

## “A Wayward Prophet” Pt 5

Jonah 1:7-17

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**Transcriber’s Note:** The recording starts into Jeff’s prayer.

**Jeff:** Father, we give You thanks in and through the Lord Jesus Christ in whom we have life. And we ask, Lord, that You will continue to bless us in the richness of this salvation as You have Your Spirit to apply it to us in abundant measure. Lord, we thank You as we gather here today, as You give us the opportunity to study Your word, to be together and to strengthen one another. As iron sharpens iron You give us brothers who encourage and sharpen us. And Lord, we just pray that You would continue to work that relationship in us, that we might be pleasing in Your sight.

Father, there are many things that we bring that are upon our hearts this morning, things that are unspoken that are private to us. And then there are things that we share in common, and Bruce is one of those things. He’s one of those people that have been special to many of us. And we just ask that You would bless him, that You would strengthen him and go before him. We pray that You would open another door for a place where he might stay. We pray, Father, that You would bless his wife at this time, Lord, as it must be so difficult to work and to care for Bruce and to do all that she does. We just pray that You will bless her as well.

Father, we ask that Your hand would be upon us for good, especially as we move into the holiday season. We know that is a difficult time for many because of the joy that is in the air, and yet the sorrow that is in one’s heart. So Father, we pray that You would alleviate sadness and that You would bring the joy of the gospel. And Father, we pray that You would help us to be a means to do that not in an artificial way, but in an organic way, in a way that is helpful and healthy and in a way that shines Christ in the life of an individual who needs that joy of the gospel. And so Father, we pray that You’ll bless us during that time.

We ask that You would strengthen our hands even in today’s labors, and be with our families as we are apart from them. And we pray these things in Jesus’ precious and blessed name. Amen.

**Brave Men:** Amen.

**Jeff:** Well let me have us turn to Jonah. And we’re going to be looking today at verses 7-17. I’m going to be reading from verse 7-17 today. And so why don’t we turn to Jonah 1 verse 7? And I’ll at least read through 17. This is God’s word; give your ear to the reading of it.

*“And they said to one another, ‘Come, let us cast lots, that we may know on whose account this evil has come upon us.’ So they cast lots, and the lot fell on Jonah.*

*“Then they said to him, ‘Tell us on whose account this evil has come upon us. What is your occupation, and where do you come from? What is your country? And of what people are you?’*

*“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.’*

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*“Then the men were exceedingly afraid and said to him, ‘What is this that you have done?’ For the men knew that he was fleeing from the presence of the LORD, because he had told them.*

*“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.*

*“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.’*

*“Nevertheless the men rode hard to get back to dry land. But they could not, for the sea grew more and more tempestuous against them. 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.’ So they picked up Jonah and hurled him into the sea. And the sea ceased from its raging.*

*“Then the men feared the LORD exceedingly. And they offered a sacrifice to the LORD and made vows. And the LORD appointed a great fish to swallow up Jonah. And Jonah was in the belly of the fish three days and three nights.”* This is the word of the Lord.

**Brave Men:** Thanks be to God.

**Jeff:** All right. Well today we’re going to continue looking at Jonah. We’re not going to get out of Jonah 1; next time we’ll be in it again I think, and we’ll take another look at it. But today we’re going to be in a new segment of it. We’re going to be looking at some old material because we can’t help but sort of reach ahead in some of our observations, nor can we help going backward in some of our observances. So we’re going to look today in the main at verses 7-17.

And here’s how I want to divide up what we’re going to look at today if we get through the material today, which I have no hope that we will. But I want us to think first of all about some introductory matters. I want us to think about *being in the same boat*. I’ll explain more of what I mean by that when we get there. *Learning a common lesson*, and this is really learning common lessons; there are a number of lessons that we might learn as we look at this text. Then I want us to look at a point in spite of us, and I think that’s almost obvious when we think about the book of Jonah, especially as you get on the thinking track that we’re going to get on today. And then *what is our right response?* And we’ll look at that as well when we get to it.

But first of all let’s look at some introductory material; let’s think about some things that will lead us into the text. One of the things that I think that you know and I know intuitively, even if we’ve never been to a literature class,—and what we’re really doing when we look at a text like this from this perspective—what we’re doing is called narrative criticism. And narrative criticism can come in one of two forms. The best form—the most healthy form, the form that helps us enter into the Scripture—is what we might call simple literary structural criticism. That is, what we’re doing is that we’re asking: What does the surface of the text say?—in other words, what’s the story? But how is that story being told?

And one of the things that we realize when we think about that kind of issue when we think about the text is that the story has a great plot to it. And yet there’s a structure; there’s a way in which the author is telling it.

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Let me give you an example. I just learned for instance that *The Silver Chair*, written by C.S. Lewis, is written in a V-shape. It’s obviously a story, but once you get the structure of it, it’s an amazing story.

You know of the Narnia stories. Maybe you’ve read them to your children or maybe you like them yourselves. But the Narnia stories are stories about the Pevensy children stepping through a wardrobe and entering into the land of Narnia. And over that land is a lion named Aslan.

Well the interesting thing about this story—*The Silver Chair*—is that it’s filled in a V-like fashion. So Aslan, for instance, never enters the land of Narnia in this story. He appears at the beginning and he appears at the end. But when the children go into the land of Narnia they never encounter Aslan. In fact the very middle chapter is the chapter about the underworld. And so the text moves from a mountaintop when they encounter Aslan before they go into Narnia, and it goes down to the underworld. And then it moves out of the underworld and back up to communication with Aslan. And so there’s a way in which the story is being told, a structure according to which the story flows.

And oftentimes when we think about a story we think about a story having one particular lesson to it. But a good story will have many lessons. But they’ll all serve the main lesson. A parable is like that, and we’ll look at one of those in just a minute. How about now? (*Laughter*)

How about this parable? We’re going to look at Luke 15. I just want you to notice. This is the parable of the prodigal son. And when you look at the parable of the prodigal son, one of the things that you realize is that it’s a story about multiple people, and yet it has one point.

Let me share this with you; it’s a quote from B. B. Warfield. And he says this about the prodigal son: *“It undoubtedly has its main lesson. But it could not well teach that lesson without teaching along with it certain subsidiary ones closely connected with it as corollaries and supports, or at least implicated in the manner in which it is taught. Only we must be very wary that we do not either on the one hand confuse these subsidiary things with the main lesson of the parable, or on the other read into it lessons of our own fancifully derived from its mere forms of expression.”*

In other words, what we need to do is just like in life. We need to keep the main thing the main thing, because if secondary things take over the main thing, then we’ll lose the main thing. And that’s the way with a story. When you interpret a story you try and find the main point of the story. But if you make the secondary points about the story the main thing you lose the main thing.

And so what you need to do is to try and identify the main point of this story. What is the author telling us here? And then you need to derive what the subsidiary lessons are, the corollaries of the story. And that’s what Warfield is helping us to see.

Now let’s look at Luke 15 again. And I want us to think about this story for just a couple of minutes really by way of exercise. But I want us to think about it from a number of different angles. And I want us to be wary about some of the lessons that we may take away and what is the main point.

Now let’s think about that. When we think about the parable of the prodigal—and we won’t take time to read it because again I just want to think about this in terms of an

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exercise—what is the main point of that parable? What do you think of when you think of the parable of the prodigal son? First of all, who are the characters in that story?

**Don Bishop:** The two sons and the father.

**Jeff:** The two sons and the father. We’ve got one son who basically wants all of his wealth now. He gets it from his father, and he goes and squanders it. The father is a waiting father who wants the son home.

You have an elder brother. And the elder brother is not really happy with the younger brother, and he’s not really happy with his father. The question is: What is this story about? What would be the main point of this story?

**John Gratner:** Restoration.

**Jeff:** Restoration. Anybody else?

**Brave Man:** Repentance.

**Jeff:** Repentance.

**Paul Sedlock:** I think about God’s unfailing love for His children.

**Jeff:** God’s unfailing love for His children.

**Don Maurer:** The difference between the brothers: the attitudes of works righteousness versus grace.

**Jeff:** Okay. So you’re saying the two brothers.

**Don:** The two brothers, yes; the contrast.

**Jeff:** The contrast? Okay. Let me ask you a question. Go to Luke 15 just for a minute. And just look at the context of Luke 15 and that parable. Does the context tell you anything about what the main point of that story might be? We’ve just been looking at the story; now open it up a little bit and look at the context. Does that tell you anything? What are the stories that come around that story? What are the stories that come after that story?

**Ted Wood:** The lost coin and the lost sheep.

**Jeff:** The lost coin, the lost sheep and the lost son. Now you’re beginning to get a little more of the sense that your instincts were right. And you’re beginning to see that this is not just one story, but a series of stories. And those other stories confirm your instincts. There may be corollary lessons—some lessons—but your instincts were basically right. And so there’s a main point and there are certain sub-points.

For instance, Don mentions the elder brother and the tension between the two, and how works righteousness is introduced. And certainly that elder brother who is introduced in the story represents for us the Scribes and the Pharisees and their attitude toward Jesus. And so that’s a sub-lesson, a corollary. But it’s nonetheless there, and Jesus is drawing that out for us.

In Jonah 2 there are sub-lessons; there are corollaries, and we need to be aware of them. We need to pick up on them. The main point I would argue—and you may disagree with me on this—but I think the main point of this story is disobedience and unrepentance.

Now Jonah does have a repentant moment in chapter 2. But at least at this point in the story, what we find in chapter 1 is disobedience and unrepentance. That’s the main point of the story up to this point. In chapter 1 that’s what we find.

Now if that’s the main point, what are the sub-points? Well one of the sub-points is the sailors. We are introduced to some men. And don’t you just love this? We’re going to be

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talking about this in a minute. But here’s Jonah. And he’s like “You know, God, I am not going to the Ninevites! I am going over here!” And then he runs into these sailors. And isn’t it funny that he just can’t help it. Anybody he runs into gets saved. “I can’t believe this kind of thing!” I don’t know; it’s one of those humorous things about this story. But anyway there are sub-points, and the sailors of course are among them.

Now I think this adds a kind of richness to the story. There is an evangelistic sense to this story that I think needs to be drawn out. I think it’s a lesson that’s a support rather than the main lesson. I think the main lesson of this story is that Jonah is disobedient and unrepentant at this point.

So I want us to move into the story and think about it as a main point and as corollaries. But I want us to think about this. We’ve been looking at the disobedience of Jonah. I want us to look now at one of the corollaries. I want us to look at the sailors. I want us to just pick them up.

So if we were looking at Luke 15 and we were examining the main point, and I were to stop and say, “Let’s just look at one of the corollaries; let’s look at the elder brother,” that’s what we’re doing. We’re just pausing and we’re just looking at one of the corollaries.

Okay, so let’s look at “in the same boat.” These are unlikely partners when you think about it. You think about Jonah and the sailors in the same boat. And yet one of the things that I think that we realize or can come away with is that this is a lesson for us.

Jacques Ellul who is a philosopher and fancies himself as a theologian but is definitely a communication philosopher says this. This is a communication philosopher, and yet he’ll oftentimes write things about the Scriptures. He has a number of books about the Scriptures.

This is what he says about Jonah. He says, “*These Joppa sailors do not belong to the Jewish people; they are pagans. But they set sail with a member of the chosen people,*” and he says, “*a Christian. They are in the same boat.*”

Now he’s using the word “Christian” obviously anachronistically, or the reverse of anachronistically; he’s reaching forward to a time frame that is not yet, and making an application which I don’t have a problem with. But here he says to us that this Christian man, or this believing man, is in the same boat with these sailors.

Now I think that it doesn’t take much imagination to think to ourselves that this is very much like where we are in our world: Christians and non-Christians alike in the same boat. I think the tendency though for us as Christians is to think that we need to divorce ourselves from the world.

I’ll never forget when I was pastoring in a church elsewhere. And there was a guy that was a very wealthy fellow. He had a full-on science lab in his basement; it was an amazing setup. The upstairs looked like it was amazing. The outside of the house looked kind of like an airplane hangar. And you walked into the house, and immediately when you walked into the house there were marble pillars. And it opened up like you walked into Athens or something like that; it was just amazing! And then when you went downstairs there was this full science lab down there.

Anyway, this guy got into his head that he needed to stop paying federal income taxes because it was illegal. (*Laughter*) And he had purchased a huge amount of property in Belize, and he was going to build a commune down there. And I want you to know that I

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was asked to be the pastor down there. *(Laughter)* And as enticing as it was, I said no. But I asked him at that point. I said,--

**Ted:** Was he offering to pay you?

**Jeff:** Yeah: tarantulas and anacondas, I think. *(Laughter)* But I don't know, right? You know, when an unstable person in his thinking offers you a bit of land to live on if you'll be his pastor, you have a tendency to think to yourself, What if I cross this unstable person? I may not have a piece of land to live on and I'll be in a foreign country. I'll be in big trouble! Anyway, that wasn't my main thought. My main thought was why do you want to do this? So I asked him, "What is your rationale for wanting to do this?" And he took me to Revelation where it says, "*Come out from among them.*"

**Ted:** Yeah.

**Jeff:** And I said to him, "I'm not quite sure that to interpret a phrase literally in a book that is in the majority, in the main, a symbolic book is the best hermeneutical way of interpreting that." Nonetheless that was his rationale and he ended up moving, and so on. But my own thinking is that his ability to put feet on what he thinks is the right interpretation of Scripture is oftentimes what we all think, at least we follow that to some degree or other. And that is that we have just got to get away from unbelievers. We've got to get out of the world in some way so that we're not exposed to these heathens. And that's really not what the bible says.

**Brave Man:** Right.

**Jeff:** The Bible says for instance in John chapter 17 that Jesus wants His people protected. But they're going to be in the world, and the way for instance that they love one another is going to be a sign to the world that He actually came and redeemed the world. And so there's a sense in which evangelism is very crucial. It means being salt and light in a very fallen world.

And so here we have these guys in the same boat. And one of the things that I think is a corollary and a subsidiary lesson is that God is teaching us that all of life is related in the Lord. All of life is related when we're in the world with people.

I want to show you this. I want to show you the interrelatedness of life: first of all the sailors, than Jonah, the Ninevites, the fish, and even the worm. I want to show you that these things are all interrelated.

But before I do that I want to remind you that what we're dealing with is a disobedient child. Think about what's happening with Jonah as a parent/child relationship, because Jonah is a covenant child who is fleeing from the Lord. And God as a parent is pursuing him; He is pursuing this covenant child.

Think about it like this. You have a child that's in rebellion. What do you do? You might track his or her phone. Where is their phone going so I can know where they're going? You put limits on their Internet searches so that when they search out things the Internet searches come back to us so that we can know what they're doing. What we're doing is, we're pursuing them.

And God is pursuing His covenant child. Now I want you to see that you've got to think about that in the midst of what I'm going to tell you. In fact I don't know about you, but when I read the book of Jonah I sometimes have the thought about a parent/child conflict that I once witnessed when I was just a young guy.

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I was over at a friend’s house and he was trying to make a trap for his dog. And what he was doing when I got there was that he had a ladder out. Now literally we were just ten years old, you know? And he had this ladder out and he was up on his mother’s ceiling in between where you entered into the dining room and where you entered into the living room. And he was up on the ceiling putting thumb tacks and pounding nails into the ceiling with a blanket draped down. So he had the blanket on one side and at the same time pounding on the ceiling. And I said, “What are you doing?”

And he said, “I’m making a trap to catch the dog when the dog comes through.” And I thought to myself, You know, in my house the rule was that when you put a hole in the wall, (*laughter*), you might have a hole in you! (*Laughter*) And I never even dreamed of putting a hole in the ceiling, and here he was.

And all of a sudden his mom came in. And I want to tell you something: I thought World War III just started. (*Laughter*) It was ugly. And I felt like the sailors, you know, watching this whole thing unfold. And here’s this mom just wreaking havoc down on her son. And she turned to me and said, “And you may go!” And I said, “I’m gone!” (*Laughter*)

But anyway you just get that sense, right? So here you have a Parent/child conflict between God and His covenant son. And yet all of life is related; I want you to see that. There’s an interrelatedness to what we’re going to see. And it’s through the word *hurled*. It’s the same Hebrew word throughout it all.

“*The LORD hurled a great wind upon the sea*”; that’s 1:4. 1:5: “*Then the mariners hurled the cargo that was in the ship into the sea.*”

And then think about it. I want you to think about it and we’re going to think about this in a minute. But think about the people who don’t get their cargo. Can you imagine that? Remember those ships that were out on the coast of San Diego for the longest time waiting to be unloaded during COVID?

I had a friend of mine. He had just published a book. And I’ll never forget that he released an email blast. And then a day later he released a blast saying, “I guess I found out that it’s still in San Diego on the water, and it’s hard to tell when it will come in.” You think that’s funny. (*Laughter*)

Verse 12: Jonah says, “*Hurl me into the sea.*” And then verse 15: “*They hurled him into the sea.*” And so the same Hebrew word appears for us throughout, I think indicating that there’s a sense in which all of this is tied together. God is the One who hurls the wind on the sea. He is the cause of the sailors hurling the cargo into the sea. He is ultimately the cause of the people in Tarshish not getting their goods. They hurl Jonah into the sea because Jonah says, “It’s because of me that you’re experiencing this. God is pursuing me.” And so they hurl him into the sea. There’s a sense in which all of this is interconnected. God is weaving this net together for all of them.

And so I think a corollary is a lesson through the grammar here that life is interrelated. There’s an interrelatedness to life itself. And so you see again that Jonah the prophet flees. He comes into contact with the pagan sailors. Those who did not receive their cargo are direct recipients because of this interaction. So the merchants, the ship owner, the Ninevites, a fish is prepared to eat him. A vine we’ll eventually get to and a worm, and even the cattle of Nineveh. All of this is related. And all of this in this story has an intersection.

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And so when we think about it we think about providence. And I think that one of the things that we don't think enough about is the way in which God providentially unfolds life for us, and I think we ought to. When we think about providence we need to think about the fact that God designs the life that we live.

God is not the author of sin; there are secondary causes. However, I want you to think about it this way. If God were not omnipotent and sovereign, then secondary causes would fall apart. And so God's sovereignty establishes secondary causation.

So there's a sense in which all things that live and move and have their being have to go back to God, all of them—even the trying moments, even the trials of life and the difficulties of life—all of those things have to go back to God. And we can either chafe against that, or we can embrace that and find a way to live in the midst of trials knowing that.

Now I don't know about you guys. But one of the things that helps me immensely is something the Westminster Confession says in the section on providence. It reminds me that God is good and wise and all-powerful. That means that He can do all things, okay? That means that He is good to me. And that means that He is all-wise; He has better wisdom than I do.

Now I want you to think about that definition over against the definition of, say, someone like—I can't think of the philosopher's name; it wasn't Immanuel Kant. Who woke Immanuel Kant out of his dogmatic slumbers? I can see it; I can't tell you his name. Anyway—

**David Miller:** Elon Musk.

**Jeff:** No. (*Laughter*) I'll remember it in a minute. I can't believe you're not helping me with this, Don. I'm kind of fishing here.

**Don Maurer:** I'm not into those vain philosophers.

**Jeff:** Oh yeah! (*Laughter*) Well anyway, this vain philosopher said that if God is all-powerful then God is obviously not all-good.

**Ted:** Yeah.

**Jeff:** And if God is all-good, God is obviously not all-powerful.

**Don Maurer:** That was John Stewart Mill, wasn't it?

**Jeff:** John Stewart Mill borrowed from him. This guy was before Immanuel Kant. I can't think of his name; it's a shame; it's terrible.

**David:** That wasn't Nietzsche, was it?

**Jeff:** No. Nietzsche was after him. I'll have to ask the all-seeing mind. (*Laughter*)

**Brave Man:** Why don't you consult R. C. Sproul?

**Jeff (*speaking into his phone*):** Who woke Kant out of his dogmatic slumbers? Hume, David Hume! Of course!

**Don Maurer:** He wasn't German!

**Jeff:** No, he wasn't a German. I didn't say he was a German. Kant was a Frenchman. So David Hume said this. And I think that one of the things that we have to realize is that the Westminster Confession reminds us that though He is all-good and He is all-powerful, I think it's the third thing that reminds us of how we move forward. God is not just all-good and all-powerful, but He is all-wise. And His ways of bringing about the makeup of our lives are wise. And they are wiser than we could construe them, given the opportunity to do so.



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And I think that every time we think to ourselves: You know what? I don't like this, and I could do it better if given the opportunity,—we may not think that way that crassly or that blatantly—but every time we think like that we're challenging God's wisdom and God's goodness. And here's an opportunity for us to think upon this a little bit, and so let me invite you to do that before we change gears.

But before I do that, let me say this. When you think about providence, providence means to see before. And I want you to kind of realize that God is not just seeing before and then ordaining the thing that He sees because He has an option, because He sees “well, if they go this way I might ordain that,” or “if they go this way I might ordain this.” No, He sees before because He ordains or plans before He sees. I'll stop there.

**Ted:** I think that's certainly true in my life personally, and probably true for most of us, that the bad times always ended up being good.

**Jeff:** Yes, right.

**Jim Hamilton:** You think of Christ as being forgiving. But you don't necessarily think of God as being forgiving.

**Jeff:** What's that?

**Jim:** There's a conflict there.

**Don Maurer:** What?

**Jeff:** Well, there's no conflict. We think that way, but that's a wrong way of thinking, because remember that it's the Father who sent the Son for our redemption, right?

**Jim:** Yes.

**Jeff:** So the Father and the Son want us.

**Jim:** But the Father had rules that nobody could reach.

**Jeff:** Say that again.

**Jim:** The Father had rules and requirements. Christ didn't seem to have that.

**Jeff:** Well, think about it. Yes, He does, because He satisfies His own righteousness. So you can't say that the Father has righteous rules but the Son doesn't, because then what you'd be saying is that the Son doesn't have the same righteous character as the Father does, because the rules are just a reflection of the righteous character of God. So God puts these rules in place. I mean, think about it this way. Yes?

**Ted:** There are more commands in the New Testament than there are in the Old.

**Jeff:** Yeah.

**Ted:** There are 613 laws in the Old Testament. There are over 1100 laws, rules and commandments in the New Testament. So that dichotomy is—

**Jeff:** Well if you think about it, what we see is that we see God. And how do we see the righteous character of God reflected? We see the righteous character of God reflected in the Ten Commandments, right? And then we see what? Out of that we see all sorts of laws, whether they be civil laws or moral laws. Those kinds of things fall out of the Ten Commandments.

And so when we say that Jesus kept the whole law, what we're saying is nothing more than Isaiah 59 says: that God kept His own righteous decrees in order to satisfy His own righteous demands, and not for Himself but for us. But that wasn't just the Father; that was Father, Son and Spirit; that was the triune God. Yes, Don?

**Don Maurer:** We have to remember that John 3:16 says that “*God so loved the world that He gave His only Son.*”

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**Jeff:** Yeah.

**Don:** Far from God not wanting to forgive us,--

**Jeff:** Right. The whole of the Trinity wants us. That’s why John Gerstner used to talk about the Father allocating some to be saved, the Son accomplishing the redemption of those, and then the Spirit applying that redemption to those who are allocated; the triple A of God. How about that?

**Don:** Yep.

**Jeff:** Anything else?

**John:** It’s worth thinking about the concept of goodness.

**Jeff:** Right.

**John:** Someone approached Jesus and said, “*Good teacher.*” And He said, “Hold on. Why do you call Me good?”

**Michael Rush:** Because no one is good but God.

**Jeff:** Yes.

**John:** Of course he wasn’t claiming not to be God. But He was pushing back. And we often attract ourselves with the concept. We define God and His goodness by what we think goodness is, rather than that our understanding of goodness in any part is only because of His goodness.

**Jeff:** Yeah.

**John:** And we have to let Him define that by Himself.

**Jeff:** Right.

**John:** I guess the main thing that He is is goodness. And if we take issue with that it’s because there’s either a misunderstanding or a lack of understanding.

**Jeff:** Yeah. You’re right; we have that tendency. We use “good” for God, we use “good” for our dogs. The dog brings us our slippers.

**Ted:** My wife does that.

**Jeff:** God is a good God. But you’re right. When we talk about the goodness of God, R. C. Sproul used to talk about the difference between spirituality and righteousness. And he said that Christians don’t use righteousness nearly enough, because when we talk about being spiritual, that’s kind of amorphous; it really doesn’t mean anything.

But when we talk about being righteous, what are we talking about? We’re talking about conforming to the law of God, and not in order to be saved. But we’re conforming to the law of God because why? Because Jesus has now enabled us to look like God. So we want our character to look like the character of God. Where do we see that spelled out? Well one clear place is the Ten commandments. And so to be good is to be righteous. And that’s reflected in what it looks like in the Ten commandments.

Okay? So in this providential act of God we see that in Acts 17:26, for instance, that *“He made from one man every nation of mankind to live on all the face of the earth, having determined allotted periods and the boundaries of their dwelling places, that they should seek God.”*

Now think about that when you think about the sailors. I think to myself: That’s really a fascinating text because here are these sailors. I mean, these guys would have either left their parents’ house the day they set sail—left their wives, left their children. They would have either been in financial hardship or not. I mean, you know, as he’s leaving she goes,

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“Now remember, when you get back in a month we’re going to my mother-in-law’s.”  
(*Laughter*) You know, there’s all this stuff going on, this everyday stuff.

And yet Jonah the prophet sort of enters into their lives. And because he’s having a conflict with God they get wrapped up in it, and their whole lives are changed as a result of it. And I think that’s kind of an incredible thing, because that means that as you’re walking throughout your life, that means that you never know what God is going to do with the people who are around you.

And so that doesn’t mean that you have to be in a conflict with God in order to be an influence in people’s lives. But it certainly means that you will be used for good or ill. And so it’s an encouraging thing when we think about.

Romans 8:28 is another one of those providential verses. “*And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good.*” It’s a pithy saying; it’s a true saying. You know, it isn’t one that people like to hear beside the casket. And yet it’s no less true beside the casket. If you love God things are going to work out for a good end, for a good purpose; it’s as simple as that.

However, providence does not negate our responsibility. In other words, Jonah still had to repent for his flight. Just because God brought good out of it doesn’t mean that Jonah was off the hook. “It’s all good, Jonah. We got a few saved out of it, so we’re going to give you a pass.” That’s not what that means. So Jonah still has to repent of his sin because he’s a sinner; he’s disobedient to God at this point.

But when we think about it there are rules of engagement. And I want to talk about that a little bit when we come to this next lesson. This next lesson is what I’m calling a common lesson. But it’s a lesson in several parts. And that’s why I said to you that there’s a lesson here. But I want us to think about this lesson, and it breaks down into a few lessons.

First of all, let me say this. All attempts at self-salvation are futile. Remember the seamen and their gods. I want you to think about this. I don’t know if this resonates with you guys. But in my mind when we think about what people do in life all around us, it’s seeking salvation through some doing of their own.

Just as I can think of examples of this, you can think of examples of this. And here are these sailors, and they are trying to save themselves. So we’re going to talk about that a little bit.

But I want us to talk about another corollary. I want us to talk about how human beings are not atheists. When we think about people trying to save themselves, one of the things that we realize is that the Bible is true. Why? Because people try and save themselves especially in a life-and-death situation because they are about to die. Now why is it that somebody would seek to save himself when he is about to die??

Now you may say, “Well that’s a dumb question. Of course they would try to save their own lives if they were about to die because that means that their lives are about ready to expire.”

Maybe. I want you to think about it from the standpoint of what Hebrews says. Hebrews says that it is appointed for man to die once, and then to face judgment. And the understanding then is that men—all men—understand that death is penal. In other words, death is a punishment; death is a sting. We can talk about it all we want to as a

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celebration, but it’s a punishment. Death has a sting because it’s the curse for disobedience.

And so we need to be careful about how we talk about death even as Christians, because sometimes we want to exalt the resurrection to the point where death is minimized where to the point it’s nothing. And death is something. The Scriptures say that death is “*the last enemy*.” And men know that. It’s the last enemy because it’s what’s going to cease their lives, and that’s going to usher them into the judgment. Go ahead, Don.

**Don Maurer:** Men may know that but they suppress it, because they say, “Death has always existed. We’ve evolved”; survival of the fittest and all that. So I don’t think that a lot of people want to admit that death is a punishment.

**Jeff:** Well I don’t think they do want to admit that. I think that they suppress that in unrighteousness; I think you’re right. But I think with their actions, if they really believe what they say, if they really believe that there’s a circle of life and we just have to take our place in it when it’s our time to go—I mean, let’s think about it. A culture that talks about euthanasia—good death—ought to embrace death when it’s their time to go.

And yet think about it. If you have money, what are you doing? You’re investing your money in all kinds of means that will prolong your life, right? Or you’re trying to invest in all kinds of surgeries that will take you back to the fountain of youth to make you look younger, right? So the point is that for all of its talk, it’s a culture that’s living in contradiction with itself.

The fact is, human beings are not atheists. They understand that there is a God, and they hate Him. But they are pragmatists. They may not be atheists, but they are pragmatists.

And these sailors were pragmatists. But I want you to know that God is neither. God is not an atheist. (*Laughter*) And God is not a pragmatist. So I think that helps us in our evangelism.

I think that helps us in our evangelism because what we do is, we bring men to God. And I think that one of our failures in evangelism is this: We have a tendency to pander to the things that they pander to. We have a tendency to commiserate with them in their atheism. Or we have a tendency to side with them in their pragmatism.

And what do I mean by that? Well, how do we pander to them in their atheism? Well, we’re not forthright with them. I’m not saying we have to be abrasive. But what I am saying is that we can’t commiserate and say, “Well, maybe there is and let’s think about it.” We have to say, “Look, there is a God. And He has a righteous law. You don’t meet up to it, but there is a way to be saved.” We have to be clear about the gospel. And I don’t think that the church is all that clear about the gospel today.

**Brave Man:** Amen.

**Jeff:** And I think that we need to be clear about it. And I also think that we need to be careful with how we approach people with the gospel and especially with their view of pragmatism.

The seamen become pragmatists, right? They lighten the load of the ship. They say, “Okay, we can save ourselves here. We just need to get rid of some cargo. And once we get rid of some cargo, we’ll be fine.”

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But then they don't only do that; look at what else they do. They seek to blame. And remember, there is still a supernatural aspect here. Somebody is to blame for this thing. In other words, somebody is holding somebody accountable for this. There's a storm here, and somebody is to blame for it.

Now think about it. Jonah is to blame, but he hasn't brought the storm. Somebody else has brought the storm because of Jonah. So there is a supernaturalness to that. And so they are seeking who is to blame. “Who do we blame?” And so they cast lots in order to find that out.

They row again. They cast things overboard, they cast lots, and then they row again. But nothing is helping them at this point. And they're confronted with God's word. And when they are confronted with God's word, what do they do? They do the very thing that Jonah does.

Think about it. Look at the story again; look at what Jonah says. “*Tell us on whose account this evil has come upon us.*” And then they have this list of questions. And then he says in verse 9: “*I am a Hebrew. I fear the LORD, the God of heaven who made the sea and the land.*”

And then “*the men were exceedingly afraid.*” And then what do they do? They do all these things: They cast the cargo over, they cast lots, they seek to row harder. And the idea is that they are fleeing from God. They are confronted with God, and they are doing exactly what Jonah is doing, right?

So they are no better in one sense than Jonah is. You can't say, “Oh, these are noble pagans because they respond.” No, they don't respond; they flee just like Jonah fled.

But Jonah needed the same lesson. And so what we see is Jonah fleeing, right?

Let me go through it. Jonah paid the fare. He's committed to his course. He's financially able. And here's an interesting detail. There is a third-person feminine suffix for *chakara*, which means “her price,” that is, he paid her price. There's a personalization to this flight.

In verse 4 the ship is personified. It expected itself to crack up. Isn't that interesting? There's a sense in which there's a personification to all this. Reflexively, he paid her price. The ship expected herself to crack up. And there's another lesson here. When an infinitive verb is used in Jonah to describe a human action, those actions fail.

However, when an infinitive verb is used of an action undertaken by God, He succeeds. And the whole point of this is to tell us one thing. Jonah 2:(9): “*Salvation is of the LORD.*”

**Michael:** Amen.

**Jeff:** What man seeks to do in his own effort will fail. And think about it. I mean, when you think about the personification of the ship, in my mind it's this idea that Jonah says, “I'm going to enlist this”—can I say it like this?—“enlist this person to get me out of this mess, and I'm going to flee from God.” And the idea then is that when you put that kind of lesson together with what you find in the infinitive verbs, you find that there is no success when we try to flee from God. God is the One who is successful because God is obviously sovereign, good and wise. And He is going to bring about His good purposes.

Well, let me ask. Are there any final questions or thoughts? Let me pray for us then, and then we'll get out of here. Father, we thank You for this day and for the time You've given us to be together. Lord, thank You for the lesson of being in the same boat with

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other unbelievers. And Lord, as we deal with them in their atheism and in their pragmatism, help us to remember, Lord, that whether or not they put great confidence in what they deem to be great things that we need not be frightened by them. We need to not be fearful of them, but we need to be fearful of You, the living God, and that like a Father. And so, Lord, help us to realize that just as You pursued us You pursue others that are Yours. And we pray, Father, that You will indeed do that and indeed use us in the process. And we ask it in Jesus' name. Amen.

**Brave Men:** Amen. (*Applause*)