

Jonah | The Prodigal Prophet

INTRO:

Picture this: You're at the airport. You've got a ticket — God has made it clear where you're supposed to go. But you don't want to go there — the people waiting for you just aren't your people. So instead of heading to your gate, you wander down to a different terminal entirely. You find a flight headed the complete opposite direction, you pay the fare, you get comfortable in your seat, put your headphones in, and think "*I'm good.*"

Here's the thing about running from God — you can always find a flight. There will always be something available to take you in the wrong direction. The enemy will never make the escape route hard to find. Jonah didn't struggle to find a ship — one was right there waiting in Joppa, headed exactly where *he* wanted to go.

But just because a door opens doesn't mean God opened it.

Maybe for you it's not a boat or a plane. Maybe it's a relationship, a career move, a habit, a distraction — something that felt like an open door but deep down you knew it was a detour. Something you ran *to* in order to avoid what God was asking of you.

The question this morning isn't whether you *can* run from God — it's whether you're already running — and how to get back.

Because that's exactly where we find Jonah today. And what happens next is going to show us something about the nature of our God that I don't want you to miss — He doesn't just let us go — God pursues us.

SCRIPTURE:

Jonah 1 NIV

¹ The word of the LORD came to Jonah son of Amittai: ² "Go to the great city of Nineveh and preach against it, because its wickedness has come up before me." ³ But Jonah ran away from the LORD and headed for Tarshish. He went down to Joppa, where he found a ship bound for that port. After paying the fare, he went aboard and sailed for Tarshish to flee from the LORD. ⁴ Then the LORD sent a great wind on the sea, and such a violent storm arose that the ship threatened to break up. ⁵ All the sailors were afraid and each cried out to his own god. And they threw the cargo into the sea to lighten the ship. But Jonah had gone below deck, where he lay down and fell into a deep sleep. ⁶ The captain went to him and said, "How can you sleep? Get up and call on your god! Maybe he will take notice of us so that we will not perish." ⁷ Then the sailors said to each other, "Come, let us cast lots to find out who is responsible for this calamity." They cast lots and the lot fell on Jonah. ⁸ So they asked him, "Tell us, who is responsible for making all this trouble for us? What kind of work do you do? Where do you come from? What is your country? From what people are you?" ⁹ He answered, "I am a Hebrew and I

worship the LORD, the God of heaven, who made the sea and the dry land.”¹⁰ This terrified them and they asked, “What have you done?” (They knew he was running away from the LORD, because he had already told them so.)¹¹ The sea was getting rougher and rougher. So they asked him, “What should we do to you to make the sea calm down for us?”¹² “Pick me up and throw me into the sea,” he replied, “and it will become calm. I know that it is my fault that this great storm has come upon you.”¹³ Instead, the men did their best to row back to land. But they could not, for the sea grew even wilder than before.¹⁴ Then they cried out to the LORD, “Please, LORD, do not let us die for taking this man’s life. Do not hold us accountable for killing an innocent man, for you, LORD, have done as you pleased.”¹⁵ Then they took Jonah and threw him overboard, and the raging sea grew calm.¹⁶ At this the men greatly feared the LORD, and they offered a sacrifice to the LORD and made vows to him.¹⁷ Now the LORD provided a huge fish to swallow Jonah, and Jonah was in the belly of the fish three days and three nights.

1: THE BOATS WE BOARD [V1-3]

A: GOD’S WORD CAME TO JONAH

- **Jonah was a real prophet — we actually meet him briefly in [2 Kings 14:25](#)**
 - His ministry was during the reign of King Jeroboam II — a wicked king
 - Interestingly, God used Jonah to deliver a message of mercy to a wicked king — showing that God's grace operates even through corrupt leadership
- **This time however, the message isn't for Israel — it's for Nineveh**
 - Three things you need to know about Nineveh:
 - It was a *great* city — massive in size and influence
 - It was Israel's *enemy* — the Assyrians were known for extreme violence and cruelty
 - It was *deeply wicked* — God himself says their wickedness "has come up before me" — one translation says it "stinks to the highest heavens"
- **Note: God is never unaware of the sins of the world**
 - His response to Nineveh's wickedness was not to ignore it — but to send his word, by way of his man: Jonah
 - This is the assignment that broke him and he ran

B: JONAH BOARDS A BOAT IN JOPPA HEADED TO TARSHISH

- **The usual route from Israel to Nineveh was by foot, camel, or donkey caravan.**
 - Instead, Jonah heads to Joppa (current day port of Jaffa in Tel Aviv)
 - From there he charters a boat to Tarshish—a port city in Spain.
 - Spain and Iraq are two totally different directions (and routes) from Israel.
- **What is Jonah doing!? Jonah is deliberately disobeying God's word.**
 - He should have been joining a caravan or renting a camel through enterprise, but instead he heads to the port and buys a one way ticket to Tarshish
- **The Disobedient Route**
 - V3 starts and ends with Jonah fleeing God's presence
 - Biblically, one who stands in God's presence is usually understood to serve him (obedience, worship)
 - Jonah running from God's presence WAS running from God's call, purpose, and plans for him.
 - In the middle he goes down to Joppa and further down into the boat. (ESV picks up the downward trends)
 - Note how sin keeps leading you lower and lower, farther and farther from what God has for you.
 - Before he spent 3 days and nights in the belly of the fish, he spent time fleeing God in the belly of a boat.
 - His heart is one that is set on disobedience and running from God's presence

PAUSE AND REFLECT:

- **Are you running from God in any way?**
 - Has he called you to ministry and you've been running?
 - Have you been running from his word — Intentionally disobedient
 - You know what the WORD commands you to do
 - But you've decided your own path
 - Should've been on a camel, but you chose a boat... you're headed in the complete opposite direction.
- **What's your boat?**

- What did you run to rather than God?
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2: THE STORM ALWAYS COMES [V4-15]

A: THE STORM ALWAYS COMES: THE CONSEQUENCES WILL CATCH UP

- **Jonah was running away, so God sent the storm.**
 - God was frustrating Jonah's plans of a Tarshish getaway.
 - God was "not blessing" Jonah's cruise — in fact he was opposing it.
 - The wind, the tempest, the raging waves, and the ship threatening to break were all consequences of Jonah's rebellion.
- **God will frustrate your plans when they are in rebellion against him, his word, and his ways.**
 - They might look like simply a storm, but they are the consequences of sin.
- **Note: not all storms in life are consequences for our sins... but in Jonah's case it was.**
 - [Numbers 32:23](#): Be sure that your sin will find you out.

B: JONAH'S ACTIONS BROUGHT OTHERS INTO HIS MESS

- **These sailors are just doing their job**
 - But Jonah's choice of their ship got them involved in his crisis
 - They greatly fear the storm will be their ruin and their death
 - NOTE: our sins often don't just impact us, but also entangles those around us
- **The sailors seem to have a better response than Jonah**
 - Even as pagans they knew to cry out for help (albeit misdirected)
 - Jonah was sleeping — careless and prayer-less
 - Notice that Jonah doesn't pray at all in this chapter.
 - He was so determined NOT to go to Nineveh that he would rather drown in the storm.
- **The sailors are doing everything humanly possible to save the ship and their lives**
 - They throw their cargo overboard

- They cry out to their gods
- They eventually cast lots to see who the guilty party is
- **Jonah confesses his faith and his rebellion and reveals the nature of the storm**
 - He is a Hebrew
 - He serves Yahweh, the God of heaven, who made the sea and dry land
 - The creator God is the one he has offended
 - At this the sailors fear exceedingly.
 - He admits that he has been running from God and that the only solution is to throw him overboard (into God's hands essentially)
 - In order to save their lives, they must drop him off into the sea — they could not allow Jonah to continue on their voyage
- **Jonah's heart still remains hard.**
 - He doesn't care enough to jump overboard or ask for a rowboat?
 - He could have said: let me down in the skiff and cut me loose. God will deal with me as he chooses, but you'll be free from my entanglements.
 - That would've required his initiative and care... rather he makes them wrestle with the moral dilemma of throwing him overboard which they valiantly try to avoid by rowing furiously before resigning themselves and Jonah into God's hand with a desperate prayer before throwing him over.
 - He never interceded on their behalf
 - He is a prodigal prophet through and through

C: THE STORM ISN'T ALWAYS WHAT IT SEEMS

- **The storm isn't merely "consequences" for his rebellion — It's God's intervention**
 - God is pursuing Jonah
 - God is throwing up a stop sign that cannot be ignored
 - REMINDS ME: "God disciplines those he loves"
- **God also is SOVEREIGN**
 - He will not allow a stubborn, hard hearted little prophet ruin HIS PLANS

- He is determined to have Nineveh receive his word
 - He is determined that his prophet will be the messenger
 - In his mercy he sends a storm to stop Jonah from throwing it all away
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3: GOD WASTES NOTHING — EVEN YOUR WORST DECISIONS [V16]

A: THE PAGAN SAILORS ENCOUNTER YAHWEH

- God allowed Jonah to run — but only so far
 - He ran right to THIS ship, with THESE sailors, on THAT day
- These men had never heard of Yahweh
 - They had their own gods — plural — and none of them answered
- But when Jonah went overboard and the sea went instantly calm — they witnessed something their gods had never done
 - The Creator of the sea just *silenced* it on command
- Their response is remarkable — *they worshipped*
- They offered sacrifices and made vows to Yahweh — the God of the man who caused all their trouble
- **Jonah's worst decision became their greatest moment of revelation**

B: GOD'S PLAN WAS BIGGER THAN JONAH'S DISOBEDIENCE

- Jonah thought he was running *away* from God's mission
- He was actually running *into* one he didn't sign up for
- This is what God wanted to do in Nineveh too — and what he wants to do through your life
- God doesn't waste our wayward detours — he *redeems* them
- But make no mistake — that detour cost Jonah everything he had

PAUSE AND CONSIDER:

- How have you run from God in the past?

- Can you look back now and see where God was working even in your mess?
 - If you're in the storm of your waywardness right now — know this: God can rescue you AND redeem it all
 - But don't miss what it cost Jonah to get there
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4: SOMETIMES GRACE LOOKS LIKE A FISH [V17]

A: THE LORD APPOINTED A GREAT FISH TO SWALLOW JONAH

- **What type of fish isn't the point—except it was sent at God's command.**
 - **Jonah's heart wasn't quite ready and he was still in the middle of the sea**
 - God needed to soften Jonah's heart
 - God needed to bring him back to land
 - So God sent a fish (more than that, he sent his grace)
 - **It would be there in the belly of the great fish that Jonah would surrender and repent**
 - It's God's kindness (grace) that led Jonah to repentance (even though I'm sure it was uncomfortable)
 - Jonah should have died for his sin... but God rescued him and delivered him from it
 - God would give Jonah another chance
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RESPONSE:

- Have you run from God?
 - God's call
 - Intentional sin
- Have the consequences caught up to you?
 - Have your sins begun to impact those around you
- Are you looking for redemption, grace, mercy and a new start?

- Today is a day of salvation
- Today is a day to respond to God's call
- Today is a day to choose obedience and get right with the Lord
- Maybe it's a loved one who is running.
 - Pray that God intervenes—sending a storm and a fish—to bring them back with a renewed heart.

When I started this morning I talked about sitting at the wrong gate. Holding a ticket to Tarshish when God has been calling you to Nineveh. Some of you know exactly what I mean. You know the call. You know the word. You've just been... in the wrong terminal.

Here's what Jonah teaches us: God will send a storm. He'll send a fish. He'll do whatever it takes — not to punish you — but to get you back to your gate. Because Nineveh needs the message. And YOU are the one he chose to carry it.

Today is your chance to stop running. The flight is still boarding. Will you go?