|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| A picture containing object, thing, clock  Description generated with very high confidence | Overboard |
| MATT BLACK, Wed, July 19, 2017 |
| [livinghopechurch.net](http://www.livinghopechurch.net/) | Jonah 1:4-16, “Into the Storm” series |

**Introduction**: Open your Bible to Jonah. We are continuing a series in Jonah called “Into the Storm.” Tonight’s study is entitled: “Overboard.”

**The Main Person in the Story**

Jonah is not just about the big fish—not just Jonah and "the whale." The main character in Jonah's story is God. Every single chapter—in fact, every single verse—speaks of the grandeur of God, the grace of God, the sovereignty of God, the beckoning of God, the discipline of God. Everywhere you look in this tiny piece of ancient historical literature, God is there. He's always there. He is right in the middle of every interruption.

1. What’s your Comfort Zone?, (1:1-3, review).

**A Prophet’s Comfort Zone Interrupted**

Jonah was a prophet to the northern kingdom of Israel during the early part of the eighth century BC (c.786–746 BCE). While we don't know much about his life prior to the events recorded in the book that bears his name, we do know from **2 Kings 14:25** that he had foretold some positive developments for his people, the Hebrews. The **borders** of Israel would be restored in his lifetime, and there would be **prosperity**.

Jonah lived in Gath-hepher, a few miles north of Nazareth. During the reign of the Northern King Jeroboam II, the nation witnessed a restoration of territories that had been taken by Syria. This allowed Israel to achieve its **most prosperous era since Solomon**, primarily by allowing them **to control most of the important trade routes** that ran through Palestine, connecting the far reaches of the ancient world. And Jonah was the prophet who had seen this coming.

He had heard from the Lord, declared the details, and been proven right when these welcome events came to fruition. Most likely, therefore, he was **popular**, highly **respected**, and greatly appreciated in his role. **Handsomely paid**, as well, for the stature he enjoyed.

Jonah was living a prophet's dream. And he was more than content for things to keep on going the way they'd always gone, the way he had planned and fully expected they would. He was living for God, doing His work, and doing it well. Why would God ever send him to do something else? If only he'd known.[[1]](#footnote-1)

God wanted Jonah for a **great task**. In the task God would reveal Himself not only to the people of Nineveh, but to Jonah himself. But Jonah ran. Jonah didn’t want the interruption.

**Jonah Didn’t Ask for this Interruption**

Jonah was happy with his place in Northern Israel. He was fine preaching repentance to disobedient Israelites. But God interrupts his comfort zone to reflect His heart to the lost world.

I’m sure you’ve experienced some interruptions along the way of your life. It may have been –

* something tragic—the death of someone close to you
* a health scare
* a debilitating accident
* a love lost
* an opportunity missed
* a life goal unreached

It may have caused such a drastic change in your moods and makeup and manner of living, you almost don't remember who you were before it happened. In many ways, you can become defined by this thing that occurred, this one startling event that threw everything off balance. It was an interruption you did not ask for!

**Tired of Running**

Like you I've run from change. I've run from life's surprises. Sometimes I've run just to keep moving when I didn't know what else to do. But I've run into a problem. Because in running toward what I thought was better, safer, more pleasurable, more fulfilling, less painful, less complicated, or less confining, I've actually been running from God, from His will, and from His blessing. And I'm tired of running. Aren't you?

Well, we are blessed tonight because we’re going to find out what happens when a true believer runs from God. God chases us down and throws us overboard into a place of helplessness where we can finally know God’s sufficient grace. Let’s read today’s Scripture.

**Scripture**

**Jonah 1:4-16**, “But the Lord hurled a great wind upon the sea, and there was a mighty tempest on the sea, so that the ship threatened to break up. **5**Then the mariners were afraid, and each cried out to his god. And they hurled the cargo that was in the ship into the sea to lighten it for them. But Jonah had gone down into the inner part of the ship and had lain down and was fast asleep. **6**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.”

**Why So Reluctant?**

The Assyrians had a reputation for physical and psychological terror, which they freely inflicted on their enemies, not the least of which was Israel. One commentator writes, “It is reasonable to suppose that on one of these expeditions to Israel the Assyrians had laid siege to Gath-Hepher, the hometown of Jonah. Perhaps the city was destroyed and some of its inhabitants slain. Some loved one of Jonah may have suffered and been killed at this time. There is a possibility that his own mother and father were slain before his eyes when he was a boy.”[[2]](#footnote-2)

Now while the details of how Jonah was personally affected by these tortures at the hands of the Assyrians are purely speculative, we know for sure that Israel as a whole had been brutalized by them, making the mere mention of the name "Nineveh" a source of raw bitterness, dread, and fear for any Israelite—Jonah included. Yet here's where God was calling him to go—to Nineveh—to leave behind his beloved countrymen, his comfort zone, his chief desire in life, and to preach the word of the Lord to his declared enemies.

Nineveh? Never. Can you imagine how he must have felt? Of course you can. Have you ever been asked to do the one thing you always said you'd "never" do.

* "I'll agree to help, but don't make me speak in public."
* "I'll serve in any capacity, as long as it's not with the homeless."
* "I'll be fine as long as my husband's just one of the church staff, but I never want to be the senior pastor's wife."
* "I'll follow you, Lord, as long as I won't still be single at thirty-five."

We've all got a Nineveh of our own. So we flee to Tarshish. It seems so much better than Nineveh. But the Lord won’t let us go to Tarshish. No child of God can be plucked from his hand. We can’t even pluck ourselves from God’s hand.

1. What’s your Tarshish?, (1:3).

**Tarshish**

**Jonah 1:3**, “But Jonah rose to flee to Tarshish from the presence of the Lord. He went down to Joppa and found a ship going to Tarshish. So he paid the fare and went down into it, to go with them to Tarshish, away from the presence of the Lord.”

No one knows for sure where Tarshish was—this place Jonah decided to make a break for. But the best guess is that it was a **Phoenician colony off the coast of Spain**. And clearly it was in the opposite direction of Nineveh. By a long shot. If Nineveh was five hundred miles to the east of Joppa, then **Tarshish was approximately two thousand miles west**, “as far in that direction toward the end of the world as a man could go in that time.” [[3]](#footnote-3) To a person living in ancient Israel, it might have been considered the farthest point you could travel without dropping off the map.

**Why Tarshish?**

If Jonah didn't want to stay in Israel, he at least could've chosen a getaway port that was a lot more commutable from home. There were closer, neighboring towns that were easier to get to and less dramatic to navigate. He didn't have to sail clear off to the edge of the known world. While either of these scenarios would have been equally disobedient as running for Tarshish—(let's be clear about that)—they would've been a whole lot easier to make happen.

Why Tarshish? Well, it goes back to Adam. We feel like we can run and hide from God. The flesh and the devil always put a place of paradise in your mind through deception. “Has God really said?” The question is always there if Satan is near.

So Tarshish for Jonah was a place of escape from God. He knew God was merciful. He might have had bitterness in his heart toward God. But can we really escape from God? Of course not.

**What’s Your Tarshish?**

One of the ways you and I can test whether or not we're on the run from God is to see if we're trying to get away from the places where His manifest presence hangs outs.

Are you staying away from **church**? Even if you're still attending, do you slip into the back at the last minute, then hit the exits as quickly as you can, hoping to avoid having to deal up-close with anyone?

Have you dropped out of your **Small group or Bible study group**, growing a little more uncomfortable with where the conversations were headed and how close they were hitting to home?

Have you **slacked off your time in the Word and in prayer**, always finding something better and more urgent to do—something that doesn't hold you so accountable, doesn't feel so convicting.

God's continuous presence is

a **soothing balm** to the hurting,

a sweet **relief** for the broken and betrayed,

a **haven** for those who don’t fit into the world.

But to those living in disobedience, to those who don't want to submit to their current circumstances and see what God might want to accomplish through them, His presence is a **scorching fire**. We duck our eyes to keep from coming face-to-face with Him. We slip down a side hallway. We go the long way around. We run.

**Tarshish Seems Great Till You Get There**

Have you ever fled to "Tarshish"—someplace that feels much more exciting and inviting than doing God's will? Ever decided you'd had enough of what God expected of you and were headed off to do what you wanted for a change? Ever decided to check out emotionally on your marriage and children and quit being burdened about whether or not everybody's getting what they need from you? Doesn't keep you happy and laid-back for long, does it? That's because no matter how remote and relaxing, nothing fills the void of abandoned purpose. Nothing feels the same anymore when you're running from God. The freedoms that appealed to Jonah most about Tarshish would eventually become empty promises, then worse—dark, heavy regrets that would mock him the rest of his life. Isn't that just Satan's way? Always? Jonah, sound asleep below deck, didn't fully realize this fact yet. But God certainly did. And so God did something about it. He graciously refused to let Jonah's deep sleep prevent him from experiencing His will. He intervened. And how!

1. What’s your Storm?, (1:4).

We've all been in storms. And then we've all been in . . . storms! You know, the ones where the TV weather people are telling you to run and hide in your basement. The ones where the trash can lids blow off and rattle into the street. The ones where 1:00 in the afternoon looks like the middle of the night— a storm can come fast and furious and the same is true in our lives.

**Jonah 1:4**, “But the Lord hurled a great wind upon the sea, and there was a mighty tempest on the sea, so that the ship threatened to break up…”

In God’s zeal to train Jonah in righteousness, the Lord hurls a great wind on the sea. This is no minor storm. These **seasoned mariners are scared for their lives**. They begin praying as they have never prayed before, calling on **any god** who can still the chaotic forces of the sea.

**Jonah 1:5**, “Then the mariners were afraid, and each cried out to his god. And they hurled the cargo that was in the ship into the sea to lighten it for them. But Jonah had gone down into the inner part of the ship and had lain down and was fast asleep.”

If they are typical sailors, some of them are so hard and salty they probably have never prayed so earnestly— if at all!— until God unleashed **this storm** on them.

**Psalm 104:3**, “he rides on the wings of the wind.” God is riding on the storm in your life. He’s guiding it. He’s sovereign. The storm is a better place than Tarshish.

God wants us to get to the place where we can cry out (as David did) in **Psalm 57:1**, “Be merciful to me, O God, be merciful to me, for in you my soul takes refuge; in the shadow of your wings I will take refuge, till the storms of destruction pass by.”

**Hurling Cargo While God Hurls the Wind**

The **sailors** are hurling cargo as God is hurling a great wind. (It is pretty obvious who is going to win the battle of hurling.) Such evasive actions are ridiculous when you are dealing with the Lord. The Lord does not want their cargo; He wants the obedience of His child! They don’t know this yet, so in fear of death, they keep hurling.

If anyone should be scared, however, it is Jonah, for **he knows the power of God**— that nothing can stop Him. In one moment, God has the power to take calm seas and make them rough; in another minute He can take the roughest seas and calm them in an instant with the words, “Silence! Be still!” (**Mark 4:39**).

1. Why Would God Throw Us Overboard?, (1:7-16).

We've all been in storms. And then we've all been in . . . storms! You know, the ones where the TV weather people are telling you to run and hide in your basement. The ones where the trash can lids blow off and rattle into the street. The ones where 1:00 in the afternoon looks like the middle of the night— a storm.

Look at what happens. Jonah 1:7-16, “And they said to one another, “Come, let us cast lots, that we may know on whose account this evil has come upon us.” So they cast lots, and the lot fell on Jonah. 8 Then they said to him, “Tell us on whose account this evil has come upon us. What is your occupation? And where do you come from? What is your country? And of what people are you?” 9 And he said to them, “I am a Hebrew, and I fear the Lord, the God of heaven, who made the sea and the dry land.” 10 Then the men were exceedingly afraid and said to him, “What is this that you have done!” For the men knew that he was fleeing from the presence of the Lord, because he had told them.

11 Then they said to him, “What shall we do to you, that the sea may quiet down for us?” For the sea grew more and more tempestuous. 12 He said to them, “Pick me up and hurl me into the sea; then the sea will quiet down for you, for I know it is because of me that this great tempest has come upon you.” 13 Nevertheless, the men rowed hard to get back to dry land, but they could not, for the sea grew more and more tempestuous against them. 14 Therefore they called out to the Lord, “O Lord, let us not perish for this man's life, and lay not on us innocent blood, for you, O Lord, have done as it pleased you.” 15 So they picked up Jonah and hurled him into the sea, and the sea ceased from its raging. 16 Then the men feared the Lord exceedingly, and they offered a sacrifice to the Lord and made vows.”

**Safe from Wrath but not from Discipline**

Can I just say, it’s better to be thrown overboard than to go to Tarshish? This is an amazing blessing. God has his hand upon you. If God needs to send a storm because you are not just anyone. You are his child.

Perhaps you've secretly wished you, too, could live with such a pleasure-based, unexamined attitude toward life. You've wondered why God seems so relentless in keeping the pressure on you, why every minor lack of surrender is met with biblical admonishment, why you can't just not care about being so spiritually responsible all the time, like when you're out to dinner, out of town, or otherwise off duty. Well, there's a very good reason: because you're His child. And our Father disciplines His children (see Heb. 12:7). His involvement in your affairs is a revelation of His affection and relationship with you. And if you'll listen and respond to it, not only will you stop considering His correction a curse to be endured, but you'll see Him turn it into a blessing before He's through.

**The Child at the Store**

I saw a child at Walgreens once who was utterly disrespectful to her grandmother behind me. I couldn’t believe it. I wanted to take that child to the back and have a good talking to. She needed correction. I wanted to, but I didn’t. Why? Because she was not my child.

Whoever God loves, he disciplines. What does that mean? He’s training you. Think of the discipline of an athlete. The coach makes sure that that athlete trains in all times of weather. They go up hill, down hill. They play in the sleet and cold and rain and in all turfs. Why? To train that athlete.

So a believer is discipline by God to live righteously.

**Discipline Can be Corrective**

Discipline is not only meant for training, but for correction. It’s going to hurt. In the church at Corinth the Lord put His children on sickbeds and deathbeds for profaning the Lord’s Supper— people who had the same grace in Christ that all believers do (**1 Cor 11:30**). God can send a storm on one’s income; He can hurl a wind on one’s health; He can crush one’s grades, scholarships, and dreams in school. When we rebel, He can do whatever it takes to get us to return to Him or to take us out of this present life in our disobedience.[[4]](#footnote-4)

**God Set the Storm to Rescue Jonah**

So God sent a storm to rescue Jonah. Jonah may not have known it, but there is a worse place to be than in a storm. For him that place would have been Tarshish. Let's just imagine for a second that this faraway region of the ancient world was a rustic, woodsy setting with nice weather and good fishing. Not a posh resort by any means but the kind of place where a man could go to forget all his troubles, a million miles away from worry and responsibility. An area that made up for its lack of culture and amenities by providing lots of peace and quiet—ample room to stretch your legs, plenty of space between you and your nearest neighbor, a beautiful view of the moon and stars at night.

**God is Saving Your Skin**

You may feel like God is spoiling your fun, but He's actually saving your skin. The worst thing in the world He could do to you (and me) is to do nothing while we're out there doing our dead-level best to get away from His will. He's on to you because you're His beloved.

His plans are a better alternative than ours, when we're snoozing all the way to Tarshish, He's not about to watch us stand perpetually outside His will, not when His abiding purposes are the only things that promise His kids freedom and real adventure and unspeakable joy. "For those whom the Lord loves He disciplines" (Heb. 12:6). It's not something to run from. It's something to be thankful for.

**Overboard is Better than Tarshish**

So remember God throwing you overboard is better than going to Tarshish.

1. Shirer, Priscilla. Life Interrupted: Navigating the Unexpected (pp. 10-11). B&H Publishing Group. Kindle Edition. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. J. Vernon McGee, Jonah: Dead or Alive? (Pasadena, CA: Thru the Bible Books, 1984), 13. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Ibid. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. Redmond, Eric; Curtis, William; Fentress, Ken; Merida, Tony. *Exalting Jesus in Jonah, Micah, Nahum, Habakkuk* (Kindle Locations 350-363). Holman Reference. Kindle Edition. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)