

Surviving the Storms of Life

Jonah Storms

Jonah 1:1-17

Over the last few weeks we have been looking at the storms of life and how to survive and even thrive in the midst of them. We have walked through spring showers, thunderstorms, and even category 5 hurricanes. Today I want to finish this series by talking about a different kind of storm - a Jonah storm. These are storms of our own making. Some characteristics of Jonah Storms.

- They can be of varying intensity - from spring showers to Category 5.
- If not dealt with they will become deadly. Even spring showers Jonah style are deadly.
- These are the only storms that WE can control.
- These storms represent a fundamental spiritual problem.

Let's look at Jonah chapter 1. If we are going to survive Jonah storms we need to know several things. I said before that these are the only storms over which we have control. Therefore we need to know where they come from and how to stop them or better yet how to prevent them. **Jonah 1:1-3** tells us:

1 The Lord gave this message to Jonah son of Amittai: 2 "Get up and go to the great city of Nineveh. Announce my judgment against it because I have seen how wicked its people are." 3 But Jonah got up and went in the opposite direction to get away from the Lord. He went down to the port of Joppa, where he found a ship leaving for Tarshish. He bought a ticket and went on board, hoping to escape from the Lord by sailing to Tarshish.

Four Causes of Self-Induced Storms (v.1-3)

Now I want you to know that I have named these Jonah storms for a reason. Not because he is the only one in scripture to have them, to the contrary almost every important person in the scriptures has faced these storms. Jonah just is a perfect example in a few verses. He displays perfectly all four of the major causes of these storms. Let's look at four major causes of Jonah storms.

1. Disobedience

Disobedience God tells Jonah to go to Nineveh. Jonah boards a ship for Tarshish. Understand Nineveh is in the east near modern day Mosul Iraq. Tarshish is in the west on the Mediterranean. Jonah did the exact opposite of what God said to do.

Now let me tell you something very important this morning. **You cannot disobey God without consequence.** God's desire is always for our best. As a father watches over his

children so God watches over us - always desiring the very best for our lives. He gives us instruction for a reason - to protect us and prosper us. We disobey him at our own risk.

I talk with people all the time who know what God wants for them but they simply say "I know it's not right but I'm going to do it anyway." (Butt prints in the sand)

One night, I had a wondrous dream;
One set of footprints there was seen.
The footprints of my precious Lord,
But mine were not along the shore.
But then some stranger prints appeared,
And I asked the Lord, "What have we here?"
"Those prints are large and round and neat,
But, Lord, they are too big for feet."
"My child," He said in sombre tones.
"For miles I carried you alone.
I challenged you to walk in faith,
But you refused and made me wait.
You disobeyed, you would not grow,
The walk-of-faith you would not know.
So I got tired and fed up,
And there I dropped you on your butt,
Because in life, there comes a time,
When one must fight, and one must climb,
When one must rise and take a stand,
Or leave their butt prints in the sand."

2. Self-indulgence

What I mean by this is pampering that part of ourselves that cries out to be indulged. The I part. I want, I deserve, I need, I, I, I. Jonah didn't want to do what God said to do - so he didn't and he paid the price. **Jonah cared more about feeling good than about obeying God.** The danger in this is that what feels good and what is good is often different.

I could spend all day talking about this but I think you know what I mean. You know the difference between right and wrong - between good and bad. While wrong and bad might feel good for a moment they lead to a lifetime of consequences. Sin might feel good for a moment but ask Jonah and he would tell you that **"Sin always takes you farther than you want to go, keeps you longer than you want to stay, and costs you more than you want to pay."**

3. Spiritual Disregard

Psalm 111:10 tells us:

Fear of the Lord is the foundation of true wisdom. All who obey his commandments will grow in wisdom.

Jonah disregarded the spiritual war that was raging around him. Satan had a plan for Nineveh (the thief comes but to kill, steal, and destroy). God had a plan for Nineveh. Look at **Jonah 3:5**:

5 The people of Nineveh believed God's message, and from the greatest to the least, they declared a fast and put on burlap to show their sorrow.

What Jonah failed to realize was that he had the opportunity to be a servant of God or a servant of the Enemy but he was going to be one or the other. Folks you cannot live your life with no regard for spiritual matters - they are real and within them brings spiritual death or spiritual life.

In 2001 Tom Cruise and Penelope Cruz starred in the rather forgettable movie *Vanilla Sky*. At the London premiere Tom was handed the mobile phone of a young fan. He rang the girl's mother, also a fan, to speak to her. Meanwhile, the fan's mum, Mrs O'Leary, was talking to her ex-husband on the phone. She heard the call-waiting signal, but figured it was one of her daughter's friends calling and didn't bother to take the call. Imagine her surprise when she heard the message left on her machine: "Hi, this is Tom Cruise. Is anyone there?...There's no-one there. I'm just saying hi." When she found out Mrs O'Leary of Northamptonshire was kicking herself: "I would rather have been speaking to Tom Cruise than my ex, that's certain. You just don't expect Tom Cruise to give you a call." How often we do the same with God! We get so busy and preoccupied that we fail to take the time to listen to God. We may even hear a "call waiting signal" but forget to "pick up". If it's a pity that Mrs O'Leary missed her conversation with Tom Cruise, how tragic that we miss our opportunity to speak with God or experience our time to be used by God in life.

4. Outthinking God

What I mean by this is thinking we know better than God what should be done. Have you wondered why Jonah did what he did? Was he scared to go to Nineveh? Was he intimidated by the scope of the job? Look at **Jonah 4:2**:

2 So he complained to the Lord about it: "Didn't I say before I left home that you would do this, Lord? That is why I ran away to Tarshish! I knew that you are a merciful and compassionate God, slow to get angry and filled with unfailing love. You are eager to turn back from destroying people."

Jonah knew that God would change Nineveh and he didn't want Nineveh changed. He wanted them destroyed. We get into major problems when we think we know better than God what should be done.

The world is full of progressive thinkers who reject the word of God. Church, it doesn't matter what century you're living in, truth is truth. You might think it's outdated, you might think it's old-fashioned, but you are going to learn eventually that God knows best.

Two Responses to Jonah Type Storms

Our response to Jonah storms must be a two-pronged approach. Like any disease, we have to deal with prevention and cure.

1. Storm Prevention

I told you in the beginning that these storms are the only storms that can be prevented. We have control over what these storms look like, how long they last, and even if they hit at all. If you want to avoid Jonah storms.

a. Listen to God

Look, God has given us a roadmap for life. If we follow it, we do well; if we don't, we lose. Listen to what God said to Joshua as he entered the promised land in **Joshua 1:8**:

8 Study this Book of Instruction continually. Meditate on it day and night so you will be sure to obey everything written in it. Only then will you prosper and succeed in all you do.

b. Obey God

Samuel tells us in **1 Samuel 15:22-23**:

“What is more pleasing to the Lord: your burnt offerings and sacrifices or your obedience to his voice? Listen! Obedience is better than sacrifice, and submission is better than offering the fat of rams. Rebellion is as sinful as witchcraft, and stubbornness as bad as worshipping idols. So because you have rejected the command of the Lord, he has rejected you as king.”

Those are the words spoken to Saul - King of Israel just before his kingship was removed. Saul knew what God wanted but didn't do it. We live in a world where Christians worship on Sunday and live like there is no God on Monday. Church, you cannot disobey God without consequence.

2. The Storm Cure - Repentance

If you find yourself in the midst of a Jonah storm, there is only one way out - Repentance. Reluctantly and stubbornly, Jonah repented. Look at **Jonah 1:12**:

12 “Throw me into the sea,” Jonah said, “and it will become calm again. I know that this terrible storm is all my fault.”

The reality is Jonah wasn't asking to be lowered over in a boat so he could make his way back to Nineveh - his storm was only beginning. **Jonah wanted to be thrown overboard because he would rather die than to obey.**

So a fish swallowed him. Now I guess when your hanging out in a fishes digestive system it gives you a few minutes to review your life. Cause Jonah did. Look at just a few phrases from Jonah's prayer to God. **Jonah 2:4** tells us:

4 Then I said, 'O Lord, you have driven me from your presence. Yet I will look once more toward your holy Temple.'

*7 As my life was slipping away, I remembered the Lord. And my earnest prayer went out to you in your holy Temple. **Jonah 2:7***

*9 But I will offer sacrifices to you with songs of praise, and I will fulfill all my vows. For my salvation comes from the Lord alone." **Jonah 2:9***

Repentance took hold in Jonah's life. And indigestion took hold of the fish. The storm was over - and Jonah got vomited onto the beach in Nineveh. Not a real auspicious arrival for a prophet - but terribly effective. If you want to stop living through Jonah storms you have to start making better decisions. Following better advice. And Listening more to God.

Two dangers are inherent as we look at Jonah storms. One is thinking that none of us struggle with Jonah storms – failing to constantly evaluate our lives to make sure that we are for God and not against him.

Second, the danger of thinking that all of our storms are a result of being our fault. Life will hand us difficult times even to those who show great faith and obedience to God. We need to be aware of what is our part and what is God's.

Jonah storms are storms none of us should go through, but we probably will - we all need to learn to stay out of them. There are plenty of storms for us to face in the world. Spring storms that make life stressful. Thunderstorms that make life difficult. Category 5 storms that make life dangerous. But Jonah storms are storms of our own making.

I hope that over the last few weeks you have learned some strategies that will help you survive and even thrive in the storms of life. How we live through them, how we treat them, and how we avoid them leads to a life of faith and peace, or a life of despair and turmoil. Who will you go to when the next storm hits? Let's pray!