

Topic	Running for God
Reference	Jonah 3:1-4:5
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Speaker	Arnold Lim

The main theme is running from God, specifically because God gave Jonah a specific task and he ran away. Now we come to chapter 3 and chapter 3 is a shift. He now runs for God.

10 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.

Shouldn't there be a verse 11 because he was running from God and now he runs for God, but there is no verse 11. He runs for God and he is probably the greatest missionary of all time, 120,000 people got saved and he is angry about it. What is interesting about the Book of Jonah is that it is very real for all of us.

Where we are now in our life, are we running for God?

Jonah ran for God and got fantastic results and he was very unhappy about it.

Where we are in our life at your work, in church, have you ever thought about what is God's specific purpose for you?

Some people will tell us, well God's purpose for me involves my talents, God's purpose for me involves my passion but God's purpose for Jonah was something he absolutely hated to do. He completely didn't want to do it and that was God's purpose for him. So this morning, I want to ask something which is for all of us to reflect as we start the year. The question is are you and I running for God and are you running in a way that pleases him and is from your heart.

Now I am going to define running away from God as when you know God wants you to do something and you don't want to do it you run. Jonah runs now for God but his heart is not in it.

- Run to God before you can run for God.
- Running for God or running for yourself ? (especially for Christian leaders)
- Running for God requires companions.
- Running for God and milestones.

### **RUN TO GOD BEFORE YOU CAN RUN FOR GOD**

Jonah was very angry with God but whatever this God used him. God used him and 120,000 people got saved. Matthew tells us

41 The men of Nineveh will rise up at the judgment with this generation and condemn it, for they repented at the preaching of Jonah.....

So we know that the salvation is beyond just physical. What caused that shift for a guy who ran so far away suddenly shift to follow God?

A fish came and swallowed him and Jonah prayed inside it. After a while our life becomes routine, you wake up, go to work, come home, spend time with your family, you do this, you do that, Sundays you go to church then the routine goes on again. Some of us maybe we do a bit more for church, some less. Here is this question. **Are you running in a circle?** Is that what God wants you to do? How you sort of like taken God and fitted him into your schedule?

Jonah was a mature Christian, a prophet and a calamity caused him to move to Nineveh. Your life is normal and then something happens, and it is only when something bad happens we stop and think, suddenly nothing seems important. The first thing we do is we contemplate and we pray, but here is the thing completely missing from Jonah's prayer. It is a great prayer on one hand; on the other hand it is not a very good prayer.

Jonah's prayer is missing anything to do with Nineveh. Running to God requires you to pull up all those things that you struggle with and he didn't do that.

But it displeased Jonah exceedingly, and he was angry. And he prayed to the Lord and said, "O Lord, is not this what I said when I was 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. 4:1-2 (ESV)

There are two prayers in the Book of Jonah. The first prayer is when God saves Jonah and he is really grateful. Here is the counterpoint, now God saves Nineveh and he prays a totally different prayer, his tone completely changes. Jonah was a Bible scholar, he knows scripture, and he is saying that you are a good God for me but not for them. These people are a bunch of cruel merciless evil barbarians. Now how deep does this go? We really have to take a look at the nuances of the text and you will find it is very real.

In our prayer life you can pray and you can pray, give your shopping list to God or you can pray and pull out all the hurt because when you don't God is going to put you in a position where it comes out. God is trying to really bring things out so that Jonah understands something about his self. How much do you think he hates Nineveh?

Nineveh is a city of Assyria, the Assyrians are cruel people but how far does he really hate them.

- "Now, Lord, take away my life, for it is better for me to die than to live." 4:3 (NIV)
- "It would be better for me to die than to live." 4:8 (NIV)
- "And I'm so angry I wish I were dead." 4:9 (NIV)

There are two things happening here.

1. He hates the Assyrian so much he rather die than have them as his brothers and sisters that is what the text is saying. His hate is that deep. May be he saw the horrors inflicted on his family. May be he saw family members dragged up by Assyrians and cruelly tortured before they were killed.
2. He is trying to blackmail God. He is trying to tell God, either I die or they die. He is saying, God you got it wrong. You cannot save them, you want to save them okay kill me.

God gently tells him on two occasions and there is where grace comes in.

- “Is it your *right* for you to be angry?” 4:4 (NIV)
- “Is it your *right* to be angry.....?” 4:9 (NIV)

So here is what God is trying to teach all of us. Knowing God is knowing yourself. We don't know our identity as much as we think we do. Here is a man who is a bible scholar who went to give a message and 120,000 people got saved and he does not know himself, his does not know his identity.

### **Grace + forgiveness = identity**

Now grace in itself is not enough. We see this very clearly because the apostle John when he introduces Jesus into the world in John chapter 1 he uses two words, he says grace and truth and then he expands what truth is. Meaning grace works with truth, if not it becomes what we call hyper-grace. A lot of churches today are teaching that God's grace is for me, I can do whatever I want. God is such a good God, God loves me tomorrow I can sin, and I can do bad things God loves me. What Jonah has is the kind of grace where he is centered on himself.

Forgiveness is an active word of grace because forgiveness recognizes this one thing many churches many churches don't talk about and it sin. We have made a diluted God to just grace and God's loves me but where is sin and the key to sin is forgiveness, why, because I sin and I need God to forgive me and then I remember when people sin against me I must forgive and they two go hand in hand. This is our gospel identity, run to God, hide in him with this. If not you are running with baggage and it does a lot of terrible things.

### **Jonah Issues**

- Unresolved hurt.
- Moral superiority.
- A belief in entitlement.

We all have unresolved hurt, people in the past who hurt us and things and we bottle it right deep inside it, we sort of clock it away and it comes out, it comes out in many ways and because we don't go to God with that it comes out in some other things. I am better than them. See these Assyrians they will burn in hell, I am better than them and because it does that there is a spiraling effect, you then say I deserve God's grace which is really an oxymoron, they don't. You can think this and you can tweak it anyway because all of us have our baggage's, it could be lust, it could be deceitfulness, it could be bitterness, it could be anger. When we don't pull these things out, what happens is we run with baggage and what we have but Jonah didn't have is we have the cross and in the cross we see God's grace, we see God's forgiveness and we focus on that. What God is telling us is that? It does not remove it but it slowly makes it better if everybody you focus on it. If I have someone, whom I really hate, and I bottled it inside but what God is saying, come to him and look at the cross and every day you look at the cross the pain goes off one inch, two inch. Do that year after year and God's grace and His forgiveness becomes you that is what you are as a human being and that is why scripture tells us this. It says, let us lay aside every weight and sin which so easily ensnares us and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us.

**Challenge for us:** What is that sin that entangles you, go to God in prayer tonight and pull it out.

### **RUNNING FOR GOD OR RUNNING FOR YOURSELF?**

You think you are running for God but you may not be. If we look at what we call the protestant church there are thousands of denominations, each church is telling you they are right. Everybody wants to start his own church, after an own church they want to write own book, start an own organization. Now obviously people are doing this, they say they are doing it for God but quite obviously there is a lot of self-actualization going on. Why is it then the church is so split, because everyone says I am running for God but actually they are doing it for themselves. You just cannot tell, you are blind to it.

**The word reached the king of Nineveh, and he arose from his throne, removed his robe, covered himself with sackcloth, and sat in ashes. 3:6**

The king started to repent when he heard what God said, but when what God said came to Jonah. This is what he did,

**Jonah went out of the city and sat to the east of the city and made a booth for himself there. He sat under the shade, till he should see what would become of the city. 4:5**

It is really strange. God already said I am not going to destroy Nineveh, but Jonah is still hoping God will destroy Nineveh. He tried to blackmail God to kill him, may be God will change his mind. That is the extent of his hate. So you can put it in two parts.

1. We have a barbarian king who is repenting and he submits to God's will.

2. There is this righteous church leader who cannot forgive and wants his will to be done.

The question is what I am doing in church now, I say I am doing it for God and God is saying really, are you sure. May be you are trying to bend my will to your will. Sometimes we name our will as God's will. We hijack God's name and say God wants me to do this, but it is us. Now how do we discover this?

Simon Sinek on TED Talks codified something interesting. He codified that the way people work is we should start with a why, but most people start with a what and he has given example of Martin Luther King and how his conviction with God led him to do what he did.

What did Jonah do?

*He went to Nineveh and delivered God's message.*

How he did it?

*With a not so great message.*

Why did he do it?

*He didn't want them saved. He wanted them to die because in his mind they didn't deserve God's grace and forgiveness. So now this is really important.*

We have to understand who Jonah represents. Jonah is representing the average church goer in particular the mature goer, he is a prophet that means this text talks to people like us, preachers, pastors, elders, all of us who think we have got our act together and this is what God is telling us. You begin with the why and you pull out and you realize when you stop and begin with the why your motives aren't so godly.

For example, I run a ministry, ministry doing very well. I am doing it for God but once you unpeel it, how do you do it? I am very structured, I do this and do that but you don't let anyone tell you what to do. None of the elders can come in and say, can you do it. No, no, I have been doing this for the last 10 years. You are territorial on your ministry. Probably most churches have their problem, because the real reason why you are doing it is it makes you feel important as a person. You say you are running for God but in reality part of it is running for self. So this is what we do in prayer. We pull ourselves out.

### **RUNNING FOR GOD REQUIRES COMPANIONS.**

The one thing the Bible talks a lot about is collective of people. It is always about land, nations and cities. It is always all over the Bible. Why, we tend to take our faith and move it to an individual basis, it is me and God. The Bible does not say that. The Bible is about people.

Twice in the Book of Jonah Nineveh is described as the great city,

1:2 go to the great city,

3:2 go to the great city

3:3 Nineveh was a very important city

This important great city was violent. There was another city in the Book of Genesis called Sodom. The entire city was guilty of immorality. The entire city of Nineveh was violent. Jeremiah told the exiles when they landed in Babylon

Jeremiah 29 prosper the city and you will prosper also.

What God is telling us is we don't live in isolation, your environment influences you or you influence the environment. So the collective is important.

Now let's look at this from Israel's perspective.

**God's mercy to Israel in the sight of the nations**

There are two verses; one is in the book of Exodus. This is when the nation of Israel is grumbling and Egypt is hot on their heels and Moses intercedes for the Israelites and says

“Why should the Egyptians say, ‘It was with evil intent that he brought them out, to kill them in the mountains and to wipe them off the face of the earth?’” Exodus 32:12 (NIV)

Locusts have attacked Israel and an army is at the gates and Joel has almost done the same thing. He has told the king, put on sackcloth, same as Nineveh.

“Spare your people, Lord. Do not make your inheritance an object of scorn, a byword among the nations. Why should they say among the peoples, ‘Where is their God?’” Joel 2:17 (NIV).

Case here, Israel is saying prosper us, bring your compassion to us, bring your mercy to us then everybody around will look at us and say, “Wow! your God is real”. What happens when you turn the tables?

When God saw what they did and how they turned from their evil ways, he relented and did not bring on them the destruction he had threatened. 3:10 (NIV).

It is almost parallel to Joel and Exodus, the difference there is Israel didn't accept it. They said, they didn't deserve your mercy. The story of Jonah isn't about Jonah per se. Jonah represents Israel because everyone in Israel hated Assyrians. The irony is this, generations down the Assyrians will take them into captivity and then they will live among the people they hate and God is almost preparing them for that and then the same with the Babylonians. Israel hates Assyria, Assyria has gone today, there is a new Israel and it is called the church. There is a new Assyria and it is us. Nineveh is around you, Nineveh is at your doorstep. Get a bunch of guys together and put them in a chat group. Someone will start a talk about somebody from another

racial group who support another political party; another guy will jump into it, after a while the trail of discussion has only one word in it, hate. That is our Nineveh. It is about collective and if we as a church encourage this we are Israel and we as the leaders don't bring this up we are Jonah.

So was it got to do with running with God?

Running with God starts with the big picture, it is not with me and God, what do you want me to do in my life is all self-centeredness, it is self-actualization. You start with God's plans for the nations. You start with God's big plan and then you go down, you go down and then God along that way will give you his purpose. Here is the reality; we got to learn to breakdown walls. For he is the one that broke down the hostility between Jew and gentile. So what I do, I learn to run with the right crowd.

As we start 2017 I want to encourage that we as a church we run together. In two months' time the church will be unwilling the vision for the church, it is something that we all have been working on a while and I pray that we can run with that vision. That vision just doesn't involve us in a holy huddle, it involves us and the community and the nation.

### **Who are you running with?**

Finding people that encourage you and help you run are never the same people who you want to hang out with. It is about intentional relationship. I am at a point in my life where I meet some people and I have completely nothing in common with them. If I sit down with them I probably feel uncomfortable but I tell myself as a Christian that if I hang out with that person his godliness is going to rub off on me and I tell intentionally I have to know that person and this is what I suggest we do as a church, because as iron sharpens iron so one person does to another. Find people you can run with, they may not be people you want to hang out with but look at their godliness, look at their grace, look at their forgiveness and hangout with them intentionally. You do this in small groups, you do this in prayers, you do this out there and they will rub off on you, if not in the collective the bad things will come on you and you will be running in a wrong direction.

### **Running Requires Milestones**

God is saying just run and He will show me the way but I focus myself on my identity of the cross, I bring people with me to run, I am conscious am I doing it for myself or am I doing it for God and I run and as you run God will whisper in your ears. I want you to encourage you this year as we start 2017 you ask yourself what is God very specific purpose for you in your family, in your work and in your church, very-very specifically and if you are like me, like most of us right now we can't tell it but bring this before the Lord, if not you will be just going around in circles and we don't have a relationship, we have religion.

We come to church and we walk, do this and do that. I want you to encourage you to not make this your Christian life, it is meaningless. Pray, go deep and ask God to pull things out and once you do that get ready He is going to give you His gospel identity, put a cross in front of you and we run. As you run storms will come, storms in life, storms will get worse, you try to do good, people snap at you, you serve in church, they don't appreciate you and you feel lonely and at one point the storm just overwhelms you and it can be any storm and you just feel like giving up and the cross does not seem so real. What do you do?

You get up and you pray and you pray and the storm is still there and then God will say, run and you keep running and as you run he will bring people to run with you and you are accountable to that person and as you follow him you will see that he has gone through what you have done and he is still running and then people look at you and they follow you and they run to and as you run the storm does not seem so bad because you are running together and one day the storm will end and one final day you will reach that finish line.

**I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. 2 Tim 4:7**