



Central Peninsula Church

...to make and mature more followers of Christ

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Rob Hall
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The God Who Will Not Let Go

SERIES: *Jonah*

Have you ever run from God? Come on CPC, let's be honest here, it's just you and me and several hundred people. Have you ever run from God? You know what I mean. God asked you to do something and you didn't do it, you've run from him instead. Maybe you haven't run but you just drifted? You wouldn't say that you have actually run from God but like a surfer in the ocean, you've slowly drifted down the beach in the current and you for whatever reason are not as close to God as you once were; you've drifted. There are some things in God's Word that you haven't obeyed. Maybe He has specifically wanted you to do something but you've ignored him and slowly drifted away. Like Dr. Phil says, "How's that workin' for ya?"

For those of us who have run from God or drifted from Him, here is the question we will answer this morning: What happens when you don't do what God wants you to do? Make sense? How does God respond to our nature to run and rebel from Him? If we were honest, we would all admit to somehow in some way running from God. How does God respond to our disobedience?

Let me give you a few bulletpoints about the Book of Jonah:

Jonah is a handbook on "how not to be a prophet"

- He was the "Reluctant Prophet"
- God! He is mentioned 38 times!
- Great truths about God
- Sovereign—God is in control

God's Mercy, Grace, and Forgiveness— That is why in the Jewish liturgical calendar the book of Jonah is read at the climatic point of Yom Kippur, the Day of Atonement.

- God's pursuit of us even in our disobedience
- God as Savior
- God as Creator
- God's heart for the city

As our view and knowledge of God grows, we become small and He becomes huge and that makes a huge difference in how we live and act.

And to answer those skeptics about Jonah:

"But he answered them, 'An evil and

adulterous generation seeks for a sign, but no sign will be given to it except the sign of the prophet Jonah. 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'" (Matt. 12:39-40); **"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"** (Luke 11:32).

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LESSON 1: GOD SPEAKS.

"Now the word of the LORD came to Jonah the son of Amittai, saying," (Jonah 1:1).

How does God speak? Through His Word (1:1 and 3:1); through circumstances (1:4-16, 1:17-2:10); through people (1:6-15). If you are not hearing God speak, from experience I can tell you that the answer is usually wait.

A year and a half ago I was finishing up seminary. I had all these great opportunities and I thought I was going to plant a church somewhere. Every day my wife and I would pray and ask God, "What do you want us to do? What is your will for my life?" And God was silent. And it was so frustrating! For an entire year I kept asking God. I felt that for that year, God gave me enough light on the path to take one step. But that whole year was great because God taught me to wait on Him. If God is silent, wait; if God is speaking, obey!

LESSON 2: GOD WILL OFTEN ASK YOU TO DO THINGS YOU DON'T WANT TO DO.

"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” (1:2–3a).

Jonah was commanded to go do what prophets do—preach against evil! Why did Jonah run? The real answer will come in Chapter 4 but for now we assume that God’s mission for Jonah was scary:

Preach against their evil

Call them to repentance

Do it alone

He didn’t want to go to Nineveh

It was an impossible task in Jonah’s mind

Why did Jonah not want to go to Nineveh?

It was the capital city of the kingdom of Assyria

Assyria was Israel’s number one enemy

Nineveh was an evil city

Assyrians were known for their terrorism and brutality

The Assyrians were absolutely brutal in not only how they attacked cities but what they did with the captives. They would torture them and be so destructive that, occasionally, when it was rumored that the Assyrians were going to be attacking, sometimes a whole town of people would just commit suicide, because they would rather die that way than experience what was coming. That’s how feared the Assyrian empire was, and they were hated by Israel.

They would go in and they would take over a city. They would kill all sorts of people, then the surviving women would be raped before they would kill them. They would torture some of the kids, and then they would take the husbands, who were prisoners of war, the men, they would take them outside the city and they would skin them alive. Then, once they were skinned, they would actually bury them in the desert’s sand up to their necks. You can imagine the pain they would be in. Then, they would take their tongues and they would pull their tongues out, and they would drive a stake through their tongue so they would go crazy as they were dying of thirst in the middle of the desert.

You can start to imagine the horror of a stake driven through your tongue, and most people would go crazy before they would die. Then once they were dead, they would behead them, and they would take the heads of all of the prisoners of war, and they would make a pyramid of heads outside their city to say to the rest of the world, “This is a city that we conquered.”

When you know that, maybe you have a little more mercy for Jonah when he said, “I don’t want to go

there.” It could have been that he had a relative or a friend or someone who’d actually experienced that. God said, “I want you to do something,” and in his mind, he had legitimate reasons why he didn’t want to obey God. Can anyone relate to that?

Let’s put this into modern day perspective. What if God asked you to preach out against the Nazis during WW II in Berlin and you were a Jew? What about the Taliban? No wonder Jonah ran!

Is there something that God has asked you to do but you don’t want to do it? God speaks, God sometimes asks us to do things we do not want to do and...

LESSON 3: YOU CAN ALWAYS FIND A BOAT SAILING IN THE WRONG DIRECTION.

“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” (1:3b).

Where is Tarshish? It’s in Southern Spain. While Nineveh is due East, Tarshish is due West. Tarshish was basically as far away from Nineveh as one could get during Jonah’s time. An even better question is: What did Tarshish represent? A place of false freedom; a place where the grass is always greener, where we are in charge and God is not; a place of pride and power; a place of more money, perfect kids, the perfect marriage and the perfect life; the place of idolatry. Tarshish is the image of a world that doesn’t exist but we think it does.

Now let me ask again, have you ever run from God? Have you ever tried to run to Tarshish? I sure have! In our running from God and to Tarshish, we can always find a boat heading in the wrong direction!

Even in Jonah’s disobedience circumstances seemed to line up: He was able to make the trip down to Joppa; he found a ship; he had a destination; he had the money (a lot of money!); he most likely had to rent the entire ship!

“When you run away from the Lord you never get to where you are going, and you always pay your own fare. But when you go the Lord’s way you always get to where you are going, and he pays the fare.” --Donald Grey Barnhouse

Even though circumstances look good, you’ll never get to where you are going. That was true for Jonah and is true for us today.

Another question arises from this verse. It says that Jonah wanted to flee from the presence of the Lord. Now,

I am not the smartest guy in the world, but can anyone really flee from God's presence?

"Where shall I go from your Spirit? Or where shall I flee from your presence? If I ascend to heaven, you are there! If I make my bed in Sheol, you are there! If I take the wings of the morning and dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea, even there your hand shall lead me, and your right hand shall hold me. If I say, 'Surely the darkness shall cover me, and the light about me be night,'" (Psalm 139:7–11).

Jonah knew Psalm 139! He was a prophet of God! If he knew that he couldn't run from God's presence, why was he trying? The answer is that Jonah was DELIBERATELY sinning and being DISOBEDIENT!

We do the same thing. "I know this is God's will but..." "I know God has spoken to me but..." "I know this isn't right, but..." It is possible to be out of God's will and have circumstances appearing to work on your behalf.

Be careful. Even in our sin and disobedience, circumstances can seem to line up. You and I can always find a boat heading in the wrong direction. When we resist God and disobey him, God lets us run; however, He doesn't let us go too far or too long.

LESSON 4: GOD MAY SEND A STORM TO GRAB YOUR ATTENTION.

"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" (1:4–7).

God providentially intervened and sent a storm that threatened to capsize the ship. The storm was intense enough to scare the sailors! They cried out to their own gods hoping for relief. When none came, they began to lighten the ship's load by throwing their livelihood overboard. Meanwhile, Jonah was sleeping! The captain wakes Jonah and begs him to call upon his god for rescue.

The sailors cast lots to see who brought the storm upon them and the lot fell on Jonah. Fakes are always found out!

"God never allows his children to sin successfully." –Charles Spurgeon

LESSON 5: YOUR DISOBEDIENCE WILL HURT OTHERS.

"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" (1:8–10).

There is no such thing as private sin. Jonah's sin endangered an entire ship of men! "Sin will take you farther than you want to go, will keep you longer than you want to stay and will cost you more than you want to pay." The sailors ask Jonah a series of probing questions trying to figure out who he was and which god he served. Jonah told them that he was a Hebrew who feared the God of creation.

Wait just one minute. Did Jonah really fear God? No! If Jonah feared God he wouldn't be on a ship headed in the wrong direction; he would already be in Nineveh; he wouldn't be endangering the lives of these sailors. Interestingly enough, that word "fear" is the same Hebrew word for "worship." Real fear of God leads to real worship. That's what the sailors will soon find out. The sailors became even more afraid and blamed Jonah for their situation but they still didn't throw him overboard.

Why were the sailors so afraid? Not the storm any longer. They were afraid of God! They've heard of the God of Israel—Moses, Pharaoh, the Red Sea, etc.

"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'" (1:11–14).

The sailors asked Jonah what he thought they should do with him. Jonah told the sailors to throw him into the sea. Did Jonah really care about the sailors or was he committing suicide? He was committing suicide!

The sailors ignored Jonah and tried themselves to row back to land without any good results. The sailors cared more for Jonah than Jonah did for them! The sailors cried out to God and asked Him to intervene. These pagan sailors acknowledged God, not Jonah! How ironic! While Jonah was running away from God, pagan sailors were embracing him.

“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” (1:15–16).

The sailors threw Jonah into the sea and it grew calm. As a result, the sailors feared God, offered sacrifices, and made vows. They became worshippers of God.

CONCLUSION

I have a question for you: What happens when you don't do what God wants you to do? How does God respond to our nature to run and rebel from Him? Let's summarize those 5 lessons again:

God is still speaking to us through the book of Jonah.

When God speaks, He often asks us to do things we don't want to do.

When we are on the run, we can always find a boat sailing in the wrong direction.

God may send a storm to grab our attention.

Our disobedience will hurt others.

“There is nothing funny or cute about the Jonah story. It is sobering truth about our tendency to rebel and run from God and God's character and nature of mercy and sovereignty” —Eugene Peterson

You can't run from God and when you try, He pursues us even in our disobedience. That is the kind of God we worship.