

Run Jonah Run

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Date: 23 June 2024

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[0 : 00] Well, we are jumping into a brand new series today. I will give you one guess what it's on. Y'all are smart people, man. It is on Jonah.

So if you would take the word of God with me and turn to the book of Jonah in the Old Testament. And we will begin in chapter one.

This is a four-part series. If you need help finding it, Hosea, Joel, Amos, Obadiah, Jonah. Jonah chapter one.

And before we get started reading in the text, I'd like to give you a little bit of a background on what is going on. So the Assyrian army is one of the greatest military forces the world has ever seen in the history of the world.

They were very fierce, ferocious, kind of took no prisoners type of army. They were feared greatly by all their enemies or prospective enemies.

[1 : 05] When the Assyrians came in, you knew that you were probably going to lose or at least have a very bloody long fight on your hands. Nineveh was their capital city.

And it was a great city in the ways of the world. It was very populated. It was very advanced. It was beautiful. And it was the kind of city that could just never be conquered by an enemy.

So that was their reputation. And one of their great opponents was the nation of Israel or the tribe of Judah, the nation of Judah. And so back in this day, in the context of Jonah, the Assyrians or the Ninevites, which was their capital city, those people were at odds with the people of Israel, God's people.

So that's the context in which we find this. Jonah is a prophet. You know what I don't have on me right now is my little clicker.

So I'm really sorry. Would you mind? I might have left it back in my office. But until then, would you mind just clicking through these slides with me?

[2 : 20] And I'll try to tell you when to advance them. So Jonah, as we open up, Jonah chapter 1 and verse 1. This is not the first time we've heard of the prophet Jonah.

There was another time back in 2 Kings when it's talking about King Jeroboam, an evil king, the son of King Joash, who was actually a great king who feared God.

But his son, Jeroboam, did not continue in that faith. And he did, the Bible says, what was evil in the sight of the Lord. And so King Jeroboam, in this previous instance in which we find Jonah mentioned in the Old Testament, King Jeroboam is getting ready to go to war.

And he calls in two prophets of God to try to tell him how this war is going to go. And the first prophet was Jonah. And Jonah tells him, don't worry, king, you've got this.

You're going to see a mighty victory today. And then the other king was Amos. And if you happen to know your Bible a little bit, you'll know that there is an entire book of the Bible dedicated to the words of Amos.

[3 : 34] A great prophet in God's eyes. And unfortunately, Amos tells him, Matt, you're a hero. That's not what Amos told him.

That was a little side note. Thank you, Matt. All right, we're good now. Amos gave the exact opposite prophecy from Jonah.

And he said, king, not only are you going to lose, but you're going to die today. And his prophecy came true. So we already have an instance of Jonah being unreliable.

You could maybe even call him a false prophet, willing to say what is necessary to please his listeners, his hearers. So Jonah, we don't have a good context for when we start reading in Jonah 1.

So if you're there, Jonah chapter 1, if you're able to, would you mind joining me in standing? And let's read these first three verses together. And then we'll go on.

[4 : 40] Jonah chapter 1 in verse 3. I'm reading from the New Living Translation. The Lord gave this message to Jonah, son of Amittai. Get up and go to the great city of Nineveh.

Announce my judgment against it because I have seen how wicked its people are. But Jonah got up and went in the opposite direction to get away from the Lord.

He went down to the port of Joppa where he found a ship leaving for Tarshish. He bought a ticket and went on board hoping to escape from the Lord by sailing to Tarshish.

Let's pray together. God, I pray that we would learn a lesson from Jonah. Over these next few weeks, God, help us to see the Jonah in us and help us to be pointed to how great you are, how in control you are, and how compassionate you are.

It's in Jesus' name we pray. Amen. You may be seated. Verse 1 of Jonah starts us off like 60 miles an hour, and we're about to get up to about 100 miles an hour in this story of Jonah.

[5 : 47] So he starts us off saying, Jonah, I'm about to ask you to do a scary, difficult thing. Go to perhaps the most feared city of that world and tell them that they have sinned against God, and God is going to judge them.

And what happens? What happened? He didn't do it. He did the opposite. Jonah says, Okay, here's what I'm going to do.

God wants me to go this way. I'm going to run in this direction as far and as fast as I can. So what does it say? Verse 3, Jonah got up and went in the opposite direction to get away from the Lord.

First of all, do you think his understanding of God was a little flawed? We understand, with the benefit of the whole Bible and centuries of Christian teaching passed down from generation to generation, but really we just understand from God himself that God is omnipresent.

It means he's everywhere. You can't get away from the face of the earth. Back in the Old Testament it said, How can I run from your presence? How can I escape from your presence?

[7 : 13] If I go over here, you're there. If I go over there, you're there. If I go behind closed doors, you're there. You're with me everywhere I go. Jonah apparently hadn't wrapped his head around that. He said, I'm going to get away from God by going in the opposite direction of where God wants me to be.

Like God's over there waiting for me to get there, but I'm going to pull a little number on him and I'm going to go the other way and he's going to wonder where I am. So in verse 3, he went down to the port of Joppa.

Now, let's look at this. Nineveh is about where modern day Iraq is. So he goes down to the nearest seaport, which is Joppa.

And then that's a 550 mile trip. Then he's going to go all the way across to about where modern day Spain is now, Tarshish.

So these were kind of the opposite ends of their known world at the time. You want me to be in Nineveh, but I'm going to go as far as I can to get to Tarshish.

[8 : 25] So overall, this is a, somebody do the math for me here. 3,000, 3,050 mile journey.

Thank you. I was an English teacher, not a math teacher. Okay. It's not my strong suit. Well, I happened to actually look that up ahead of time and I said, what's about that far away from Henrietta, Texas?

And it's about Juneau, Alaska. So if y'all decided, God wants me in Henrietta. Instead, I'm going to jump in my car and I'm going to drive all the way to Juneau, Alaska.

Well, you'd be pretty far, wouldn't you? But you think you'd outrun God? Think you'd be able to get away from God? Think God be waiting for you in Juneau? Sure he would.

Think God is everywhere. So here's a question for us. Why do we run? Why do we run? We do it all the time.

[9 : 23] Maybe not as physically or as drastically as what Jonah did. Although maybe there have been times in your life and maybe you're in one now where you are actively living in an opposite way of how you know God wants you to live.

Maybe you know God wants you somewhere or wants you to be doing something and instead of following God, you're going in the exact opposite direction because you don't trust that God is good, God is right, and God knows what's best.

You don't trust that. It's hard for us to trust that. It's easy for us to say that. It's easy for us to sing that. But it's much, much harder for you and for me to live that.

Do our actions, do our thoughts, do our choices, does the trajectory of our life back up that we believe that God is good, he is right, and he knows what's best?

Or are we a little bit more like Jonah than we would care to admit? Have we said, I don't think so. I don't like those people in Jonah's case.

[10 : 44] Why in the world would I go and warn them of God's coming judgment why doesn't he just smite them down and destroy them? Why doesn't he just wipe them out?

They don't deserve to be forewarned. They don't deserve a chance to repent. That was Jonah's hang up. That was his problem. That was his lack of faith in God, God's goodness, God's justice, and God knowing what was best.

So, why do we run? You ever seen the movies where they're usually movies about police or maybe a prison guard or something, and all of a sudden, you see the guy who's trying to get away sneak out, or you see a cop come up and approach somebody on the street.

Sir, I need you to put your hands behind your back, and what do they do? They run. They take off running. And what does the policeman or the security guard or whatever inevitably say? We got a runner.

We got a runner! Inevitably, there's a microphone or they've got a walkie-talkie or something, and they say, we got a runner, and then the chase is on. And for the next five minutes or so, there's a chase, and you know that at some point, the guy is going to get caught, and justice will prevail.

[12 : 17] That picture really has nothing to do with anything else in the sermon. It was just too good, and I had to put it in there. So, some high-speed, high-stakes car chase like you see in the picture there.

I really want to know the story. Is that photoshopped, or did that really happen right there? Amazing. Can we just run out and grab the kid and stuff? Anyway, that was fun.

Why do we run? Well, we run because of our lack of faith. Maybe we run in those movies because their lack of faith in the justice system. If I get caught, I'm going to get in trouble for what I did.

Or maybe if they're wrongfully accused, if I get caught, no one's going to be able to get me off of the charges that I've been accused of. Whatever it is, and so they run because they have a lack of faith in surrendering.

Well, you and I also often run because we have a lack of faith in surrendering to God. So, we actually have a little bit in common with Jonah there. Say, we can easily look at Jonah and say, man, why didn't you just do what God told you to do?

[13 : 23] Because it was scary. Because Nineveh's not a place you wanted to go, especially if you're preaching a counter-cultural message. Nineveh's not the place as an Israelite to walk in and say, you guys aren't following the right God.

You need to follow our God. And he says, you're wrong and he's going to destroy you. Well, what do you think is going to happen to him? So, he's scared and he's got a legitimate concern.

But instead of surrendering that to God and saying, I am your prophet. Literally, my mission and commission is to go out and preach your message to those who will hear.

So, instead of just surrendering to that, he runs. Tim Keller, the late Tim Keller, died just last year, I believe it was. Great pastor up in New York City area and wrote a lot of very helpful books.

This one came from the prodigal prophet on Jonah. He said, Jonah concluded that because he could not see any good reasons for God's command, there couldn't be any good reasons for God's command.

[14 : 32] Jonah doubted the goodness, wisdom, and justice of God. How many times have you and I done the same? Doubted God's goodness, wisdom, and justice.

I think sometimes we find ourselves doing it almost without consciously making that choice.

Just our subconscious surrenders to our flesh instead of surrendering to the Holy Spirit, and we doubt that God is good, we doubt that he is all-wise, and we doubt that he dictates what is just.

God's justice trumps our justice. So Jonah says, I don't see any good reason for that, so there must not be a good reason for that.

And I think we put ourselves in his shoes far too many times. because I don't see any good reason to make this change in the church, because I don't see any good reason to step out and volunteer in this new ministry, because I don't see any reason to go do this kind deed for someone else because, you know, they probably won't appreciate it, or it probably won't make the difference that everybody thinks it will, or maybe I'll be embarrassed, maybe I'll look bad.

[16 : 04] Whatever our reasoning is, could be something completely different that your flesh and your mind convinces you of in your wisdom, but instead of saying, I don't see a good reason, so I'm not gonna do it, God is waiting on us to say, God, I don't get it, but like Peter, when Jesus said, Peter, launch back out, put your fishing boat back out there even though you were out there all night and you didn't catch anything, and Peter says, God, we already tried that, it didn't really work, but at your word, I will let down the net.

That's the difference in what happened with Jonah and what happened with Peter. Neither one of them loved the idea that God told them to do, but Jonah, instead of saying, I don't get it, but I'll do it anyway, he ran.

Peter said, I don't get it, but I'll do it anyway. He stayed and he saw God's miracle right away. He didn't have to endure this great trial before it happened, so there's a difference there.

Why do we run? Our lack of faith. Secondly, why does God pursue us? Why does God pursue us? Let's look back at the text, Jonah chapter one and verse four.

But the Lord hurled a powerful wind over the sea, causing a violent storm that threatened to break the ship apart. Fearing for their lives, the desperate sailors shouted to their gods for help and threw the cargo overboard to lighten the ship.

[17 : 47] You see, Jonah's mistake, his sin against God is already costing other people. They had to throw their cargo, the very reason for their journey on this ship, they had to throw it overboard.

But all this time, Jonah was sound asleep down in the hold of the ship. He's just content, relaxed in his running away from God.

Sometimes we get this idea that if we flee from God, if we sin against God, our lives are just going to immediately be a wreck and we're going to be stressed out all the time and freaked out and nothing's going to be right.

You know, you can actually go a while. You can actually go a while feeling just fine about yourself. And maybe you have. Maybe you've gone a while running from God and you're feeling just fine about yourself.

Like Jonah, you're down there just sleeping soundly and peacefully and thinking, I got away and everything is all right. Can I tell you, the storm is coming.

[19 : 03] The storm is coming. The Bible says, be sure your sin will find you out and just like Jonah, his sin found him out and it cost those around him and your sin will find you out and it will cost those around you.

My sin will find me out and it will cost those around you. None of us are exempt. So Jonah, sound asleep down in the hold.

Verse 6, so the captain goes down. The captain went down after him. How can you sleep at a time like this? He shouted, get up and pray to your God. Maybe he will pay attention to us and spare our lives.

Then what happens? The crew cast lots. The crew cast lots to see which of them had offended the gods and caused the terrible storm. When they did this, the lots identified Jonah as the culprit.

How many of you guys know what we're talking about when it says the crew cast lots? Yeah, I was probably about where you are. She got it. So, closest thing that we could find, there's a couple different here.

[20 : 12] Have you seen this little matchstick thing? You don't have to use it with matchsticks, but you're holding them in your hand and the back of the sticks is kind of behind your fingers where they can't see how long they are and you are holding a group of sticks and it looks like they're all the same length.

But in reality, behind your hand, one or more of them are shorter than the others. So, have you ever heard the expression drawing the short straw? So, that's kind of where it came from.

It was this idea and a lot of it was wrapped up in mysticism and all this, but it was the idea that the gods would cause the person that they want to draw the short stick or the short straw.

So, when they're casting lots, that's what they're doing. It's this game of chance that they believed was up to fate or God to determine. So, they play this and I absolutely love God's sense of humor in making sure that Jonah was the one who drew the short straw.

It's also a lot like a game of dice and this was kind of dice that they would maybe use back in those days. So, whoever would draw the unlucky number would be the one.

[21 : 29] So, they're playing this in the middle of a storm trying to see whose fault this was. Apparently, this was unusual for their journey.

Something about this storm made them realize this is not just nature taking its course. This is a God's judgment upon our journey and our ship.

So, let's get back to it. Jonah chapter one in verse eight. They see that Jonah draws the short stick and they say why has this awful storm come down on us?

They demanded an answer from him. Who are you? What is your line of work? What country are you from? What's your nationality? Tell us all about you because something is wrong here and we gotta fix this or none of us are gonna live.

Jonah answers, I'm a Hebrew. I worship the Lord, the God of heaven who made the sea and the land. So, the sailors then are terrified.

[22 : 37] He'd already told them that he's running away from the Lord and now he tells them, oh, by the way, I'm a servant of God. I'm a prophet of the God that I'm running away from and he is the one true God, not just the God of the wind or not just the God of the stars or not just one of the Greek gods that, you know, would have their area that they controlled.

He says, I serve the God of everything and I'm running away from him and I'm his prophet. So, they're looking at him like, what are you thinking? Have you lost your mind?

They say, oh, why did you do it? They groaned and since the storm was getting worse all the time, they asked him, what should we do to you to stop this storm? What does your God want us to do to you?

And Jonah, the ultimate martyr, says, guys, you can just throw me in the sea. Throw me in the sea, it'll all get better for you.

It'll become calm again. I know this terrible storm is all my fault. I heard somebody say this about Jonah's request to throw them in the sea.

[23 : 55] He said, suicide is never the answer. Suicide is honestly the most selfish act.

and maybe there have been families or lives in this room who have been touched by that tragedy. There's usually mental health issues and all kinds of things that lead up to that ultimate final act.

But Jonah is literally giving up his life instead of repenting to God and saying, God, save me from this.

I repent of running from you. I surrender myself to your will. Do with me as you will. But God, I repent, I surrender.

Instead of doing that, Jonah says, end my life. Throw me into the sea, and then for sure I'll never have to go to Nineveh. God, I don't know.

[25 : 00] But the sailors didn't take the bait. They said instead, they rode even harder to get to the ship to the land. But the stormy sea was too violent for them and they couldn't make it.

So finally they say, okay. But they cry out to Jonah's God, who he was unwilling to cry out to. And they say, oh, Lord, immediately recognizing him as Lord and said, oh, Lord, clearly you have control over everything.

Even nature responds to your command. They said, don't make us die for this man's sin. Don't hold us responsible for his death. Oh, Lord, you've sent this storm upon him for your own good reasons.

So they pick him up and they threw him into the raging sea. And what happens? The storm stops at once. And the sailors were awestruck by the Lord's great power.

they offered him a sacrifice and vowed to serve him. How crazy of a scene is this? God's preacher, God's prophet is running away from him.

[26 : 06] This great storm comes down to grab his attention and draw him back to God. And instead he says, forget it, throw me over. I'm just going to end my life. It's all over for me anyway.

So they do it. He finally talks them into it and they do it. Begrudgingly, they don't want to. They feel terrible. They're saying, don't let this man's blood be on our hands.

Jonah doesn't care if the blood's on their hands. They're begging God, forgive us for this. We don't know what else to do. This is your prophet. He's telling us to throw him in.

Clearly your judgment is on him. We surrender ourselves to you. they did what Jonah was unwilling to do. And as soon as he hits the waters, how surreal was that experience?

The storm stops. Instantly, the sea becomes calm. Not just a regular day on the ocean with the waves, it becomes calm.

[27 : 19] can you imagine how crazy those sailors what they just experienced?

So they said, we offer you a sacrifice. We vow to serve you. God just got some servants in that moment.

Meanwhile, Jonah, with the calm sea above him, he's now falling down through the depths, thinking that's it.

His life is over. You wonder what's going through his mind. Is it regret? Is he having second thoughts? What did I just do?

In my pride, in my selfishness, in my ego, ego, what did I just do? My life is now over. There's no hope.

[28 : 22] I'm in the middle of the ocean. I'm falling down under the water. I'm without hope. And the story could have ended there.

And Jonah would have been a cautionary tale for you and for me to always do what God commands us to do. don't run from him. Don't be like Jonah.

But to answer the question we asked earlier, why does God pursue us? To draw us to himself. God was not done drawing Jonah to himself.

So let's look back at the last verse. The Lord had arranged for a great fish to swallow Jonah. Jonah. And Jonah was inside that fish for three days and three nights.

Was it a whale? Who knows? Nobody knows. There was a preacher who said, I believe whatever the Bible tells me, if the Bible had told me that Jonah swallowed a whale, I would believe that.

[29 : 32] Whatever God has complete control over his creation, if he wanted to bloat up a goldfish so big that it could swallow Jonah, God could certainly arrange that. But whatever it was, call it a whale or a great fish, Jonah was in there for three days and three nights.

How crazy is this story? It just keeps getting crazier and crazier as we unfold new chapters of this tale.

Now, Jonah is falling through the sea to his death, and God sends the whale. Jonah was a whale. The creator of VeggieTales, Phil Vischer, had this really interesting quote to say about this story.

It's pretty clear in the Bible story that the whale swallowing Jonah wasn't meant as a punishment from God. It was God saving him from drowning. So it was actually provision to give him a second chance.

The whale itself was the start of Jonah's second chance. Now, about day two, Jonah probably wasn't feeling like this was a great thing. Sitting in that whale's belly, all the stinking rotten fish everywhere, and wondering how in the world he's ever going to get out of that.

[30 : 47] He's thinking, man, I was going to drown to death, and then it would have been over, but now I have to starve to death and whatever inside this whale's belly. So I'm going to die this way. This is more of God's judgment on me.

But the whale was actually God's second chance. It was God's way of escape. And you know, sometimes in our life, God sends new trials in the midst of trials.

Have you ever heard, ever felt like you're just being piled on? You ever heard, man, it just gets worse and worse? It goes from bad to worse.

Jonah might have felt like being swallowed by this great fish was going from bad to worse. But it was actually God's rescue. And maybe whatever is happening in your life is God's rescue.

Maybe he's going to use it as a way to give you a second chance to do what he told you to do all along. So, what is the point of this entire story of Jonah?

[31 : 50] We're going to get into it in chapter 2, chapter 3, and finally chapter 4. But it begins here. This story points us to the sovereignty of God.

It's a big word, meaning God is in control. God is sovereign.

His sovereignty, in his wisdom. We don't just believe that God is omnipresent. He's everywhere. We also believe that he is omniscient, all-knowing. And he is all-wise and always right, always just.

And in his master plan, he allows terrible things to happen. And sometimes it's to draw us to himself. When we run, God pursues us to draw us back to him and to show us his sovereignty.

So, our takeaway today is God's plan always wins. God's plan always wins. And that's going to be really the takeaway, the theme of the entire book of Jonah.

[33 : 21] As we race through this book along with Jonah, because this story does not slow down. God's plan will always win. Despite you and me fighting against it sometimes, God's plan will always win.

Despite us not liking what he's always doing, his plan will always win. In the end, he will win. From Genesis to Revelation, God's plan always wins.

In Jonah's story and in your story and in my story, God's plan always wins. In your family, in your circle of life, in the things that you think you're in control of, God's plan will win.

In this church that sometimes you feel like is yours and you've got ownership of it, in reality, God's plan for this church will win. Don't fight against God.

Don't run from God like Jonah did. God will pursue you to draw you back to himself. And in the end, his plan will win.

[34 : 27] Let's surrender to his plan. Would you bow your heads with me? God, I pray that you would help us surrender to you. Teach us. Don't let us go running from your face, running from your command any longer.

God, don't let us take down others with us and harm others in our process of running from you and resisting you. God, don't let us fall through the depths of the sea.

Spend days in the belly of the whale, so to speak, running from you. Help us to turn and repent and surrender long before any of that happens. And God, if some of us are far from you, let this be a wake-up call from your prophet who ran, your prophet who resisted.

And help that to grab our attention and turn it back to our Heavenly Father. We'll give you all the glory for it, knowing you're in control. And we'll trust that you always win. In Jesus' name, amen.

Church, would you take a moment just to pray? Brother Greg's going to lead us in this song. If you'd like to join in singing, you can. Change my heart, oh God. Make it ever true. That's what we need. Jonah needed a change of heart.

[35 : 38] And you and I have the opportunity to do that every day with God. So would you take a few minutes and pray through what God has for you? Would you bow your heads with me? And I want to ask just a couple of questions. We haven't done this in a couple of weeks.

One, if there's somebody here who doesn't know Jesus as your Savior. And you say, I'm not a child of God yet. I need to place my faith in Him for the first time. Would you slip your hand up now and I'll pray for you? Thank you.

There's someone else who says, would you pray for me? Because I've got some things I'm struggling with in my life and I need some prayer. Maybe it's someone else who's on my heart. Or maybe it's something that I'm dealing with who's on my heart and I need some prayer.

Would you slip your hand up and I'll pray for you? Thank you. Thank you. God, you see these hands and you know what's going on. I just pray your power and your blessing over every situation. And we'll thank you for it in Jesus' name.

For those of you who raised your hand or anyone else, I'll be waiting down front if you'd like to come speak with me. If you'd like to take advantage of these steps and bring you or your family down for a time of prayer, please do that.

[36 : 35] That's what this time in our service is dedicated for. Brother Greg, would you lead us in singing? Well, it's like a prayer. Okay.

Agmat iron. Have a great day, though. Thank you. Thank you. Bye. I'll say again. Good night sam an ocurrasca. Woo. Bye five. Thank you. Good night. Bye. Bye. Good night. Good night.

Journey.