

Slow Ship To Tarshish Jonah 1:1-17

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

You all know the story of Jonah, that he got on a boat heading away from where God was sending him, he was running away from the presence of the Lord. You heard today's reading that God sent a storm to stop that ship from going there, the wind and waves so violent that the whole crew and everybody on board was afraid they were going to die. And Jonah slept in the bottom of the boat – calm, cool, and collected. He knew the mercy of God, and was comfortable enough to sleep.

They woke Jonah and found out he was to blame for the tempestuous seas. They did not want to throw Jonah overboard, so they tried to go back to shore. But God prevented them by making the storm worse. Finally, they threw Jonah overboard.

You also know that God sent a fish that swallowed Jonah. God kept Jonah alive and safe in the belly of that fish for three days before having it spit him up on dry land. Once upon dry land, God again commanded Jonah to go to Nineveh to preach a message of, "either repent or God is going to destroy you."

Well, they repented. In fact, the king called a fast, telling the whole city to put on sackcloth (clothing made from burlap bags), to sit on ashes, and call upon God, turning from their wicked ways in repentance.

Did you hear what they did? They repented! When the wrath of God against their sin was revealed to them, they repented! Can you imagine that response to such a message today?

A more likely response would be, "Who does Jonah think he is, telling us to repent? How dare he call what we are doing, sin? God is a loving God, He'd never punish us with calamity! What we are doing is not sin, we just have a different culture, we live in a different time. God understands!"

I wonder how many people truly know the whole account of what happened with Jonah. Most people know of Jonah being told to go, getting on a boat going the opposite direction, God sending the storm, Jonah being thrown overboard, his being swallowed by a sea creature, his being spit up on dry land, and his finally going to Nineveh to preach. But I think what else happened is often left out.

After Nineveh repents, what happens? God relented concerning the punishment He was going bring upon them, and did not destroy them.

And this is where we find out why Jonah had hopped on a slow boat to Tarshish, a slow boat going away from Nineveh. *But it displeased Jonah exceedingly, and he was angry. And he prayed to the LORD and said, "O LORD, is not this what I said when I was yet in my country? That is why I made haste to flee to Tarshish; for I knew that you are a gracious God and merciful, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love, and relenting from disaster. Therefore now, O LORD, please take my life from me, for it is better for me to die than to live."* (Jonah 4:1-3)

Did you hear that? These people that Jonah had never met, he wanted to be destroyed by God! He

did not want to go to them and proclaim God's Word, for he knew that the Holy Spirit would work through his proclamation, that the people would repent, and God would forgive them.

Can you hear his little temper tantrum? "No, God, I will not forgive them. I hate them! I have a right to be angry with them. Nineveh, capital city of Assyria, is the home of our enemies. They have attacked and killed Israelites. I did not want to go to them, for I knew that Your Spirit would work in the Word that I proclaimed to them. I knew they would repent and then you would not destroy them. I want them punished! I want them to suffer! If you will not punish them, Lord, then take my life, I have no more desire to live.

Dear friends, how about it? What can we take away from this text? We could talk about the will of God in our lives. How many of you know that you are to be taking the message of the Gospel to your neighbors? No, you did not run away on a slow boat to Tarshish, but neither have opened your mouth to tell your unbelieving neighbor about God's Christ.

If they do not repent, they will most certainly perish eternally!

Do you hate anybody so badly that you do not want them forgiven by God? Is there someone who, if you learned God's vengeance against their sin was averted because of their repentance, that you would rather be dead? Who is it that you do not want God to forgive? Who is it that you beg God's wrath to fall upon?

For those times you are unwilling to bring the Gospel to others, repent! For your anger and unwillingness to forgive, repent!

Of course, that brings us to the main purpose of the book of Jonah. Is this a book to encourage you all to be prophets? No, it is a book to proclaim to us the mercifulness of God!

Yes, the Ninevites were unbelievers when Jonah came. Yes, they were abominable sinners in the worst way, when Jonah came. BUT, the point is that God's mercy was for them as well as God's chosen people, the children of Abraham.

God is not just for those in the know, but for all. Christ died for all. Of course, some may reject God and His Christ, but then they will answer for it. That my friends is what it was about, and the same is true today. It is still all about the Gospel.

Jonah pointed forward to Christ. In the belly of the fish for three day, just as Christ was in the belly of the tomb for three days. And both broke forth on the third day – and both brought life to people.

Dear friends, yes, you are to love your neighbor as yourself, even the ones you'd rather just love to hate!

I read a sermon on this text I think it was entitled, "Don't Make God Make You Whale Puke, Be An evangelist!"

Maybe we should be. We should be bold to proclaim the good news of salvation in Jesus Christ to all people.

But even still the message is that God is merciful! We are all on a slow boat to Tarshish, we are all going the wrong way. It is not just about whether we are willing to take the Gospel where God sends us. It is we are on a slow boat to Tarshish because we are constantly going the wrong direction, that is what sin is. Sin is more than 'missing the mark.' Sinfulness in action is going in the total opposite direction of God's desires for us.

Jonah goes in the opposite direction than where he was directed by God because of his hatred for others who were also created by God. He thought their sinfulness was somehow worse than his. That is what it means to be judgmental.

But God is a *gracious God and merciful, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love, and relenting from disaster*. That is how God dealt with Nineveh. But that is also how God dealt with Jonah, did he realize it at the time?

It is how God deals with you. It is how God deals with me. With you and me God is a *gracious God and merciful, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love, and relenting from disaster*.

Instead of dealing with us as we deserve to be dealt with, punishing us sinners with His wrath and eternal punishment, He speaks to us through the mouth of His servant. As we hear that Word, His Spirit is at work in us, and we are moved to repentance. God graciously relents of His wrath, and instead gives to us His Divine gifts of grace.

The one who created the wind and waves, and rebuked them to be still, gave His life unto death to purchase the forgiveness we desperately need. And it is He would gives us the will to love those around us and have that life we could not obtain on our own. It is this same God who was merciful to Jonah and Nineveh who is merciful to you.

He speaks words of forgiveness in your ears.
He places the flesh of His Son in your mouths,
He pours the blood of Christ between your lips.
He blesses you with His presence and bestows upon you His grace. Amen.