

All right. We are in Jonah. An easy book to teach, no problem with Jonah.

The title of this morning's sermon is "Running From Your True Self," and we're going to be looking at the life of Jonah in chapters one and two this week. Next week I'm gonna look at three and four and we're gonna learn more about Nineveh. I really don't mention Nineveh this week, but next week we're gonna get into why Jonah might have hated Nineveh. There's there's a lot of great information in that. Next week we're going to look and see why God is the author that you want telling your story, but this week in chapters 1 and 2 we're going to look at running from your true self.

And I'm not going to mention this text of scripture again—I want it up front—I want you to write it down if you're taking notes. But it's Matthew 16:24-26. It's a passage that I want you to keep in your minds as we read the first half of this book. It says Jesus told his disciples, "If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. For whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake will find it."

I hope that at the end of this message, or when you're driving home, or later on this afternoon or this week, that you remember that I mentioned this verse up front and you look at it and it takes on new meaning in light of chapters one and two of Jonah and the message this morning. But there's a few things that we have to clarify before we really get started on the reading, and the first one is obvious. It's, "What am I talking about when I say your true self?" That's a concept that could mean a lot of things, and it actually has meant a lot of things over the course of history.

A lot of people have asked this question. I don't know if the name Abraham Maslow is familiar to anybody, or his hierarchy of needs. If you look it up on Google you're going to see something that looks like a food pyramid for psychology, but near the top just below transcendence is a phrase that probably most everybody in here has heard and that's "self actualization." That's one person who thought long and hard about what is the true self, and that's what he came up with: "self actualization." You know, becoming the person that you were meant to be. Nietzsche would have called it a "super man." Young just simply called it "the self," and Aristotle called it "the ideal man."

These are people who aren't believers, coming up with this idea that there is an "ideal you." A best version of you on this earth. Now, we would say the "you" with greatest potential is the Christ-like you. That would be the Biblical version; that would be true. But if you grew up Christian and you grew up hearing "Christ's likeness," much like if you grew up hearing the term "straight and narrow," it elicits an image that I want to completely destroy this morning. Because the term "straight and narrow" to me, when I was growing up, was always like ants marching in line—unimaginative, uncreative, not very brave, just following what everybody else is doing, and "Christ's likeness" elicited that same idea from me, growing up, a lot. This image that we're just all going to be the same. We're supposed to be like Jesus. You're an automaton. You're dull. You're conformist.

But the truth is, is that Christ's likeness, the "true you," is really just the most original version of you. I could spend all morning—and I don't have time—talking about all the ways the world tries to get you to conform to a pattern. They can't even help it in advertisement. They can't help it because it sells things, like a mentos commercial—I just don't know why I thought of a mentos commercial—but like who has ever ate mentos and had as much fun as the person on a mentos commercial? Or controlled reality like the person on a mentos commercial? That's that's intentional. It's like they're trying to sell something.

You think of any advertisement, that's the easy place to go, but there's all kinds of ways the world is trying to get you to conform to a certain pattern. Christ's likeness, the true you, is going to break out against all patterns. That's the Romans 12:2 passage, that you're not conformed but you're transformed by the renewing of your mind. So that is the true self, not a cookie-cutter person. It also just happens to be

the most God-pleasing version of you, doing the things that God has called you to do, in a Christ-like way. And it's not going to look like what God has called him to do or what God has called her to do. It is you.

I almost want to say snowflake, but that would be the wrong thing to say. So Jesus is the go-to archetype for this, and that's a great thing. Even people that don't believe that Jesus was the Son of God, he is over and over again the go-to person that people look back to as a human being that lived his life true to himself. And that's a wonderful thing. God is glorified by that, that even people who don't believe in God still look at Jesus the man and see that he was a person who was true and honest to himself, and Jonah is also a Christ figure. Jesus said in Matthew 12 that Jonah's experience in the belly of a fish was a sign. In verse 40 he said as Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of a great fish, so will the Son of Man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth. So as we look at Jonah this morning we're gonna learn a lot about him in light of Jesus Christ's experience and life.

The second thing that I want to clarify is that Jonah is actually not an easy book. It's a very difficult book because while this man walks through the sign of Christ, he is a curmudgeony complainer the entire way through. He is obstinate the whole way through. We're gonna start looking at him running the opposite direction of where God wants to go. And where Jesus was obedient, he ran. Where Jesus approached death willingly to save others and to sacrifice himself, Jonah makes the sailors throw him in the water. My wife pointed out he could have just jumped in the water. Like, oh man, I never thought of that! He makes the sailors throw him in the water. And it's not even clear when he did that that he knew anything was going to happen other than the waters were going to stop raging. So it is difficult, and I will remind you a few times, remember Jonah is not perfect. He is human.

There's two other quick things that I want to make sure that we know as we go into the book. Jonah was a real person. This is a real historical document. Not only did Jesus refer to him as the prophet, but he's also mentioned in Second Kings 14:25 as the son of Amittai, the prophet who was from Gath-hepher. And while I don't think the creature that swallowed him, or his physical state, is really worth arguing about—I don't know why: it's fish or whale, but there's—if you go online and see commentators, it's like really emphatic that it's a fish or a whale. I haven't done a whole lot of research on that. I kind of wonder if it didn't happen after the movie Pinocchio, when it was proven by Disney that you could live in a whale with campfire and everything, and and that's not miraculous so let's make it a fish. I don't think it matters so much what it was. He shouldn't have survived. And I don't think it matters whether he lived or died. Whether Jonah was miraculously resurrected or whether Jonah was miraculously given oxygen, I don't think either of those matter. The point with Jonah is that the fish that swallowed him took him down into the ocean and he was as good as dead, as good as buried, and it wasn't until God helped him that he was brought up from the pit. That's what matters. So let's look at Jonah, the first three verses in chapter one.

Jonah 1:1-3 (NKJV)

<Now the word of the Lord came to Jonah the son of Amittai, saying, "Arise, go to Nineveh, that great city, and cry out against it; for their wickedness has come up before Me." But Jonah arose 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 from the presence of the Lord.>

So you have a map that shows exactly what happened here. When Jonah was called to go 600 miles northeast, he instead went 30 miles southwest and caught a boat to the farthest known civilized place on the map to those people. It's the west side of Spain. And you have to see the deeper implications of what's going on with Jonah and what he's doing. Because you don't have to just see this as disobedience—it is disobedience—but it's not just disobedience. God called Jonah to be a prophet and that means that God created Jonah to be a prophet. God called Jonah to go to Nineveh. When Jonah said no God didn't just pick someone else. God called Jonah to go to Nineveh and he created Jonah to be that person that he was

going to call to go to Nineveh. Now we'll see next week why Jonah possibly hated the Ninevites, but let's just stop and recognize a universal truth here: God has a right to call us. He created us. It would be wise of us to obey that calling of God. Ephesians 2:10 says he created us for specific good works. In other words he has a plan for the things that you're going to do, individually. It's amazing how quickly people dismiss doing something that the Bible says, because that's not what they want. As though we know what we want. Now this is easy for me to say in front of a group of teenagers, which is where I usually say it. Because you ask a teenager, "What did you want five years ago?" and they're like, "Pokemon!" You know, it doesn't matter what they say. It's something that if, like "Do you want that now, a teenager five years later?" of course not. They don't want the same thing, and they really thought they wanted that thing five years ago.

So it's easy for us to look at a five-year-old's hopes and dreams for the future and chuckle. It's easy for us to look at a fifteen-year-old's hopes and dreams for the future and chuckle. I would say that it's easy for some of you to look at a 25-year-old's hopes and dreams for the future and chuckle. But somehow we lose that imagination when we're looking at ourselves. Why? Because we know what we want. Why do we think we're any different? Why do we think we're not driven by vanity and impulse and emotion, and maybe a commercial we saw as a kid, or watching a sports game with our father, or something that that great history teacher said to us when we were in high school? There's lots of things that drive us and there's lots of people that get later in their life and say, "Boy did I go the wrong way!"

Yesterday at the men's breakfast General Higby was our speaker, and it was a great breakfast. There were lots of men that came out, and he had a good message about being in your devotions. But one of the things that he mentioned was being in Proverbs. You know, there's 31 proverbs. You can read a proverb a day and get through it in a month, and that's a great thing. We're teaching through Proverbs with the youth right now, and one of the things I have noticed—it's just come out over and over more than ever before—is this promise from Proverbs of straight paths. And then you begin to notice that whenever the Bible talks about somebody who's sinning against God, they use words like crooked or deviant or perverted or wayward, wide open, aimless—that's the word—wandering. This idea that Proverbs promises straight paths—the idea is that there is a point, there is a you, there is a self-actualized (but it's not self, that's a terrible way to put it), but there is a best version of you—the true you—and it's found in God's plan. And the promise of straight paths is, "trust in the lord with all your heart lean not on your own understanding in all your ways acknowledge him and he will make your path straight."

It's not that everybody's walking the same path. It's that God knows your north star. He knows where you really want to go, and the promise of straight paths is that if you're doing that, if you're acknowledging him, if you're looking to him, you can make decisions with confidence even though you're not really sure what you're supposed to do and you can make those decisions with confidence because God is directing you the right way. The promise of straight paths. Towards what? Towards the true you. A more direct route to the you that, whether you know it or not, you want to be. And so when you look at Jonah, he's not just being disobedient. You've got to see it in the framework of that is what he's running from. He's not trusting God. And he says later he can't trust God in this, or he doesn't trust God in this, because he can't imagine how the Ninevites' repentance would be a good thing. He's looking at what God wants and he's saying, "I don't see how that's good. I can't wrap my head around how that is the right thing to do." So he goes in the opposite direction, and God lovingly chases him. Look at verse 4, and we're going to go all the way to 12.

Jonah 1:4-12 (NKJV)

<But the Lord sent out a great wind on the sea, and there was a mighty tempest on the sea, so that the ship was about to be broken up. Then the mariners were afraid; and every man cried out to his god, and threw the cargo that was in the ship into the sea, to lighten the load. But Jonah had gone down into the lowest parts of the ship, had lain down, and was fast asleep. So the captain came to him, and said to him, "What

do you mean, sleeper? Arise, call on your God; perhaps your God will consider us, so that we may not perish." And they said to one another, "Come, let us cast lots, that we may know for whose cause this trouble has come upon us." So they cast lots, and the lot fell on Jonah. Then they said to him, "Please tell us! For whose cause is this trouble upon us? What is your occupation? And where do you come from? What is your country? And of what people are you?" So 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." Then the men were exceedingly afraid, and said to him, "Why have you done this?" For the men knew that he fled from the presence of the Lord, because he had told them. Then they said to him, "What shall we do to you that the sea may be calm for us?"—for the sea was growing more tempestuous. And he said to them, "Pick me up and throw me into the sea; then the sea will become calm for you. For I know that this great tempest is because of me.">

So Jonah has a moment here, because actively to this point he's running away from God. While he doesn't jump in the sea and run towards God, he stops running. And the reason I know he stops running here is that he didn't have to open his mouth. And he opens his mouth and tells them the word that he got from God, that if you throw me in the sea the sea is going to stop raging. So he's not running towards but he's not running away, and the question is what happened to Jonah that made him stop running and consider his actions here? And I think the answer is that he could not wrap his mind around how going to Nineveh was a good thing, but now he's being confronted face to face with his sin. And he's seeing good men who are about to die because of his actions. It's one thing to do something and know that people are going to suffer because of my inactivity, but now I'm confronted with the reality of these men's death because of my activity. These men's lives are in his hands and there's a lesson there for us. It's not just us who suffer when we ignore God's calling or outright refuse to follow his laws. Your closest friends suffer, or your family suffers. And beyond that your family is a node in a network, called a community. That community suffers because of that, all the way up to the national, all the way up to the world level. Everybody in here can think of personal examples where people around them suffered because of something they did not do right or did do wrong, and everybody in here can conjure up examples of where they've seen that escalated all the way up to the national or the world level, where people suffered because one person or a few people didn't do the right thing. It affects other people when we go the way that God does not want us to go. And then nevertheless—I love this word, verse 13 he tells them what to do—but in verse 13 it says nevertheless they tried to row against God.

Jonah 1:13 (NKJV)

"...the men rowed hard to return to land, but they could not, for the sea continued to grow more tempestuous..."

There's a pattern here. These men were told what to do but they didn't think it was right. They couldn't see how it was the right thing to do to kill a man even though God told them to. And the lesson there for us is there are times when God's word makes no sense to us. The last shall be first? Not in DC! The meek will inherit the earth? Not in DC! Bless those who curse you? Are there times when the Bible just doesn't make sense to you? How do you handle that? Because when the Bible didn't make sense to these men they rode hard against God, until it became obvious the ship is going to break apart and we're not going to make it. And so here at the end of verse 13 they finally decide to throw him in the water. The storm grew more tempestuous against them. Verse 14,

Jonah 1:14-16 (NKJV)

<Therefore they cried out to the Lord and said, "We pray, O Lord, please do not let us perish for this man's life, and do not charge us with innocent blood; for You, O Lord, have done as it pleased You." So they picked up Jonah and threw him into the sea, and the sea ceased from its raging. Then the men feared the Lord exceedingly, and offered a sacrifice to the Lord and took vows.>

I grew up around lakes, not giant lakes but calm lakes. And so whenever I read this, and even to this day, I picture the storm raging and small boats—pontoon boats, you know—you pick someone up during a storm where you can't see five feet beyond the boat and you throw them in the water and everything goes dead calm—that dude is still floating there like three feet away from the boat. This is like, "Now what? Do we do we pick him back up?" Did it start storming again, it's like doing this? [Gesturing, repeatedly picking up and putting down.] No, I don't think that's what happened here. I think Jonah is swept away. I think he sinks right away. I don't think that they're faced with this because their reaction is not, "What do we do now?" Their reaction is they exceedingly feared God. I used to not really care about what their fate was, but I read a commentator that moved me to think that these men are saved. He pointed out that the fear of God is the beginning of wisdom. These men made sacrifices to God and then they made vows to God. But the thing that really compels me is that the entire narrative of Jonah is about transformation and redemption, and these men saw God working. They submitted to God and I believe they were saved. But now Jonah is in the water and he is swallowed by a fish in verse 17.

Jonah 1:17 (NKJV)

"Now the Lord had prepared a great fish to swallow Jonah. And Jonah was in the belly of the fish three days and three nights."

And willingly or unwillingly, this tiniest sacrifice of Jonah—this tiny little thing where he says what to do—he finally does what God [says], obeys, and puts him back on the right path. And praise God that when we're going the wrong way against God he honors and blesses and is merciful to the smallest act of obedience—that we often demand more of each other than God demands of us, because he could demand it all. And what he wants is he wants the smallest act of obedience, the smallest sacrifice on your part, that puts you one step towards him. So Jonah does that, and he is put on the right path. But he has to die first. Symbolically or not, it doesn't matter, he's as good as dead without God pulling him out of the water. And this is the sign of Jonah. This is where Jesus connects himself to Jonah's life. In Matthew 12:38-41 the scribes and pharisees are asking for a sign and they say, you know,

Matthew 12:38-41 (ESV)

<"...we wish to see a sign from you." But 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. For 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. The 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.>

So for us to understand, because Jonah being swallowed by a fish is a fantastic story—that means very little. You guys hear about the guy that fell out of an airplane and his shoot didn't open and he bounced twice and got up and walked away? Like, a real story, that really happened! That's amazing. It's not connected to Jesus in any way, so beyond the fact that it's amazing I don't really care. Jonah being swallowed by a fish and spat out three days later is amazing, but it's really important because Jesus connected himself to it. And so we have to look at what happened to Jesus during those three days. Second Corinthians 5:21 says this.

2 Corinthians 5:21 (NKJV)

"For He made Him who knew no sin to be sin for us, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him."

See, Jonah needs to be remade and transformed. You and I, we need to be remade and transformed. But Jesus? Jesus does not need to be remade and transformed. He went through something that he, personally, didn't need. Jesus needed to do this if we were going to be saved. So there's a long passage of scripture

that I want to read right here. It's Romans 5:18. So I want you to turn there because I can't put it all up on the screen. Romans 5:18 and we're going to read into 6:4—that kind of lays out what this thing that happens when we are buried with Jesus, when we enter into his death, what happens there. Look at Romans 5:18 and we're going to go all the way to 6:4. Verse 18 says,

Romans 5:18 - 6:4 (ESV)

<Therefore, as one trespass led to condemnation for all men, so one act of righteousness leads to justification and life for all men. For as by the one man's disobedience the many were made sinners, [That's Adam!] so by the one man's obedience [That's Jesus!] the many will be made righteous. Now the law came in to increase the trespass, but where sin increased, grace abounded all the more, 21 so that, as sin reigned in death, grace also might reign through righteousness leading to eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord. [Chapter 6] What shall we say then? Are we to continue in sin that grace may abound? By no means! How can we who died to sin still live in it? [Pay attention to this!] Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? 4 We were buried therefore with him by baptism into death, in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life.>

So while Jesus didn't need to be transformed for himself, he did have to become sin so that we could become righteous. Now that doesn't mean that Jesus sinned. It doesn't mean that Jesus became evil incarnate. What it means is that at the time of Jesus's death, a legal transaction took place. He became sin legally, so that we could become righteous legally, in sight of God. There are two verses that help us understand this better, and these will be up on the screen. John 12:24-25 says,

John 12:24-25 (ESV)

"Truly, truly, I say to you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains alone; but if it dies, it bears much fruit. Whoever loves his life loses it, and whoever hates his life in this world will keep it for eternal life."

And the next one is 2 Corinthians 5:17 that says,

2 Corinthians 5:17 (ESV)

"Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation.[a] The old has passed away; behold, the new has come."

You see this thing that I can't fully explain, about what happened to Jesus when he was three days in, is still connected to Jonah and then threw Jesus connected to us, and the point of our transformation happens with him in that time. It's where we lose our sin by believing in him. And when Jonah is swallowed, while it might be a miraculous event of mythological proportions, Jesus turns it into something that's much greater—a moment of transformation. And again, you know the story of Jonah. You know that he's not going to come out of the ocean all perfect and pretty and smiles. He's complaining for the rest of the book. And I think that's fitting, because while Jesus carries out the sign of Jonah with sinless perfection, Jonah represents us. And while we can be transformed on this earth, we are going to complain and gripe a lot on the road. Not that it's right, but it happens. And in Jesus our death leads to new and glorious life. And it's the only way that we can become this person, this true self that I've been talking about. It's the only way for us to get there and this is where, in this state, in the grave, Jonah prays to God. Listen to his prayer in chapter 2, verses 1 through 9.

Jonah 2:1-9 (NKJV)

<Then Jonah prayed to the Lord his God from the fish's belly. And he said:

"I cried out to the Lord because of my affliction,

And He answered me.

"Out of the belly of Sheol I cried,
And You heard my voice.
For You cast me into the deep,
Into the heart of the seas,
And the floods surrounded me;
All Your billows and Your waves passed over me.
Then I said, 'I have been cast out of Your sight;
Yet I will look again toward Your holy temple.'
The waters surrounded me, even to my soul;
The deep closed around me;
Weeds were wrapped around my head.
I went down to the moorings of the mountains;
The earth with its bars closed behind me forever;
Yet You have brought up my life from the pit,
O Lord, my God.

"When my soul fainted within me,
I remembered the Lord;
And my prayer went up to You,
Into Your holy temple.

"Those who regard worthless idols
Forsake their own Mercy.
But I will sacrifice to You
With the voice of thanksgiving;
I will pay what I have vowed.
Salvation is of the Lord.">

That sounds to me like a salvation prayer. Whether Jonah was a believer in God at the temple, or whether he was one of those prophets that we hear about in the old testament who wasn't a believer and this is a moment of his translation, it doesn't matter. To us this is an echo of the transformation that happens at salvation. He's as good as dead. Verse two says,

"Out of the belly of Sheol I cried". That used to be interpreted as Hades. It's the resting place. Verse six says, "I went down to the moorings of the mountains; The earth with its bars closed behind me forever;" And yet he acknowledges that God saves him. In verse 6 he says, "You have brought up my life from the pit, O Lord, my God." And then he submits to God and says, "Salvation is of the Lord." So the scary thing here is, that for us to see this and understand that through Jesus it's connected to us, means that there are times where parts of us are going to have to die, and death is scary. And it does feel like death. The death of your desires—you don't want to give those things up. The death of a personality trait that you think is yours but you realize is wrong. The death of a dream.

Letting God live through us can feel like death, and the symbolism that we get over and over again of sacrifice in the Bible is supposed to help us understand that it is actually how you kill your old self, and how god can live through you. That you're taking something to the altar and holding it up, and it's supposed to be something you love. This is the reason why it was so horrible what the Israelites were doing when they were taking people's sheep, and selling them a sheep, instead of taking their sheep and sacrificing it. They would say, "Your sheep's no good. Here's a sheep that's okay. Give us money and we'll pay for it." Because sacrifice is supposed to be something that I know is living, and I love, and I offer it up to God because he's worthy of it, and I have transgressed against him, and this is the result of

my transgression—death of something that I love. And they turned it into a fine financial transaction. That you go and give someone some money, and they take a sheep you've never seen, behind the curtain and they kill it and that's it. You're saved. You've taken care of your sins. They take something that was supposed to be about sacrifice and they made it about a financial transaction. So you can see why Jesus was so upset about this. That the image of sacrifice is supposed to teach us that it is painful to transition from our old self into our new self, and it's not random.

Jonah needed to go to Nineveh—this is a dilemma that I think we need to face head on—because it's not random. I know that the map looks like it's up here, and it's over there, but there's only so many places you can go in the Mediterranean—Jonah went in the opposite direction. Jonah needed to go to Nineveh not just because God had a plan for Nineveh, but because God had a plan for Jonah. And that was part of his plan. It was integral to it. So when Jonah is on the path of God telling him, this is how you get to your true self, and he decides to go somewhere else—he doesn't go to Egypt, he doesn't go to Babylon, he goes the opposite direction. And I think that we need to face this head-on and be aware of it, because it isn't random. It's not like we're a bunch of free-floating neurons flying around the universe with our own desires bouncing, into other people who are free-floating neurons around the universe trying to follow their own desires, and it's just random. It's not random, because we have a God who has a desire for how this universe plays out and is in total control of it, and has desire over each of our lives, and we have a fleshly impulse that wants to go in the opposite direction. So it's not a surprise, and it shouldn't be a surprise, when you notice in your life that the thing that is most important for you to change is the thing you're most unwilling to talk or think about. There's a great quote in a book called *The Art of War* by Steven Pressfield—sorry *The War of Art*. Not Sun Tzu, Steven Pressfield, *The War of Art*. And it's gonna be put up here, but I want you to hear the last, the end of it, first. This is a picture that I took of this book several years ago, so if you've known me, I might have told you this quote. The bottom of it says, "Rule of Thumb: The more important a call or an action is to our soul's evolution, the more Resistance we will feel towards pursuing it." Now here's the full quote.

"Like a magnetized needle floating on a surface of oil, Resistance will unfailingly point to true North—meaning that calling or action it most wants to stop us from doing. We can use this. We can use it as a compass. We can navigate by Resistance, letting it guide us to the calling or action that we must follow before all others.

Rule of thumb: The more important a call or action is to our soul's evolution, the more Resistance we will feel towards pursuing."

To my knowledge, this guy doesn't believe in God or believe in sin. And yet, he has recognized something that is true about humans: We aren't random. We are very calculating in what we avoid, and what we don't avoid. After the first sermon, someone came up to me and said, "Oh, you should talk about doing morning devotions!" Like, that's great! I'm gonna say that. I'm gonna use that. If you don't believe this, and you're not doing daily devotions, try to do daily devotions. Because I can promise you, it is necessary for your soul's evolution. It is necessary to take you towards the true man that God wants you to be. And if you're not doing it, try it. See how much resistance happens. See how much other events conspire to keep you from doing it, or how much your whole being just does not want to do it. Because it is true. We row against God as a fleshly impulse and if you're not fighting it, you're doing it. So this morning, as you consider the life of Jonah, ask yourself where are you rowing against God? Pray to God—he will reveal those things to you. You might not want to hear it, but he will reveal it to you. Where have you rationalized a wrong move, because what God wants doesn't make sense? You can't wrap your head around how it would be good. We sing songs like, "take my life and let it be consecrated all to thee;" simplicity, "Lord strip it all away till only you remain." Are those just words, or are they a thing that you actually want God to do in your life? Have you prayed, "As Jesus was undone and resurrected for me, Lord let me be undone and remade for you"? And as Jonah prayed in the belly of the beast, he prayed,

Jonah 2:7-9 (ESV)

<When my life was fainting away,
I remembered the LORD,
and my prayer came to you,
into your holy temple.

Those who pay regard to vain idols
forsake their hope of steadfast love.
But I with the voice of thanksgiving
will sacrifice to you;
what I have vowed I will pay...>

Salvation belongs to the Lord, and it's new life! And it's not just the life with God for eternity—that's there—but it's the new life here on earth. It's the life that you were made to live, that resonates inside you when you get a taste of it. You want more of it. It's new fruits of the Holy Spirit coming out of you. You appreciate life more. It's a new you, and it's the true you, whether you know it or not. And it's so much better to be the person after God's design than to be the person after the capricious whims and envy and emotions of your mental state. Yes, it is scary to be thrown in the water. It's scary to face the death of your old self, to discard things that make you feel like you, because let's face it: you love that guy! He's a fun guy! The Bible says taste, and see that the Lord is good. Put my yoke upon me—see that it's light.

People pay so much, and think so much, for things like self-actualization, and the true purpose in life. And the truth is, that God offers it to you. The most trustworthy Father in the universe offers it to you. The question is will you give yourself up, so that God can live in you? let's pray.

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Heavenly Father, if this were easy everybody would do it. It's not easy because of our flesh. It's not easy because of the world's deception. It's not easy, Lord, because we want to be our own gods. So we do pray, Lord, that when we sing, "strip it all away, 'till only you remain," that it is a cry from our heart, from our spirit. A desire for you to work in our lives. Lord I pray that you help us this week, the coming weeks, as Jeff would say, "make us more readily accessible to You." Help us to be in your Word, and help us to see those things—every person in this room—to see something this week where they're rowing against you. To be horrified by the implications, and overjoyed by the possibility of being the man or woman that you want them to be. I pray all of this in Jesus's name, amen.