

We have a tendency, I think, to think that things just sort of happen, right? That everything that happens happens because that's just what happened. It was an accident or whatever might've happened. And God sort of reacts to it, that he just comes along afterwards and tries to clean up the mess. We think this way especially when it comes to disasters, don't we? If a great storm blows through and causes all kinds of property damage, we might say, "Well, that's just the way it goes. We have insurance to cover it. Maybe God will help me recover." Or whenever we are dealing with something like drought, we pray to God and say, "God, please give us some rain. Please help get us out of this drought." But we might not think that he had anything to do with us being in the drought in the first place. Or especially when it comes to something like a natural disaster where there is a great loss of human life, we might say that God comes along afterwards and gives comfort to those who are grieving. He helps those who are suffering to get through it, which, of course, he does. But whenever we think of God in this way, Christians, it makes him seem a lot like us: limited, just sort of reacting to things. And when we think of him in that way, it makes him maybe easier for us to understand, or least we think that he's easier to understand. But Christians, God is not just sitting around waiting for something to happen. God is the one who does all things. God is the one who sends the storm. God has all things in his mighty hand. God has all things under his almighty control. Whatever happens in this life, happens because of God for a reason. And that's what we want to focus on here in our continuation of our series in the book of Jonah.

Because at the beginning of our reading, we see this happening right away in verse 4, where it says: "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." You'll notice here that it does not say this storm just happened. They were out on the water, and it just came up all of a sudden. They didn't know where it came from. What it says is "the Lord hurled the great wind upon the sea." It was God who sent that wind. It was God who sent that storm. Because God is the Lord of all things. When God gives the command, the winds begin to blow. When God gives the command, the waves rise up. When God gives the command, the storm comes upon the sea and catches Jonah and the sailors out there in the open. All of these things happen because of God. Because whatever happens, happens because of him.

We see this also at the very end of our reading in verse 17, where it says this: "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." Notice it does not say here that the fish just happened to be there. It does not say that the fish thought the Jonah looked pretty tasty. God appointed that fish to be there to swallow him up. God chose that particular fish at that particular moment to carry out his will. This is what God had chosen, because whatever happens, happens because of God.

And this isn't just in the big things of life, either. Because I think that's another thing we sometimes think, that God controls the wind and the waves, but he kind of leaves all the little things alone. No, God controls the small and the insignificant things too, Christians. We see this in verse 7, where it says this: "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." Casting lots in the Old Testament is kind of like rolling dice or kind of like drawing straws or pulling names out of a hat. What the sailors are doing here is looking for an answer. They want God to answer a question for them, and however these lots turn out, that will be God's answer.

Now, we in the New Testament are not commanded to do this. If we want to know God's will, we can go here to the Bible, because this tells us the will of God. But what this does show us, Christians, is that God commands even the small things, because God gives them an answer through the casting of these lots. God commands the rolling of the dice. God commands the drawing of straws. God commands the drawing of names from a hat. God commands the casting of lots, because all things are under his control. Whatever happens, happens because of God.

But these things happen for a reason. God is not just some dictator who is deciding what happens just because he feels like it. God has a purpose in everything that he does. Jonah and the sailors realize this, because after they ask Jonah what he's doing and where he's going, they realize that this storm has come upon them because of him. God had sent the storm upon that boat because of what Jonah had done. So God had a clear purpose in sending it. And no matter how hard the sailors tried to get away from it, no matter how hard they rowed, they couldn't escape, because this was no accident. This was God bringing this about. The only way out, so to speak, was to submit to the will of God.

So why did God send it? What was his purpose in doing so? There's actually at least a couple, Christians. And the first reason he has is probably the most important, and that is to call Jonah back to himself. Because you'll remember from last week, or even from our reading, that Jonah is running away from God. Jonah thinks he's doing the right thing. Jonah thinks he's serving God in doing this, but he's actually fallen into a great sin. And if he were to continue on this path, the way that he's going, he's going to end up in hell, because he has broken the commandment of God. And so God sends this storm upon them as a way of calling him back, as a way of calling him back to himself. Basically saying to him: "Jonah, stop! Turn around! Come back to me. Don't go this way, because that way leads only to death. Come back to me, and you will live." Because God does not want Jonah to die.

And we hear this all throughout the Bible, especially in a passage like Amos chapter 4, where it says in verse 6: God says to Israel, "I gave you cleanness of teeth in all your cities, and lack of bread in all your places, yet you did not return to me, declares the Lord." In other words, God tells us very clearly through Amos that he had sent a famine upon Israel for the purpose of telling them: "Stop! Turn back! Come back to me. Learn that I am the one who gives you all good things. Learn that I am the one who will take care of you. Turn away from your sins and live!" But they didn't do that, of course. Israel continued to sin against God. Amos goes on to say, verse 7: "I also withheld the rain from you when there were yet three months to the harvest. I would send rain on one city and send no rain on another city. One field would have rain, and the field on which it did not rain would wither. So two or three cities would wander to another city to drink water and would not be satisfied. Yet you did not return to me, declares the Lord." God had sent a drought upon his people as a way of saying to them: "Stop! Turn back! Come back to me. Learn that I am the one who takes care of you, that I am the one who gives you all good things." And yet they did not return to him, because Israel was stubborn in their heart. Amos, of course, goes on to lots of other examples, but the point is clear. God sent this storm upon Jonah as a way of calling him back to himself. Whenever we are dealing with the storms in our life too, God is calling us back to trust in him.

But there's another reason why God sends this storm, Christians, and that is to call these sailors to faith. Because these men do not know who God is. These men are not Israelites. They are worshiping false gods. But through their experience, through this storm, they come to know the Lord, so that we hear in verse 14: "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.'" They have learned to call on God's name through the coming of this storm, so that they who were once not his people have become his people, so that they who were once in darkness have now seen his marvelous light. And even in verse 16, where it says that "they feared the Lord exceedingly, and they offered a sacrifice to the Lord, and made vows." This storm brings them life, because now they know the Lord, because now they are part of his people. Because whatever happens, Christians, happens because of God for a reason.

But we also must remember in all of this that that reason is for our good. That God loves us and all of the things that he sends into our lives are meant to bring us closer to him. Because God is our loving Father, Christians. As the book of Hebrews says, he sends these things not to crush us, not because he's angry with us, but because he loves us, because he is disciplining us as his children, so that we would trust in him. So that no matter what happens, God has sent these things for our good. In love, God sent that storm upon Jonah so that Jonah would not end up in hell. In love, God sent that storm upon the sailors so that they would come to believe in him. And when it comes to our lives, Christians, it's the same way. In love, God has sent even this drought upon us as a way of calling us back to himself, as a way of teaching us to trust him, to know that everything good comes from his hand. Because sometimes that's so easy for us to forget. In love, God has sent the rain and the snow of these past several days to teach us that he answers prayer, to teach us that all good things come from him, so that when we have a harvest, it is because God has given us that harvest. And even something like the turmoil and the troubles that we are having in our nation, God has sent that too, as a way of teaching us not to trust the world, as a way of teaching us to remove ourselves from it and to look towards him who has overcome the world. Because I think sometimes we as Americans get very comfortable in the lives that we have, and God teaches us through these things to look towards him. Because all of these things, Christians, are meant for our good. God loves us, and because he loves us, he disciplines us. And if we respect our earthly fathers for disciplining us and know that they did it for our good, how much more should we trust our heavenly Father who has our eternal good in mind?

So Christians, when facing the storms of this life, do not despair. God sends them, because he loves you, because he wants to bring you closer and closer to himself. And when we remember that, we will know that we can face the very worst thing that life may be able to throw at us, because God does all things for good for those who love him. So come to him. Call on him through his Son Jesus Christ, and you will know that he is treating you not as enemies, but as the children of God, the sons of God who are now his forever.

Let us pray. Lord God, heavenly Father, you rule over all things, the wind and the waves and all the ways of our life. We pray that you would teach us always to trust in you, knowing that you do all things for good for those who love you. We ask this through your Son Jesus Christ, in whose name we pray. Amen.