

Letting Go

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[0 : 00] I'd like us to think a few moments this evening about these two verses, 11 and 12, in the first chapter of Jonah. Then said they unto him, What shall we do unto thee, that the sea may be calm unto us?

For the sea wrought the most impetuous. And he said unto them, Take me up, and cast me forth into the sea. So shall the sea be calm unto you. For I know that for my sake this great tempest is upon you.

There are three aspects, perhaps, I'd like us to think about this evening with regard to this chapter. Three aspects, the two sides that I'd like to look at. The two sides being, on the one hand, the sailors themselves and the ship, and Jonah himself.

But also the two aspects that relate to the sailors, and one aspect that relates to Jonah. All of which, I would suggest, relate to our own condition before the Lord.

Perhaps, in the lead up to our committing ourselves to the Lord. Or perhaps, in our ongoing relationship. Because, of course, there are many times in our relationship with the Lord that we may need to, as it were, go back to the beginning.

[1 : 07] And make a fresh start. And we have to learn again, sometimes, the simplicity of grace. First of all, I'd like us to see the situation with the sailors.

First of all, they are taking Jonah on board as a passenger. He's paying his fare. That is mentioned explicitly, that he paid the fare. And that's the fare all the way to Tarshish.

Which is as long a sea journey as it was possible to take in that culture. And the entire length of the Mediterranean. So that would have been a good, big, fat fare that they received from Jonah.

He must have used the vast majority of whatever money he had just to get on that ship. Just to get all the way to go to Tarshish. So, on the one hand, they have been enriched slightly by the fact they've got this good, fair-paying passenger on the boat.

We don't know how many other passengers there may have been. We don't know what the particular cargo was. The wares that they chucked out of the ship in the midst of the storm. But we know that taking Jonah on board has enriched them a little bit in the short term, at least.

[2 : 13] What they don't know is that they are taking on something which is angering the Lord. The Lord is angered by the sin of rebellion. Just as he is angered by all sin.

He has a loathing, an inveterate hatred of sin. He and sin cannot abide together. That is why there is no sin in heaven. In the immediate presence of God.

He will not look upon iniquity. Something must give. Either the Lord will withdraw from where sin is. Or he will turn his wrath upon it and destroy it. It cannot dwell with him.

And Jonah is the one against whom the Lord's wrath, if we can say that, against his sin of rebellion, is being poured out. But they have brought him into their ship.

So the wrath that the Lord has against the sin of rebellion, although it's not their rebellion, it's not them who are guilty of it, but they have brought it in amongst them. And as a result, this wrath is being poured out upon them too.

[3 : 15] This, to an extent, is what sin is like in our lives. It is almost like an alien thing. Although it's very much natural to us in a sense. It's not alien to our nature.

But it's alien in a sense that man was not created with sin in him. It came in. It entered in. It was like a virus which entered into the good, healthy body of mankind, which the Lord had created at the first.

Man was made male and female, sinless in the image of God. And then this virus, this cancer of sin, was injected, as it were, into it by man's own disobedience.

And sin, from there on, just multiplied its toxic cells. And, of course, it needs a healthy body in which to feed. And eventually, as these enemy cells multiply in the body, eventually the wages of sin kicks in.

And every human body dies. Unless the Lord comes back first, as we know from our looking at things on the Lord's Day. But this is how sin comes in amongst us. And sometimes we take sin in, and we take sin on board, without realizing that something is offensive to the Lord.

[4 : 32] Without realizing that we have sinned against him so much. Take the case of St. Paul, for example. He believed he was doing good. He believed he was doing the right thing by persecuting the Church of Jesus Christ.

But, in fact, he was attacking God. As the Lord made clear on the road to Damascus. He said, Lord, thou, Lord, I am Jesus, whom thou persecutest. It's hard for me to take against the bridge.

You're fighting against the goads, the ox goads that prod the oxen to make them pull the plough. You're fighting against it. But the Lord wants you to go in a certain direction, but you're fighting against it.

And as a result, it's hard. Oh, you're having a hard time because you're sinning against me. He didn't know that he was. But the Lord made clear to him that he was.

Sometimes we don't genuinely don't know that what we're doing is sin. We think we're doing okay. Think again of the case of Josiah, who was repairing the house of the Lord. And he thought he was doing good, which he was.

[5 : 29] And then they found the book of the law. And once they began to read in it, he discovered that the way that he was living, and Israel was living, was completely at odds with what the Lord had revealed in his word.

He didn't know that they were living in such a state of sin. But they were. And the wrath of God was going to be poured out upon them when they went to the prophetess. He didn't say, ah, well, it's okay.

Don't worry. Because the Lord knows you've got a tender heart. So that's okay. He's not going to judge you for this. She said, he is. He's going to pour out his wrath upon Israel for all that accumulated sin over the years.

But it all fares because your heart was tender. You're seeking the Lord. And you're trying to be faithful to him. It won't happen in your time. But it was going to happen. And likewise here, these men taking Jonah into their ship.

They don't know that they're sinning against the Lord. They don't realize that they are bringing sin in with them into their ship. When you're at sea, especially in those olden days, in the old ships they would have, this is a little wooden world.

[6 : 34] That's the only world there is, is within the confines of that ship. Everything outside, you can't survive out there on the open sea, alone on the surface. You will drown or you'll eventually become exhausted and just sink below the waves.

You have to, if you're going to live, you have to be within the bark. You have to be within the ship's confines. This is their little wooden world until they reach Tharshish.

And they have brought Jonah into their world. They have imported that against which the wrath of God is being poured out.

Sometimes we do it unconscionably. We don't intend to import sin into our heart, into our lives, into our practice. But nevertheless, we do it.

And the Lord's wrath will be revealed against sin. It's like that really in a sense in our body and soul. Sin is something which, although it's very much part of us, it is distinct.

[7 : 34] The Lord is able to recognize that which is sin and that which is merely us. And although we are shot through with sin, yes. Remember what it says in Hebrews about the Word of God.

It's able to divide asunder between soul and spirit. How would we define the difference between soul and spirit? Well, you could preach a whole sermon and happily convoluted to tease out the different strands of the distinction between soul and spirit.

The Lord knows the difference. He can work his way intricately between soul and spirit. He knows the detail between every little nuance of it. And likewise, he knows what is sin and what is just us. There has to be a separation between sin and us if we are going to live. And that is the case here with these sailors. They have discovered, through the wrath that's being poured out and through interrogating Jonah, they now know the reason why their lives are at risk.

Because they have got this object of sin within their little wooden world, within their lives amongst them. And if they do not separate between themselves and this sinful object, sinful subject, then the wrath being poured out upon the sin will be visited on them too.

[8 : 53] It's like if we do not divest ourselves of the sin that is within us and part of us, then the wrath of God against sin will fall upon us too. Think of us like the ship and sin like the Jonah within us.

The Lord is wrathful against Jonah because of his rebellion. The Lord is wrathful against sin because it is sin. If we harbor the sin in our hearts, the wrath will fall on us. If we can somehow separate the sin out and get it out of our hearts and sort of peel off that outward skin and be free of it and be clean of it, the wrath will still fall on sin, but we'll have to put some distance between us and it.

That's what they've got to do here. That is likewise what the Lord required of the Israelites. When, remember, Achan sinned by taking the goodly Babylonish garment and the wedge of gold and so on after Jericho.

When Joshua cried to the Lord as to why they've been defeated in battle by the men of high, the Lord said unto Joshua, Get thee up, wherefore liest thou thus upon thy face? Israel hath sinned. And they have also transgressed my covenant which I commanded them. For they have even taken of the accursed thing and have also stolen and dissembled also, and they have put it even among their own stuff. Therefore the children of Israel could not stand before their enemies, but turned their backs before their enemies, because they were accursed.

[10 : 14] Now, it's a bit steep. Only one of them's actually done it, and yet the whole tribes of Israel, all the nation of Israel, are regarded by God as being guilty. The wrath of God is falling on them all because they were accursed.

Neither will I be with you anymore except ye destroy the accursed from among you. Except you get rid of the sin itself. Except you get rid of the cause of my wrath, my judgment against you.

That's what you've got to do if you're going to survive. You've got to put distance, separation between yourself and the sinful object. In this case it was Acham, who had to be disposed of. He had to be put to death. He had to be got rid of from the body of Israel as a whole. Otherwise the wrath of God falls on the whole of Israel. Jonah has to be separated from the ship. Otherwise the wrath of God falls on the whole ship.

Sin has to be separated from us. Otherwise the wrath of God falls upon us. Just as the prophets cried to Elisha when they were cooking with the gourds in the pot.

[11 : 19] Oh man of God, there is death in the pot. There is death in the ship here. It's called Jonah. There is death in your heart and mine. It's called sin. We have to separate between ourselves and that sin.

And there is inevitably a reluctance to do so. The mariners are reluctant to get rid of Jonah. They don't want to chuck him over the side. They say, well that's akin to murder. Then he'll be even more guilty before God.

But they become more and more afraid when they discover that the God whom he worships and against whom he is in rebellion is the Lord, the God of heaven, which hath made the sea and the dry land.

Verse 9. If he is the one who has made the sea, he is the God of the sea, as well as the God of the dry land, they are really in trouble. Here they are at sea with the God who made the sea, directly offended against something that is in their little boat.

What are they going to do? They have to get rid of the thing that is in their boat. What shall we do unto thee, that the sea may be calm unto us?

[12 : 21] For the sea wrought and was tempestuous. He said unto them, take me up and cast me forth into the sea. So shall the sea be calm unto you, for I know that for my sake this great tempest is upon you.

And it seems like a crime to them. It seems like just murder. They can't envisage doing this. And sometimes the parting from the sin which is so much part of us will seem like a death.

It will seem like we are killing part of ourselves. We're destroying part of our very identity. How can I possibly be a person that can go on the way I did before if I don't have this thing to cling to, this thing that I may cherish.

It may be a besetting sin. It may be a favourite sin. It may be a sin which I have delighted for years. But if I cling to it, the wrath of God will continue to fall upon me and all those associated with me. Unless I can separate between myself and my sin. And this is what they have to do with Jonah. It seems like a certain death. In fact, they're not committing murder.

[13 : 27] A, because God has told them to do it. And B, because he doesn't die in this instance at this time. So, but they are required to do it to separate between themselves and the object of sin in this case.

That is the first thing. It's facing up to the reality. Identifying the problem. The problem within us is sin which must be God rid of. The second thing is we find, if we were to look to the end, then we see, end of the chapter, we see that when they discover it actually works, they're even more terrified.

He took up Jonah, cast him forth into the sea, and the sea ceased from a raging sun. And it's calm. And says, you know, thank goodness for that. That's okay now. That's a relief. Maybe we can fish him back out of the water again now.

The men feared the Lord exceedingly and offered a sacrifice unto the Lord and made vows. So, the very fact that they have seen that, yes, this actually was the problem.

They got rid of it. And look how quickly everything calmed down. Look how quickly everything was put right. We get rid of the sin in our lives. We repent of our sin. We turn from our sin. We put it away from us.

[14 : 33] And we turn to the Lord, the only remedy for sin. And look, it actually works. Our lives actually change. There is a peace that passeth all understanding.

There is a sense that, yes, we have actually done the right thing. There is a peace that floods the penitent heart when it knows that whatever else may happen to it now, it is right with God.

And that is a thing that is, on the one hand, wonderful and life-changing. But, on the other hand, it's a bit scary, too. It's a bit scary to think, well, we might actually have carried on in that scene.

We might have carried on thinking, no, no, it's totally illogical just because we get rid of this thing. That's not a disorder. But it does. We identify the problem in our heart, which is sin.

We get rid of it. We cast it from us. We turn from it. And we turn to the Lord. They feared the Lord exceedingly and offered a sacrifice unto the Lord and made vows because the sea had ceased from our raging.

[15 : 37] I think it's lovely the way the old-fashioned, the authorised version puts it where it says, the sea wrought and was tempestuous. Now, if something is wrought, it means it's working.

If somebody had, you know, some wrought iron, for example, is iron that has been worked upon, been wrought in a particular way. The sea wrought means the sea was working.

It was working God's purposes against the ship and against Jonah. It didn't just happen to be in a rage. It wasn't just throwing the natural equivalent of a tantrum in nature.

It was working. It was at work from the Lord. The sea wrought and was tempestuous. Again, verse 13, the sea wrought and was tempestuous against them.

But once the object of that wrath is removed, it's calm. Suddenly there is peace. And when we have identified and confessed and repented of whatever the sin may be that we are clinging to, whatever may be the final obstacle we have still to let go of, which we may be so reluctant to let go of, when we finally cast it from us, throw it overboard and turn to the Lord, there is that peace which passes all understanding.

[17 : 02] The sea ceased from her raging. Then the man feared the Lord exceedingly to discover that it actually works. This gospel, this good news of turning and repenting of sin and turning to the Lord, that it actually works.

It actually changes not only our lives, but our entire environment. It's frightening. It's scary. But in a good way, the men feared the Lord exceedingly and offered a sacrifice unto the Lord and made that.

And so we must identify what it is that is the sin that must be got rid of, which is causing the wrath of God against us. And we must get rid of it.

And we must repent of it. And we must turn to the Lord. And then when we see, my goodness, it actually works. There is actually this calm. There is actually this peace. It is frightening, fearful, but in a good and a holy sense.

And that is what those who turn from their sin will experience, and will have experienced, no doubt, in the past. That this is what the Lord has wrought. And he has used nature, and he has used people, and he has used circumstances, and he has used all the seemingly random collision of these circumstances to finally bring us to the place of being parted from our sin and being turned at last to the Lord.

[18 : 27] The sea wrought. Actually, we said at the last, what hath God wrought when souls are compelled by his grace to part from their sin and to turn to the Lord?

Sin which they may not be initially completely awake. But God identifies it. And they are compelled to recognize it and to choose if they will cling to it and perish or part from it and live.

The sea ceased from our religion. Third thing, as though I'd like us to recognize, is that Jonah himself almost certainly did not come to this conclusion lightly.

This realization that he must be cast overboard is almost certainly a little bit of inspiration from the Lord. He has recognized what the problem is through the problem is and how he must be parted from these men and their little wooden world or else he will be the death of them all.

His own rebellion is bad enough, but it is between him and the Lord. That he should jeopardize the lives of others with it would be even more reprehensible. This is something we should bear in mind, particularly if we have a position of influence in families or with those we may work amongst or whatever, is that if we are resistant to the Lord, if we are in rebellion against the Lord, it will be an influence, a malicious, a sinister influence on others.

[20 : 00] And they may stand to come down with us, to be brought down with us. We must recognize that it is sin in us that must be dealt with, that we bring not down others with us.

Take me up and cast me forth into the sea, so shall the sea be calm unto you. For I know that for my sake this great tempest is upon you. No doubt this was inspiration from the Lord, but this is what must be done.

Jonah, we have no reason to think, expected to live through the experience. Almost certainly he thought he was asking them to cast him to his death.

And he realized that if this did not happen, then there would be certain death, not only for himself, but for these men as well. He thought, this is it. I have to be cast into the sea.

My life is gone. My life is over. I've rebelled against the Lord. Now he's wrathful against me. Now he's judging me. And I'm going to be destroyed, but there's no reason why I should have to take them down with me.

[21 : 04] So he almost certainly expects that this will be to his death that he is going. That there will be no life left once he has been thrown overboard from this ship, from this little wooden world in the midst of the ocean.

And yet, this very willingness to die to self is what becomes not only the instrument of their salvation, but also the instrument of his own, the means of bringing himself to reconciliation with the Lord.

Obviously, it's only Christ who saves anyone, but this is the means the Lord uses to bring Jonah to that place of reconciliation, this willingness to die to self.

Almost always, almost always, when a soul is prepared to die to self, the Lord ends up not requiring it of them.

The Lord will not cruelly demand this of them. There's only one life that is offered up on behalf of sin. We can't pretend that our lives will do it, will save others.

[22 : 15] Occasionally, somebody may be called upon to give up their life, to surrender their life so that others might live, but it's not a means of their salvation, but it may be a means of saving their lives for a time.

This readiness to die if that be required, this willingness to give up whatever is left of life, to which, of course, we cling instinctively in this world, marks the Lord's people throughout history, throughout time.

We see, for example, in the book of Esther, remember when Mordecai says to Esther, you know, don't think you'll escape if this commandment is given against the Jews. And, you know, who knows what you've made even brought to the kingdom for such a time as this.

Then Esther bade them return Mordecai this answer. Go, gather together all the Jews that are present in Shushan, and fast ye for me. And neither eat nor drink three days, night or day.

I also my maidens will fast likewise, and so will I go in unto the king, which is not according to the law. And if I perish, I perish.

[23 : 21] Now, in fact, we know that Esther was the means of saving her entire nation, the Jewish people from throughout the Persian Empire. They who were set apart for destruction ended up being spared and having the victory over their enemies.

But she was only able to accomplish this because she took her life in her hand and was prepared to die if that should prove to be the consequence.

She is willing to die. If I perish, I perish. And Jonah almost certainly expects that this will be his death. Take me up and cast me forth into the sea.

So shall the sea be calm unto you, for I know that for my sake this great tempest is upon you.

There's a certain sense in which for some Christians, I know, but certainly in my own case, that one can think that if you don't actually expect to physically die, you can certainly expect that by giving your life up to Christ, your life is effectively over.

There's not going to be anything worth living for now. It's all gone. It's all spent. Anything that was good, anything that was enjoyable, anything that was going to be fulfilling or meaningful or good, in your life, that's it.

[24 : 31] You know, you might as well kiss a goodbye because you gave your life to the Lord, that's it. It's all going to be downhill from now on. There's nothing left to hope for. And to think that your life is over, even if you're not physically expecting to actually die, there is a sense in which somebody not yet in a state of grace, but on the brink of entering that state of grace, believes that they are giving up everything, believes that they are effectively dying to their old self, and that is what they are in fact being called upon to do.

This is what Paul writes to the Galatians, chapter 2 and verse 20. I am crucified with Christ. Nevertheless, I live. Yet not I, but Christ liveth in me.

And the life which I now live in the flesh, I live by the faith of the Son of God who loved me and gave himself for me. The old self has been put to death.

The old self is effectively dead. The old unbelieving self has had to, has been compelled to let go of its life. And now, the new life that the believer lives is because it is Christ in them, the hope of glory. It is Christ within them that brings forth this blossoming, this hope, this new life, this joy, this faith that they never imagined could be possible.

[25 : 59] They believed beforehand that they were going to certain death. If not physical death, then death to all intents and purposes. Life was over. That is what Jonah almost certainly believed.

But in order to surrender to God, in order to finally be faithful to the Lord after all the awareness of his rebellion, his disobedience, and that which had brought the wrath of God upon him, there was no hope left.

He had simply to give his life up to the Lord. That giving up of his life to the Lord is that which ended up being the defining ministry that he entered in upon.

People don't say, when they think of Jonah, they don't say, oh yeah, Jonah was thrown over the side of the ship. They think, Jonah, who was three days and three nights in the burial of the fish, yes. They think, Jonah, who went and preached to the Minamites and said, yet 40 days, a minifah shall be destroyed.

And they repented at the preaching of Jonah. That's what they remember. They remember their life. They remember the ministry. They remember the experience of Jonah, which only really began after he is thrown over the side of the ship.

[27 : 11] This defining experience, three days and three nights in the rebellion of the fish, or the way was the New Testament, which Jesus makes reference to, comparing it to his own burial before his resurrection.

This is that which happens after he goes over the side of the ship. The ministry that he exercises toward Minamite in this huge pagan city, he repents and turns to the Lord of glory.

They repent. They turn. They believe. This unprecedented act of an entire pagan city turned to the Lord God of Israel. All this, God uses Jonah to accomplish.

He does that. This defining ministry of his that only happens after he goes over the side of the ship. The life that a believer has, the service, I won't say ministry because that makes people think, oh yes, it's the ordained ministry.

No, the ministry in the sense of service, we are all called upon to render whatever walk of life we are in, whatever the Lord desires and intends to use us for, will only really be possible to be entered in upon once we have been prepared to go over the side of the ship.

[28 : 21] Once we are prepared to effectively say, my old life is over, there's nothing I can cling to, there's nothing I can hold on to, it was sin, it was rebellion, I acknowledge the wrath of God is revealed against sin and I've been holding on to my sin.

Could that be a reason why absolutely everything seems to be going wrong? Why everything seems to be against me? God is against me at every turn. He's against me for this, for this, for this, and this, everything.

It's as if he is turning providence and closing off every possible avenue and making heaven brass over my head and they are iron beneath my feet. Everything. How can this be?

Why should this be? What a cruel God it must be. I have nothing left to do but die. Die to self. Die to the old life. Die to the old way and see that it was not against you.

It was against the sin which found such ready harbor in your own heart that God's wrath was revealed from heaven. Reject that sin.

[29 : 24] Part from it. Cast it overboard and you find the sea is calm to you. You find that peace which passeth all understanding. You find that your life instead of being over has rather only just begun.

That by which your life was to be defined. That which was to be the fullness into which you would enter. And that by which if you are remembered at all. If you and I have ever remembered at all. It will only be for what the Lord began to do after we were saved. After we were turned to the Lord. Nobody really remembers a working for long.

Even if they are the most famous person in the world and people put up statues and so on. Within a couple of generations young people will walk by oblivious as they are crisps or whatever and look up the statue.

I wonder who that was. And maybe their grandparents might know who it was but quite quickly they forget. And since people don't tend to be taught proper history anymore nowadays they won't be taught by that person or whoever it was and still the world.

[30 : 25] Does not remember for long. The plaudits of the world and the celebrity of the world and so on. It's gone like vapor. Like snow off a dike in the morning.

That which is remembered not only on earth albeit perhaps forgotten on earth but remembered and recorded in heaven is that which the Lord enables us to do after.

We are prepared to go over the side of the ship. We are prepared to die to the old self. Because you get to the stage as Jonah got to the stage of realizing what he might say is the inverse or the reverse of what Paul wrote in Romans 8.31 you know what he said if God be for us who can be against us?

And Jonah probably got to the stage and thought well if God be against me who can be for me? It doesn't matter who's for me now. It doesn't matter if the sailors are all for me. It doesn't matter if the world is all for me.

If God is against me then I have nothing. I might as well go over the side of the ship. I might as well be plunged into the raging sea. And this is a reality which we also must recognize.

[31 : 38] All the plaudits of the world if we had them and we don't none of us have that. All the world patting us on the back and telling us how brilliant we are tomorrow we'll turn to someone else. But even if we could last it for a lifetime and be the most famous and successful person in the world and nobody is if we own the whole world and nobody does Jesus said you know what should it profit a man if he shall gain the whole world and lose his own soul if God be against us.

who can be for us. It doesn't matter who is for us if God be against us. And as long as we are at odds with the Lord as long as we retain and harbor whatever sin it may be whatever rebellion it may be in our hearts God will be against that sin as he is against every sin and we must be parted from our sin.

and it may mean tearing the very heart out of the old self and throwing it over the side you tear the heart out of somebody they die the old self has to die and we have to recognize that we are to die to self that we may live unto Christ.

As Paul said nevertheless I am crucified with Christ nevertheless I live and the life that I now live in the flesh it's not I that live it but Christ that lives in me and he who is said he is the way the truth and

the life if he lives in you then you are alive indeed if the son shall make you free he shall be free indeed if the God of all grace dwells in you and gives you the power to do whatever it is he commands and sends you to then you are powerful indeed not for yourself but for the Lord free indeed powerful indeed rich indeed and more alive than you will have ever been before but in order to gain that life in all its fullness we must be prepared to die to the old self that we might have life in all its fullness this Jonah was compelled to face up to this the man was also were compelled to face up to but I forget which of the missionary leaders it was who is reputed to have said he is no foe who gives up that which he cannot keep in order to gain that which he cannot lose if we have Christ we cannot lose him because it is not we who hold him but he who holds us in the power of his hand let us pray let us pray
Thank you.