

Are you in awe of God?

Jonah 1:11-16

January 29, 2023

Pastor Francis Bezzam

¹¹ Then they said to him, “What shall we do to you, that the sea may quiet down for us?” For the sea grew more and more tempestuous. ¹² He said to them, “Pick me up and hurl me into the sea; then the sea will quiet down for you, for I know it is because of me that this great tempest has come upon you.” ¹³ Nevertheless, the men rowed hard to get back to dry land, but they could not, for the sea grew more and more tempestuous against them. ¹⁴ Therefore they called out to the Lord, “O Lord, let us not perish for this man's life, and lay not on us innocent blood, for you, O Lord, have done as it pleased you.” ¹⁵ So they picked up Jonah and hurled him into the sea, and the sea ceased from its raging. ¹⁶ Then the men feared the Lord exceedingly, and they offered a sacrifice to the Lord and made vows.

Do you use the word “awesome” in your conversations? You ate a sandwich and you called it awesome. You went to the beach and you called it awesome. You went to a concert and called it awesome. You saw your child get an A+ on a test and you called it awesome. Some say that the word “awesome” is overused. I would not disagree. These days, we use the awesome to signify something extraordinary or something worth noting.

But I think the word “awesome” should not be used unless it prompts emotions or feelings of *awe*. The original meaning of “awe” meant whatever causes, induces, or inspires an overwhelming feeling of reverence, admiration, or fear. If you ask me, the word “awesome” in its truest sense must be reserved for God only. God alone is awesome. God alone is worthy of your admiration, honor, praise and wonder and reverential fear.

And that is exactly what we see in this passage and in the previous passage. Jonah fears God but those who are with him are astounded by God’s power.

This morning, we are continuing our series in the book of Jonah. Last two weeks we saw God giving Jonah a mission. Jonah is to go to Nineveh and warn them. But Jonah, instead of going to Nineveh goes to Tarshish.

And we saw that Jonah wants to run and hide from God.

But God is not done with Jonah yet. God sends a storm. Everyone is terrified. They begin calling out to their gods. And the captain of the ship tells Jonah to call out to his God too. However, Jonah doesn't call out to God. Jonah tells them that he is running from God. And they begin asking Jonah all kinds of questions. Who are you? Where are you from? What is your occupation?

You know what Jonah's answer was? I am in awe of God.

Now, Jonah does not fully live up to what he professes about God but what he says about God makes them more afraid.

That was verse 9 and 10 – *“And he said to them, ‘I am a Hebrew, and I fear the Lord, the God of heaven, who made the sea and the dry land.’”*¹⁰ *Then the men were exceedingly afraid”.*

They are more in awe of the God of Jonah than the storm itself.

Before we look at today's passage, here is a question I would like you to consider.

Are you in awe of God? What does admiration, honor and fear of God look like in your life?

Paul writes to the Romans this way in Romans chapter one – *“For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who by their unrighteousness suppress the truth.”*¹⁹ *For what can be known about God is plain to them, because God has shown it to them.*²⁰ *For his invisible attributes, namely, his eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly perceived, ever since the creation of the world, in the things that have been made. So they are without excuse.*²¹ *For although they knew God, they did not honor him as God or give thanks to him, but they became futile in their thinking, and their foolish hearts were darkened.”* Romans 1:18-21

Someone asked me a while ago. How do I know there is a God? I told him what Paul and the prophet Isaiah say. Look up and see.

“Lift up your eyes on high and see: who created these? He who brings out their host by number, calling them all by name; by the greatness of his might and because he is strong in power, not one is missing.”

Isaiah 40: 26

“The heavens declare the glory of God, and the sky above proclaims his handiwork” Psalm 19:1

“⁶ By the word of the Lord the heavens were made, and by the breath of his mouth all their host. ⁷ He gathers the waters of the sea as a heap; he puts the deeps in storehouses. ⁸ Let all the earth fear the Lord; let all the inhabitants of the world stand in awe of him! ⁹ For he spoke, and it came to be; he commanded, and it stood firm.” Psalm 33:6-9

This is what Jonah knew about his God. When Jonah told the sailors that his God was the God of the sea and land and that he was running away from God, they believed him.

We know they believed him because of the question they ask him at the beginning of our passage. Let's look at verse 11.

¹¹ Then they said to him, "What shall we do to you, that the sea may quiet down for us?" For the sea grew more and more tempestuous.

They had tried everything they knew to save themselves from the storm. And they know it is Jonah who is responsible for the trouble they are in. They have seen Jonah's confession too. But now they need relief from the trouble Jonah has caused. You said you were running from God and hence the storm. You caused this trouble for us. Now we are in danger of losing our lives. Get us out of this trouble. Their question was one of desperation and urgency. Why was it urgent? Because the sea was getting more and more turbulent by the minute.

This is what sin does. The longer you continue in sinful patterns, the more the turbulence. Perhaps you have asked the "what shall we do?" You have tried everything but the trouble keeps increasing. How do I have peace again?

So the sea became more and more rough. And what does Jonah say in reply?

Let's look at verses *twelve* and *thirteen*.

¹² He said to them, "Pick me up and hurl me into the sea; then the sea will quiet down for you, for I know it is because of me that this great tempest has come upon you." ¹³ Nevertheless, the men rowed hard to get back to dry land, but they could not, for the sea grew more and more tempestuous against them.

Here is Jonah's solution in response to their question. Throw me overboard and everything will be okay. Notice the irony here. The sailors tried to throw their luggage and that didn't help. But Jonah says he is the only "luggage" who needs to be rid of.

Now, how does Jonah know that being thrown overboard will calm the storm?

We are not told explicitly but we see Jonah's willingness here. He has acknowledged his disobedience.

He confessed to having not done what God had told him to do. But confession alone is not enough. Confession must be followed by repentant action. Jesus said, *“And if your eye causes you to sin, tear it out and throw it away. It is better for you to enter life with one eye than with two eyes to be thrown into the hell of fire.”* Matthew 18:9.

Now, it’s possible that Jonah may have thought of himself as some kind of a hero with a martyr complex. It’s possible but seems unlikely. He knows he has caused enough harm already and clearly sees the hand of God. Whatever his motive might be, Jonah sees that he needs to be removed from here. Whether he sees that God will rescue him or not we don’t know but it is always better to give yourself into the hands of God than to disobey. Even when it difficult entrust yourself to God and His care. God’s care and protection is better than any other care this world has to offer. We are reminded from God’s Word that *“it will be well with those who fear God”*. (Ecclesiastes 8:12) Whether Jonah is relying on this promise of God when he is in this difficult situation, we don’t know. But we know Jonah is not a wicked idolater. Jonah has disobeyed God but Jonah has not denied God.

So, while Jonah proposes a solution, the sailors, on the other hand, are not willing to throw him overboard. Again, notice here, that they are more afraid of the God of Jonah than the storm. They don’t want to offend God’s prophet by throwing him off the ship. So they try rowing harder and harder. And the more they row, the more tempestuous the storm becomes. Finally, they relent, they say a prayer and follow Jonah’s proposal.

Let’s look at verses *fourteen* through *sixteen*.

¹⁴ *Therefore they called out to the Lord, “O Lord, let us not perish for this man's life, and lay not on us innocent blood, for you, O Lord, have done as it pleased you.”* ¹⁵ *So they picked up Jonah and hurled him into the sea, and the sea ceased from its raging.* ¹⁶ *Then the men feared the Lord exceedingly, and they offered a sacrifice to the Lord and made vows.*

What a prayer! There are at least *three* distinctives in this prayer that we ought to notice.

1. First distinctive – Notice they address their prayer to the Lord the God of Jonah. This is so different who they prayed to when they didn’t know who had caused the storm. Verses 4 and 5 – *“But the Lord hurled a great wind upon the sea, and there was a mighty tempest on the sea, so that the ship threatened to break up.”* ⁵ *Then the mariners were afraid, and each cried out to his god”*. Each prayed to his own god. And nothing happened. But you see all them together pray to

the Lord of heaven, the only God who made the sea and earth. How did they know who to address? It's possible Jonah told them and they believed Jonah. The disobedient prophet becomes an unlikely witness to God's saving power. In this age of social media, the word 'prayer' is thrown around so casually. The object of our prayer is always God. You remember Jesus taught his disciples to pray – "*Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name.¹⁰ Your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.*" Matthew 5:9. And we pray in Jesus name.

2. Second distinctive – they acknowledge the *righteousness* and *authority* of God. Their prayer is not just to say "well, we have no other option. Therefore, we'll stick to our beliefs but we'll get rid of Jonah so that we can relief" No. Their prayer tells us they know God will hold them accountable if they take a man's life. God is the Author of life. And they plead with God to be spared for the action they are going to take. They see Jonah as innocent because they rather have God be the judge than they judge Jonah.
3. Third distinctive – they acknowledge the *sovereignty* of God. In the last part of verse fourteen they address the Lord one more time – "*O Lord, have done as it pleased you*". This is actually a reflection of Psalm 115:3. Surely God is Sovereign over all nature. God is absolutely free to do whatever he chooses according to his own purpose and will. There is so much we can learn from this prayer.

There is one thing you can say about their prayer. They pray with sincerity. And then hurl Jonah into the sea. The word "hurled" is the same word we see in verse four. The Lord hurled a great wind upon the sea. This again has a Gospel implication. Sin has to "hurled" away to not see God's wrath "hurled" at us. And we see the picture of our Lord Jesus Christ. He took our sin so that we would die to sin and live to righteousness. And as believers we need to be constantly hurling away sin that can trap us and cause all kinds of storms.

So, as the sailors hurl Jonah away, what happens as a result? The sea ceased from its raging. Jonah didn't cause the storm to stop. God did.

And what is the response of the sailors? "*the men feared the Lord exceedingly*" Verse 16.

These men also offered sacrifices to the Lord and made vows. Now we don't know if their sacrifices and vows pleased God but one thing we know – they were in awe of God!

They are filled with awe! With astonishment! With fear and trembling!

This reminds me of at least two eyewitness accounts in the Gospel where people responded with awe.

First account:

This is from the Gospel of Luke. There was man was paralyzed. And this paralyzed man's friends bring him to Jesus for healing. You know the first thing Jesus says to this man? “..Your sins are forgiven”.

Luke 5:20. And all religious people around began grumbling and say in their hearts “Only God can forgive sins”. And Jesus knows exactly what they are thinking. And he tells everyone “Which is easier, to say, ‘Your sins are forgiven you,’ or to say, ‘Rise and walk’? Luke 5:23. It is a very easy thing for Jesus to calm a storm or to heal you. What is more important is the forgiveness of sins. And after Jesus healed this paralytic, here is the response of those who around.

“And amazement seized them all, and they glorified God and were filled with awe, saying, “We have seen extraordinary things today.” Luke 5:26

Do you see that you have a Savior who forgives your sin is an extraordinary thing in itself?

Second account:

Jesus Christ was crucified. He was put in a tomb. And there were soldiers who was watching all the events of Jesus' crucifixion and death unfold before his eyes.

Here is their eye witness account.

“⁵⁰ And Jesus cried out again with a loud voice and yielded up his spirit. ⁵¹ And behold, the curtain of the temple was torn in two, from top to bottom. And the earth shook, and the rocks were split. ⁵² The tombs also were opened. And many bodies of the saints who had fallen asleep were raised, ⁵³ and coming out of the tombs after his resurrection they went into the holy city and appeared to many. ⁵⁴ When the centurion and those who were with him, keeping watch over Jesus, saw the earthquake and what took place, they were filled with awe and said, “Truly this was the Son of God!” Matthew 27:50-54

May we be in awe of God. In Jesus Name. Amen!

----- Discipleship Questions-----

MESSAGE SUMMARY: Are you in awe of God? Jonah 1:11-16

HEAD: These questions help you examine the truth of God's Word.

1. Given the response of sailors after the storm had ceased from raging, what is your response in light of the death of Jesus on your behalf and his resurrection? Go around and share. Matthew 27:45-54, Luke 5:20-26

HEART: These questions help you wrestle with what you believe.

2. When things do not go well and according to your expectations, how does the prayer of the sailors help us understand the Sovereignty of God to trust and pray?
3. What is God convicting you of and to believe in light of this message?

HANDS/HABITS: These questions help you bring the truth into your everyday life and develop behaviors that change your habits.

4. For personal reflection: What can we learn from Jonah's life so far?