

Series: Jonah: A Man on the Run

Running To God - Jonah 2

Introduction: Momma didn't want me to play football. I kept pleading and begging and reassuring her that I wouldn't get hurt. She said, "*Well, OK, but if you get out there and get hurt and break your leg, don't come running to me!*"

Sometimes we don't realize what we're saying, but by the same token, we don't always realize what we're doing either. That's what can do to us. When we are tempted, we get caught up in the lure and lust of the moment, and we don't stop to think about the consequences. We don't always understand the consequences of our actions until it's too late.

When we mess up, and we cry out to God, aren't you glad He doesn't say, "*Don't come running to me?*" Instead, God says, "*Come to me you who are weak and heavy laden, and I'll give you rest. Come to me and I'll receive you unto Myself. Come to me and be saved.*"

Jonah was in a whale of trouble. He tried to run from God. **Jonah 1:3 (NASB)** says that when Jonah made this decision, he started on a downward spiral. "...so he went **down** to Joppa, found a ship which was going to Tarshish, paid the fare, and went **down** into it..." Verse 5 (NASB) says while in the ship, "*Jonah had **gone below** into the hold of the ship, and lain **down**...*" After the sailors had decided to throw him overboard, he went **down** into the sea, and then was really **down** in the mouth!

Jonah was about as low as he could get. He was so low he would have had to unlace his shoes to see out! Jonah's rebellious attitude and hardened heart had taken him so far down; his only options were to either pray to die or pray to survive. Either way, Jonah knew he must come face to face with God.

Jonah knew God was merciful. That's the reason God had called him to preach to the Ninivites in the first place. He knew that with God, there's always hope. So, he decided to run back to God. How did he get there? Well, it's the same way we get to God when we decide to run back to Him. First, you must:

1. Start Where You Are (1-3)

It doesn't matter where you are, what you've done, or how far you've gone, God is just a prayer away. That's what Jonah discovered in the belly of the whale. Chapter 2 is the prayer of Jonah from inside the whale. Jonah realized that it was either die as a runaway from God, or die trying to run back to God.

I don't know your condition. Hopefully it's better than Jonah's. I don't know how far you've sank, how far you've ran away, or how deep in trouble you are, but God is only a prayer away. And if you're ever going to

get in a right relationship with Him, you're going to have to start from where you are. You can't go back and undo things, and it's impossible to wish it never happened. It's futile to try to forget about it. So, you have to start where you are. You may be like Jonah and where you are is:

A. In Distress (2). In vs. 2 (NIV) Jonah says, "*In my distress I called to the Lord...*" Jonah was in distress because of what he had done. He realized that his rebellion had not only affected him, but he had put the lives of innocent sailors in danger.

But even more than that, Jonah knew how much he had hurt God. Jonah had heard the call of God upon his life. He had been God's man, and had given his life to him in service. But now, that fellowship with God had been broken. He was ashamed of what he had done and broken over whom he had hurt.

That's what sin will do. It causes great distress and pain and grief and guilt. And the longer you carry it around, the bigger it gets. It may not bother you the way it used to, because you've gotten used to it. It's like a ball and chain, and somehow you've adapted to it; but it's there, and it's dragging you down deeper. You're in distress, and you're about to explode.

Why not do as Jonah did and cry out to the Lord from your distress, and run back to Him? He's the only one you'll ever find real peace and joy in. He's the only one who will give you rest.

Or, you may be like Jonah and you're:

B. In Danger (3). Jonah ran back to God because he was in grave danger. In vs. 3 (NIV) he prays, "*From the depths of the grave, I called for help.*" He was in trouble; he was trapped, and he was traumatized. He was going to die. So he prayed.

Some of you may be in grave danger this morning and you may not know it. I do know that if you don't know Christ as your Savior, you're in grave danger, because someday - it might be ten years from now, or ten minutes from now - you're going to die. And if you die in your lost condition, you're going to be forever separated from God in Hell. That's a dangerous place to be.

So this morning, consider this a warning. Don't continue down that road. Turn around and run toward Jesus. Call on Him and say: "*God, I have sinned against you. I want forgiveness for all my sins. I believe that Jesus died on the cross for me and rose again the third day. Dear God, I give you my life to do with as you wish. I invite Jesus into my life and into my heart.*"

There's a third way you can run to God. You don't have to be in danger or in distress to pray. You don't even have to be in trouble. You can come to God anytime you want to. Jonah could have done this, but he

didn't. You can come to God:

C. In Delight. There's an old song that says, "*Central's never busy. Always on the line. You may talk to Jesus, always any time.*" So this morning, keep the prayer line open. Don't ever get too busy or out of the habit to pray. The Bible says to "*pray without ceasing; and in everything give thanks, for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus.*" **1 Thessalonians 5:17-18 (NASB).** No matter how long you've been a Christian or how many times you've read the Bible through, or how many churches you've attended, we all have room to move a little closer to God. And prayer is the best way to do it.

So this morning, however far or close to the Lord you are, you're not close enough. We need to start where we are, and run to Him. But that's just the start. If we're going to make our way back to God from where we are, we had also better:

2. Stay Alert (4-9)

As we're running back to God, we need to constantly be aware of what's happening. The devil is not going to like it and he's going to throw up all kinds of obstacles in our way. So there are some things we can do to stay alert as we are running back to God. First:

A. Look Ahead to God's Presence (4-5). Jonah described his predicament as being "*banished from (God's) sight,*" and that the "*engulfing waters*" threatened him. He talked about the "*seaweed... wrapped around my head*" (NIV). With all those things going on around him, it wasn't easy for Jonah to focus on prayer. Yet, in vs. 4, Jonah prays, "*...yet I will look again toward your holy temple.*" (NIV). Instead of being overcome by the hardships around him, Jonah chose to look ahead toward the time when he would worship God again in the Temple.

Now we might not understand just how significant the temple was to a Hebrew. When the Israelites were wandering in the wilderness, God instructed them to construct a Tabernacle which was to be the centerpiece of the camp. Among other things, this Tabernacle was where sacrifices were made and sins were atoned for. It was the forerunner of the permanent Temple in Jerusalem. But first and foremost, the Temple symbolized the presence of God. To the Hebrew, it was the dwelling place of God, and was the only place where one could find God. So looking to the Temple for Jonah meant looking for the place where God dwelt.

Jonah chose to keep his focus, in the midst of all the distractions, on getting to where God was. And, if we are going to get to where God is, we must do the same.

Now for us, we know that we don't have to go down to the church house to find God. We can come to

Him where we are and He will hear us. **Hebrews 11: 40 - 12:1-2 (NIV)** says, *“God has planned something better for us...Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles, and let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us. Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith.”*

Do you want to get where God is? Then keep your eyes on Him. Don't get distracted by all the bad stuff. Don't let the problems overwhelm you. They're only temporary, but they will drag you down if you let them.

Secondly, it may seem like a contradiction in terms, but while we were looking ahead toward the presence of God, if we're going to stay alert, we also have to:

B. Look Behind to God's Providence (7). Jonah says in vs. 7, *“When I had lost all hope, I turned my thoughts once more to the Lord.”* **Jonah 2:7 (NLT).** When Jonah was at his lowest point, when things looked their darkest, and he was at the point of giving up, he began to look to the past and remembered the Lord.

I've often thought about what my last moments on earth would be like. That may sound morbid and unpleasant, but I want my last moments on this side of eternity to be peaceful. Like Jonah, I hope my last thoughts will be on the Lord. I hope I will have the opportunity to remember all the joys, all the peaceful times He has given me.

Elaine and I used to sing a song entitled, *“He'll Do It Again”* because it reminds us of how God has proven time and time again His providential love and care for us. One line in the song says, *“If you'll just take a look at where you are now, and where you've been.”* It will help you to know that God can certainly do it again.

Jonah was not in a great place at this particular moment, but he knew where he had been. He remembered when he was in God's will, and how God had blessed him. He remembered when he was living for God instead of running from God, and how sweet the fellowship was. He remembered the peace in his heart that came from knowing and obeying God. And he longed for that renewed relationship.

Don't you want to have that again? Aren't you tired of running from God? Aren't you sick of what sin has done to your relationship with God and others? Don't you want that peace and joy again? Look back and remember that God is still God; that His love is still real; and that He has not changed.

Another way to stay alert while running back to God is to

C. Live in Thanksgiving of God's Purchase (9). Jonah says in vs. 9, *“But I, with a song of thanksgiving, will sacrifice to you...”* **Jonah 2:9 (NIV).** Sadly, the only time a lot of people think of giving thanks is during

the Thanksgiving season, and some don't even do it then! But if we really want to stay alert and get to where God can use us effectively, we ought to live in a state of thanksgiving all the time.

By doing so, we'll stay alert to the fact that everything we have belongs to God. Everything we do should please God. And everything we are should bless God and others.

It's hard to be angry and bitter and hold grudges and have bad attitudes when you live in a state of thanksgiving. So, while you're making your way back to God, always look ahead toward God's presence. Remember to look back at God's providence. And constantly be thankful for God's purchase of salvation.

There's one other thing we must do when we decide to run back to God. And it's so important. We must:

3. Submit to God's Answer (9-10)

Children have a hard time accepting what momma and daddy says don't they? I mean when they want this and want that, and we say no, or wait awhile, they don't like it. And they don't mind showing it.

The same is true for children of God. We pray to God for this and that. We agonize with God to answer our prayers, but mostly we want Him to do it our way, and in our time frame.

If there ever was a person who personified this type of Christian, it was Jonah. Here was a man who blatantly refused to do what God said, and tried to run from God presence. Here was a man who had to face the consequences of his actions by being nearly drowned and eaten by a whale. Here was a man who ran back to God by praying one of the most honest prayers recorded in the Scriptures. Notice his last couple of statements in this prayer: "*What I have vowed I will make good. Salvation comes from the Lord.*" **Jonah 2:9b (NIV).**

This says two things we need to learn about submission: First, it will cost us something, and second; we can't pay it.

Jonah had to come to the realization that his sin had cost him. Now, he didn't know if it was going to cost him his life or his obedience to do what God had commanded. But as he closed his prayer, he was willing to do either one. He had come to the point where he had to accept his fate whatever it was. So he basically said, "*Whatever the price, I will pay it.*"

But in his closing statement, Jonah stated the ultimate fact of submission: That is that "*Salvation comes from the Lord.*" He understood that there was nothing he could do at this point to save his life. He could kick and scream. He could plead and beg. He could make all kinds of promises to do better, but ultimately, his salvation depended upon the Lord, so he submitted to whatever answer God chose to give.

And when he came to that point, that's when God chose to spare his life, and he commanded the fish to spit

him up on dry land.

Conclusion: There's a little bit of Jonah in all of us. We all find ourselves at some distance from God everyday. None of us are as close to God as we can be.

We're all like the wife who had been married to her husband for a long time. One day while they were riding down the road, she said, "*Honey, why don't we act like we did when we were dating?*" He said, "*What do you mean, dear?*" She said, "*Well, we used to sit close together on dates, and I'd cuddle up to you in the car. Why it was like it took both of us to drive? What happened?*" The old man just stared ahead and said, "*Well, I ain't moved. Scoot over!*"

God hasn't moved. He's still God. It's us who need to move up a little closer. We've all got room to scoot over.