

Series: Jonah: A Man on the Run

Running From God - Jonah 1:1-5

Introduction: One of the most watched TV shows that was on when I growing up was “*The Fugitive*.” In that show, David Janssen played a doctor by the name of Richard Kimball, who had been falsely convicted of killing his wife. On his way to prison, his train wrecked, and he escaped. Each show was about the fugitive trying to stay one-step ahead of the lawman assigned to find him, while he was trying to find the real killer -- the one-armed man. It was a suspenseful drama and kept it people watching the show because the fugitive was always on the run, always looking over his shoulder, always afraid of being identified.

A Biblical character who falls into the category of a “*fugitive*” would be Jonah. He didn’t start out that way. You see, God called Jonah to be a prophet. In **2 Kings 14:25 (NIV)** it says that Jonah had indeed prophesied about the expansion of Israel’s territory during the reign of Jeroboam II. It says of King Jeroboam, “*He was the one who restored the boundaries of Israel...in accordance with the word of the LORD, the God of Israel, spoken through his servant Jonah son of Amittai, the prophet from Gath Hopher.*”

However here, in the book that is named after him, the writer paints a different picture of Jonah. Here, God told Jonah to do something, but Jonah didn’t want to do it so he ran. He did not want to preach to the Ninevites, because he was afraid that some of them would repent and escape the judgment of God. Jonah felt they should be judged, not forgiven. God had just the opposite in mind.

The book of Jonah is a lesson in how God’s people are **NOT** to act. This book shows how petty and silly even some Christians can act at times. The Holy Spirit often points out the weaknesses and flaws of even prophets, in order that we might understand they were human beings and have problems just like you and I do.

Let’s look at Jonah’s story of rebellion and running in three different ways this morning. First, I want us to understand what caused Jonah to run from the Lord in the first place:

1. The Reasons for Running

There was more than one factor that led Jonah to try to do things his own way rather than God’s way. First:

A. Jonah had an Improper Fear of God. Jonah seems to lack something that the Bible recommends for every child of God – A proper “*fear of the Lord*.” **Proverbs 9:10 (NIV)** says, “*The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom.*”

Now, the fear of the Lord is not being afraid of God in the sense of a dread or Him being someone who causes us to shake in our boots, or run from Him whenever we hear His name. The fear of the Lord is an attitude of awe and respect toward a holy God that makes us run from the presence of sin and evil. A proper fear of the Lord is having so much respect of God and His divine authority in our lives, that we had rather do anything than disobey our Heavenly Father.

Jonah did not fear God as he should have. If he had, then he would not have run from his responsibility to

preach to the Ninevites. He would have immediately done what the Lord had told him to do and would not have caught a ship going in another direction.

A proper fear of God will not cause us to shrink in fear of Him or make us think that He's out to make our lives miserable. Second:

B. Jonah had an Incomplete Faith in God. Faith leaves everything in the hands of God whether we understand it or don't understand it. The people of Assyria and its capital city of Nineveh, had been so cruel to Israel. They were Israel's enemies and Jonah didn't think they deserved to be spared by God. He didn't understand why God would want Him to go tell them that they could be forgiven, so he refused to go.

Now before we go any further with this point, let's stop to give Jonah his props. Jonah was a man of some faith. After all, he was God's man. He recognized and understood God's voice, and he knew exactly what God was saying to him. But it wasn't His voice that caused him to run. It was what God said he didn't agree with. You see, Jonah tried to rationalize and reason out everything instead of trusting God to do what was right. And that caused him to have an incomplete faith. So, he ran from his responsibility. When he ran from God, he certainly was not exercising his faith. Faith says, *"God will do what is right, whether I understand it or not."*

A lot of us are like Jonah. We have no trouble hearing God - we just don't like what He says to us. The lost man hears God say, *"Your righteousness is as filthy rags. You have sinned and fall short of My glory. Your good deeds won't save you. You must repent, and be born again."* But because of his lack of faith, he runs. Is that you this morning? Is God telling you like it is, but you're turning Him away? Are you running from Him?

The same is true for believers. We run from God for the same reasons. We say, *"Lord, I hear you calling me to teach that class Lord, but...I'm just not comfortable doing that. I hear you calling me to tithe Lord but...I've got too many bills to pay. I hear you talking about being faithful and all Lord but...I'm just too busy to commit. I hear you saying to forgive that guy Lord but...you just don't know what that person said about me. I hear you Lord but I can't do that."* More precisely we're really saying *"I'm **not** going to do that."*

But if we have faith, the kind of faith that is complete and active and trusting, we would commit ourselves to God, trusting His knowledge is greater than our knowledge, and His ways higher than our ways. Third, Jonah had:

C. Jonah had Inconsistent Forgiveness. Jonah was not willing to forgive the Ninevites for the terrible things they had done to Israel. Jonah didn't think they deserved the opportunity to repent and be spared. His philosophy was this: since they had sinned--they needed to be judged, not forgiven.

Some folks become your enemy for life if you cross them one time. But, those who think like that are so much unlike God. When you read what the Bible says about God, you will discover He longs to forgive those who sin against Him.

Jesus said in **Matthew 6:14-15 (NIV)**, "*For if you forgive men when they sin against you, your heavenly Father will also forgive you; but if you do not forgive men their sins, your Father will not forgive your sins.*" You cannot get much plainer than that when it comes to forgiveness.

I like the way someone put it in describing forgiveness. They said "*Forgiveness is the fragrance that flowers breathe when they are trampled upon.*" Take a rose, step on it, pick it up, then smell the fragrance. It still smells like a rose.

The reason some folks can't get anywhere with God is that they have an inconsistent and unforgiving spirit. That is exactly what led to Jonah's running from God. Jonah ran from God because of his improper fear of God, his incomplete faith in God, and his inconsistent forgiveness. Next, I want us to see:

2. The Results of Running

Next, I want to point out three results of Jonah's running from God and trying to do things his own way. First:

A. It Affected Jonah Personally. God gave Jonah orders but he didn't heed what God said to him. Verse 3 says he "*ran away from the Lord,*" and he tried to "*flee from the Lord.*" It was not so much that he thought he could get away from the presence of an omnipresent God; it was more that he ran from the responsibility that God had given to him. Somehow he thought that by running away from his responsibility, God would just eventually forget about it and then he would be released from it. So Jonah decided to just try to get away and take a vacation.

Now Tarshish, the place where he was headed, was probably the Tarshish in Spain. It was a lovely place to take vacation, but Jonah found that his resistance to do what God said was going to lead him to anything but a vacation.

God told Jonah to: "*Arise-go-preach.*" Jonah knew exactly what the Lord expected of him. But his disobedience brought trouble in his life. He was caught in a storm, thrown overboard, swallowed by a great fish and lived inside of it for three days. That doesn't quite sound like a vacation Jonah had in mind.

We bring trouble into our lives when we disobey God. Trouble is not always an evidence of disobedience, but it can be sometimes. Second, Jonah's disobedience and his running from God:

B. It Affected Others Proportionately, Jonah 1 speaks about a ship rolling and tossing in the midst of a storm, with fear among the sailors that the ship may go down into the depths of the sea. They began praying to their false gods, took all the goods and tossed them over the side of the ship to make it lighter. They felt that would help keep the ship afloat.

They finally decided to cast lots to find out who it was that was causing the problem, and when they did, they discovered the troublemaker was Jonah. They wanted to know why this was coming upon them.

Jonah had already told them he was running from what God had called him to do (10). But the sailors did

not want to throw Jonah overboard, so they attempted to row to bring the ship to land (13). That did not work so they cast him into the sea. When they cast Jonah over the side, there was an immediate calm.

Those sailors were put through intense pressure, fear, loss of goods and near death, all because Jonah sinned against the Lord in his spirit of rebellion and defiance.

Often people think they can sin and get by with it. That's a lie from the devil. Sin always has its payday and always affects others in some way. How many innocent children have suffered because of a drunken parent? How many families are torn apart over an adulterous relationship? How many people have passed on diseases because of sinful living? How many churches have been divided and friendships ruined because of some unresolved petty disagreement?

Third, Jonah's disobedience and running from God:

C. It Affected God Profoundly. It grieves the heart of God when His children do not obey His commands for their lives. Our sin affects the Savior.

The Bible says in **Ephesians 4:30 (NIV)**, "*...do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God.*" The word "grieve" means to cause sorrow or sadness. God obviously is a Person with emotions. We should strive to make God glad, not cause Him sorrow.

If you are a parent, you know what sorrow it brings to your heart when your children disobey. We're glad when they obey, but sad when they disobey. Remember, God is a "*perfect*" Heavenly Father. We feel sorrow and are imperfect, but what must God feel when we do not listen to Him?

Live your life to please Him. If you live to please everyone around you, it will unsettle and disturb the peace of God in your heart. If something bothers God it should trouble you also.

Finally, I want us to see:

3. The Reprimand for Running

Jonah 3:1&4 says that Jonah finally arose and went to Nineveh, announcing that God was going to destroy the city in forty days.

What brought about the change? What reprimand did God use to bring him to his senses? Sometimes God has to use drastic measures to bring us back to Him. When we've run as far as we can go; sometimes it takes something drastic to bring us back. For Jonah, it was a couple of things. First it was:

A. A Dangerous Storm. This was not just any old ordinary storm. The Bible says it was caused by the Creator of all matter- the Lord God Almighty. Jonah 1:4, "*Then the Lord sent out a great wind on the sea and such a violent storm arose that the ship threatened to break up.*"

Why did God send the storm? Well, primarily it was sent to get Jonah's attention so God could correct his behavior. Jonah was trying to exercise his own will rather than follow God's will, so God sought an opportunity to change it.

This may seem like a harsh measure, but really, correction is an evidence of love. Parents who love their rebellious children don't want them to continue in their rebellion. They will do whatever it takes to correct their behavior. To not do so reveals a lack of love.

Prov. 22:15 (KJV) says, "*Foolishness is bound in the heart of a child; but the rod of correction shall drive it far from him.*" Jonah was acting foolishly, so God sought to correct his behavior and thinking.

The other drastic thing that brought Jonah back was:

B. A Disgusting Stomach. The Bible says that Jonah found himself "*inside the fish*" (2:1 NIV). Can you imagine what it would be like to live in slimy and smelly belly of a big fish for three days?

There are confirmed and documented instances of whales of the size that could have a man inside their stomach. One of them is the whale shark. Whale sharks can go through the water at high speeds, catch their prey, strain out the water from their mouths, and swallow whatever is left.

In 1933 a sulfur bottom whale was found off of Cape Cod. His mouth was 10 or 12 feet wide; he was over 100 feet long. They have numerous stomachs chambers and cranial cavities which are an extension of the nasal sinus, which means there are air storage chambers inside the whale where a person or persons could conceivably stay alive. These nasal sinuses can measure 7 feet high, 7 feet wide, and 14 feet long. (www.anglefire.com) How about that?

In fact, it is documented that another man besides Jonah was found alive in a whale. In 1891, a man by the name of James Bartley, was thought to have been drowned at sea. Two days after he disappeared, some sailors harpooned a whale. When they cut it up, they found the man alive but unconscious inside of the whale. It took him two weeks to recover. (http://www.grmi.org/Richard_Riss/evidences/8jonah.html)

Now, odds are, none of us will ever be swallowed up by a big fish. But how many of you have been swallowed by a whale of sickness – by a whale of troubles, by a whale of financial worries; by a whale of relationship problems? Could it be that through these disasters or disgusting predicaments; that God is trying to get your attention? Could it be that God is calling you to trust Him and obey Him, and follow His Will?

I don't know what it would be like to be inside the belly of a big fish for several days, but it can't be pleasant. Being out of God's will was no vacation for Jonah, and it will not be for you either. But I guess there's something about storms and disgusting circumstances that will cause a person to finally turn to God. And when Jonah did submit to God's will, Jonah 3:3 says, "*Jonah obeyed the Word of God and went to Nineveh.*" When we are willing to do whatever God says, that is clear evidence that our rebellious days are over.

Conclusion: We have seen the reasons for his running, the results of it, and the reversal of it.

Are you running from God? Are you where Jonah was? Just as God dealt with him, He'll deal with you if you're trying to run from Him and do things your own way. Instead of running from Him, run to Him today.