

Topic	Running From God
Reference	Jonah 1:1-10
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There are three things which we are going to learn from Jonah today.

1. When and why we run from God
2. We can run but we cannot hide
3. There is always love beneath the waves

### **1. When and Why We Run From God:**

He was a prophet even before this called Cain working for Jeroboam the 2<sup>nd</sup> of the Northern kingdom and this is the assignment.

Jonah 1:1-2 (ESV) Now the word of the Lord came to Jonah the son of Amittai, saying, 2 “Arise, go to Nineveh, that great city, and call out against it, for their evil has come up before me

So this is a very evil city, very evil inhabitants and he is asked to go all the way up north 250 miles up to minister and this is a very difficult task for Jonah. Now if you talk about other prophets that we look through the bible, how they responded when God called.

Exodus 3:11 But Moses said to God, “Who am I that I should go to Pharaoh and bring the children of Israel out of Egypt?”

Moses will express inexperience, inadequacy.

Jeremiah 1:6 Then I said, “Ah, Lord God! Behold, I do not know how to speak, for I am only a youth.

Jeremiah was a young man. So he is inexperienced, so he doesn't have what it takes

Isaiah 6:8 And I heard the voice of the Lord saying, “Whom shall I send, and who will go for us?” Then I said, “Here I am! Send me.”

Isaiah is the most enthusiastic, but Jonah is the only prophet who is a runner. He rose to flee to Tarshish from the presence of the Lord. He was in complete opposite direction. So the center of God's will is Nineveh he is running from the center of God's will into whichever direction that is away from God's will. So we are running when we are not living in line with the gospel which is what God wants for the world today and we find that he is probably a good man. He is probably a very ethical man.

Sin does not have to be a violation of moral code, you get right intention, right speech which is the way you live your life.

Paul describes his life

Philippians 3:4-7 (ESV) I have more: 5 circumcised on the eighth day, of the people of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of Hebrews; as to the law, a Pharisee; 6 as to zeal, a persecutor of the church; as to righteousness under the law, blameless.

According to him he had no violation of the moral code and yet he is far away. So walking in line with what God wants is not necessarily governed by moral code.

Oliver Cromwell lived in the 1600s and he actually is the only fellow who actually chopped off the head of a king, Charles the first and he became the lord protector of England, a very godly man at time controversial but godly. He was a puritan; he wanted to impose Christian values upon the nation of England. What he did was, he actually shut down Inns, theatres, pubs, you couldn't play football if you were found playing football you will be whipped, you couldn't swear you would be fine. Women couldn't walk anywhere other than the church on a Sunday. If you walk beyond that to the mall you would get fine or jail, could not celebrate Christmas. He imposed the moral code to make the nation Godly but actually you cannot do that because the heart is sinful and they rebelled against him. He chose the most godly people and put them in parliament, within three to four years they kicked him out because they couldn't even agree it. It is not a moral code that you impose that will help you.

So we could be sitting in church, blameless but our hearts could be on the ship on the way to Tarshish. It is the way we live our lives and the direction in which our lives are heading.

#### **b. We are running when we are not seeking his presence**

Jonah 1:3 (ESV) 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 down into it, to go with them to Tarshish, away from the presence of the Lord.

In Hebrew the presence of the Lord is *Penae*, which actually literally means the face of God which actually literally means the face of God.

We can be running, we could be sitting in church here and yet our hearts are running when we don't look at the presence of God and move towards it.

Face of God is consciousness of the brightness of his personal character, his supreme greatness of beauty and its worth.

If the direction of our lives are so focused on something other than the beauty and the supreme glory of what God is to you then no matter what happens you are running. We are designed to

look at the face of God. We are designed to bask in his presence. Paul when he preached to pagans in Acts 17 says

**Acts 17: 27 that they should seek God, and perhaps feel their way toward him and find him.**

It is in our DNA, we are created to find God. Augustine bishop of hippo says

*“You have made us for yourself, and our hearts are restless, until they can find rest in you.”*

So we are running if we are not seeking God.

### ***Definition of sin***

*If being human means life in free response to God who freely and graciously addresses us , then sin can be described as the denial of our relatedness to God and our need for God’s grace -*

Daniel Migliori

So life is to be lived in response to a holy and wonderful God. If you are not responding you must be running

### **c. We are running when our words and actions do not match**

**Jonah 1:9 (ESV) 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.”**

**Jonah 1:4 (ESV) 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.**

Imagine you are flying in an airplane and storm hits and you got turbulence, no body can sleep but here Jonah is sleeping.

**Jonah 1:5 (ESV) 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.**

Here he is talking about a God of the heaven and earth who made the dry land.

**Jonah 1:16 (ESV) Then the men feared the Lord exceedingly, and they offered a sacrifice to the Lord and made vows.**

But he was fast asleep, something wrong with the guy. When your actions don’t match what you believe. John Kerry, secretary of state from United States and he is a typical example. He says

*“I don’t make decisions in public life based on religious belief.”*

So religious belief make no difference to him. So he supports abortion, he supports homosexual union. Is that the way we supposed to live our lives? He is running.

A true story told of a small town in Middle America where they had a pub and it was built across the road from a church and the people in the church didn't like the bar. It attract people to ungodly lives, so therefore they started prayer meeting after prayer meeting against the bar and true enough business was bad and they had to close down and what he did, the owner of the bar was so upset about the prayer meeting he started a lawsuit. He sues the church because the church caused the bar to close down by the power of prayer, big lawsuit and the church in their defense even cited the Benson Harvard Study, which is a study on post cardiac bypass patients showing that actually whether you prayed for them or you didn't prayed for them there is no result. The judged summed up the case; *"I have a very interesting cause. On one hand I have a bar owner who is totally convinced about the power of prayer, a whole bunch of Christians in the church who do not believe in the power of prayer."*

Isn't that a sign that when the action do not match our belief but we are not seeking his presence, we are not living in line with the gospel, we are running away from God.

### **Why did Jonah run?**

Jeroboam and they were doing well, they were expanding, they were going into Assyrian territory, very successful, the Israelites were overcoming the Assyrians at that time but the Assyrians were really bad people. Whenever they caught prisoners they would actually flay their skin alive and hang the skin over the walls of Nineveh. They bury the people into the ground and grab their tongue and drove a stick through the tongue, so that they would die of thirst that is what they did. They were terribly cruel people and God is asking Jonah to share the gospel with them. It was very hard for him to actually obey God to do that and this is the reason.

**Jonah 3:10 - 4:2 (ESV) When God saw what they did, how they turned from their evil way, God relented of the disaster that he had said he would do to them, and he did not do it.**

Jonah's Anger and the Lord's Compassion

**1 But it displeased Jonah exceedingly, and he was angry. 2 And he prayed to the Lord and said, "O Lord, is not this what I said when I was yet in my country? That is why I made haste to flee to Tarshish; for I knew that you are a gracious God and merciful, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love, and relenting from disaster.**

Edward Welch is a Christian psychologist. He wrote a book 'When people are big and your God is small'. When people around you are in color and your God is like a small black and white TV set far-far away that is why he actually ran. Anything that erodes the fear of God will intensify the fear of man. So when you are actually not in touch with God very much and don't really have a personal experience of him in your life then the fear of man becomes very-very big.

Once you have a fear of man then unbelief will follow and later on disobedience. He couldn't bring himself to be found, the great prophet of Israel now goes and tries to save their enemies. What would people think? What would his family think as it were?

In 2008 there was a disaster in Mumbai, a bunch of terrorist came and they rounded up people in the mall and they shot them. 136 of them were killed and about 400-500 were injured. In that attack on the city of Mumbai there was a house called the Nariman House where Jewish missionaries were there, Rivka Holtzberg and Rabbi Gavriel Holtzberg and when terrorist came inside they caught all of them. The only person who escaped was there little baby which was about 2-3 years old, smuggled out by a nanny and the lady was actually five months pregnant. They were tortured, their sexual organs were mutilated and then they were killed and then one of the foremost Rabbis in America had this to say when they asked him on talk radio what about the love of Jesus, what about loving your enemies, aren't you guy supposed to love enemies. This is what he writes

*But to love those who indiscriminately murder God's children is an abomination against all that is sacred. Is there a man who is human whose heart is not filled with moral revulsion against terrorists who target a rabbi who feeds the hungry? Would God or Jesus ask me to extend even one morsel of my limited capacity for compassion to fiends rather than saving every last particle for their victims instead? Could God really be so unreasonable, could Jesus be so cruel, as to ask me to love baby-killers? And would such a God be moral if He did? Could I pray to a God who loves terrorists? Could I find comfort in Him knowing that He offers them comfort as well? No, such a god would be my enemy. He would abide in Hades rather than heaven. And I would be damned before I would worship him. I will accept an eternity in purgatory rather than a moment of celestial bliss shared with these beasts.— Rabbi Shmurley Boteach*

It is very difficult to love people like terrorist. When you actually meet killers you could trivialize and say Jesus asked me to love everybody so I love him too but he has not come and kill your mother. He has not come and raped your sister. So you will say I will trivialize it, it will be okay. Or some people will tell you, I will hate the evil and love the sinner. How you are going to extract the evil from the sinner? It is like orange juice, you take off the juice and then you love one and you hate the other. It is not possible. We actually hate the person and his evil together as they come in a package we actually hate. When they actually killed terrorist that is called justice, there is that we love justice but in that sphere there is enough room for love and pity. We are pity and desire for their salvation as well. We are not so one dimensional, we either love a person or we hate the person, it comes together.

In God's eyes we are all the same. We are all awful sinners and there are greater sin that we actually do is to walk away and turn away from the God who actually gives you every single breath. That is the atrocity, that is the sin but in our own eyes I am very big and he is very small. That is what we do. Each of us need all the Baghdadis and people in our lives so that we could feel good. We compare ourselves with height, race and religion.

We cannot stand somebody who is better than us; you got to be better than the whole bunch of people in order to feel good about yourself. That is how we are actually made. So we have to be better than somebody else.

When people are big and God is small that is what happens to us that we measure each other. A story was told in England where there is a factory next to a watch seller. What the owner of watch shop does is every day he knows exactly at 4 o'clock the siren goes off and everybody knocks off work. So he sets all of his clock at 4 o'clock siren and one day the factory owner walked past and said, I love your clocks, you know I set my horn to your clocks.

But that is what we do, if we cut ourselves from God the only standard we actually have is each other and so therefore we seek glory from each other, people become very important, people are big and then God is small. Imagine you get to the traffic light and you are sitting there in traffic and suddenly either your neighbor next to you in the car is actually moving backwards, what do you think. Is he moving backwards or you going forwards and the first thing you do you jam your breaks on but you did not know your brakes are working or not. So how do you solve the problem?

We look at the object that is fixed. In life if we are always looking at the watch and the other is looking at the siren we are lost and so therefore the only place where you could fix, there is only one fix point in the center of the universe that we need to look. When you look at the cross you become very-very small because all the differences between me and the other guy disappeared because God is infinite. If you look at the cross we become very-very big because the cross indicates to me God's power and love is poured out for me and I live my life based on that and then when an atrocity like a terrorist coming and killing friends and relatives comes in, I do not look at it from a point of it when people's opinion by looking at it in God's light.

## **2. We Can Run But We Cannot Hide.**

**Jonah 1:3 (ESV) 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 down into it, to go with them to Tarshish, away from the presence of the Lord.**

So here is Jonah, he wakes up in the morning, he goes to the port and he gets on the ship and he goes. We always find a ship to Tarshish all the time.

So if you want to run away from God, you will always find a ship to Tarshish. If you always entertain lust in your mind, one day you will find a bed. If you always harbor resentment and bitterness in your heart, one day you will wind up hurting somebody else. That is how it works in our lives. Obeying God is much harder; obeying God is like you know trying to lose weight.

So the road to Tarshish is very-very easy, but to obey God is hard, but if you don't obey God your life takes a downturn.

Jonah 1:3-5 (ESV) 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 down into it, to go with them to Tarshish, away from the presence of the Lord. 4 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. 5 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

The author is emphasizing the word down. As he runs away from God his life cycle is out of control and he is going downhill all the time.

### **God lets you run**

Romans 1:21-23 (ESV) 21 For although they knew God, they did not honor him as God or give thanks to him, but they became futile in their thinking, and their foolish hearts were darkened.

There is something that happens to us when we actually run from God. Our life comes apart, in fact if you look at our brains we are actually hardwired for sin. There is a part of our brain called the medial prefrontal cortex which actually acts in such a way that it multiplies everything that you do by 2 that is why certain person says, I am the best businessman; I have got a hugest business deals. Because there is a part of the brain called the medial prefrontal cortex it lets us exaggerate what we do.

There was an experiment at Mount Claire University in New Jersey where they actually put electromagnetic waves on that part of the brain to suppress that and once they did that then people started telling the truth. Naturally we are sinful people and we are running away from God all the time. Sin is like radioactive poison, it is not a bullet that hits you and then you die on the spot. Sin kills you slowly by enslaving us and destroying us from inside. Famous evangelist Franklin Graham, he tells his testimony

*“The more I tried to fill my life with things I thought would make me happy, the more empty I felt inside,” “I realized for the first time that sin had control over my life. Franklin Graham was not in charge, but sin was. And there was absolutely nothing I could do in my own power to overcome it”.*

When we leave God he lets you run but you cannot hide because the consequence of sin will form a power over you. We sadly remember the loss of George Michael who died recently and if you look at his life. This is what he writes

*“I have never and will never apologize for my sex life! Gay sex is natural, gay sex is good! Not everybody does it, but ... ha ha!”*

It is very defiantly sinful. So that is 12 years of depression and fear and lots of other stuff.

*I swear to god it was like I had a curse on me, I couldn't believe how much God was piling on at once. There was so much death around me I can't tell you.*

In 2007 he wrote, his life was self-destructive and yet there are parts of his life where he tries to do good. He even paid 25000 pounds for women who have IVF, a random woman. He tipped his waitress 8400 pounds because she had some debts. In the end he died bloated, empty and alone. So you can run but you cannot hide

### **3. There Is Always Love Beneath The Waves.**

Jonah 1:11-12 (ESV) 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. 12 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.”

He knew God was doing something, if he continue to run he would lose his life and God was knocking something to him.

There was a nice fairy tale told of a place, a cottage in the middle of the forest where they lived a witch and this witch would entertain strangers who would come to her house, very hospitable. She would feed them really well until they felt sleepy and then she will usher them into a room where they would lie there and rest overnight and as soon as dawn comes and the sunlight trickles through the window, if they were sleeping on a bed they would be turned into stone and she takes the stone out and puts it with a whole bunch of stone statues outside, the people are still alive but they are entrapped in stone. One day a very handsome man came and suffered the same fate. His night was very uncomfortable, he was tossing and turning, was most uncomfortable. There are bits here and bits there and just before dawn he got up very-very grumpy and there was a servant standing nearby, he scolded her and he proceeded to walk away. He didn't realize that during the night because he was a handsome man, the servant girl fell in love with him and so as he was sleeping she was throwing stones and sticks into the bed, so that he couldn't get a good night sleep and actually that saved his life. Isn't that typical of what God does, when we are running or we are slumbering away he throws sticks and stones into our lives.

This trips out our careers and we sought of think that we are not superman anymore that we are actually vulnerable. Where your life comes apart at the scenes and your livelihood is threatened, that is God throwing sticks and stones into our lives but then there is always love beneath the waves.

(ESV) He said to them, “Pick me up and hurl me into the sea; then the sea will quiet down for you,

Jonah 1:15-17 (ESV) 5 So they picked up Jonah and hurled him into the sea, and the sea ceased from its raging. 16 Then the men feared the Lord exceedingly, and they offered a sacrifice to the



Lord and made vows. 17 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.

When I was young, I had six uncles and all of them would call me Jonah and that is an insult, because you bring bad luck. Jonah is used to be a moniker for people with bad luck but actually what are your odds when people through from the ocean and a fish comes and saves your life. That is not bad luck that is very good luck. It is a complete opposite, what are your odds of being thrown into the sea and being picked up by a whale. So we actually have here a picture of God's relentless love that he does not let you go away, like the servant girl who throw stones and sticks into the bed of the handsome man, God throws stones and sticks upon us. He reaches out to rebellious Israel, rebellious prophets, rebellious Assyrians.

## CHALLENGE

Isaiah 55:6 (ESV) Seek the Lord while he may be found; call upon him while he is near;

Because thousands of years after Jonah Matthew writes these words

*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*

God sent a whale or a fish to pick up Jonah, thousands of years later on God sent his son. So when we are thrown into the waves, when we are thrown into the tempest there is someone there who will pick us up and that is our Lord Jesus Christ he will never let us go.

Hien Pham worked with the famous apologist Ravi Zacharias and in 1971 he was Ravi Zacharias translator because he knew theology as well as English. So he was having a crusade around the country and he translated. Then the Americans left and the whole country collapsed into communism he was sent to jail because he was thought to be a western collaborator because he was associated to American Ravi Zacharias and they tried to reeducate him. So day and night there will be Karl Marx and then there will be communism, all streamed to his brain and he got so tired one day he said to the Lord, I don't think I will pray to you anymore, I will just stop, because it is just I am in prison, nobody cares, nobody gives a dam. The moment he said that the next day he got punished and his punishment was to wash toilets. Hien Pham went into the toilet and the toilet stank, you could hardly breathe and he was cleaning this toilet. There he found a piece of paper with some poo on it and he cleaned it off and on that day he read it. It was a page from the bible, Romans chapter 8, God causes good for all those who love him and are called by him and then he goes down to chapter 8, the bottom part says, what shall separate you from the love of Christ, nothing. And he knew God was speaking to him right that very minute. It is like a whale coming and picking you up when you have almost given up, thrown yourself into the hands of God. The next day he volunteered for another toilet duty because he knew the commanding officer in that camp did his business with the bible every day. And every day he would collect the piece of bible and he would learn and he would grow and God didn't leave him

alone. Now he left prison and he planned to escape from Vietnam and he was planning to boat and as he was planning of the boat four Vietnamese soldiers heard about him and came, they asked him “are you planning to escape, are you getting a boat”. He said, no. He lied at that moment. But as they left he felt a tinge of remorse and guilt because he has told a lie and he said to the Lord, if they come back again I will not lie. The four fellows come back again and they grabbed him again by his collar and they said, are you planning to leave and he said we are planning to leave and they lean forward and said, “Can we come along?” So by God’s grace as they were in the gulf of Thailand outside there, it came to a horrible-horrible storm and they nearly died if not for the four soldiers who were actually sailors, they knew how to handle the ship and they were brought to safety and then he went and migrated. He is business person in USA.

So when you jump beneath the waves there is love.