

An Encouraging Word From Dr. Tim Watson
Series: The God Of A Second Chance- A Study In Jonah
"Dealing With The Storms Of Life"

If I were to ask you to think back to one of the worst storms, one of the worst bad weather situations you've ever been in, what would come to your mind? A thunderstorm? A hurricane or tornado? A snow storm? One of the deadliest storms to take place in our country occurred on September the 8th, 1900 in Galveston, Texas. A hurricane with winds of 140 miles per hour swept over Galveston Island, bringing a storm surge of 15 feet 7 inches of water upon the residents of Galveston.

After the storm surge of 15 feet 7 inches subsided, there were 6,000 of the city's 37,000 residents dead, and more than 3,600 buildings were totally destroyed. Think back to one of the worst storms, one of the worst bad weather situations you have experienced. Perhaps you've been fortunate to have never been in a tornado or a hurricane or a snow storm. You can live in certain parts of the United States and enjoy good weather almost all year round.

But if you live on this earth for any amount of time, you will be touched by storms of another kind: *the storms of life, the trials and testings that come with everyday living*. If you were to ask the eighth-century prophet and preacher Jonah, "What was the worst storm you were in?" Jonah would point to a time in his life in which he was running from God's will, and as a result of running from the Lord, God sent a storm into Jonah's life to get his attention.

As we continue in our series of messages from the Old Testament Book of Jonah, we're going to see how Jonah dealt with this storm, and we will get some wisdom and insight on how we are to deal with the storms of life. Look in your Bible to Jonah 1:11-17. Our message this morning is entitled Dealing With the Storms of Life. We are continuing in our series of messages entitled The God of a Second Chance.

Perhaps you come to this service today needing a redo, a do-over, a second chance in your life. The good news of the gospel is that the God of the universe gave Jonah a second chance, and He is willing to do the same for you. The Book of Jonah was written between 782 and 745 BC. Jonah was living in the northern kingdom of Israel in a small town called Gath Hopher. Gath Hopher was just a few miles from Nazareth, the boyhood home of Jesus Christ.

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God commanded Jonah, this Jewish prophet, to leave Gath Hopher and travel 500 to 600 miles to the north and the east to Nineveh, at that time the capital city of the Assyrian Empire. Nineveh was located in what is today the modern-day country of Iraq. Jonah was instructed to go to Nineveh, a city of 120,000 people, and tell them that if they would repent from their evil ways, God loved the people of Nineveh, and He was willing to spare their lives.

Jonah did not want to go and preach God's message of repentance and love to the Assyrians, because the Assyrians were Israel's enemy, and the Assyrians were a cruel and wicked people. When the Assyrians conquered a people group, they were known to have skinned their prisoners alive, cut off various body parts. Sometimes they would pull out the tongues of their captives. Would you want to go and tell these wicked people that God loved them?

Instead of going to Nineveh, Jonah got on a boat at Joppa on the Israeli seacoast, and he headed across the Mediterranean Sea to Tarshish near the modern-day country of Spain. As a result of disobeying God and not doing what God had commanded him to do, God allowed the storms of life to come Jonah's way in a figurative as well as a literal way. When Jonah ran from God, he got on a boat at Joppa on the Mediterranean Sea, and he sailed for that small Phoenician area near Spain called Tarshish.

He tried to get as far away from God and Nineveh as he could. While on this ship, a horrible storm jolted the Mediterranean Sea, and the

small ship where Jonah was a passenger almost capsized. Jonah and the pagan sailors on this ship were about to drown, and in Jonah 1, the Bible tells us the sailors on this ship knew something was wrong. They realized someone on the ship was responsible for this terrible storm.

They drew lots, which would be similar to rolling dice.... and one of the lots pointed to Jonah as the guilty party, the one responsible for the storm. Let's read Jonah 1, beginning at verse 11 and reading through verse 17.

11 The sea was getting rougher and rougher, so they asked Jonah, "What should we do to you to make the sea calm for us?" 12 "Pick me up and throw me into the sea," he replied, "And it will become calm. I know that it is my fault that this great storm has come upon you." 13 Instead, the men did their best to row back to land, but they could not, for the sea grew even wilder than before. 14 Then they cried to the Lord, "Oh, 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, oh, Lord, have done as you pleased." 15 Then they took Jonah and threw him overboard and the raging sea grew calm. 16 At this, the men greatly feared the Lord, and they offered a sacrifice to the Lord, and they made vows to him. 17 But the Lord provided a great fish to swallow Jonah, and Jonah was inside the fish three days and three nights.

Dealing With The Storms Of Life

All of us experience the storms of life. Perhaps it is a health crisis, a financial problem, difficulty in marriage, problems with our children, problems at school, or work-related issues. All of us experience the storms of life. When the storms of life come our way, there are a couple of questions we need to ask.

Question #1:

1). **What is the reason for the storm?** What is the cause? What is the root? What is the reason for the storm? You will notice here in Jonah 1 as the ship Jonah was on was about to sink, the sailors began asking Jonah some very important questions. For example, in verse 8 that we looked at last week, they began asking, "Who is responsible for this storm?"

What is the reason for this storm? Jonah, where are you from? What is your people group? What ethnic group are you from?" Jonah

answers their questions by telling the sailors the truth, that he is a Hebrew, a worshiper of the one who has created the land and the sea, and, yes, it is his fault that they are in this mess because he is running from God.

In verse 11 of our text, the sailors ask another important question, "Jonah, what shall we do with you?"

In every storm of life, it is important to get to the root, the cause, the reason for the storm. In other words, we need to be insightful and perceptive in trying to gain some understanding about the storms we are experiencing. Most of the time when we're going through a difficult season of life or we are working through a tough situation, our mind is on getting out of that adversity as fast as we can. But rather than just trying to get out of a hard situation as soon as possible, I want to suggest to you that we use this as a time to ask some perceptive and insightful questions. What's going on here? What's the cause? What's the reason? I have found God does not waste anything, even the tough times. If you're going to go through it, you might as well grow through it.

What are some causes or reasons for the storm?

a.) **Some of the storms of life are inevitable.** That means they're just going to happen. It is a part of the human experience. Some storms are going to come our way because we live in a broken, fallen, sinful world. We sometimes forget this is not heaven and because we are not in heaven, bad things will happen to good people. So, when the storms of life come our way, it doesn't necessarily mean you have sinned. It doesn't mean that you've done anything wrong. It doesn't mean that you don't have faith. Sometimes, things happen where there seems to be no explanation whatsoever. I remember hearing a minister tell the story about his young daughter, who was eight years of age, and that she had suffered at least one seizure a day, every day, for six years. Some of the storms of life happen because they are inevitable and there

doesn't appear to be an explanation or a reason. Here's another reason we have storms:

b. **Some of the storms of life come our way for testing.** Think back to the Old Testament character Job. This was certainly the case for Job. Sometimes God allows the storms of life to come our way so we can be tested, and as a result, our faith is stronger. Sometimes we go through trials, testing, and adversity, where we say, "Okay, God, I think I'm ready for a break from this period of testing. I have had enough." Most of us have had one of those years where one thing just seemed to happen after another. But I have found we don't grow through the easy times. Isn't it interesting how we really have our greatest spiritual growth through the hard times when we have to be on our knees, desperate for God? Some of the storms of life are inevitable. Some of the storms of life come our way for testing. And then thirdly:

c. **Some of the storms of life come our way for discipline.** That is, God disciplines us. He's trying to get our attention. This is what was happening to our friend, Jonah. Jonah found himself in the worst storm of his life because he was rebelling against God. So God sent this storm to discipline Jonah, to get his attention, to get him back on track to doing God's will. The sailors asked the question, "Okay, Jonah, you're responsible for this mess we're in. What are we going to do with you?" And Jonah replied, in verse 12, "Pick me up and throw me into the sea." Now, one way of seeing this, instead of doing what God wanted him to do, rather than obeying God, Jonah was willing to die.

And if we're not careful, we can be just like Jonah. Instead of doing what we know God wants us to do, we can become stubborn. Some of us let pride rule our lives to the point where we would almost rather die than do what we know God wants us to do.

If you're going through a rocky time in your life, realize some of the storms of life may come your way because they are inevitable. They're just going to occur because we still live in a broken,

imperfect, sinful world. Storms may come your way because this is a time of testing, and this can be a time of tremendous spiritual growth if you will continue to trust the Lord. But it may be you're going through a stormy time, and this is a storm of discipline. God may be trying to get your attention, and one of the ways God may be getting your attention is through allowing certain storms to come your way. The great British writer C.S. Lewis once said, "*God whispers to us in our pleasures, but shouts to us in our pain.*"

When facing the storms of life, there are a couple of questions we need to consider.

II.) **What is the reason for the storm?**

II.) **What will be my reaction to the storm?** Many times, we cannot control the storms that come our way, but we can control how we respond and how we react to those storms. Chuck Swindoll, the gifted Bible teacher and writer says, "*Life is 10% what happens to me and 90% how I react to it.*"

These pagan, non-believing sailors, they ask Jonah a question. "Jonah, what are we supposed to do with you?"

Look at Jonah's response in verses 12, 13, and 14. "'Pick me up and throw me into the sea,' he replied, 'And the sea will become calm. I know that it is my fault that this great storm has come upon you.' Instead, the men did their best to row back to land. But they could not, for the sea grew even wilder than before. Then they cried to the Lord, '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 please.'"

When the storms of life come your way, you can choose to react in a couple of ways. Number one, you can just try harder.

a. **You can try harder.** You can row harder. You can pull yourself up by your bootstraps. You can try to deal with that storm in your life by struggling and straining and working to do things in your power and

your strength, which will be physically, mentally, and emotionally exhausting.

This is exactly how the sailors responded to the storm. They tried to overcome this storm in their own power and in their own strength. Notice verse 13 says, "They rowed harder. They did their best to row back to dry land." In verse 13, when the writer says, "They did their best to row back to land," in the language of the Old Testament, it literally says they were **digging into the water**. They were desperately, frantically rowing, digging, pushing those oars down into the water as hard as they could to get back to dry land. Jonah 1:5 says, "*When they were in the middle of the storm, they threw their cargo into the sea to lighten the ship.*" Remember last week, we said that in the ancient world when life was short, a long voyage of over 2,000 miles across the Mediterranean Sea could take several months. It could be your one chance at wealth in traveling to Tarshish, a Phoenician island off the coast of Spain where there was money, and fame, and fortune.

More than likely these sailors had packed on this ship their most valuable belongings, and now as they are in a life and death situation, they are throwing these valuables overboard. You cannot enjoy your valuables if you are dead.

By getting rid of extra weight on the ship, they thought they could survive the storm. The point is, they reacted to the storm like many of us. They, they did everything humanly possible they could to make it through the storm. But notice verse 13 says, "But they could not get back to dry land."

Perhaps some of you can identify and empathize with these sailors. You're going through a rocky time in your life, and you are doing everything in your power and your strength to get through this adversity. You are rowing as hard as you can, and you are doing everything humanly possible to deal with your situation. And instead of rowing harder, and struggling in your energy and strength, it may

be you need to respond to the storm that you're in in the following way:

b.) **Maybe you need to let go and let God be in control.** Instead of trying to do everything in your power and your strength, maybe you need to quit forcing things that don't need to be forced, pushing things that don't need to be pushed. Quit rowing. Maybe you're trying to force a relationship, you're pushing too hard when it comes to dating a person that you want to date. You're struggling and straining in your marriage, and God's word to, to you today is, "Do your part to make the marriage work." Control the things God wants you to control, but quit forcing and pushing. Surrender your marriage to God. Let go, and let God be in control. God can do more in the heart and soul of your spouse than you could ever do by nagging, complaining, and controlling every area of your spouse's life.

Notice in verse 12 how Jonah reacted to the storm. Verse 12, "Pick me up and throw me into the sea, and it will become calm." "I know that it is my fault that this great storm has come upon you."

How could Jonah make such a request? Was he suicidal? Was he, as psychologists say, displaying self-destructive behavior? You could say he was stubborn, and he was willing to do anything rather than obey God. But I believe verse 12 is pivotal, it is a turning point for Jonah. He has finally begun to think about his choices, and the consequences of his choices have now jeopardized the lives of all these innocent sailors on board that ship to Tarshish. Here in verse 12 when he says, "I know all of this mess is my fault," we slowly begin to see him turning the corner. We see Jonah starting to take responsibility for his own actions. He did not blame anyone else for the storm. He finally reacted and responded to the storm by surrendering and submitting himself to God. He begins to let go and let God work in his life. And this is exactly how some of you this morning need to react to the storms in your life. You need to quit

trying to do everything yourself, and you need to let God have his proper place in your life.

Isn't it interesting that at first these sailors, they do not grant Jonah's request. They try to row back to dry land. These unbelieving pagan sailors, their lives are at stake, and yet they do not want to sacrifice the life of this Jewish stranger. These pagan unbelieving, perhaps Phoenician sailors, had more compassion and more grace to the Jewish prophet than the Jewish prophet had on the people of Nineveh. If anything, this narrative reminds us we always need to be careful about judging people, judging who the good guys are, who the bad guys are, who is on God's side, and who is not on God's side.

At this point, these sailors hold a prayer meeting. Look at verse 14. They cried out to the Lord, "Please, Lord, do not let us die for taking this man's life.

Do not hold us accountable for killing an innocent man, for you, oh Lord, have done as you pleased." Two times in this verse, they refer to God as Yahweh. They don't refer to him as Elohim, a generic word for God, god with a little G. Elohim could refer to any number of gods. But in verse 14, when they're talking to God, they refer to God as Yahweh, which is an exclusive name reserved for the one and only God of Israel.

III.) **The results of the storm.** Look at what happened when Jonah let God and allowed God to begin to work in his life. Look at verses 15 through 17.

"Then they took Jonah and threw him overboard, and the raging sea grew calm. At this, the men, that is the sailors, greatly feared the Lord, and they offered a sacrifice to the Lord and made vows to him. But the Lord provided, literally the Lord commissioned, a great fish to swallow Jonah, and Jonah was inside the fish three days and three nights." Jonah 1:15-17

What is the result of the storm? In verse 15 it says when Jonah was thrown overboard, the raging sea grew calm. When did the storms

begin to subside? When was there finally peace and calm? Things began to change for the better when Jonah began to take responsibility for his actions. The sea began to grow calm when Jonah started surrendering to God's will for his life. More was accomplished in one moment **in** God's will than in hours and hours of intense work, labor, and struggle **out** of the will of God.

Sometimes we are slow to grasp this great truth of the Bible. The secret is in surrender.

Can you believe what happened in verse 16? This pagan boat becomes a place of worship. The ship to Tarshish, it becomes a place of worship to the one living God. In verse 16, the Bible says these sailors greatly feared God, they had a reverence for the God of Israel. They offered a sacrifice, that is they found an animal onboard and they offered a sacrifice to the God of Israel.

Then they made vows, commitments to the God of Israel. I bet this was not Jonah's plan, this was not on his bingo card. You see, this is not some little throwaway detail in the story about Nineveh. It turns out God's story is so big, it's also a story about Tarshish. This reminds us that we serve a big God, and even in our disobedience and running in the opposite direction of where God wants us to go, God is never taken by surprise.

As a matter of fact, God is at work in ways that Jonah cannot even begin to dream of. Even in his disobedience, God loves these sailors and reaches down and reaches out to these crusty, old, calloused, and weather-beaten sailors whom he loves and showers his grace. I don't want to mislead you this morning. Just because you surrender to God's will and turn things over to him does not mean you will not experience stormy times.

As a matter of fact, we're going to see next week how Jonah spent three miserable days and three nights in the belly of a large fish. But I will say this to you: When you surrender to God's will, although the storm may be raging around you, the God of Jonah, the God of a

second chance, will give you peace, confidence, and assurance in the middle of the storm.

A small mouse once found himself stranded on a beach during a violent thunderstorm. No matter which way the little mouse ran, there was endless sand or endless water. The lightning flashed nearby, and the thunder crashed with tremendous force. The little mouse was terrified, running wildly and erratically. The panic-stricken mouse came upon a piece of hollow driftwood just large enough for him to crawl inside. And once inside, the mouse relaxed somewhat, and he felt more secure as the storm continued to rage.

And finally in exhaustion, the mouse fell asleep. And the moral of the story is this: **Sometimes God quiets the storms, and sometimes he quiets the mouse.**

It has been said we are either coming out of the storm, we are in the storm, or we will be going into the storm. Life this side of heaven involves being in one of those three stages all the time. Perhaps you're in a season of life where you're out of the storm.

Be thankful for the uneventful times of your life. Maybe you're in the storm and the storm is raging, and like the little mouse, you need God to quiet the mouse. You need God to give you peace in the storm. We have no idea what we will face this week. We may be going into the storm. The good news of the gospel, the good news of Jonah, is that even though when we are thrown overboard into the sea, God is still with us.

God may not lead us out of the storm, he may not take away the storm, but God is always faithful to walk with us through the storm. When you go through the storms of life, do you have Jesus Christ walking with you through the storm? Perhaps you need to make Christ your Lord and Savior today.