

A Saving Sacrifice
Jonah 1:11-17
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One of the most interesting verses in the bible is **Luke 24:27 (NLT) Then Jesus took them through the writings of Moses and all the prophets, explaining from all the Scriptures the things concerning himself.** As they traveled to the town of Emmaus on Sunday afternoon following Jesus' resurrection, 2 of his followers the privilege of hearing Jesus explain how the entire old testament refers to him. That included, I am sure, some exposition for the book of Jonah. I suspect this may have been one of Jesus' favorite books. Today we see part of the reason for that. If you have your bible you can turn to Jonah 1:11-17. Otherwise the words will be on the screen. Let's pause and pray the Lord would challenge and encourage us through this portion of his word today.

Last week we focused on the men sailing a ship with a man named Jonah. Who displayed so much admirable qualities? Now we turn our attention to Jonah. Because of his disobedience, the Lord sent a great storm that is threatening to destroy the ship and kill all on board. **Jonah 1:11 So the sailors said to Jonah, "What should we do to you so that the sea will calm down for us?" for the sea was getting worse and worse.** And then Jonah gives this answer. **"Pick me up and throw me into the sea so that it will calm down for you, for I know that I'm to blame for this great storm that is against you."** Wow. What is Jonah thinking? Maybe he realized that he deserves to be punished because of his rebellion against God and is saying that he is willing to accept the consequences. Or maybe he is so intent on not going to Nineveh as the Lord commanded that he would just as soon die. Yet, Jonah does not mention any thought about God at all. He notes that the reason the sailors are in danger is not because of anything they have done, but because of his actions. He tells them, "throw me into the sea, so that it will calm down for you sailors."

The sailors do not want to throw Jonah or anyone else overboard. **1:3 The men rowed hard to get**

back to dry land, but they couldn't because the sea was raging against them more and more. Seeing no alternative. **They called out to the Lord, "Please, Lord, don't let us perish because of this man's life, and don't charge us with innocent blood! For you, Lord, have done just as you pleased."** **Then they picked up Jonah and threw him into the sea. And the sea stopped its ragging.** Just like that it is over. The storm is done. The sailors are safe. Jonah is apparently drowned. **1:16 The men were seized by great fear of the Lord, and they offered a sacrifice to the Lord and made vows.** As we noted last week, their theology understanding was probably minimal, but they were sure headed in the right direction. It looks like they are becoming worshipers of the one true God. And Jonah, well, I will give you a preview. This is chapter 1 of the book and can Jonah really be dead, yet? **1:17 says The Lord appointed a great fish to swallow Jonah, and Jonah was in the belly of the fish for three days and three nights.** That will be our focus next week.

Okay... what is God saying today to us through this passage?

#1 Jonah is an example of sacrificial love. This text reflects great irony. Jonah is running from God because he detests the pagans in the city of Nineveh. He refuses to go and preach there because he doesn't want to give them a chance to repent of their evil. Yet now, he is willing to forfeit his own life to save these pagan sailors. **1:12a Pick me up and throw me into the sea so that it will calm down for you.** Bible scholar Leslie Allen says at this point Jonah seems to be regaining his sense. Yet, the reasons are not because he is contemplating his sin against God, but because he is feeling compassion for these men. Perhaps the compassion is little more than "pity," but pity is preferable to self-focused indifference. Whenever we start thinking about the interests of anyone other than ourselves, our

hearts begin to change. As a result, Jonah says he is willing to die, so the sailors might live.

So, here's a question: Did Jonah love those sailors? That is not an easy question in modern American culture, something which influences all of us to at least some degree. For one thing we have intertwined love and sex so much that we assume erotic love, a sexual relationship, is the greatest expressions of love. That is reflected in so many of the songs we hear. "because I really love you, I want to sleep with you." The crazy thing is a statement like that makes sense to a lot of people. When **1Samuel 18:3** says **Jonathan made a covenant with David, because of he loved him as his own soul**, many assume this had to be a homosexual relationship. That is the understanding of what deep love is about. Now anyone who reads the old testament and understands ancient Jewish culture knows that is not what Jonathan and David's relationship involved. Yes, sexual love is an important dimension of a healthy marriage, but there is much more to love than that.

Others, would say: well we do not really know if Jonah loved the sailors because we do not know how he "felt" about them. Whether the tendency to equate love with feelings of affection, whether it is in a romantic, platonic or familial, a family relationship. However, the fact that someone makes you feel good, does not mean you love that person. Now I do believe love involves feelings. Acts of kindness done merely out of a sense of duty are not really loving acts. Helping another person because you believe you will be compensated or rewarded in some way does not really constitute love. Yet, there is so much more to love than warm feelings. In the bible, the Greek word used to describe God's love for us and the love we are to have for others is "agape." This is a self-giving love which Clements in sacrifice for another person. This, I believe, is at the heart of genuine love.

We see this in various situations. The most common is probably the sacrificial love of parents for their children. Now, every mom and dad is human and imperfect. All parents make mistakes and some can be abusive. Yet, almost all parents, out of love, make sacrifices for their

children. There are financial sacrifices. Some of you empty nesters are puzzled how your bank account seems to keep growing. Even while your income stays the same. Yes, when your children start buying their own groceries, that puts a few more dollars in your account. Yet, because of love almost every parent is glad to provide food for his/her children. Most parents are also willing to sacrifice time, energy, sleep, and pretty much anything for the welfare of their kids. In fact, I think most parents would be willing to take a bullet, or step out in front of a speeding car to protect the life of their child. Another example of sacrificial love is forgiveness. Every time someone truly forgives another they make a sacrifice. That person gives up the right to justice, to getting what he/she deserves. True forgiveness is an act of love. A vow is a promise to sacrifice for someone else, no matter what the cost. Whenever you get close and stay close to a person who struggles with life, it involves sacrifice. Whether the person's problems are physical, emotional, financial, or whatever, loving that person will mean sacrifice on your part.

Genuine love involves sacrifice. And acts of true sacrifice are rooted in love. So yes, I believe Jonah did love those sailors. Oh, the love was underdeveloped. He had only known these men for a short time. Yet he told them **1:12 Pick me up and throw me into the sea so that it will calm down for you**. His choice to give up his life to save theirs was an act of love. As Jesus says, **John 15:13 Greater love has no one than this; to lay down one's life for one's friends**. In our text we see a rebellious prophet who is running from God. Showing us the ultimate expression of love, as he is willing to sacrifice his life for the sake of pagan sailors he hardly knows. Part of the lesson for us is that if Jonah is capable of such a sacrificial love, we should be as well. And whenever the Lord calls you to make those sacrifices for others, you need, buy God's grace to strive to do so.

#2 God uses, Jonah's sacrifice to accomplish his purpose. This is really just a side note to the whole story, but it is wonderful. **Verse 1:16 The men were seized by great fear of the Lord, and they offered a sacrifice to the Lord and made**

vows. As I have said, this may not be a full conversion at this point, but these pagan sailors are sure moving in the right direction. They had been very afraid of the storm, but now they fear the Lord, the true God. This, as **Proverbs 9:10** says is the beginning or the heart of true wisdom. They offer a sacrifice to him. And they make vows. There are foxholes conversions where people make vow to God, saying, "Lord if you save me from this danger, I promise to do this for you." However, in this case the danger has passed these vows flow out of gratitude for what God has done. And folks, that is really the only time that vows to God make sense. The lives of these pagan sailors are being transformed. And from a human standpoint, this was all because of Jonah's foolish decision to try and run from God. Because he despises the pagans of Nineveh, pagan sailors are saved. Yet, all this comes as no surprise to God. Before the beginning of time God knew what was going to happen out in the Mediterranean Sea that day. He knew some pagan sailors were going to become worshipers of the one true God. even as Jonah is thrown into the water, he does not have a clue the role he is playing in helping those men become worshipers of the true God. yet, the Lord still uses Jonah to accomplish his purposes.

Friends, in this very chaotic, confusing time in which we live, the truth that God is sovereign, is one of which we often need to be reminded. God is at work. He will accomplish his purposes. No matter how goofed up and crazy things seem, he will do that. As **Ephesians 1:11** says, "**God works out everything in conformity to the purpose of his will.**" He will use us to accomplish his plan. Sometimes we will enthusiastically do what he desires, and sometimes, like he did with Jonah, God will use us even as we are trying to run from him. That is the sovereignty of God. It is a truth that helps me sleep at night. I hope it does the same for you. If not, we should have a chat.

Ok, so we should imitate Jonah and lovingly sacrifice for others. We should be encouraged by the fact God sovereignly accomplishes his purposes despite our disobedience. These are important lessons for us. Yet, I think the Lord has something even bigger for us in this passage.

#3 Jonah's sacrifice points us to the far greater sacrifice of Jesus. In **Matthew 12:39-41** "**An evil and adulterous generation demands a sign, but no sign will be given to it except the sign of the prophet Jonah. For as Jonah was in the belly of the huge fish three days and three nights, so the Son of Man will be in the heart of the earth three days and three nights. The men of Nineveh will stand up at judgement with this generation and condemn it, because they repented at Jonah's preaching; and look-someone greater than Jonah is here.**" Yes, Jonah kind of "coming back to life" after being swallowed by the great fish, our topic next week, points us to Jesus. Clearly Jesus' resurrection from the dead is the great sign of Jonah. Yet, I believe that Jonah being thrown into the sea and saving the ship's crew also is a sign from Jonah that points to the Lord Jesus. I am confident that when Jesus was explaining to those 2 disciples all the things from the old testament concerning himself, he indeed talks about how Jonah survived 3 days and 3 nights inside the belly of the fish. Yet, I also believe he talked about how that great storm stopped when Jonah was thrown into the sea. Of course, there are differences. Jonah was guilty of running away from God, he deserved punishment, while Jesus was completely innocent. He never sinned. While Jonah almost died under the water, Jesus actually died on that cross. Yet, there is an important parallel. Jonah's sacrifice points to Jesus' sacrifice.

And to assure that I'm not the only one who sees it, let me quote the French theologian Jacques Ellul. He was a fellow a lot smarter than me. As he is thrown into the sea, Jonah takes up the role of scapegoat. The sacrifice he makes saves the crew. Jonah is an example of the Christian way. What counts is that this story points to an infinitely greater story and one which concerns us directly. What Jonah could not do, but his attitude announces, is done by Jesus Christ. It is He who accepts total condemnation. Jonah is not Jesus, but he is one of the long line of types of Jesus, each representing an aspect of what the Son of God would be in totality. If it is true that the sacrifice of a man who takes his condemnation can save others around him, then this is far more true when the one sacrificed is the

Son of God himself. It is solely because of the sacrifice of Jesus Christ that the sacrifice of Jonah avails and saves.

Folks, as we read the Old Testament we always want to be looking for signs that point us to the Lord Jesus. When we studied the book liking for signs that point us to the Lord Jesus. When we studied the book of Judges, we noted how God used very imperfect judges, Ehud, Gideon, and Simon to save Israel. These flawed men pointed to the perfect savior. He will provide not temporary but permanent, eternal salvation. In **1 and 2 Samuel**, we focus on King David, the very imperfect ruler, who built a kingdom for God's people. That flawed man points us to a much greater king whose kingdom will have no end, for he will reign for ever and ever. Now, we have Jonah, the very flawed prophet, who gives his life so that others might live. This points us to the prophet messiah who came (Matthew 10:45) to give his life as a ransom for many. As Jesus died on the cross, he died in our place, paying the penalty for our sin. **2 Corinthians 5:21 For God made Christ, who never sinned, to be the offering for our sin, so that we could be made right with God through Christ.**

The great storm that God threw at Jonah and the ship carrying him was in many ways an expression of God's wrath against Jonah's sin. When Jonah is thrown overboard the storm stops immediately. God's wrath has been appeased. That is what Jesus' death accomplishes, for those who believe. He is (1 John 2:2) the propitiation for our sins. Propitiate is an old word that means Jesus satisfied the wrath of God against sin and evil by taking our place and bearing the punishment we deserve. This is, as we saw in **Luke 22**. Drinking the cup of God's wrath as he died on the cross in our place. That is why we sing, "for on that cross where Jesus died, the wrath of God was satisfied."

Jesus dying on the cross, paying the price for our sin, is at the heart of the Christian message, the gospel. It is something the book of Jonah pointed to 750 years before it happened. It is something we talked about very often at CBC.

And maybe some of you are thinking, "yeah, I know that story. I have heard it any times

before." That is an easy attitude in which to slip into. But don't let that happen. Don't lose your enthusiasm and sense of wonder for the gospel, for what Jesus has done for you. There is an old hymn that says, "I love to tell the story, the gospel, for those who know it best, seem hungry and thirsting to hear it like the rest." Friends, if you really know the story. If you really understand its significance. Your hunger and thirst for the gospel will not diminish. At least for any length of time. If you find that happening, if you find yourself uninterested in the gospel, you need to take another look and pray the Lord would open to marvelous wonders of what the one far greater than Jonah has done for us.

Folks, without a question this has been a tough year for many of us. For me there have been a lot of disappointments. The Packers losing that football game last Sunday afternoon is not at the top of the list, but it wasn't any fun. Knowing that because of COVID and the shutdowns we are not able to do our Easter musical (adult retreat) for the second year in a row is disappointing. A lot of things are happening in this world right now that do not really thrill me. But what the Lord Jesus has done for us does thrill me. No matter what else is happening around us, no matter how inconsistent or frail I sometimes seem in my own Christian life, this truth brings great encouragement: **1 John 4:10 this is love, not that we have loved God but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins.** Friends, that love encourages me on the darkest of days. I pray it encourages you as well. And then as God to help you share this great news with others. A lot of people out there are discouraged. Many of them far more than you are. They need the hope that only the Lord Jesus Christ can give. Of course, most of them do not realize that. Most of them think that the church, Christianity, are not very relevant for real life. But they, do not understand why Jesus has done and what that means. Pray the Lord will give you opportunities to explain that to your friends and family members who do not need Jesus.

And if you are encouraged by what Jesus has done for you, celebrate! Worship the Lord with enthusiasm and joy. You can do that as we sing our closing song.