, God help us to act justly. To not condemn an innocent man. Please do not hold us accountable for this man's death, because you are Lord have done as you pleased." Or in other words: "Your will be done." Because this is all part of Your plan O Lord.

What an amazing contrast between the sailors who didn't want to be guilty of killing an innocent man, whereas the crowd before Pontius Pilate cried out for Jesus' Blood: "Let his blood be on us and our children they cried." v15: "Then they took Jonah and threw him overboard, and the raging sea grew calm." And again, we can only begin to imagine what these calm seas did to those sailors. Would it be an internal change we don't actually know, but O the stories which they must have told around the campfires at night! *'Do you remember that weird storm which nearly cost us our lives?'* *'Do you remember that strange passenger which we had on board?'* *'Now that was a storm.'* *'I've never seen anything like it before or since.'* *'And that storm which was so fierce became like a mill pond the very moment we threw that strange guy Jonah in, and at his instruction no less.'* *'I wonder whatever happened to that guy? Jonah.'* *'You know someone told me that they heard he ended up going to Nineveh.'* *'Are you serious?'* *'It couldn't have been him; he was fish food for sure. But you never know. We are talking about that Hebrew God who made the land and the sea, only He could have done what happened that day!'*

We can only speculate what God Almighty did through these men's testimony over the coming years. Whatever happened to them. Again, personally I do believe that that encounter with God had a profound effect upon them for the rest of their lives, even unto eternity! Brothers and sisters, when Jesus calms those raging storms of sin in our lives, (even though we continue to struggle each day) we have a calm assurance and peace which the world just cannot understand. This is that Philippians 4:7: "Peace of God, which passes all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus." Yes: "The raging sea grew calm. At this the man greatly feared the Lord, and they offered sacrifices to the Lord and made vows to him."

Again how astonishing. These Pagan men worshipping and paying homage and making vows to the God of Jonah, the One True and Living God! You see the Jews thought God was exclusively theirs. Even that He was some kind of pet which they could boast of, but not share with the rest of the world.

And that is a big part of Jonah's problem here, as it was during Jesus day. Listen to John the Baptist's words from Matthew 3:4-9: "John's clothes were made of camel's hair, and he had a leather belt around his waist. His food was locust and wild honey. People went out to meet him from Jerusalem and all Judea and the whole region of the Jordan. Confessing their sins, they were baptised by him in the Jordan river. But when he saw many of the Pharisees and Sadducees coming to where he was baptising, he said to them: 'You brood of vipers. Who warned you to flee from the coming wrath? Produce fruit in keeping with repentance. And do not think you can say to yourselves, we have Abraham as our father. I tell you that out of these stones God can raise up children for Abraham.'"

Yes out of the seemingly stoney hearts of these pagan sailors, God brought about a great testimony. While His Own people bowed down to idols and rebelled against Him! God does not belong to us brothers and sisters, we belong to him. We don't know out of what situation or from where He will raise up His people. We must simply submit to Him! v17: "But the Lord provided a great fish to swallow Jonah, and Jonah was inside the fish three days and three nights." Now next time we're going to look at Jonah's experience in the sea, but the thing which I want to leave us with this week, is the amazing depth of God's mercy and love. Because in the midst of His Wrath, His mercy is always found! Firstly to those sailors His mercy was shown. They weren't on some kind of spiritual

pilgrimage looking for truth, they were bowing down too and worshipping their idols. God could have broken that ship apart and these men perish, and He still could have touched Jonah with this great lesson in the fish, but He didn't. He had mercy upon these men.

Can you see? In the midst of that supernatural storm, they had a meeting with God's power, mercy and love. He preserved them, and He was merciful to them! And next it is toward Jonah. He was given a task; he'd deliberately rejected and rebelled against that Command. Rightfully could God have punished his rebellion with death, but no. He uses this bizarre way of saving him and showing Jonah mercy!

Now let's be clear. We don't know what kind of fish this was. It may even have been a supernatural fish sent by God to preserve his rebellious servant's life. But this did actually happen. Those who seek to explain away this event would seek to rob God of His glory and power. As if God was not able to make this happen. But could not the One who created the universe and everything in it, make a fish big enough and able to swallow a man and sustain him for three days, in that fish? Could He who gives breath to all life not do that? Well of course he could! The thing which we do need to see here, is that in this most seemingly godforsaken event, He sends a saviour out of the depths, to in a sense, carry Jonah through death, and then restore him to life!

Well of course this is what Jesus does for us. Not with a fish, it is in even more bizarre than that. No He carries us into life through one of the greatest symbols of death the world has ever known, the Cross! Because just like that fish which came to Jonah and picked him up in the midst of that raging sea, Jesus comes to us in the storm of this world. Picks us up upon that Cross of God's Wrath, and carries us into eternity: "By his wounds we are healed."

Beloved, God is merciful. We are all here this morning because of the great mercy of God! 1Peter 1:3: "Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ who in his great mercy has given us new birth into our living hope, through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead." Yes dear friends, this is not a story about a great fish, it is the record of our Great God, who bestows upon us great mercy in the midst of His Wrath because of great sin! Hallelujah what a Saviour!

Let's pray!