

## “RUNNING AWAY FROM GOD (Jonah 1)”

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. (Jonah 1:1-3 NKJV)

For the next four weeks I am going to be preaching from the prophecy of Jonah. Jesus chose the experience of Jonah to describe what He himself would experience for three days in the grave when He died for our sins, was buried, and rose again on the third day. He could have chosen the experience of Joseph when his brothers threw him into a pit. He could have chosen the experience of Jeremiah when he was thrown into a pit. He could have chosen the experience of Daniel in the lion's den. He chose the experience of Jonah in the belly of a great fish.

Jonah is not only a reluctant prophet, but a man who has emotions like those that you and I feel. If you look on Jonah as an exercise in ancient history, a Biblical tale that is hard to believe, a Sunday School story more suited to children than adults, you will miss out on the messages God has for you in this book of the Bible.

Start off this series by admitting to yourself, "Yes, there have been times that I have fled from the presence of the Lord." The truth is that every time we disobey one of God's commands we are fleeing from God. There have been particular moments in each of our lives when we knew that God was clearly telling us to do something or not to do something. We fled from the presence of the Lord. We may have told ourselves that we would do it later. We may have reasoned ourselves out of doing it, or justified to ourselves something that was wrong.

1.) 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. (Jonah 1:1-3 NKJV)

Jonah was a prophet. God spoke directly and probably audibly to him. None of us are prophets. God does not speak to us directly, audibly, or even in visions. Instead He speaks to us through His Word and His Holy Spirit, through godly friends, and by providential circumstances and in that priority. If a godly friend gives advice that is contrary to the Word of God, the friend's advice did not come from God. If circumstances seem to be providential and God's leading, if the direction is contrary to the Spirit's direction and our friend's advice, the circumstances are not God's leading.

Jonah was a prophet, that is a preacher. God's will for him was to go to a great city, a heathen city of people known for their cruelty and to cry out against it for its wickedness. Jonah was afraid to go; he was filled with doubts; these people were a threat to his own homeland. If you are not a preacher, your temptations will not be those of a preacher. You may be working someplace or working for yourself and the boss wants you to do something dishonest, or you decide to cheat someone else. You may be a student and the only way you can see to pass a course is to copy someone else's answers or have someone on the internet to write a paper for you. You may have met a young man or young woman who is the person you have always dreamed of but that person isn't a Christian or maybe one of you is already married. Will you flee the presence of the Lord, pay your fare and get on a ship?

2.) 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." (Jonah 1:4-6 NKJV)

A great wind on the sea, a mighty tempest on the sea, the ship about to be broken up and the LORD sent it! Why? To punish a prophet who disregarded the LORD's call for him to warn Nineveh to repent.

'But if the watchman sees the sword coming and does not blow the trumpet, and the people are not warned, and the sword comes and takes any person from among them, he is taken away in his iniquity; but his blood I will require at the watchman's hand.' "So you, son of man: I have made you a watchman for the house of Israel; therefore you shall hear a word from My mouth and warn them for Me." (Ezekiel 33:6-7 NKJV)

Why did the sailors, the captain, the owners of the cargo suffer along with Jonah? Later on they cast lots to determine whose fault it was that they were overtaken by this mighty tempest. We cannot accuse God of punishing innocent people. Not one of us is innocent. All have sinned, have offended God, and deserve to die for their sins.

The seamen were afraid. Each one cried out to his own God. Even in this they condemned themselves. Each of them had his own god, but none of them knew or worshiped the true God. They did what they could to shield themselves from being sent to a watery grave.

Where was Jonah, the only one on board who knew the true God. He was not willing to go to Nineveh to warn the people there. Here on board a ship in peril, he is not willing to join the crew in prayer. He does not make any effort to point them to the true God who could save. Jonah is fast asleep in the lowest part of the ship. Sometimes heathens point out our backsliding to us as did the captain who rebuked Jonah.

3.) 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." Nevertheless the men rowed hard to return to land, but they could not, for the sea continued to grow more tempestuous against them. 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. (Jonah 1:10-16 NKJV)

When the crew cast lots and Jonah was shown to be the guilty one, he told them he had fled the presence of the LORD.

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." (Jonah 1:9 NKJV)

In this extremity Jonah confesses both his guilt and also the true God about whom he had been reluctant to witness to them.

The sailors are reluctant to toss Jonah into the raging sea and certain death. They did not want his blood on their hands and consciences. They try with all their might to bring the ship to land but they are wrestling with Almighty God. Finally, they picked up Jonah and tossed him into the sea. As they did so they glorified God by praying to Him by the name that Jonah unwillingly taught them:

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." (Jonah 1:14 NKJV)

Then the men feared the LORD exceedingly, and offered a sacrifice to the LORD and took vows. (Jonah 1:16 NKJV)

The LORD prepared a great fish to swallow Jonah. It wasn't a whale. It was a great fish specially prepared by the LORD to swallow Jonah and keep Jonah alive for three days and nights. Of those three days and nights Jonah will tell us more next Sunday.

