



The Realities of a Radical Rescue

Jonah 1:15-16

TO: NEBRASKA STATE SENATORS

FROM: REV. PERRY GAUTHIER

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“GOD, I NEED A MIRACLE RIGHT NOW.” “Dear God I need a miracle from You. I spent the past couple of months, since Christmas, trying to find a job, and I can’t find anything. I [have been] having such tight financial situations and I really need a job...I know that there’s a lot of things that I’ll be asking from you, but right now, I need this one miracle....Amen.”¹

In today’s economy, it’s easy to understand this prayer blogged on the internet by a man named Daniel. 432 people responded to this prayer with sympathy and prayers of their own. In these dark times, people are turning to God because they need a radical rescue from a real God. Today we will see God’s radical rescue power readily available.

I. RADICAL RESCUE’S CONDITION—REAL RESPONSIBILITY

Last week the wet-bearded sailors on this small Mediterranean storm-tossed ship were fighting the shrieking storm and fighting their seemingly inevitable role of becoming Jonah’s executioners. A funeral at sea is solemn, but hurling a prophet of God into a watery grave terrified these manly sailors. They valued his human life. No longer able to resist Jonah’s capital punishment they reluctantly take real responsibility for his sin and their own safety.

Jonah 1:15a *So they picked up Jonah, threw him into the sea,...²*

Someone has well asked “Why didn’t Jonah jump?” Because, as we will see later in Jonah 4, Jonah’s narcissism is near masochism. If he repentantly saw himself as the true problem, he should have run to the rail and jumped into the black billows. Yet he puts even more burden, the burden of his death, onto the sailors & into their hands.

The sailors’ galley was filled with brine. Great gushes of foamy liquid filled the deck. The soaking sailors had no choice in the slanted and punishing rain. They took the radical action that God was requiring of them. He caused the lot to fall to Jonah, He hurled the storm onto the sea, He increased the squall’s intensity when they tried to row Jonah to rescue by beaching the ship. These sea salts are left with only one choice--taking radical responsibility.

Desperate times call for desperate measures. The seamen blog, as it

were, to heaven “God, we need a miracle right now.” The Sovereign of the Sea says “Then give up your passenger. Hurl him over the rail”. They do. Providential pressure. Radical responsibility.

II. RADICAL RESCUE—A REALITY

Jonah 1:15b *...and the sea stopped its raging.*

The literal Hebrew says the sea “stood still from her anger.”³ The grammar communicates that the sea became calm like glass. The text does not say the storm stopped instantly but that the squalling sea became calm. This would normally take hours. But when God radically rescues by His miracle power, time is not an issue. In Joshua 10:13 God caused even the sun to stand still and the moon to stop. There, God radically rescued His people by His miracle power.

Matt 8:24-26—*And behold, there arose a great storm on the sea, so that the boat was being covered with the waves; but Jesus Himself was asleep. And they came to Him and woke Him, saying, "Save us, Lord; we are perishing!" He said to them, "Why are you afraid, you men of little faith?" Then He got up and rebuked the winds and the sea, and it became perfectly calm.*

By these words of Jesus and in Jonah’s story, we see Biblically that all of nature obeys Creator God, except of course the crown of His creation--man. Consider also that it’s man who cries out for God’s miracles and, contrastingly, it’s also man that denies God’s miracles.

Next week we’ll see Jonah’s big fish swallow and stomach Jonah for 3 days. Many men deny God’s miracle power to orchestrate such an event. But let me remind us of Jesus and the big tomb that swallowed Him up. In light of our recent Easter, consider this:

JESUS SAID—JUST LIKE JONAH WAS IN THE BELLY OF THE SEA MONSTER 3 DAYS AND 3 NIGHTS SO THE SON OF MAN SHALL BE IN THE BELLY OF THE EARTH AND ALSO COME OUT—ALIVE!

I recently took a night time prayer walk around Holmes Lake. On

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top of the dam I could see the distant clearly-lit State Capitol Building. I found myself saying and praying phrases I'd recently been reading in the Psalms. I'd speak out into the night sky, "Oh Lord, do not shorten Your arm!...Oh Lord, show Yourself mighty to save...and...How long oh Lord?!" What was I doing in the night air of our capital city? Like the blog posted prayer of Daniel, I was saying "God I need a miracle, now." I would like a radical rescue.

All of nature obeys God. Will we? Will I? All of nature heeds the Creator's beck and call. The sailors finally did. Will I? Do I? Life is often a crucible of pressure. Will we seek His miracle relief?

III. RADICAL RESCUE'S RIGHT RESPONSE—REAL REVERENCE

The boistrous sea was now balmy. The howling sky now hushed by God's miracle power and His radical rescue. Jonah holds his breath as he sinks into the sea. But the sailors breath a sigh of relief. The sea closed over Jonah. We turn our eyes upward to the ship's draining deck and see real reverence in reaction to this radical rescue.

Jonah 1:16 *Then the men feared the LORD greatly, and they offered a sacrifice to the LORD and made vows.*

God loves to be praised. In fact, man exists to worship God and enjoy Him forever. The Realities of Radical Rescue should produce a right response. That right response is one of worship.

Jonah, our prodigal prophet is sinking to a fish food status. Nonetheless, he has been a missionary to pagan men in spite of himself. God's continuing theme in the minor prophets is that God will be God in His justice and in His mercy. This is stated succinctly in the last verse of Obadiah which is velcro-strapped to Jonah 1:1. Obadiah 1:21 says "...and the kingdom will be the LORD's."

Jehovah God *will* be God and King of all the earth, not just King of Israel. He will be worshipped by all peoples, not just the Jews, that special people through whom He intended to reach the world in missionary evangelism. God will be God and we will not. God will be worshipped. He receives the worship of squall-soaked sailors on a serene sea as readily as dry Jews in Jerusalem's beautiful temple.

The sailors' passenger is gone, the sea has closed over him. Jonah will do some worshipping of his own as we will see in chapter 2 in two weeks. But now the ship sails on, "unconscious of her matchless story."⁴ But the shuddering shipmates and the calming

captain are all too aware that they have been radically rescued. The result? Real reverence. Right reactions to a radical rescue.

The sailors are a small group of heathen that have now turned to the LORD. They have three right reactions to this eerily instantaneously still sea and their stunning reversal of fate. Their three reactions are all part of worship or "Real Reverence" as I'm calling it here.

1. RIGHT MOTIVES: Verse 16 says they "feared the LORD." Literally, "they feared a fear (a big one) and they feared the LORD." The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom. The fear mentioned here (*yare* in Hebrew) means a **radically reverential respect**. Until we radically revere and respect the Lord, we cannot worship Him or be in right relationship with Him. It all starts with right motives. Worship starts in the heart. Jonah, of all people, should have known this and shown this. But the sacred text has shown us that his heart was hard and his motives were bad.

2. RIGHT ACTIONS: While Jonah has taken his seaward plunge, the sailors start to sacrifice. The Hebrew writers of Scripture are fond of using cognate accusatives. We saw this in "they feared a fear". We'll see it two more times. Here they "sacrificed a sacrifice". Sharpening their knives these sailors prepare an animal sacrifice to offer to the Lord. Real worship and real reverence and a real reaction to radical rescue involve costly sacrificial sacrifices.

A reader of the volumes on ancient sea-faring finds that portable altars were not uncommon on such ships. Animals were often on board to provide fresh meat for the sailors. Now they gladly sacrifice a sacrifice on orange fires lit in reverence for the Lord.

3. RIGHT WORDS: Finally the sailors "vowed vows". The men pledge a fidelity to the Lord. He has become their real and radical Rescuer. Note that these are not the words of a foxhole prayer. These are the words of real verbal commitment to the Lord AFTER leaving the foxhole's dangers. There's a difference.

"Dear God I need a miracle from You." In these difficult times, may we learn & apply the truths of Radical Rescue to our own lives!

¹ <http://www.prayersonline.net/2008/02/22/god-i-need-a-miracle-right-now/>

² All Scripture quotations are taken from the New American Standard Version 1995 Update unless otherwise noted.

³ Waya`a`mod miza`a`pow = (Hebrew right to left) הפעוזמ דמעיר

⁴ Jonah, Ellen Gunderson Traylor, Tyndale House Publishers, © 1989.