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## JONAH 1:4-10

Jonah Series

[PRAYER] Lord, we come before you right now and ask that you would reveal to us your greatness so we can be motivated to be humble in our lives. Humble enough to encourage other people and to value other people and to value you. Lord, the pride that we have in our heart often gets in the way of our ability to have good relationships or to even progress in our work or other pursuits that we have. So we ask that you would help us to have that gentle humility that comes from you when we understand how you've gifted us. Not a weakness, but you've gifted us in particular ways, you've blessed us, you've redeemed us, you've created us in your image, and yet you want us to continually acknowledge and recognize that you are God. So right in this moment, Lord, we take this time to dedicate ourselves to you and ask that you would be honored in our lives in the decisions we make and the words that we use and the way that we talk to each other and to others, that we would be able to demonstrate that graciousness that comes from the humility that you want us to have. So humbly now, Father, we open your word to this book of Jonah and ask that you would speak to us through it and teach us, that we would go away from here changed people, appreciating a little bit more of who you are in our lives so it impacts how we live. In Jesus' name, amen.

We started in our book of Jonah just in the first three verses looking at how God speaks. He does speak to us. He speaks to every one of us. God is speaking. Sometimes when God speaks we don't like the message that He shares. That's not just a Jonah problem when he runs away from the Lord, but it's a challenge I think we all face in our hearts. I face that challenge and sometimes when I sense the Lord wants me to do something, I'm like, "Wait a minute. I don't think I want to do that." So when that takes place in our hearts and we don't want to do what God wants us to do, the solution really is to get this bigger picture of God. When we understand how big God is and His plan, then we're humble to the place where we're willing to fit into that plan.

That's where we're headed in verse 4. So in verses 1-3 we have God speaking to Jonah, Jonah doesn't like the message, and Jonah runs away from the Lord and gets on a boat heading to Tarshish, the opposite direction from Nineveh.

Then verse 4 says – *Then the Lord sent a great wind on the sea, and such a violent storm arose that the ship threatened to break up.*

This got me pondering this idea. You see in the passage it says the Lord sent the wind. Do you see that? You have to ask the question, is the storm in your life coming from God?

If our theology is so small that we think that God is always there to please us or make us happy then I think we miss out on some of who God is. We've got to recognize that sometimes the challenges in life come from the reality that God is trying to do something. He's trying to work in our lives. He's trying to make some changes.

Now sometimes God uses natural consequences in life to prompt us to change. A natural consequence is the natural result of our actions. For example, if a child is playing silly on a skateboard and falls off and hurts his knees, that's a natural consequence. He can't get up and blame God or his mom or something like that. That's a natural consequence.

Now God has ordained our world in such a way that the world has these rules and is governed by various things. So consequences take place in life. There are a lot of natural consequences to the things we do. If you are accustomed to keeping your gas gauge in the red and empty and then you run out of gas, you can't blame that on God. That's a natural consequence of the actions. If you yell at your mate continually and then tension develops in that relationship, those are natural consequences in life.

Sometimes God allows a person to experience natural consequences so that they will change. If something bad happens to you, you've got to ask yourself, did I do something that I need to change? This is the prodigal son illustration. God didn't step into the prodigal son's life and bring a fish to swallow him up in order to change him. He didn't do that. He used natural consequences. Natural consequences happen in our life. When you do a stupid thing, a foolish thing, make a bad decision, there are often natural consequences that take effect. That's what happened to the prodigal son and he was prompted to change.

So we have to realize God uses natural consequences in our lives to motivate us to change and we need to be aware of that. But sometimes a loving parent doesn't allow natural consequences to take effect for two reasons. One is because the pain is too great and secondly because the lesson takes too long to learn.

For example, you don't let a two year old learn from experience by running in the street. It's too painful of a lesson to learn by natural consequence, so the parent might discipline the two year old. The two year old is screaming because he's not happy, yet the parent understands wisely that it's not a good idea to allow him to run into the street. That's God in an illustration of parenting. But God as a parent steps into our lives and does that.

Or the child who leaves his bike out in the front where it would get stolen, the parent might say, "I'm going to discipline you. You're going to lose the privilege of riding the bike for a while, we'll lock it up in the back yard." The parent is disciplining the child because the lesson is either too painful or it takes too long to learn.

Now God does the same thing in our lives, He steps in and He uses different things that are beyond the natural consequences of life in order to help us change because God is a loving Father.

Let me show you this verse that illustrates what I just said to you. In Hebrews 12:5-7 it says – *“My son, do not make light of the Lord’s discipline, and do not lose heart when he rebukes you, because the Lord disciplines the one he loves, and he chastens everyone he accepts as his son.” Endure hardship as discipline.* At least one question we have to ask when hardship comes into our lives is, is God trying to teach me something here?

*For what children are not disciplined by their father?* So a loving father steps in and brings about change and sometimes that change is painful. Sometimes it’s hard to accept. Sometimes it’s a storm in our lives. How do you know whether the current storm in your life that you might be experiencing is from God, from a natural consequence, or from some other source? How do you know what’s going on in your life now? How do you evaluate this particular storm?

I want to suggest to you, just to fill this out for you a little bit, that there are three causes in life for any problem that comes into our lives. I want to show you what those causes are according to the Bible because if you understand them it may help you to evaluate your present situation and be able to take advantage of where you are right now. The three causes are important and they help us grasp the responsibility of what’s happening.

The first cause of problems that happen in our lives is our own choices. God designed us with a free will. So when Adam sinned and sin came into the world, Adam made a choice. Jonah has a choice. God doesn’t make Jonah a robot and say, “You have to do these things.” God created in us a free will so that we could make choices and then when we make those choices sometimes we make good choices and sometimes we make bad choices. Sometimes we inadvertently make bad choices. We don’t realize we’re making a bad choice, but sometimes the problem that we’re experiencing is because of our own will, that we have made some kind of a mistake.

It’s the idea that if you put your hand in fire you’re going to get burned. That’s not God’s fault that you did that. We make choices. It’s not just physical things or scientific things like that; it’s also areas of relational challenge. If you continue to mistreat your spouse, it creates tension in that relationship and there is a consequence that comes with that. God designed our world so that it has laws that govern the universe.

There are ethical things that happen too. If you do the wrong thing, you feel inside of your heart that challenge. God has designed our world that way so that we could understand it. God placed our world in motion with certain results, certain things that happen. If you go into debt then it’s going to be a problem.

One of the reasons we study God’s word is so we can understand the way God designed it and we can tie our lives into His success principles. There’s a way to live that fits in with God’s design and brings about success.

Now I want you to understand that when we make these kinds of mistakes or decisions, it is a way for us to experience God in a new way. Because even when we make mistakes, we see God’s mercy and His grace. God is merciful and gracious. So there are times you and I know that we’ve really messed up and we don’t get what we deserve. We don’t get the natural consequences of our actions because God is merciful and gracious and He steps into that

situation in order to allow us to experience Him in a new way. So we have to understand first of all that one of the causes to the problems that we have in life is our own personal choices, the things that we do that bring about certain actions.

The second cause of problems that we experience in life come directly from Satan, from his demons, and sin in our world. Satan is a real person. Demons are real and working in our world. I don't want you to be afraid and fearful of demons. I don't want your children to be afraid of demons. But we have to know that they are there and they are trying to derail us.

That's why I want to encourage you never to get involved in something like reading your horoscope or going to a psychic reading, or tarot cards, or Ouija boards, or any of those kinds of things, anything that could be used of Satan to derail us. Because those things can be used of Satan and his demons in order to get us off track. You want to stay far away from those things. You ought to be afraid of those things and not go near them because they are dangerous things.

When you open yourself up to those things, you are opening yourself up to Satan's influence. It is true that a psychic reader or someone who does tarot cards might know something or be able to determine something about the future of your life. But the reality is Satan does not know everything about the future. He might be able to determine some things just by knowing a lot more than we do. So it may indicate some things about what's going on. But the reality is he always likes to bring lies in the midst of that to captivate us.

When you get yourself involved in some kind of fortunetelling of some kind, you're making a tremendous error because God wants us to rely on His truth, the word of God, not on these other things. You can be sure that those things will mislead you, captivate you, and create harm in your life.

It's really interesting in the Bible that a disobedience to God is put next to psychic reading and tarot cards and so on. In the passage (I'll share with you this passage), Saul was asking and he had his own ideas about how he would get things done. He didn't really like God's plan, so he had a better idea. Kind of like Jonah. But Saul had a better idea when God told him to go and kill all of the animals, kill all of the people in this particular battle. Saul did not do that.

When he was on his way back, Samuel the prophet met him and said, "What is this bleating of sheep that I hear?" And Saul said, "Well we brought those back in order to offer them as sacrifices to God." He had a better idea. I'm not going to obey God, but I'm going to use these things to worship God.

Samuel made a very important statement to Saul at that moment that I think we can take away and will help us as we try to understand our own lives and being under God's protection. He says to Saul this: Obedience is better than sacrifice and disobedience is like the *sin of divination*. Divination was this idea of having a divining rod or like a psychic reader, tarot cards, or something like that. He says disobedience is just like it.

Here's why. God has designed an umbrella of protection for us to live under and when we obey Him, we're under that umbrella of protection. But as soon as you disobey God and you try to do

things your way or you try to live life in a way that's not according to God's standard, you step out from under the umbrella of protection and you make yourself vulnerable to Satan's attack. So disobedience moves you outside of this umbrella of protection and it's like the sin of divination so that Satan and his demons have access to you that they can mistreat you.

That's why in Ephesians 4 it says that our *anger creates a foothold for the devil*. When we get angry and then we start mistreating people with our anger, it creates a foothold for the devil inside of our lives. We never want to do that. We want to be obedient to the Lord and what He's doing for us.

We need to realize that Satan does have limited power. We see that in the book of Job. God allowed Satan to create some havoc in Job's life. Sometimes Satan is responsible for the travesties, calamity, the problems that exist in our world.

We also know that Satan is called the prince of the power of the air, which means he's really in charge of the world system. When I say world system I'm talking to you about the culture that we live in that has a point. It's going somewhere. So the world tells us things that are against God's truth and we have to be aware of that, that Satan is the prince of the power of this world. So you don't ever want to say, "Well if everybody's doing it then I can do it." You never want to say, "Well it's culturally acceptable to do this, so I'm going to do it," because the culture is being dominated by Satan as the prince of the power of the air. He's the one who's driving that. So we need to be very careful about anything that might be satanic or demonic.

Furthermore, sin is often the cause of some of the bad things that happen in life. It's just that God created this beautiful world for us to live in, but when Adam and Eve sinned then sin came into the whole world. It affected not only them, it affected all of the people, like us, that have come after them and it affected our world, so now we have weeds that grow up. Weeds are a result of sin. So sin's presence has created some damage in our world and it affects us in the form of natural disasters and other things.

I don't know whether mosquitoes are the result of creation or the fall. I tend to think they're a result of the fall, but I'm not quite sure about that. But at least mosquitoes are an annoyance. But the bacteria, the Zika virus, that they carry is definitely a result of the fall.

So when a problem like that comes into a person's life, you can't just say, "Well God did this." It's an opportunity to recognize that our world's a sinful place. Harmful bacteria is a result of the fall. But it gives us an opportunity again to recognize God. Because God redeems a broken world. God has this plan that allows sin to be conquered. This whole redemptive plan that God has designed is a powerful one that we become more grateful for and appreciate more when we see the terrible pain that sin causes in people's lives. God can heal, redeem, and He wants to do that in people's lives today. So the faith that we have in God is something that's very powerful.

The trust that we have in the Lord is so immensely strong that we want to share that with other people. Because there are broken people around us. What causes their brokenness? I don't know whether the brokenness is because they made their own decision or sin in the world or even other people make decisions. When we look at the first verse, we looked at our own will, but

sometimes it's other people's will around us. When the Supreme Court makes a decision, it affects a lot of people. If they make a bad decision, it affects a lot of people. That's our own will. In the case of Jonah making a decision, it's not just Jonah who's going to suffer; it's all the people around him. So you got to realize that bad things happen in the world for lots of different reasons.

But one of the things that happens in our world is that God is directing the course of human events. Because of that and because He's a loving Father, He often steps in and alters the course of human events, like He did in this particular story by causing this strong wind to blow, creating a huge storm. Our view of God must be big enough to understand that. I don't know if we can ever understand God, but we certainly can appreciate the fact that God is bigger than we are and has a plan that's bigger than we understand. That plan is something that we can appreciate only in that we are a part of it.

God has a plan. He wants to save Nineveh. God sends a storm. He's not trying to be mean, but it's a painful thing in the life of Jonah and the sailors around. God's plan includes Jonah. He's determined to save Nineveh, but God's plan is going to affect all of the people involved here and even others we don't know about.

You can't come to a problem in life and say, "Why God?" as if we can try to understand God. The better response is, "God, what do you want me to do with this? How should I respond as a result of it?"

Let me just give you two applications of an understanding of God's sovereignty. We use the term sovereignty of God to define or to recognize God's plan and how He's involved in all of the things that are going on in our world and life. There are two practical applications that I think are important for us, at least this morning.

Number one is that the safest place for any of us to be in is right in the center of God's will. That's the safest place. If you're doing what God wants you to do and it takes you into danger, then you're in as safe place because you're right where God wants you to be.

Likewise, the most dangerous place to be is not being a non-Christian. So I want you to know if you're here today and you're not a Christian, that's not the most dangerous place to be. If you're here today and you're not a believer, you need to understand God offers a great plan for your life. God wants to empower you with a fuller understanding of life. Your eyes will be opened and great things will happen when you accept Jesus Christ as your Lord and Savior. He does a work inside of you that's just so powerful.

But the most dangerous place is to be a Christian who's disobeying God. Because not only might you suffer the natural consequences of your own foolishness and now you're opened up by your disobedience to the effects of Satan and his demons, but now you're likely to be disciplined by God. Because God disciplines those He loves and He wants to bring you back into the right place in life. So the most dangerous place to be is a Christian who's making the wrong choices and deliberately running away from the Lord or trying to get away from God's direction.

The second application I'd like to make about the sovereignty of God is that it opens the opportunity when we believe this, understand it, it gives us tremendous ability to understand some things inside. Things like peace in the midst of the storm. Or to experience joy when things are going poorly. Because we trust that God is good and God is sovereign and, because of that, I can fit into His plan. So the prayer we make every day is not, "God, give me this, give me that." Our prayer is, "God, show me today how I can fit into your plan." When we do that, then God allows us often to see glimpses of what He's doing that are miracles in people's lives. God enjoys doing miracles in people's lives and we get to see those things take place many times.

God's sovereignty is big. It's very big. It's much bigger than we can understand, but God's plan isn't limited here to Jonah. It's about Nineveh, but it's also about the sailors that are involved in this particular process.

So let's go on now to verse 5 where it says – *All the sailors were afraid and each cried out to his own god. And they threw the cargo into the sea to lighten the ship.*

The first thing I want to point out is this must have been a very bad storm because these are professional sailors. These are guys who know what they are doing and the Bible says they are afraid. This is a storm like they haven't seen before. They are going to do something about it on an earthly plane. They're real men. Real men solve problems. So they're not crying over there on the side of the boat. They're out there trying to solve the problem by throwing stuff overboard.

I would suggest that men often do that. God has designed us as men to solve problems, so we go out and do that. But these men are just men. That's all they are. They're just men, so they come to the end of their abilities and they're afraid because they've tried throwing all the cargo overboard. This isn't working. We are going to die. So they come to their abilities to be able to solve the problems of life.

Now I think all of us come to that place in our lives when we come to the end, but some people take longer than others. In fact Jesus said this when He was talking about salvation. He says it's *hard for a rich man to come into the kingdom*. Why is that? Because rich people have a lot of resources to throw at problems that come their way. The person who doesn't have a lot of money often comes to the end of themselves more quickly and they say, "I need help!" where the rich person doesn't have to do that. It's hard for a rich man to come into the kingdom.

I think we could also say it's hard for engineers to come into the kingdom. Why? Because engineers are the problem-solvers of our world. We need them. They solve the problems of life. So it's hard for them to come into the kingdom I think because they've got the solutions and they can figure out the problem. They're like the guys throwing the cargo overboard.

I think we could also say it's hard for intelligent people to come into the kingdom because they've got ways to solve problems. There's an international organization called Mensa. It's an organization who have a high IQ. I was a part of that organization for several years and I find it fascinating they have special interest groups, S.I.Gs they're called, and you can join whatever ones you want. They use their intellect to dialogue about the problems of the world dealing with global warming or world peace or political issues or economic issues.

I was interested in the special interest groups that had to do with faith and it was fascinating to me to see the intellectual people dialoguing about faith. All of them thinking, using their intellect to try to define and understand and explain things, but often all of them having to come to the place where they can only explain it so much and then they have to trust. Trust is at the end of there somewhere for all of them, for all of us.

Some of us have more ability to solve problems or do whatever in life, but the reality is all of us come like these mere men to this place where we say, “I need help.” Notice the kind of help they were trying to get. It says *all the sailors were afraid and each cried out to his own god.*

See, God has designed us a special way. We’re all spiritual people and God has placed within us this spiritual capacity. That human spirit is the place where you experience joy and fulfillment. It’s where you have that mission in life, you feel this sense of satisfaction and there’s a lot of human ways that you can try and solve that. But God’s designed the human spirit to be the most satisfied, fulfilled and have purpose in life when the Holy Spirit, God, comes into our lives to equip our spirit to be able to go forward. He does that in the work of our hearts.

Now God has created each of us with this capacity, so these guys who are trying to row their boat or move on the stormy sea are at the end of their capacity, so they don’t know what to do. They cry out to their gods in order to find some solutions in their lives. That’s their desire. They all have a spiritual component. They’re just mere men.

We can often think that we can solve the problems of the world, but we have a challenge because we all have an end that we come to and we say, “I need God.” Of course we made that decision to accept Jesus Christ as our Lord and Savior because we recognize our need and we know that we need God. So there’s this tremendous freedom that we have to live life knowing that we don’t have to solve all the problems of the world. God is right there to guide us through even the challenging times that we experience.

There’s a contrast made in verse 5 between the sailors who were afraid, called on their god, and threw their cargo into the sea to lighten their ship, and then the next phrase says – *But Jonah had gone below deck, where he lay down and fell into a deep sleep.*

I would suggest that if you’re a Christian, you can have peace in your life. If you’re a believer, you can have peace in your life. But Jonah is running away from the Lord and he has some sense of peace, but his peace is coming because of a false notion inside of him, this notion that he’s run away from the Lord. If you were to ask Jonah at this moment, “Hey Jonah, how are you doing?” I think he would say, “I’m doing fine. Everything’s cool.” So he’s sleeping on this ship in the midst of this storm because he thinks he can outrun God.

There’s some times when we think riding on the skateboard in a silly way, you get away with that a few times. I think I can do that. So some people think they can do the same thing with God. They can outrun God or not get hit by the natural consequence. And so they find themselves trying to feel good about somehow missing the bullet in their lives. Jonah is like that, sleeping like a baby. If you asked him how it’s going, he would say it’s going fine.

Verse 6 says this: *The captain went to him and said, “How can you sleep? Get up and call on your god!”* Now you know what’s really bad when the unsaved people are telling you you better pray. That’s what’s happening here. *“Maybe he will take notice of us so that we will not perish.”*

*Then the sailors said to each other, “Come, let us cast lots to find out who is responsible for this calamity.”*

We’re going to see God’s sovereignty a number of times in the book of Jonah. God has a plan to reach Nineveh and He’s going to choose a man, sovereignly picks him out to be the one to go there. Jonah is going to choose on his own to run away from the Lord, so God is going to sovereignly choose a great wind to come and create this big storm on the sea. He’s also going to choose a big fish that’s designed especially for Jonah, and that’s part of God’s sovereignty.

Here we see in the midst of this that they’re going to cast lots. They cast lots in different ways. Sometimes it was drawing straws and the short one was the one that indicated the person. Sometimes they would throw things like rocks and the ones that came up with the painted thing on the top then that would indicate who the guilty one was. We don’t know exactly how they cast lots in this case, but we do know that as they’re casting the lots. Notice in the next verse it says – *They cast lots and the lot fell on Jonah.* That’s verse 7.

I want you to just see God’s sovereignty. In Proverbs 16:33 it says – *The lot is cast into the lap, but its every decision is from the Lord.* That’s why I don’t like to use the word luck or fate. There’s no luck, there’s no fate, there are no accidents, there are no random events. God is in charge. He’s always in control even of the dice that are rolled.

Sometimes we think that when we sin we’re only hurting ourselves, but you have to understand these words “we never sin alone.” You can sin by yourself, but your sin always affects other people. It may be now. It may be later. But sin affects other people. It damages them. And so Jonah’s sin in this case is one that’s going to affect a lot of people. In this case it’s the sailors as well that are going to experience these problems that Jonah is experiencing of the storm.

Verse 8 says – *So they asked him, “Tell us, who is responsible for making all this trouble for us? What kind of work do you do? Where do you come from? What is your country? From what people are you?”* That’s a long question. Lots of questions, I’m sure, for Jonah to answer. Notice in verse 9 he answered, *“I am a Hebrew and I worship the Lord, the God of heaven, who made the sea and the dry land.”*

Now word *Lord* is capitalized there in your Bible. Do you see that? As opposed to the word *god* that is not capitalized when he refers to *pray to your god*. But the word *Yahweh* is a personal name for God. This is a specific God that we’re talking about. He has a name. He’s the one who created the world, created *the sea and the dry land*.

Notice their response. *This terrified them and they asked, “What have you done?”* Again, you know you have a real problem when the unbelievers are saying to you, “*What have you done?*” That’s what’s happening. *(They knew he was running away from Yahweh, because he had*

*already told them so.)* You know you're in trouble when it's the other people in the world that are saying you've got a problem here.

I want to be able to listen to the whispers of the Lord and not have to have the hammer come down or the spanking that might take place by the discipline of the Lord.

Jonah grew up as part of God's covenant people. From a young boy growing up he understood the great heroes of the faith. He understood how God created the world and how God made the sea. God is the Creator. Jonah knew that, yet he's the one here who's running away from the Lord.

Essentially the message that Jonah is getting is if you're a Hebrew you better live like a Hebrew. You better obey the Lord that you believe in. The same message is one for us. We need to say if we're Christians, we need to live like Christians. This is what we call a moment of reckoning, I think, for Jonah. Where he comes to this place in his life where he recognizes I've really messed up, and he's going to tell them to throw him in the sea. We'll look at that next week, but it's a moment of reckoning where he comes to this place where he realizes he's made a big mistake and now he's in trouble.

I would suggest that in our lives we have those moments of reckoning. Those moments where we come to the end of our human capacity to solve problems and we say, "God, I need your help." That's why we plan a ministry time for prayer after our teaching time on Sunday morning. It may be that you personally have come to the end of your rope in some area of your life and you say, "I need God to do something big here in my heart and life." But sometimes you recognize someone else is coming to that place and you want to pray for that other person. We just want to have prayer time up here so that people can be praying. So there can be a ministry time where you can rely on the faith of someone else to bring about God's grace into your life as you're trying to deal with this reckoning. When you realize that this person you're praying for, or yourself, or the situation, really needs the power of God here.

Jonah came to that place in His life at this point and I think it's a regular place we want to come to in our life. I think every day, every week we ought to be coming to the place where, "God, I need you here. God, I can't do this on my own. Lord, would you please go before me in this situation." When we pray that prayer, God does go before us and He does help us and He does answer our prayers. Jonah is in that place where God's going to teach him some valuable lessons. We'll pick up more on that as we study in a couple weeks when come back to this passage.

Let's pray together.

[PRAYER] Lord, we're in the middle of this study and in the middle of this story. Jonah is coming to a rather challenging place where he sees himself and he sees the mistakes that he's made and knows some actions need to take place. Lord, I ask you to take each one of us to that place where we recognize you. I pray for each young person here and each parent, each man, each woman. Lord, give us a great sense of inadequacy and our need for you. Help us to call out on your name and appreciate you in new ways. We ask this in Jesus' name, amen.