

## **Thou Art The Man**

Jonah 1:7-10

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When we rebel against the revealed will of God, and then aggravate that sin by seeking to flee from the Lord, we only compound the consequences that will likely befall us from a Father who loves us too much to allow us to continue in our rebellion against Him. Our flight from the Lord may not lead us to board a ship in order to get away from all those reminders of God's presence, but if we continue in our rebellion, we will most certainly devise other means to remove ourselves from having to think about our sin and rebellion against our most holy and gracious God.

For instance, we may seek to suppress the conviction of the Lord by further immersing ourselves in sin. We may think that if one act of rebellion causes us such grief and sorrow that we do not want to face, we might as well just plunge ourselves into a sea of law breaking and covenant breaking. Perhaps we can drown out (at least temporarily) the conviction of the Holy Spirit through our licentiousness. As most of us have found in our own lives, this only increases our grief and sorrow, for such flight into licentiousness only increases the gravity of our sin, only increases the volume of God's just and gracious conviction in our conscience, and only increases the number of people close to us who are hurt and damaged by our sin.

Another way in which we may seek to remove ourselves from having to think about our sin and rebellion against Christ is by immersing ourselves in activity and busyness, so that we do not have time to stop for a moment to reflect upon our rebellion against the Lord who will pursue all His wayward children. The activity and busyness in which we involve

ourselves may not be licentious or immoral in itself—it may be a perfectly lawful activity. However, we keep our minds and bodies so busy, so that we can crowd out the voice of the Lord. And we hope to be so dead tired by the end of the day that we will just fall asleep when our head hits the pillow. But the Lord pursues us in those quiet moments, and we find that a restful sleep grows wings and flies away from us, just as we have taken flight from the Lord.

There are no doubt many other ways which we may devise in order to turn down the volume of the Spirit's voice within our conscience, but let me mention this last attempt that we may use. Our unconfessed rebellion may lead us into discouragement, depression, and at times into a total collapse in mind and body, so that we do not want to get out of bed or go to work. In the thralls of self-pity, we lose all strength and reason for living.

Dear ones, such consequences of rebellion are completely unnecessary, if we would only fall quickly upon the mercy of the Lord in confessing our sin to Him, in seeking His abundant pardon, in being humbled and grieved over our offense against God's love, grace, and holiness, and in endeavoring new obedience. You can mark it down—the longer we continue in our rebellion, the more severe the degree of loving discipline that the Lord will usually bring upon us in order to humble us and stop us in our tracks so that we listen to Him. The natural sinful tendency within us (but the very worst thing that we can do) is to flee when we rebel against the Lord. But, oh dear ones, how we need to plead for the grace of the Lord to STOP—stop in our tracks; to LOOK—look to the mercy and promises of God in Christ Jesus; and to LISTEN—listen in renewed obedience to the commandment of the Lord, “Go and sin no more.” STOP, LOOK, and LISTEN; rather than run, close your eyes, and put your hands over your ears. This is what Jonah should have done, but he didn't

(and so God uses the example of Jonah to teach us to STOP, LOOK, and LISTEN).

The main points from our text this Lord's Day are the following: (1) The Sin of a Fugitive Prophet Exposed by God (Jonah 1:7,8); and (2) The Confession of Aggravated Sin Expounded by Jonah (Jonah 1:9,10).

## **I. The Sin of a Fugitive Prophet Exposed by God (Jonah 1:7,8).**

A. In the previous sermon from the Book of Jonah, we saw how the Lord pursued His fugitive prophet, Jonah, by means of a hurricane-like storm on the sea, and by means of a heathen sea captain on the ship. Jonah might run (and we might run), but God will pursue all those who belong to Him (praise His name). Now in the present sermon, we see that God not only pursues His rebellious prophet, but He always catches the one whom He pursues as well. To those who are bound by covenant (bound by the Covenant of Grace) to Christ, there is no escaping or falling through the cracks (whether one is a fugitive minister like Jonah or a seemingly insignificant member of the church, whether one is a fugitive king or subject, whether one is a fugitive millionaire or a pauper, whether one is a fugitive senior citizen or a youth, whether one is a fugitive husband or wife, whether one is a fugitive parent or child), no child of God is too big or too small that he might escape the constant and loving care of our heavenly Father (Matthew 10:29-31). What befell Jonah in that storm was frightening as to its intensity, but it speaks volumes as to the lengths that God will go to reclaim His beloved children (great or small) by means of His unfathomable love. Dear ones, never judge true love by the absence of pain (for true love will reluctantly bring some degree of pain to the one who is dearly loved at times out of a greater concern for the soul of the one that is dearly loved). True love hurts

sometimes, because true love “rejoiceth not in iniquity, but rejoiceth in the truth” (1 Corinthians 13:6).

B. After Jonah had been rebuked by the heathen sea captain (in Jonah 1:6), the impending destruction of the ship by the hurricane-like storm led the sailors on board to take very serious action in order to determine who and what was responsible for this unparalleled storm that would soon break the ship into pieces and crush them beneath the force of the pounding waves: “And they said every one to his fellow, Come, and let us cast lots, that we may know for whose cause this evil is upon us. So they cast lots, and the lot fell upon Jonah” (Jonah 1:7). Thus, the sailors cast lots for all those on the ship in order to locate the one who had offended God (or at least offended God as they perceived Him by the Light of Nature) to such a degree that the heavens and sea pursued this one at the expense of them all. The casting of lots in Scripture was used at God’s command in certain situations (Leviticus 16:8; Numbers 26:55), and was used at other times voluntarily (for example to select certain ones for particular assignments, Judges 20:9; Luke 1:9). Now it cannot be imagined that these heathen sailors called upon the name of the one true living God to show them on whose account (in particular) it was that this horrendous storm had come. But the Lord, nevertheless, rendered a decision in His providence identifying Jonah to be the fugitive whom He pursued by means of the hurricane-like storm. Two observations should be noted from the text.

1. The first observation is that none of the heathens on the ship apparently considered himself to be a sinner of such a degree that the storm would be sent on his account from a just God. Does this not display the blindness of natural man to their own inherent depravity and corruption, and to their own wickedness in transgressing even the light and knowledge of God that He has inscribed on the conscience of every human being? Does this not demonstrate that apart from the

illumination of the Holy Spirit that men, women, and children will look for others to blame for the judgments that God sends upon the earth, rather than heeding the words of the Lord Jesus Christ, “Except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish” (Luke 13:3). You see, dear ones, those who would never consider themselves deserving of such earthly judgments for their sin against a holy God would certainly never consider themselves deserving of everlasting judgment in the lake of fire for their violation of God’s holy Law. And if they do not consider themselves worthy of hell, why do they even need a Savior? From what do they need to be saved? Sadly, we as Christians (or we as the Church) fall into the same worldly way of thinking when we refuse to examine our own hearts before God when God’s judgments are upon the earth all around us. Our first thought may be to point the finger at others rather than to examine our own hearts and lives by the Word and Spirit. Afflictions, trials, and calamities that strike this world should always drive us to the Lord in humility to fall upon His mercy, rather than puffing us up with pride as if we are completely without sin and without need to be taught God’s righteousness through the afflictions, trials, and calamities of others (“when thy judgments are in the earth, the inhabitants of the world will learn righteousness” Isaiah 26:9).

2. The second observation is that God exposed to all on that ship the sin of Jonah and the flight of Jonah from the revealed will of God as being the direct cause for the hurricane-like storm that threatened to destroy them all. It was as if the Lord said to Jonah through the lot what He said to David through Nathan, “Thou art the man” (2 Samuel 12:7). Of course, Jonah knew in his conscience that he was the man (just as David knew in his conscience that he was the man), but he refused to humble himself in confessing before God that he was the man. Jonah did not willingly confess his sin until he was caught in his sin by the very public exposure of his sin through the casting of lots (which was similar to the case with Achan in Joshua 7:19,20). Oh, dear ones, how much better to

judge ourselves quickly for our sins than to be publicly judged and exposed before all for our sins (1 Corinthians 11:31,32). It was as if the finger of God pointed directly at Jonah as the direct cause for this storm when the lot fell upon him. What a contrast between the rebellion of Jonah, who through his fleeing from the revealed will of God, became the means of impending destruction to all the souls on that ship, and the obedience of Paul, who through his submission to the revealed will of God, became the means of salvation to all the souls on that ship (Acts 27:44, "And so it came to pass, that they escaped all safe to land"). Dear ones, are you like Jonah, the means of grief and sorrow to your family, church, and co-workers; or are you like Paul, the means of salvation to your family, church, and co-workers? Choose whose example you will follow, for there is no neutrality. Have you driven those close to you away from the Lord by your rebellion, or have you driven those close to you unto the Lord by your loving obedience? Yes, it is true that even our faithfulness and loving obedience to Christ and His truth will drive people away from Christ and away from us, but that is clearly their sin, of which we are not partakers. But what a shame for us to drive people away from Christ because we do not keep our word, because we gossip, because we profane the name of the Lord, because we dress immodestly, and because we talk in such a worldly manner. If people turn away from Christ and away from us, let it be the gospel and truth of Christ that offends them and not the sin of the messenger that offends them.

C. The next step of Jonah's ever increasing humiliation comes in the form of his being now interrogated by the salty heathen sailors in Jonah 1:8: "Then said they unto him, Tell us, we pray thee, for whose cause this evil is upon us; What is thine occupation? and whence comest thou? what is thy country? and of what people art thou?"

1. Although the lot revealed that Jonah was the man who was directly responsible for this storm that would soon destroy them if

not subdued, the lot did not give any details about Jonah and the sin he had committed. So the captain and the sailors add further humiliation and shame to Jonah by calling the prophet of God to account for himself and for his actions. These interrogators want basically three pieces of information from Jonah: (1) They want him to confess with his own mouth that he is the guilty party directly responsible for the destructive storm (“Tell us, we pray thee, for whose cause this evil is upon us” Jonah 1:8); (2) They want to know what is the work that he does (“What is thine occupation” Jonah 1:8); (3) They want to know where he is from (“whence comest thou? what is thy country? and of what people art thou?” Jonah 1:8).

2. Dear ones, it is one thing to be called to account by a brother or sister in Christ who is spiritually a joint heir in the grace of life. It is another thing to be called to account by one who has no clear knowledge of God and His truth, who is spiritually dead and lifeless, and who even acts as though he has no sin that deserves the righteous judgment of God. When we have made ourselves (due to our rebellion against God’s revealed will) even sickening to the wicked, we have brought Christ and our Christian faith down and dragged them in the gutter for all to ridicule and mock (“So he/she is a Christian?”; “So that is how a Christian acts?”, “What a hypocrite!”). Beloved, none of us is without sin or even public sin at times, but we only damage our testimony for Christ when we will not humble ourselves before our non-Christian family members, friends, and co-workers to confess in sorrow our sin and humbly seek their forgiveness for our offense. That is the gospel of Jesus Christ in action. But watch out when we refuse these godly steps: we will like Jonah be shamed and called to give an account by even the wicked who observe our sin. Let us now turn to consider the work of God’s grace in Jonah’s life (and in the life of every true child of God).

## II. The Confession of Aggravated Sin Expounded by Jonah (Jonah 1:9,10).

A. In Jonah's reply to the questions put to him, we see the awakening of faith in Christ and repentance toward God. The prodigal prophet has now been brought by the Holy Spirit to the point of humiliation in seeing how greatly aggravated is his sin before the Lord who called him. Let us with joy and thankfulness to the God of our covenant witness the work of God's Spirit in graciously breaking the rebellious heart of Jonah. Jonah's replies (in Jonah 1:9) actually begin with the last question that was put to him.

1. In answer to the questions dealing with where he is from, Jonah answers very briefly, "I am an Hebrew" (Jonah 1:9). This no doubt was a testimony to these wicked sailors that Jonah had despised the mercy and grace of God freely poured out upon him through the Covenant of Grace that extended to the posterity of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. "I am an Hebrew" brought before the mind of Jonah that he had seriously aggravated his sin of rebellion against God by treating the unfathomable riches of his spiritual birthright as if they were common and ordinary. Dear ones, it is one thing to realize how we have shown contempt for the holiness and righteousness of God by our rebellion against His revealed will, but I submit it is even a greater sorrow to realize how we have shown contempt for the love, grace, and mercy of God by our rebellion against His revealed will. "I am an Hebrew" uttered in pride was the source of Jonah's rebellion in fleeing the revealed will of God to preach God's Word to Nineveh. However, "I am an Hebrew" uttered in humility was the source of Jonah's shame in having greatly aggravated his sin against the Lord. Dear ones, "I am a Christian", or "I am a Covenanter" may either proceed from pride or from humility in your life and mine. May the Lord teach us through the true historical account of His prophet, Jonah, that we are what we are by the grace of God alone.

2. In answer to the question as to his work, Jonah does not give his specific calling *per se*, but rather give his general calling—He is a God-fearer, and not a God-fearer of just any local god that a nation or people may worship, but a God-fearer of the one true living God that made the sea and dry land. Here again, Jonah’s answer brings upon him greater shame and reproach for his rebellion. For he who truly feared (and held in awe and wonder) the one true living God who created heaven, the earth, and the seas was the very one who had rebelled against the revealed will of God. By Jonah’s answer, he both pours contempt upon his pride, but also testifies against the idolatry and false religion of the captain and sailors upon the ship. The God of Jonah is the only true living God—their gods are vain and conceived by the mere imagination of men. The God of Jonah created all things and controls all things (even this violent hurricane-like storm)—their gods are lifeless, powerless, and mute before Almighty God. Jonah confesses here that as a God-fearer, he has sinned against the light of God’s revelation made known to him, and he in shame acknowledges his sin. Dear ones, a true repentance and sorrow for our sin will bring upon us shame for how we have rebelled, ignored, or been indifferent to the revelation of Christ’s truth to us, Christ’s doctrine, Christ’s worship, Christ’s government for His Church, Christ’s promises, and Christ’s commandments. We have been freely and graciously granted to bask in the blessed light of God’s revealed Word have so often sinned against that glorious light. Do we sense no shame in having done so?

3. In answer to the question put to Jonah as to whether he is directly responsible for this storm, Jonah’s answer is inferred from what is said at the end of Jonah 1:10: “For the men knew that he fled from the presence of the LORD, because he had told them.” Not only the lot cast pointed to Jonah saying, “Thou art the man”, but Jonah had finally come to confess in shame, “Yes, I am the man; the man whom the one true living God that made heaven, earth, and the seas is pursuing by means of

this hurricane-like storm.” Jonah’s faithful confession is complete. The Lord has pursued His child and brought him in love to repentance and new obedience.

B. Beloved, in conclusion, we are reminded again of that blessed promise found in Proverbs 24:16: “For a just man falleth seven times, and riseth up again.” Praise God for this inspired testimony and historical account of God’s restoring grace. Dear ones, just as we can take no credit at all for God’s redeeming grace, so we can take no credit at all for God’s restoring grace. For we are no more able to restore ourselves from the power of sin when we have fallen into that besetting sin or when we have rebelled and fled away from the revealed will of God, than we are able to redeem ourselves from the guilt and penalty of sin. We are what we are by the grace of God. Salvation from beginning to end is of the Lord. “But of him are ye in Christ Jesus, who is made unto us wisdom, and righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption: That, according as it is written, He that glorieth, let him glory in the Lord” (1 Corinthians 1:30,31). Amen.

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