The Perfect Storm

Jonah 1:4-16

You may remember the movie, “The Perfect Storm”… It was the story of the fishing vessel, the “Andrea Gail”, struggling to reach land during the greatest storm of modern history took place in October 1991 in the North Atlantic. All those aboard the Andrea Gail were lost.

Storms change things – landscape, property. There can be total devastation in a tornado or hurricane.

You may remember, God told Jonah to go to Nineveh and cry against it because the wickedness of the Ninevites had gone up to Him. Instead of crying against the city, Jonah decided to flee from the presence of the Lord in the opposite direction. He went to the seaport city of Joppa, paid a fare, boarded a boat, and headed for Tarshish. He chose to be disobedient to God, and now God was going to turn up the heat on Jonah until Jonah decided to do what the Lord had initially asked him to do. We must remember the words of Hebrews 12:6, “Those whom God loves He disciplines.” How did God turn up the heat on Jonah? He did it by sending “the perfect storm.” A storm that would not take anyone’s life, but would, in the end, save many lives.

I invite you to open the Bible to Jonah 1:4-16 as we investigate the message entitled, “The Perfect Storm.”

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and they threw the cargo which was in the ship into the sea to lighten it for them. But Jonah had gone below into the hold of the ship, lain down, and fallen sound asleep. [6] So the captain approached him and said, "How is it that you are sleeping? Get up, call on your god. Perhaps your god will be concerned about us so that we will not perish." [7] And each man said to his mate, "Come, let us cast lots so we may learn on whose account this calamity has struck us." So they cast lots and the lot fell on Jonah. [8] Then they said to him, "Tell us, now! On whose account has this calamity struck us? What is your occupation? And where do you come from? What is your country? From what people are you?" [9] And he said to them, "I am a Hebrew, and I fear the Lord God of heaven who made the sea and the dry land." [10] Then the men became extremely frightened and they said to him, "How could you do this?" For the men knew that he was fleeing from the presence of the Lord, because he had told them. [11] So they said to him, "What should we do to you that the sea may become calm for us?"-- for the sea was becoming increasingly stormy. [12] And he said to them, "Pick me up and throw me into the sea. Then the sea will become calm for you, for I know that on account of me this great storm has come upon you." [13] However, the men rowed desperately to return to land but they could not, for the sea was becoming even stormier against them. [14] Then they called on the Lord and said, "We earnestly pray, O Lord, do not let us perish on account of this man's life and do not put innocent blood on us; for Thou, O Lord, hast done as Thou hast pleased." [15] So they picked up Jonah, threw him into the sea, and the sea stopped its raging. [16] Then the men feared the Lord greatly, and they offered a sacrifice to the Lord and made vows."

God uses things to bring change. He can use the weather. He made the sun stand still as the children of Israel fought their
enemies (Joshua 10:12,13). Jesus calmed a storm in the Mark 4:39. Here is another example of God’s sovereignty.

Change in the Sailors

A change of attitude – they were fearful – vv4,5,
“[4] And the Lord hurled a great wind on the sea and there was a great storm on the sea so that the ship was about to break up. [5] Then the sailors became afraid, and every man cried to his god, and they threw the cargo which was in the ship into the sea to lighten it for them. But Jonah had gone below into the hold of the ship, lain down, and fallen sound asleep.”

The storm that God brought against the ship bound for Tarshish was no small storm. Jonah 1:4 states that the Lord hurled a great wind on the sea that accompanied the great storm so that the ship was about to break up. Notice that it was not God’s intent to destroy Jonah, but to discipline him and bring him back to a place of obedience.

The sailors realized this was no small storm. They had seen storms before, but they saw that this one was different. It was so strong that the ship was about to break up. If it broke up the sailors would likely drown. They thus were filled with fear. They feared for their lives.

It’s like flying on an airplane. If the pilot and stewardesses seem calm, probably everything is going to be OK. But when the crew begins to show great fear, you can know that things are getting pretty bad. The sailors who knew the sea, knew that things were life-threateneing.
Not only did the sailors fear for their lives, but later in the story when they learned why the storm had come, and Jonah told them that he was responsible, and that they needed to throw him overboard, they initially wouldn’t do it, because they feared God’s wrath. They believed in their heart that throwing Jonah over the side of the ship was equivalent to murder, and they were sure that if God was out to get Jonah, and they got in the way, He might also get them. Jonah 1:11-13 states,

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Actually being in a position of fearing God is precisely where God wants us to be. The Bible says the fear (deep reverence of God, and trembling in His presence) is the beginning of knowledge (Proverbs 1:7). In other words, when we have a reverent respect for God and know that He can discipline us for bad behavior, we tend to live a better life. That’s good. Although we know as Christians that the New Testament of the Bible says we should be motivated by love, if God’s love for us is not enough of a motivator to follow God, perhaps fear of Him is.
A change of focus – they prayed – v5

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The storm not only changed the attitude of the sailors to one of fear, the storm changed their focus from sailing to praying. They turned from being sailors to prayers. As has been often said, “There are no atheists in a foxhole.” When the bullets start flying, the bombs start dropping, or the storm starts raging, people have a mind to pray. The sailors knew their lives were on the line and they needed help from an outside source. Certainly their prayers weren’t doing much good because the passage states that they all prayed to their own god, little “g”. Unfortunately, gods, little “g”, can’t stop storms or do anything else. Their prayers weren’t really doing any good, but it does show again that although people might swear like sailors and do their own thing, a real hardship can make them change their focus and turn towards God.

Have you turned to God in the midst of problems in your own life. Actually, turning to God in times of trouble is great. You just need to be sure you are turning to God, big “g” because he is the only one who can really help you.

Not only was God going to bring change in the life of Jonah, He was using His discipline of Jonah to reach the hearts of others as well, and draw them to Himself. Indeed, man’s calamity is often God’s opportunity.

A change of priorities - they jettisoned the cargo - v5

[5] Then the sailors became afraid, and every man cried to his god, and they threw the cargo which was in the ship into the sea
They went from being cargo carriers to cargo casters. They threw all the cargo overboard. They realized that “stuff” (cargo) is not nearly as important as life. It is amazing how we often hold on to our “stuff” and view it as so important. But we need not only to view life as important, but to view eternal life as important. When we get the correct view of life itself, and eternal life in particular, we will begin seeing that life on this earth is not a matter of how much stuff a person can accumulate, but rather how many lives can a person touch for Christ. Do you view your “stuff” as relatively unimportant in the larger scheme of things.

Someone might argue. It was easy for them to jettison the cargo from the ship because it wasn’t their cargo. But that cargo was their livelihood. The people who would pay to receive the cargo at the other end of their voyage would not be paying anything. And the people who sent the cargo, would be extremely unhappy that the cargo was lost. This would directly affect the sailors, because people would be sceptical about shipping cargo with Tarshish Cruise Lines in the future.

There is a storm out there that blows everyday; a storm of Satan that blinds the eyes of men. Men’s eternal lives are being saved or lost everyday depending on whether or not Christians are willing to share with them. I hope that we like the sailors will change our priorities to be sure we focus on the things in life that really matter.

A change of heart – they changed their allegiance – vv14-16

[14] Then they called on the Lord and said, "We earnestly pray, O Lord, do not let us perish on account of this man's life and do not
put innocent blood on us; for Thou, O Lord, hast done as Thou hast pleased." [15] So they picked up Jonah, threw him into the sea, and the sea stopped its raging. [16] Then the men feared the Lord greatly, and they offered a sacrifice to the Lord and made vows."

Before they finally cast Jonah into the sea, the men had a change of heart. They didn’t change in their intentions for Jonah, but they changed their allegiance from their former gods, little “g”, to the one true God. They not only prayed to Him, but verse 16 states that they feared the Lord greatly, and they offered a sacrifice to the Lord and made vows. It doesn’t say what their sacrifice or vows were, but it would be fair to say, they vowed from now on to pray to Him and to honor Him, because they realized, as where their former gods, little “g” could not calm the storm, Jonah’s God, big “G” could. They like any other thinking person wants to go with a winner. God is that winner.

The change of heart probably undoubtedly changed them from being sailors only to sailor-evangelists. They undoubtedly told this story far and wide and became God’s witnesses. Amazing.

**Change in Jonah**

God’s chastening of Jonah brought great change in Jonah’s life as well as the lives of the sailors.

**A change of comfort level**

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call on your god. Perhaps your god will be concerned about us so that we will not perish." [7] And each man said to his mate, "Come, let us cast lots so we may learn on whose account this calamity has struck us." So they cast lots and the lot fell on Jonah. [8] Then they said to him, "Tell us, now! On whose account has this calamity struck us? What is your occupation? And where do you come from? What is your country? From what people are you?" [9] And he said to them, "I am a Hebrew, and I fear the Lord God of heaven who made the sea and the dry land." [10] Then the men became extremely frightened and they said to him, "How could you do this?" For the men knew that he was fleeing from the presence of the Lord, because he had told them. [11] So they said to him, "What should we do to you that the sea may become calm for us?"--for the sea was becoming increasingly stormy. [12] And he said to them, "Pick me up and throw me into the sea. Then the sea will become calm for you, for I know that on account of me this great storm has come upon you." [13] However, the men rowed desperately to return to land but they could not, for the sea was becoming even stormier against them. [14] Then they called on the Lord and said, "We earnestly pray, O Lord, do not let us perish on account of this man's life and do not put innocent blood on us; for Thou, O Lord, hast done as Thou hast pleased." [15] So they picked up Jonah, threw him into the sea, and the sea stopped its raging. [16] Then the men feared the Lord greatly, and they offered a sacrifice to the Lord and made vows."

Running from God is hard work. No sooner had the boat set sail then Jonah went down inside of the ship, lay down and fell asleep. He was so comfortable, that not even the storm woke him up. He was like a baby rocking in a cradle, oblivious to what was going on topside. But all this changed very quickly.
He was awakened by the captain who confronted him and said, “How is it that you are sleeping? Get up, call on your god. Perhaps your god will be concerned about us so that we will not perish.”

Sometimes we can be running from God, and quite comfortable in our sin, even though it is negatively affecting those around us. If we have children or family in this category, we need to care enough to confront them like the captain confronted Jonah.

Jonah became increasingly uncomfortable as the men cast lots and the lot fell on him. Casting lots is like crawling straws or pulling marked pebbles out of a hat. The person with the short straw or marked pebble loses. Jonah chose the short straw, so to speak, and the sailors believed he knew why this calamity had befallen them.

Jonah’s comfort level took a further drop when he found himself confessing that the storm was on account of him and eventually found himself in the water.

A change of perspective – Jonah finally fessed up

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I can’t run from God anymore. It is my sin that is causing all these problems. I am responsible for putting these people through this whole mess

**A change of status – from anonymity to serious problems**

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Jonah’s status went from an anonymous passenger, to the focus of attention, to an accused man, to a person drifting in the open sea.

I don’t want the fallout that comes into a person’s life because of sin. I want one status – to be close to the Lord. If we stay close to Him, we may still go through tough times occasionally to strengthen us, but those tough times won’t be His discipline upon our lives.

A change of heart
“[12] And he said to them, "Pick me up and throw me into the sea. Then the sea will become calm for you, for I know that on account of me this great storm has come upon you."

Not only did Jonah confess his sin but he wanted to make the situation right. He took responsibility for his sin and wanted to help make it right – throw me overboard God was most certainly getting his attention.

When some people are caught in sin, they finally confess it, but often they don’t want to make things right. They don’t want to really repent (turn away from it) and do whatever it takes to make it right.

When you sin, do you really want to change, or do you just want somehow to avoid the negative consequences of your actions?
Conclusion

Storms bring change. How do you respond to God during hard times? Do hard times make you turn away from God or turn to Him? Do they make you bitter or better?

God used these hard times to change hearts. It shows a person again, that God is not out to destroy us but to help us be committed to the right things. He may allow difficulty to touch our lives in order to get us to focus on Him.

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