

Man Overboard!

One of my earliest childhood memories was at my grandparents house in Texarkana Texas. I was about 3 or 4 Saturday Night and my Mom declared that a bath was required. Them's fighting words to a 4 yr old At least this 4 year old. Part of being in my family was to understand that when it comes to bath time Mom rules. She alone determined what clean really was

But I remember this particular night because instead of going to the bath, I tried to exert my newly discovered independence. The Word of Mom came to Frank and Frank ran to Tarshish. I wasn't dirty and didn't need a bath. I remember trying to hide all over my grandparents home

I should have known better. There was no way Mom was going to let me go to church without taking a bath the night before. I ran and Mom pursued. I thought she was angry... Not impressed at all my with sudden realization that I could decide what clean really meant and I didn't need her advice or opinion.

No matter how hard I tried to run from Mom. She kept pursuing me. She began to reveal to me the consequences of my disobedience. She eventually left me no choice but to surrender.

After all of the drama, I expected painful scrubbing, disappointed Mom lecturing me throughout the whole bath. I thought she wanted to get me to surrender so that she could make an example of me

I remember standing there naked and exposed. Waiting for my punishment and recognizing that my relationship with Mom was at least strained

She made me acknowledge that I was covered with dirt. Made me recognize what I had tried to deny...What I was running from....Then she said it was time to make sure I was clean....I braced for the brillo pad.....lye soap....and painful scrubbing

I have been thinking a lot about that night. Our walk with God is a lot like that. Part of being in His family is to understand that God rules and He alone decides what clean really is. In God's Family Jesus wants all of His children to be clean

God declares that we are dirty and need to be cleaned. We run to Tarshish. We run and He pursues us. We argue with Him that we are not that dirty. That we really don't need to be cleaned. That our dirt is not that obvious and isn't hurting anyone. So God pursues us and brings circumstances into our lives to direct us back to the truth

The more we run the more He pursues us Each time we move farther away. He intensifies His pursuit. We fear that God is pursuing us to punish us for our disobedience. God's pursuit of us seems relentless...because it is.

We know that running from His presence is fruitless But we would rather do that than face his disappointment and punishment. Eventually what God reveals can't be denied. We often feel naked and exposed. God requires that we confess that we are dirty, vulnerable, exposed, ashamed and guilt ridden. We brace for the punishment that we have feared

We have been studying the story of Jonah. The Word of the Lord came to Jonah and he ran. We learned last week that God sent a storm to get his attention. Today we are going to continue our story. We learned in week 1 "God loves everyone and we do not". Last week " We are all connected". This week "God lovingly pursues His Children"

God has a lot to teach us in this Story Let me remind you of where we left off Jonah has told the mariners a half truth The ship is going down. The storm is raging Like no storm they have ever seen The mariners understand that Jonah's God is powerful and huge. They have cast lots and Jonah has confessed that the storm is due to his rebellion. They have just turned to him and said essentially are you crazy? You can't run from this God! Even we know that!

Jonah 1:11–13 (ESV) 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.

Isn't that an odd question? What shall we do to you? I would have expected them to say..."Jonah what do you need to do to correct this problem that you have caused?" This is your storm....fix it!

But they must realize that Jonah doesn't care. Jonah has essentially said..."I know I have caused this...but I am not going to do anything about it" The Mariners realize that they are going to have to act. Jonah is so passive that he is ineffective

I think their frustration and anger is building at this point. They realize that whatever happens Needs to happen TO Jonah. What do we need to do to YOU? So WE can get out of YOUR storm?

Also note that the storm is building Every time God gives Jonah an opportunity to repent, and Jonah chooses half truths, and refuses to acknowledge what God already knows, the storm intensifies

Jonah 1:12 (ESV) 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."

I don't like Jonah. He is not even man enough to throw himself into the water. He is saying..."look the only way this storm calms down is for you to throw me in. I am not going to make any effort to save you, but if you want to be saved you have to throw me in. I don't really care about me...and I don't care about the Assyrians....and honestly I don't really care about you." People who run from God eventually get to a point where they only care about themselves and they will use anyone to get what they want. But since you guys are right here in front of me.....if you want to get out of this....the ONLY option is to throw me in....

But that is not true is it? Jonah is still spinning half-truths. There is another option Jonah...Drop to your knees...put your face on the deck of this boat...Cry out to God....Confess your sin, your rebellion, your hatred for the Assyrians, your selfishness, and your lie to others. Jonah you must own the damage that you are causing. Ask God if he will still use you...tell Him that you will go to Nineveh and do whatever He tells you to do I believe that if Jonah had taken that option...the storm would have ceased.

But Jonah would rather die. Than be involved in saving an Assyrian even when faced with his own death. He plans to go down with fist gripped tightly around his hatred and racism.

Some say that Jonah is repentant at this point And is sacrificing himself for these mariners. I don't see that in this text at all. He is not sacrificing himself for others. He is thumbing his nose at God and saying...Kill me if you want...Throw me overboard But I would rather die than see and Assyrian be forgiven

I truly don't care what you do, but I am NOT going to Nineveh. I am taking control here....I am doing what I want to do....God you can't make me go..... I am ending this right here and right now....Either they throw me overboard or this ship goes down, But I am not going to Nineveh!

Jonah 1:13 (ESV) 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.

Note that these mariners are acting more Christ-like than Jonah. It seems Jonah isn't going to lift a finger to help them, yet they are rowing hard to try to save him

They decide to try to solve the problem themselves Forget what Jonah says....We can get ourselves out of this storm if we just work hard enough. But the harder they tried....the worse the storm got. They were afraid...but still willing to try to save Jonah

But as the Mariners tried to solve the problem themselves. They began to interfere with what God was doing. God was using these circumstances to change Jonah...Good motives...but disobedient nonetheless

And the Mariners began to interfere with what God was doing...They were taking matters into their own hands...Rather than realizing God caused the storm for a purpose...They were just trying to escape...God sent a clear message to them...the storm became stronger than ever. It is not God's intent that they get out of this storm on their own effort

We do the same thing don't we? Often God is involved in discipline or correction and we rush in trying to solve the problem with our opinions instead of praying to see if God is even asking us to do anything.

We interfere in what God is doing in the lives of others in an effort to do the right thing....Just like the mariners were doing. Their intentions seemed honorable, but what they didn't realize is that Jonah had to learn a lesson and His lesson had to come from God, not them. God was doing something much bigger than what they could see in that moment.

But God wasn't just using this storm to reach Jonah.....They all have a lesson to learn in the storm....God loves them too much to allow them to miss it.

Note they could not for the sea grew more and more tempestuous against them....the storm has grown rougher...not just rougher...but against them...God is using the intensity of the Storm to get their attention...to force them to stop trying to fix it themselves...

To get out of their solve mode and to get into what God is doing.....To admit their futility and surrender to Him...Therefore....As a result of that awareness...Jonah is going swimming.

Jonah 1:13–15 (ESV) 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."

Something incredible is happening here....do you see it? When this storm started, they were crying out...each to their own gods...when that failed they began trying to solve the problem themselves.

They try to fix the problems themselves...they aren't crying out to God because they believe in Him....They are in the midst of their panic...Crying out to any God or any guru that may be able to help us. They have already thrown everything, except Jonah, overboard. Tried to escape the storm through their own efforts and exhaust everything that they knew to do

The longer they are in the storm....and the longer they have to persevere in the storm...they begin to learn something. Something that they never would have realized without the storm.

Note that each time they cry out to God from their storm, they gain more truth. When the storm hits they do what all of us do...Stop the Storm!!!! People who don't even know God and don't believe in God will cry out to God for help if the storm is bad enough.

But in the midst of the storm.....They learned about Jonah's God....because they stayed in the storm....because they persevered in the storm they begin to believe in Jonah's God. In the midst of the storm....they are beginning to see and understand God. And because they are starting to believe....look at what they say...

"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."

Oh Lord...not Oh Jonah's God...not Oh little g god...not one of the many God's...not even the term for the general concept of God. They call Him Yaweh....and they do it...twice so that there is no doubt.

The Tetragrammaton YHWH, the Lord, or Yahweh, the personal name of God and his most frequent designation in Scripture, occurring 5321 times

So they cry out to God...Note that this time when they cry out to God, he is no longer just Jonah's God but the longer they stay in Jonah's Storm...the more they learn about God and the more they believe....But that new realization now raises a problem for them.

Think about their dilemma. They have tried to save Jonah on their own but failed. They are pretty sure that Jonah is the problem, but if Jonah is thrown overboard and he is not the problem, they have just made now their God....their personal God.

God really mad because they just tried to kill one of His prophets. They saw what happened to Jonah when He disobeyed Yaweh....they want no part of that for themselves. They better get this one right.

They are begging not to be punished for throwing Jonah overboard.

Jonah 1:15 (ESV) 15 So they picked up Jonah and hurled him into the sea, and the sea ceased from its raging.

Can you imagine the experience the mariners must have had? They are in the middle of a huge storm...waves everywhere....wind....ship tossing. Jonah hits the water and everything instantly changes...Calm, serene, smooth seas, no wind...The ship is still and all you can hear is the sound of water dripping off the mast

Instantly God calmed the storm...The Mariners knew that God caused the storm, and they know God stopped the storm

The way God stopped the storm was a gift to them If the storm had gradually improved....slowly resolved They could have passed it off as a coincidence...We see that all the time...Promises in the storm....Forgetfulness when all goes calm

But Jonah's splash brought immediate calm waters. God once again arranging circumstances to reveal Himself to those He pursues.

Jonah 1:16–17 (ESV) 16 Then the men feared the LORD exceedingly, and they offered a sacrifice to the LORD and made vows.

The men have been through three kinds of fear. There is the fear that mean impending danger and threat to life, Then there is the fear that comes from realizing that you are not in control and powerless...But the fear expressed here is one of being awestruck and full of wonder. The One True God of everything caused the storm....rescued them....and stopped the storm

And this God deserved their sacrifice, worship and surrender. They offered a sacrifice and made vows...God had used Jonah's rebellion and a storm to bring others to know and surrender to Him

God used Jonah's rebellion to bring these mariners to know Him It was not a coincidence that Jonah found a ship going to Tarshish It is no coincidence that Jonah was on this ship with these men God was pursuing not only Jonah but some mariners who thought they could navigate, but discovered that without God....they were lost. God lovingly pursues His children and those He loves....God loves everyone....

Now as far as they know....Jonah is dead Imagine Jonah as he hits the water. He is ready to die...expects to die...and would rather die.....He has maintained his own control, and chose not to do what God wants him to do.

But what Jonah doesn't realize or had forgotten, is that God is always in control of every moment...and when His children run from Him...He runs TO them.....The warm embrace of God's love for Jonah would next be felt in the digestive system of a great fish. But as Jonah continues to run.....God lovingly pursues.

Jonah 1:17 (ESV) 17 And the LORD appointed a great fish to swallow up Jonah. And Jonah was in the belly of the fish three days and three nights.

Note that the Lord appointed the fish....Jonah runs....God sends a storm....Jonah keeps running....God sends a fish...God has total control over every created being. HE created this fish for this purpose...This was his destiny...every thing God creates fulfills a purpose

Note that this was a great fish....NOT a whale We don't know what kind of fish this was It must have been large...It could have been a unique fish created one time solely for this purpose....We just don't know.

But imagine Jonah... Sinking in the water.....expecting to die...and then this massive fish with a massive mouth....Envelopes you...All of the sudden you can breathe...ok it stinks but you can breathe....It is dark....it is wet....and you realizeAnd finally it dawns on you that you are not in control....God is ...always has been....and He still has a lesson for you to learn....You run....God pursues. You will learn the lesson.

Do you wonder why when we know running is futile that we keep running even when the circumstances in our lives get worse and worse? It is because we do not understand the depth of God's love for us

We run because we picture God Angry, Mad, Judgmental...Standing next to a hot bath holding a Brillo Pad and Lye Soap....Ready to chastise us and punish us for not obeying Him.

So many believe that God sent the storm and fish into Jonah's life...To judge him....to punish him...and to chastise him....But do you know what true judgment would be?

If God wanted to really punish Jonah...he would let Jonah go to Tarshish and not do anything. An unloving and uncaring God would look at Jonah and say.....Go ahead...run from my presence....live the rest of your life and eternity away from me

But Jonah's God and our God loves everyone. And God lovingly pursues His children. The greatest love God showed to Jonah was to bring a storm into his life

And when Jonah failed to repent. God loved Jonah so much that He led the mariners to throw Jonah overboard... Jonah now still is not repentant...But God loves him too much to let him drown

God sent His love to Jonah through a fish. Everything that happened to Jonah on that boat
Was God's love being poured out on him Because God loved Him too much to let him Really
run away to Tarshish

We run from him and yet He runs to us. When we run from God...We end up running
right into Him...Because when we run...He pursues us. But too often we don't see the
actions of God as acts of love.

But God does not pursue us to judge us He is not vindictive and not angry He loves you
and wants the best for you The problem is we don't understand the depths of God's love
The crisis that God allowed into Jonah's Life Was His love being poured out on Jonah We
don't often think of the crisis and challenges in our lives...As evidence that our Loving
God is pursuing us.

Do you see the troubles in your life as evidence of God's love?

God is all powerful, all knowing, and not surprised by anything Anything that has happened in your life
occurred because God allowed it. Let that soak in for a moment.

It is one of the hardest things to embrace about God. Every event in your life has been allowed by
God. He had the awareness and power to stop it and He did not...How could a loving God allow crisis
in the lives of His children and His creation?

Because God's love is often manifested in discipline.....Reminders that God has decided not to let
us run all the way to Tarshish....He creates circumstances to get us to turn around and obey Him

And the most important thing from God's perspective Is not your experience here on earth, but
rather the eternal state of your soul. We tend to focus only on the here and now but God is
interested in eternal things...He will allow almost anything in this life to keep you from being
separated from Him forever.

We run and God is constantly pursuing us ...But His love often comes to us and feels like a
crisis...It is in the challenges of life that we realize we are not in control...In the crisis of life we
recognize our need to be saved....In the challenges of life we turn back to God....It often takes
a crisis to get us to surrender- nothing else would have done it....And that is exactly why a
loving God has allowed it.

Have you noticed how we judge everything? Something happens in our lives we
immediately judge and rate it. Good things from our perspective....are blessings...when bad
things happen....we get angry at God....and see them often as His punishment

Yet when we look at the rear view mirror of our lives. The things that often we thought
were bad....The things that we prayed so hard for God to change or take away, were in
hindsight huge blessings.

Looking back our greatest growth and experience with God came out of those difficult
moments...And when we see how God uses them, we look back on our lives and thank
God that he didn't answer our prayers by giving us what we wanted in that moment.

Our view of God limits our understanding....God has promised us that He will use the
things that happen in our lives for our good.....To grow us to be more like Christ. The
problem is that we don't have his perspective...In our flesh we can only see the
immediate But God is focused on eternal things. As we spoke several weeks ago...we
focus on the moment...God focuses on the mission.

We see life in a linear fashion. Start to Finish. But God' is not limited by space and time. He sees you not only where you are now but who you will become....When he looks at you....he sees you now....but He also sees who you will become when His work is complete in you

He can also look forward into eternity And see you complete, transformed and in the image of Christ and with that view in mind, He will allow any crisis in your life that gets you to that point

God's focus is on our souls and on our eternal needs. The experiences we have on earth are important to get us there. God is in the saving and transforming business.

In our flesh...we focus on our immediate circumstances here on earth....Throughout the Bible God tells His children that our focus should be on eternal things, we run from God because we only focus on our immediate circumstances. Yet, God has great plans for us...He has seen our future...any crisis that we are going through is necessary to get us there....It is the best thing that God can bring into our lives to change us....To transform us to be like Christ.....God uses the challenges in our lives, and will allow any challenge in our lives in order to conform us to His image

James 1:1-4 (ESV) 2 Count it all joy, my brothers, when you meet trials of various kinds, 3 for you know that the testing of your faith produces steadfastness. 4 And let steadfastness have its full effect, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing.

Notice that to be perfect and complete lacking nothing. We must go through trials of various kinds. Trials are necessary for God to grow us. Sometimes, like Jonah, trials are the only way God can get our attention, we are so self absorbed that it takes a trial to make us realize that we are not in control

James tells us to count it as joy when we meet trials. He is not talking about oh boy happy happy. Joy here means that we are content and can find peace, regardless of our circumstances. Somehow in the midst of storms, we know that God is teaching us and we know we can trust Him to be good.

We understand that what has happened is best...Even though we don't like itEven though it hurts...Even though we do not understand it. We get to a place not of denial...but of trust...God has allowed it...and He loves me....I can trust Him to be good....We change from why is this happening to me, to thank you God what do you want me to learn.

God used the Storm in Jonah's life to get Jonah to turn back from Him and stop running. To show some mariners that there is one true God worth following. To show thousands in Nineveh that they need to repent and turn back to Him. God was doing something so huge that impacts so many lives....and all Jonah could see was himself.....in a moment. He thought he was more important than what God was doing in Human History and for all of eternity.

James 1:5-6 (ESV) If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask God, who gives generously to all without reproach, and it will be given him. 6 But let him ask in faith, with no doubting, for the one who doubts is like a wave of the sea that is driven and tossed by the wind.

In the context of trials....if any of you lacks wisdom ask God.....We do not serve a God who wants to teach us something in our trials and does not reveal to us what the lesson is. God wants to make sure that we understand completely the lesson that He has for us. God promises us that if we lack wisdom in our trials to ask Him and He will give it to us....GENEROUSLY

He goes on to say that we will receive God's wisdom regarding our trial without reproach. God is not using our trials to punish us or to humiliate us. HE uses the trials in our lives to teach us...to grow us...to transform us....and to bring us back to Him.

God tells us that when we are going through trials. He does not want us to be unaware. He is not going to put us through trials and not use the opportunity to teach us, but he wants us to act in faith. To focus on Him and know that He can be trusted to be good.

HE wants us to focus on the lesson, our response, and our eternal perspective. Not the temporary circumstances necessary to transform us. Note also that he says...Let steadfastness have its full effect That means that we have to allow the crisis to play out

That our knees jerk reaction to row to shore in our own efforts. To take shortcuts that compromise our faith to try to get out of a situation is not the response God has for us

We are to persevere and ride out the storm as God directs, so that we can be perfect and complete lacking nothing....Trials take time...we have to allow them to go to completion so that we don't miss anything that God wants to teach us.

God is more concerned about the condition of our souls. Than our immediate comfort, security and pleasure on earth. He will do whatever it takes to rescue us eternally. We are transformed by the renewing of our minds and that often occurs through the lessons that we learn in trials.

As we gain God's Eternal Perspective We see the challenges in our lives not as punishment but as opportunities to be transformed.

We begin to ask different questions of God. Rather than.... God make it stop! God why me? God why are you punishing me? We learn to ask...this is happening...you God have allowed it.... You love me...You know the future....I can trust you to be good.... So God...my question is....what do you want me to learn? Because I am more focused on you and what you want me to do Than I am the crisis that you have allowed. I don't want to miss what you are trying to teach me

I am able to persevere through the storm because I am gaining a bit of your perspective God...Somehow this storm is the best option to change me....Of all the possibilities of things that could happen in my life, this is the one that you have deemed to be best. I trust you to be Good. I know that this storm is evidence that you are pursuing me. I want more than anything else whatever you deem that I need. I need to stop running and just surrender

Which brings me back to a young dirty 4 yr old Realizing that continuing to run was fruitless That the consequences of my flight may be worse Than the consequence of surrender and obedience. With much fear I released my grip on control Came to my Mom and confessed that yes...I am dirty....yes I need to be cleaned...Then I closed my eyes and braced for it.

But Mom didn't chase me to hurt me I braced for the brillo pad.....lye soap....and painful scrubbing...But what I remember was Tony the Tiger....She had my favorite Tony the Tiger foam bath mit. Her touch was not scrubbing and punishment But rather gentle and full of love

I remember that she sang softly and hummed, told me how much she loved me...that I didn't really want to be dirty and I would feel so much better clean. While she methodically went through the process of cleaning me. The process was one of deep love...not punishment

I remember her saying "All right Pumpkin....now you are clean. Don't you feel better?"...And remarkably I felt better than I had ever felt before....She wrapped me in a huge warm towel and just held me....I remember the feeling of that embrace...She just kept humming and telling me how much she loved me and that I didn't need to disobey or run from her

Looking back...there was no way I was going to get out of taking a bath...It would have been so easy to just submit But I didn't understand that her pursuit of me was because she loved me. I thought she was angry but they were laughing at how hard I was trying to get away and how useless my run was.....I didn't like having my dirt exposed... I didn't like the idea of getting clean...I thought she was chasing me to punish me..... Because I had never been bathed in love and grace before

I remember that I use to be afraid to sleep in my grandparents home. It was next to a train track and huge pine trees that scared me. But on that night....I was clean..but I also went to bed safe knowing that I was loved. Nothing is better than knowing you are clean....knowing you are loved....and being secure in that relationship

In the same way, God wasn't chasing Jonah and isn't chasing us to punish us. He was chasing us because He loves us. We don't have to fear our punishment because He has already taken our punishment for us...All that He has for us is grace, mercy, and transformation....There is no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus...Only loving and grace filled transformation

He points out our dirt so that we can learn. His touch is gentle and full of love. The soap that He uses is grace and mercy. He lovingly goes about making sure that we are clean. Pouring out His love for us like water from a cup...Cleansing us....from all that separates us from Him

All the while humming, singing, and telling us how much He loves us. Reminding us that when we are clean we will feel much better. Then He wraps us in the warm towel of forgiveness....Holds us in His love....

He makes sure that we know we are safe and secure.....and reminds us that next time it is easier to just obey when He calls us to go.He loves us too much to leave us dirty and defiant....No matter how far we try to run from Him

If you read about this moment in history at a very superficial level, it is a great children's story. Unfortunately, when we tell this story to children, we leave out the most incredible part of the story. The part that tells us about the love of God. You see, Jonah didn't end up in the belly of a fish because he was being punished by God. He was driven there by the love of God.

He was driven to the depths of his existence because God wanted to show Him the depths of His love. He was driven to near death so that God could show him what it means to really live. An angry judgmental God would have let Jonah go to Tarshish, but being wrapped in the gastric juices of a fish is the most loving experience that God could show Jonah in that moment. That is where we pick this story up as God continues to show Jonah and us what love really looks like. Let's Pray