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The King's Ambassadors: Let Me Take You Down

Introduction. What does your walk with the King look like?

Pastor Tim Keller often referred to our walk with Christ as a dance. This simile conjures up two partners whose dance steps are driven by a musical score and are led by one of the dancers. I am not referring to the frug or the Watusi which are largely impromptu and not always done with a partner. For our purposes, think more about a tango or a ballet in which the dancers **know** the music and **act out** the music in such a way that their movements are synchronized to the music and the story it tells. The movement of each dancer is always a response to the music's nature and each dancer is always in step with the leader. Almost always, there is a portion of the dance that attempts to communicate tension of some kind. For instance, if a villain enters the dance and threatens the character portrayed by the lead dancer, then the composer would have built this conflict into the music so that the audience can see and feel the tension of the conflict between the lead and the villain. The tension was put into the music **by** the composer **for** the composer's purposes. Often this occurs midway through the performance and is resolved peaceably by the time the performance ends. The resolution is **also** written into the music by the composer. Then, choreographers use the themes of the composer to create the dance moves to help the audience visualize the music's story..

I think Pastor Keller was correct in calling our walk with Christ a dance. Think of the Word of God as our life's musical score. God's Word is sufficiently complete and choreographed, so that we can move gracefully through the life He has given to each of us. Think of God the Father as the maestro Who conducts **our** performance of **His** composition. Think of the Holy Spirit living in each of us (His "dancers"). He drives our passion and performance through our hearts, souls, minds, and strengths. Think of Jesus Christ as our lead in this dance. All we must do is follow Him and the dance will please the Father, who crafted the entire score of our lives from beginning to end.

God has shown me time after time from His Word that His sanctification resembles a dance (such as the Psalms and Song of Solomon). Especially, in the tension He brings or allows to be brought into my life and which seem to

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me to come out of nowhere. I then think, “ If only it would go away, my life would promptly become better, more peaceful.” You also have those moments, do you not?! This tension, **this troubling of my heart**, requires resolution for **my satisfactory** completion of **my** task. Therefore, **I am the judge** of satisfactory resolution!

It seems I am wired to anticipate a resolution of my liking in every project. But, when resolution does not come on my timetable nor by my specifications, which it never does, more tension comes in waves. This is internal. It is spiritual warfare as I continue to prop up my own Dagon because it keeps falling over. Why? As the old-time cartoon character, Pogo, famously and sort of said, “We have met the enemy, and he is us: my black heart and me.”

This is the product of sin, because my relationship with God has been ignored by my own desires. Believer, at no time does the Father's love for us change, nor does the Son cease to intercede for us, nor does the Holy Spirit abandon us, nor do I resolve any smattering of tension. When I repent, **He** resolves my troubled heart and restores my soul. What I lost sight of, His never sight never lost..

So we see tension is a means of God's grace. By it, He wants us to remember all that He has taught us in life and to cry out to Him when we struggle, even if it requires us to fall on our faces before Him and plea.

Brothers and sisters, we are permitted and expected to come to Him in our tense moments and circumstances, our “failures”!! This demands that we must take a very low position of weakness before Him. We can do so only because Jesus has already shown us the way of weakness. That way is the Gospel!

The Gospel is God's declaration to us that Christ's work opened the way for His gifts of faith and the Holy Spirit to dwell in us. Faith in Christ is the Holy Spirit's power and the **only** power that will turn us back to God. It is not our strength that does so. It is His gift in us. When we turn to Him to seek Him, He will use these gifts that are in us to bring rest for our souls flowing from His

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gracious right hand. We cannot grasp that rest for ourselves, we are so weak. If you think you've done it, you're wrong and someone sold you a lie.

On that note, let us look at Jonah Chapter 1 as was just read by Logan and examine the parallels of our lives' themes of messiness and complication to those of Jonah.

But first, let's pray.

Bible Exposition. Who was Jonah? Turn with me to 2 Kings 14:23 – 27

²³In the fifteenth year of Amaziah the son of Joash, king of Judah, Jeroboam the son of Joash, king of Israel, began to reign in Samaria, and he reigned forty-one years. ²⁴And he did what was evil in the sight of the Lord. He did not depart from all the sins of Jeroboam the son of Nebat, which he made Israel to sin. ²⁵He restored the border of Israel from Lebo-hamath as far as the Sea of the Arabah, according to the word of the Lord, the God of Israel, which he spoke by his servant Jonah the son of Amittai, the prophet, who was from Gath-hepher. ²⁶For the Lord saw that the affliction of Israel was very bitter, for there was none left, bond or free, and there was none to help Israel. ²⁷**But the Lord** had not said that he would blot out the name of Israel from under heaven, so he saved them by the hand of Jeroboam the son of Joash.

These verses tell us nothing about when Jonah heard his call to go to Nineveh, but they tell us plenty about his background. They also explain what might have prompted Jonah's disobedience (and ours).

Jonah lived during a time in Israel (the Northern Kingdom) when it was governed by evil derelicts who followed King Amaziah whodid not follow God's Word: he did what was evil in the sight of the Lord. King Amaziah did not depart from all the sins of Jeroboam the son of Nebat, which he made Israel to sin.

BUT amid his sin, King Amaziah **restored the border of Israel** according to the word of the Lord, the God of Israel! Of all that Jonah spoke for God to the

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King, the only thing he grasped was resetting Israel's borders. Do you see why God spoke? Not so much to restore physical boundaries but to **show** the bitter affliction **to** Israel for the absence of **any** Israelites **who could help** Israel. It was Jonah whom God used to speak to the King so that the King would know how to properly lead God's people and to teach God's boundaries by example. It was God's very people who brought onto themselves their bitter afflictions. All the while God is graciously giving them more time to repent. The King of Israel was to Israel in its obedient dance with Yahweh. Jonah's frustration would only increase as he slowly takes his eyes off Yahweh.

From this passage in 2 Kings, Sinclair Ferguson¹ tells us that Jonah's life was one where he enjoyed spiritual privileges as a prophet. These spiritual privileges also help us to understand the unravelling of Jonah's life. They are the privilege of **service** (this is what he wanted to be trained to do), the privilege of **a sense of destiny** (this is where he is does what he is knows he is supposed to do for God), and the privilege of **spiritual fellowship**¹(there are other prophets who share the same calling as Jonah).

These privileges today are found in membership and fellowship at GABC. Yes, they are: service, sense of destiny, and spiritual fellowship. These are part of the dance we have been called into to enjoy as children of God. Our VBS closing session on Wednesday was an example of these to all who attended. Other examples are our Sunday fellowships and Gospel Life Groups. We dare not think superficially of these privileges. They assure GABC is a safe place to spill our guts, as it were, when your life gets messy and complicated, to learn from and to teach each other no matter where you are in your dance.

I conclude it matters not where the book of Jonah appears in Jonah's life, before or after this account in 2 Kings. Let's examine three points from Jonah chapter 1 and see if you agree.

Let's look at verses 1 – 3.

¹ Ferguson, S.B. "Man Overboard – The Story of Jonah" pp 2 – 7. Banner of Truth Trust. 1981

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Now the word of the Lord came to Jonah the son of Amittai (a mee' tie), saying, ²“Arise, go to Nineveh, that great city, and call out against it, for their evil has come up before me.” ³ But Jonah rose to flee to Tarshish from the presence of the Lord. He went down to Joppa and found a ship going to Tarshish. So he paid the fare and went down into it, to go with them to Tarshish, away from the presence of the Lord.

Point 1 our King's call is for us to go into the nations to make disciples.

This is the third of our King's three marching orders. The first two marching orders? We shall love the Lord our God with all our heart, soul, mind, and strength. The second? We are to love our neighbor as our self.

Now, put yourself into the character of Jonah.

For his dance with Jonah, God **chose** to lead Jonah as His partner. Rather than being that partner, Jonah chooses to get away from God, as though that were possible. Jonah's decision does not cause God change His mind about Jonah going to Nineveh.

At the onset there seems to be a general calm surrounding Jonah as he ignores the call of God. This reminds me of some cautionary advice I received from a brother in Christ who is also Marine, “When all seems really peaceful, you're about to beambushed.” God graciously allows Jonah safe passage to go **down** (to the coast) at Joppa. Then, “Voila, Jonah! There is a ship headed for Tarshish!” Jonah's plan for getting away for some “me time” still looms large in his mind. So, he goes **down** from the dock into the ship.

Because God is holy, He would have been justified to lower the boom of **punishing** wrath upon Jonah right then and there. God is also long – suffering in His holiness.

He is also merciful in graciously **teaching** Jonah while allowing him to go ahead with what he thinks is his God-free plan. God is giving Jonah more time to repent. Jonah is now experiencing the same means of grace that has kept God from promptly destroying Israel for its disobedience to His Word, spoken

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by Jonah. This is akin to a lesson I learned on a tour of the Hershey chocolate company in 1963 when a tourist asked the tour guide how Hershey kept people from stealing. "Oh, we encourage them to take as many samples as they want and eat them as they work!" Hershey allowed newbies to be reckless with their chocolate consumption. By the end of their first month of employment, the last thing a new hire wanted was to even think of taking another piece for themselves. So also, God lets us be reckless with His freedom He has given us. The tension for the newbie chocolatiers was a troubled digestive tract. The tension from our disobedience begins with a troubled heart.

Jonah's safe passage to Joppa so far is evidence that God is ***not*** silent in Jonah but Jonah does not hear Him as He speaks in Jonah's safe passage thus far. While Jonah continues to ignore God there has been no announced change in His original plan for Jonah. God is also gradually introducing Jonah to His merciful wrath and a wide-open door for Jonah to repent and head for Nineveh.

Do you get that? ...more time to repent!

Friends, God's voice often is subtle and always comes with a wee bit of tension when He calls us. When we continually ignore Him, He will either go silent or turn up the volume. In Jonah's case, he is experiencing God's silence.

But before we go further, how is Jonah's behavior up to this point explained? Let's all look inward and see if this makes sense.

Imagine that this episode comes before the 2 Kings 14:23 - 26 narrative.

Jonah had been called to serve a king of Israel who would not heed Jonah's faithful speaking for God that the King of Israel must lead Israel to repentance. Day in and day out, the faithfulness of those prophets who had gone before Jonah was only greeted with the same disobedience of the current king. The result was the continued spiritual decline of Israel. Yet, Jonah continues this arduous task.

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Let's stop here for a second or twelve. Do not lose sight of the importance of the King to lead Israel in righteousness. No king ever wholly sought nor displayed such righteousness until Christ came to live His perfect life, be crucified for our sins, to take upon Himself all our sins, to pray to the Father that we be forgiven, who gave up His life as He bled out, was buried, was resurrected from the dead, walked among men, and ascended to Heaven in order to reign from His throne at the right hand of God.

Jonah's sense of service, destiny, and spiritual fellowship carried him into many confrontations with the leadership of God's chosen people. Certainly, because of these his stamina was pressed to the point of utter exhaustion.

We all can easily understand how this would weigh on him. The spiritual strength of a person, certainly a prophet of God, will wane and result in physical and spiritual fatigue.

Jonah may also have been thinking that he was called by God to minister to the king of Israel. Period. Nothing else. Therefore, retreating to Tarshish is Jonah's plan A for not going to Nineveh because the mission to King Amaziah for Israel was his mission.

How different is Jonah from our Prophet, Priest, and King whose fatigued body stumbled as He bore His cross to Golgotha yet He was enabled by the Holy Spirit, who recruited Simon the Cyrene through the command of a centurion to finish His walk to the place where He would die.

Where should Jonah turn? Where should we turn when all hope seems gone? We should turn to Christ as our help and our example!

During His ministry, our Lord would retreat to solitude; to a private place so that He could talk to God without interruption. This is not "me time" it is "we time" with the Father. Do you practice this means of grace that is always opened for us through Jesus?

Now, if Jonah 1 occurred after 2 Kings 14:23 – 27, it is easy to see a wholly worn-out Jonah throwing in the towel when God calls him ***away from Israel*** to

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go to ***the heathens in Nineveh***. Later in this book, Jonah will even declare, to this effect, “That’s it! I’ve had it! I cannot, nor will not, give **them**, of **all** people, **Your** Gospel message of repentance! They’ll probably repent. And how would THAT look to Your people Israel? And it won’t do much for me when I go back home!”²

If so, Jonah suffers the same affliction of self-worthiness that we all suffer when **our focus shifts from God’s will to our will**. Remember the faithfulness of our Lord and contrast His triumphant home going with Jonah’s feared homegoing!

In order for Jesus to “go back home”, He was completely **obedient to His Father’s will**. Jonah feared reproach from his homies if he obeyed God.

This brings us to vv 4 – 5

⁴But 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. ⁵Then the mariners were afraid, and each cried out to his god. And they hurled the cargo that was in the ship into the sea to lighten it for them. But Jonah had gone down into the inner part of the ship and had lain down and was fast asleep.

For those of you keeping score at home, Jonah has gone down to Joppa, then went down to the dock, then went down to the ship’s main deck. Now he is down in the ship! Little does he realize he is not out of “downs”. At no time is God wringing His hands, wondering if Jonah is going to get the rocks out of his head and think straight. Even all of this is under the absolute control of The Maestro, including the rocks in Jonah’s head, if there were really such a thing, taking Jonah down one more notch.

² Jonah 4:1 - 11

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Here is **point 2, God calls us into storms**. It is either the storm of spiritual warfare for the salvation of others' souls or for the storm of spiritual warfare for relief of horrid accusations of us by Satan. Or both.

Verses 4 – 5 are a scene from above decks amid the storm. This is another of God's means of grace! Sheer terror above decks while the crew is spared! But below decks, God has allowed Jonah to be as snug as a bug in a rug. Even in this comfort, Jonah is awash in tension that will soon come to him as it has the ship's crew.

Now there is more tension in Jonah's circumstances and in the minds of all the crew.

Brothers and sisters, God has called Jonah into this very battle as He calls us into our spiritual battles! It is what we are signed up to do! He didn't give us His armor, His sword and His strategy for us to march with and to look good while we do it. He **expects** us, **He commands us** to use them **as** He commands, according to **His** strategy given to us when we prayed to Him in solitude.

But aren't we the odd lot? We have all His tools at our disposal to be obedient and effective for His call. Instead, we wait for a self – made opportunity to show them off or even attempt to pawn them off instead of using them.

In His wonderful mercy, **God has** provided some rest for what Jonah thought was due him. Jonah is sound asleep! This brings us to verses 6 – 17

⁶ So the captain came and said to him, "What do you mean, you sleeper? Arise, call out to your god! Perhaps the god will give a thought to us, that we may not perish."

⁷ 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. ⁸ 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?" ⁹ 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

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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.

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^[a] 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.

¹⁷ ^[a] And the LORD appointed^[a] a great fish to swallow up Jonah. And Jonah was in the belly of the fish three days and three nights.

In verse 6, God graciously provides Jonah the "wakeup call of all wakeup calls". Why? **God is still using him** to minister to the seafaring heathens Jonah **chose** to be with rather than the heathens in Nineveh God wants Jonah to be with. Nineveh has not been taken off the table by God.

The soon – to – no – longer – be – heathen captain orders Jonah top – side to call to his god in order that none would perish. Psst... Did you catch that? "...that none would perish!" Isn't that effectively the call of the Gospel of John 3:16 now uttered from the mouth of a pagan who hopes that **none would perish?** Jonah was not the one who issued the call. It was the pagan captain seeking salvation and rescue.

The whole crew recognize they must appeal to **the** higher God, **the** God Who always knows what lots will be cast. And the lot fell to Jonah in the midst of a collection of unbelievers and the one prophet of God caught in the middle of a physical and spiritual battle each crew member is being worked on by the Holy Spirit. At just the right time, they ask Jonah for his identity, and his home. Then he volunteers the name of the God he serves, the LORD, the God of heaven who made the sea and the dry land. Next, he is asked what he has done to cause such turmoil. "Fleeing from the presence of the LORD," Now,

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the ship's crew all know that there is the Almighty God Who is mighty to save. In verses 11 – 16, the crew essentially asks, "What must we do to be saved?" Jonah tells them to toss him into the drink. Salvation appears to come to the crew, but they fear they will be guilty of murder if they obey Jonah. Yet, even their combined strength is no match for this storm and they cry out to the Lord! They ask God for permission to throw Jonah overboard and to be held innocent in God's eyes.

That's the Gospel! When we cry out to God and confess, our sins are blotted out and we are declared righteous by Him!

This is the tension's climax that needs resolution in all who are on board.

The storm begins to resolve just before it abates (unbeknownst yet to any on board) with God having Jonah right where He wants him and the crew right where He wants them in His plan to get Jonah to Nineveh. Oh, the deep, deep love of God! Nineveh will be an important reference for a future lesson from Jesus of Nazareth. **That's** why God is adamant about Jonah going to Nineveh!

The sailors pitch Jonah overboard, the storm ceases, they fear the LORD exceedingly, and offer a sacrifice to the LORD and make vows. They worshipped the LORD!!

Even as Jonah sinks while calm reigns on the surface, calm will soon descend upon him as well. He is swallowed by a great fish sent by God to rescue Jonah. This brings us to our third point

Point 3. God's calls have an explosive resolution as He defeats Satan with His Gospel in every one of our storms. His peace that passes understanding has settled onto the sea and in the souls of the sailors. Resolution comes to Jonah as he does not drown but rests safely in the chum juices of God's piscatorial salvation, the great fish.

This chapter of Jonah **is** the Gospel of Jesus Christ! It is **so** critical to His Gospel that Jesus uses it as sign to for the scribes and pharisees to prove His resurrection and therefore Lordship, according to Matthew 12:38 – 42.

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³⁸Then some of the scribes and Pharisees answered him, saying, "Teacher, we wish to see a sign from you." ³⁹But he answered them, "An evil and adulterous generation seeks for a sign, but no sign will be given to it except the sign of the prophet Jonah. ⁴⁰For just as Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of the great fish, so will the Son of Man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth. ⁴¹The men of Nineveh will rise up at the judgment with this generation and condemn it, for they repented at the preaching of Jonah, and behold, something greater than Jonah is here. ⁴²The queen of the South will rise up at the judgment with this generation and condemn it, for she came from the ends of the earth to hear the wisdom of Solomon, and behold, something greater than Solomon is here.

That's how much God loved Jonah and loves us. Now we see why God's eye was on Nineveh! His Son would use it and Jonah's experience to answer the demand of the scribes and the pharisees!

Right before Jonah's eyes, God showed His love for the sailors and caused them to cry out to God for salvation. He has also left Jonah to truly have his "me time" as a 3-day timeout.

Jonah is being taught the important first step in being closer to God: stop doing sinful things. Ignoring God is sinful, church. Salvation begins in the house of God and it starts with each of us submitting to the LORD God Almighty. This is our daily lesson.

If you're here today and wondering if the Gospel would work even on you, please come talk with me after the service or seek out Pastor Michael or Pastor Dean. We'd love to visit with you about that very thing.

Let's close in prayer.