
Running from God / Rescued by God

Jonah 1

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Introduction

The year: 1970.

The place: my grandmother's living room.

The occasion: a *Wizard of Oz* showing on her brand new color tv.

I recall it as though it were yesterday. My sister and I on my grandmother's living room floor with coca cola in hand awaiting the most spectacular scene in the movie - Dorothy Gale, a 12-year-old Kansas farm girl, is knocked unconscious during a tornado. She, her dog Toto, and the farmhouse are apparently swept up in the storm and dropped into the magical Land of Oz. Opening the door and stepping out of what was up to then a black-and-white film into full Technicolor, Dorothy finds herself in a strange village where she sets out on the yellow brick road to the Emerald City to ask the Wizard of Oz to return her to Kansas.

Opening the door & stepping out of black and white into full Technicolor was for me the most unforgettable moment in the story.

Now, for some of you the gospel (the pure, powerful, pleasing, purposed gospel) is played out on the screen of your mind in black-and-white. You know Jesus and how he went to the cross to die for you and how the grave did not hold him but rather gave way to his resurrection. Yes, you know the gospel...but it comes across in black and white (unimposing, unimpressive – easily forgotten).

The door has not been opened and you have not stepped into the vivid wonder of the worth of Jesus, the vibrant truth of His cross work, the vital Holy Spirit-enabled daily applications of the gospel. The gospel is as distant in your imagination as the Land of Oz was to people in Kansas (*cf. 2Kings 6:16ff; Ps.119:18; Eph.1:17ff; Rev.3:15ff; Matt.13:13; Mark 8:22-26*)

Today marks the beginning of a 4-part series from the book of Jonah.

The title of this month's series is ***two hearts one story***. What I'm trying to communicate by this title is that Jonah's 4 chapter, 48 verse narrative tells a single story. And this story unfolds two hearts – Jonah's defecting heart (who represents God's chosen people) and the LORD's gracious heart.

As the plotline develops we will see how the Lord moves His mission forward by bringing His people back. As I thought over this theme I began to see four reasons why He would need to track down his people and bring them back to himself. Demonstrations of a defecting heart and how the LORD works to retrieve Jonah will serve to hold our series together.

Today we will notice a demonstration of heart defect as – *Running from God*

Next week we will be confronted with a demonstration of heart defect as – *Acting close to God*

The following week we will witness a display of heart defect as – *Begrudgingly obeying God*

The final week 10/24 we will observe a display of heart defect as – *Disgusted with God*

My aim in all my preaching this month is to assist Clearcreek Chapel in becoming more commissional

- by helping believers rediscover the vitality of the gospel
- and to help unbelievers discover the vitality of the gospel

With Bibles open to the book of Jonah let's pray and ready our hearts to open the door and step into the vivid colors of the gospel found in the first chapter of Jonah.

Running from God Jonah 1:1-17

Now the Word of the LORD came to Jonah the son of Amittai, saying, "Arise, go to Nineveh, that great city and call out against it, for their evil has come up before me." But Jonah rose 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 on board, to go with them to Tarshish, away from the presence of the LORD. But the LORD hurled a great wind upon the sea and there was a mighty tempest on the sea so that the ship threatened to break up. Then the mariners were afraid and each cried out to his god. And they hurled the cargo that was in the ship into the sea to lighten it for them. But Jonah had gone down into the inner part of the ship and had lain down and was fast asleep. So the Captain came and said to him, "What do you mean, you sleeper? Arise; call out to your god! Perhaps the god will give a thought to us that we may not perish. And they said to one another, "Come, let us cast lots that we may know on whose account this evil has come upon us." So they cast lots, and the lot fell on Jonah. Then they said to him, "Tell us on whose account this evil has come upon us. What is your occupation? And where do you come from? What is your country? And of what people are you?" And 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, "What is this that you have done?" (For the men knew that he was fleeing 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 quiet down for us?" (For the sea grew more and more tempestuous.) He said to them, "Pick me up and hurl me into the sea; then the sea will quiet down for you, for I know it is because of me that this great tempest has come upon you". Nevertheless, the men rowed hard to get back to dry land but they could not for the sea grew more and more tempestuous against them. Therefore they called out to the LORD, "O LORD, let us not perish for this man's life, and lay not on us innocent blood, for you O LORD have done as it pleased you." So they picked up Jonah and hurled him into the sea, and the sea ceased from its raging. Then the men feared the LORD exceedingly, and they offered a sacrifice to the LORD and made vows. And the LORD appointed a great fish to swallow up Jonah. And Jonah was in the belly of the fish three days and three nights.

Its characteristics

vv.1-3

The story begins abruptly using words that tell us that Jonah was a real person who lived in a real place who had a real job as a prophet and was really successful. This starting point sends the reader back into 2Kings 14. Listen as I read these couple of verses.

[23] In the fifteenth year of Amaziah the son of Joash, king of Judah, Jeroboam the son of Joash, king of Israel, began to reign in Samaria, and he reigned forty-one years. [24] And he did what was evil in the sight of the LORD. He did not depart from all the sins of Jeroboam the son of Nebat, which he made Israel to sin. [25] He restored the border of Israel from Lebo-hamath as far as the Sea of the Arabah, according to the word of the LORD, the God of Israel, which he spoke by his servant Jonah the son of Amittai, the prophet, who was from Gath-hepher. [26] For the LORD saw that the affliction of Israel was very bitter, for there was none left, bond or free, and there was none to help Israel. [27] But the LORD had not said that he would blot out the name of Israel from under heaven, so he saved them by the hand of Jeroboam the son of Joash.

(2 Kings 14:23-27 ESV)

From this text we see that:

1. Israel was sinful, vulnerable and could not deliver herself.
2. Israel was miserable due to sin.
3. The LORD saw this and delivered them from their enemy (fortified the boarder of the Land)
4. He did this by sending His word to the King through the prophet Jonah.
5. Success and safety happened as a result of a king listening to and relying upon God's Word.

So here is the main character in the story – a prophet named Jonah who was from Gath-hepher located in Galilee just three miles from Nazareth where many years later another Galilean known as the Faithful Prophet would grow up.

The writer of Jonah raises our expectations of Jonah high. Jonah was commissioned by the LORD to go to Nineveh; a place full of the Israelites' terrifying enemies. Will Jonah do for other people what he did for his own people? Will Jonah faithfully carry God's word to God's enemies? How does Jonah respond to this test? He fails by fleeing.

(3 characteristics of a defecting heart = running from God)

In fleeing from the LORD's commission

These first three verses tell us that he is fleeing two things. We see Jonah fleeing the LORD's commission. He wants no part of obeying the LORD's will. He sees nothing promising in God's word. The Lord told him to do something difficult and even dangerous. And he heard it, understood it and wanted no part of obeying it. Jonah was his own authority. He makes his own decisions. He knows what's best and best is not obedience.

In fleeing from the LORD's company

The second thing we see Jonah fleeing is found in the latter part of verse three. Jonah flees the company of the LORD. He wants to depart not only from the LORD's commission but also from his presence. Jonah saw nothing promising in the LORD. On the contrary, he saw him as a threat. When the LORD was around, Jonah believed he could not do what he wanted. And so off he went away from the presence of the Lord.

In fleeing to the lucrative counterfeits

Lastly, we can see what running from God looks like by noticing another characteristic of it. He is not merely running away from something, he is running to something. In verse three the writer refers to a place called Tarshish (three times in one verse for emphasis). This is his target destination. How Tarshish functions in the Bible is fascinating¹. The references describing this place generally talk about it in terms of high action, lucrative industry, seaport setting; in other words, a far, far away unspecified promising place.

Why does Jonah want Tarshish and not the LORD? Why do we when running away from God run to things like isolation, ease, action, far away fairyland, gold-like promises? Why do we see God's Word as bad and forbidden places good? ,

The prophet Jonah was tested by God to carry out God's commission to go to God's enemies with God's word. He fails the test immediately by fleeing from God's commission and company and fleeing to counterfeit pleasures. Leaving the genuine because it's difficult and pursuing the imitation because it's promising are characteristic of Running from God.

For us to be so (re)captured by His grace that we will follow Him all our days into difficult days we must identify with Jonah. Everyone in this room has a Jonah-like heart. Left to ourselves we will flee from God and flee to our pin ups. We will view obedience as a joy-spoiler and disobedience as a joy-giver. We will never understand the delight of following His great commission and enjoying his grand company in a state of running from God.

¹ Dr. Lubeck compiled references on Tarshish I found to be most helpful. Here are references for your studies. Isaiah 60:9; Psalm 72:10; Genesis 10:4; 1Chr.1:7; Isaiah 2:16; 23:1,6,10,14; Jeremiah 10:9; Ezekiel 27:25; 38:13; Psalm 48:7; Isaiah 66:19

To be recaptured by His grace we must look not only at the characteristics of running from God but also the consequences of doing so. These are noticed in v4-13.

Its consequences

v4-13

To get a vivid and concise understanding of consequences of running from God notice the setting and what Jonah is saying.

The setting

Settings in narrative help us not only to be engaged with them. They communicate truth. They help the reader interpret the story. Notice Jonah's setting. First "the sea".

The sea

The sea in the Bible is a threatening place. In Genesis 1:2 the deep is described as untamed and shrouded in darkness. As you read on in the Bible the sea looks threatening with creepy creatures lurking in its deep and unending uncertainty sprawling afar. It is not a promising place.

The ship

Where does Jonah go in the midst of such a sea? Notice the movement described for Jonah. He goes **DOWN** to find the ship. He goes **DOWN** into the ship. He goes **DOWN** deeper into the ship. He goes **DOWN** into deep sleep. He goes **DOWN** into the water.

Huh, consequences of running from God are what again?

Also notice Jonah's chosen deliverance from the sea. The ship is breakable and breaking apart. There is nothing sturdy and promising and helpful in Jonah's chosen get-away.

In his book *Surprised by Grace* Tullian Tchividjian describes this scene as "*trapped...this ship is like a shrunken world to them. There's no Tarshish anymore, no Joppa, no Nineveh, no Israel, no land at all – all of that is now out of reach, seemingly forever. There's only this fragile ship carrying living human beings, barely suspended over this gaping gray expanse of wet chaos and death*" (p.49).

The sailors

If the sea and ship were not enough to communicate the awful consequences of running from God we come to the sailors. Here we see pagans who worship false gods. Now I use to be a sailor who worshipped false gods. I experientially know this group is the least likely group to respond favorably to God's word and grace...so one would think.

The sailors function in the story as a backdrop to the main character Jonah. The contrast is to tell us something of Jonah. All through chapter one Jonah looks out of step. When everyone else is awake he sleeps (v.5). When pagans are crying out to their gods he remains silent to his God (v.5). When pagans are urgent and concerned he appears indifferent and apathetic (vv.6-10). When he identifies himself to the pagans one is tempted to laugh. He says he believes that God made the sea. And yet we see him attempting to flee on the sea. We hear that he fears the LORD. But we see that it is the pagans who eventually fear the LORD (v.16). We notice that the pagans want to live and the prophet desires to die (v.11-13).

A summary

In attempting to put this together into a composite sketch of consequences of disobedience this is what I got.

A dull, indifferent to people's pain, prayerless person

who is able to quote truth while not living truth and cannot see his own dire condition.

This, friends, is a description of both the characteristics and consequences of sin...awful!

Rescued by God

v14-17

As the sailors in vain row hard to save themselves, as Jonah yields to his despondency amid the storm, is there any help? For fugitives is there any hope at all? Throughout chapter one the narrator wants his readers to see Jonah's disobedience and discrepancy on the backdrop of the LORD's amazing grace. The way you will be captured by grace this morning is not merely to see your sin. The heart we've looked at so far has been cold, dark and deadly. This is the heart of Jonah. This is the heart of us all. We are to feel that. We are to see the hopelessness of that. We are to loathe that. We are to abhor our disobedience. But left there, we would either lose all hope for God's favor or work all the harder for God's favor. Both activities keep us at the center of our actions and lead us to unrepentant misery.

We do not need advice on how to be better people. We do not need steps to climb out of our mess. We do not merely need rules and regulations to clean up our act. We need to be rescued!

Notice how the LORD rescues the run away.

Through a great storm & a great fish

We see Him rescue the run away by intervening with a great storm and a great fish. The text says both these events were supernatural. He hurled the storm. He appointed the fish. The narrative makes plain that these intrusions are God's interventions. This stopped the rebellious movement of Jonah. This kept him from going farther away from grace and truth. This brought the wayward back onto dry land. God went to great lengths to interfere with Jonah's rebellion. This rescue was mediated by a great storm and a great fish. .

A merciful intervention – Christ Jesus our Lord

Left here, it's just a great story. But as our minds move to the New Testament we hear Jesus say, "behold, something greater than Jonah is here" (Matt.12:41). In Matthew 12 we read of Jesus' interpretation of the book of Jonah. He says, "*for just as Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of the great fish, so will be 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*".

We read of Jonah's rescue by God as a sign to unbelievers that his message was from God. Jesus' death and resurrection is likewise to be God's sign to this present generation. Now listen carefully.

When we run from God we need more than anything this world offers. We need God to go to great lengths and spare nothing in his activity to change us from foe to friend. We do not need self-help books. We do not need to deny that our heart is Jonah-like. We do not need pretension. We need God's merciful intervention. As the Lord hurled his great intrusion into Jonah's life through a storm he hurled his great intrusion into our lives by sending his one and only son. The Bible says that "God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us" "he gave himself for our sins to deliver us from the present evil age" "that He might bring us to God" as "he made him to be sin who knew no sin so that in him we might become the righteousness of God" (see Romans 5:8; Galatians 1:4; 1Peter 3:18; 2Corinthians 5:21)

Beloved, this mediated intrusion is to stop our course of rebellion and save us from the depths of hell. God sent [not merely a storm and a fish] but his son into this sin-infested, cursed world to live the life we could not live. We all were commissioned to live a representative life for God's glory. And we all failed utterly and completely. We all turned to our own way doing what was "right" in our own eyes. We all needed rescued. And God in his infinite grace hurled his stormy wrath upon his son and killed him. He put his son deep into the grave for three days. Then He brought him out from the grave to live forevermore. And he did this on our behalf so that we could be freed from the curse and be brought back into happy submission to him.

Reflect

As I end the message I leave you with these reflections. As the Lord moves his mission forward by bringing his people back reflect upon these facts with me:

1. God is the great ruler of this world.
2. We all were sent into his world to represent his word.
3. We all ran from this commission and thus guilty of treason.
4. Jesus came to fulfill this test. He did so perfectly.
5. Jesus came to take in full measure the hurling storm of God's just wrath for us.
6. Jesus died in doing so, was buried for three days in the belly of the earth and came to life through resurrection.

Respond

How will you respond this morning? Do you sense that this story of Jonah has a bigger story to tell? Do you see yourself as Jonah and in need of rescue? Do you see the rescue as the Person of the Lord Jesus Christ?

1. Turn from your Tarshish (deceitful promises of sin).
2. Call upon Jesus to save you from guilt, punishment and bondage.
3. Bank your hope completely on all that God is for you in Jesus.
4. Become involved in the Chapel's mission and grow together with each other who treasure Christ above all things.