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**Running Away from God Part 2**

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**Jonah 1:3-17**  
*3 But Jonah ran away from the LORD and headed for Tarshish. He went down to Joppa, where he found a ship bound for that port. After paying the fare, he went aboard and sailed for Tarshish to flee from the Lord.4 Then the LORD sent a great wind on the sea, and such a violent storm arose that the ship threatened to break up. 5 All the sailors were afraid and each cried out to his own god. And they threw the cargo into the sea to lighten the ship. But Jonah had gone below deck, where he lay down and fell into a deep sleep.6 The captain went to him and said, "How can you sleep? Get up and call on your god! Maybe he will take notice of us so that we will not perish."   
7 Then the sailors said to each other, "Come, let us cast lots to find out who is responsible for this calamity." They cast lots and the lot fell on Jonah. 8 So they asked him, "Tell us, who is responsible for making all this trouble for us? What kind of work do you do? Where do you come from? What is your country? From what people are you?"   
 9 He answered, "I am a Hebrew and I worship the LORD, the God of heaven, who made the sea and the dry land."   
 10 This terrified them and they asked, "What have you done?" (They knew he was running away from the LORD, because he had already told them so.)*

*11 The sea was getting rougher and rougher. So they asked him, “What should we do to you to make the sea calm down for us?” 12 “Pick me up and throw me into the sea,” he replied, “and it will become calm. I know that it is my fault that this great storm has come upon you.” 13 Instead, the men did their best to row back to land. But they could not, for the sea grew even wilder than before. 14 Then they cried out to the Lord, “Please, Lord, do not let us die for taking this man’s life. Do not hold us accountable for killing an innocent man, for you, Lord, have done as you pleased.” 15 Then they took Jonah and threw him overboard, and the raging sea grew calm. 16 At this the men greatly feared the Lord, and they offered a sacrifice to the Lord and made vows to him. 17 Now the Lord provided a huge fish to swallow Jonah, and Jonah was in the belly of the fish three days and three nights.  
  
 New International Version*

This summer we’re doing a three week series about that popular Sunday School story of Jonah and the whale. Just to refresh you a bit, Jonah gets word from the Lord to go to one of the three capitals of the evil empire of Assyria called Nineveh and preach against it and thus give them an opportunity to repent before it was too late. The Assyrians were kind of like Hitler’s Nazis in that they had killed off thousands of Jews in a sort of ethnic cleansing exercise. So sending Jonah into Assyria would be like God sending a Jew into Nazi Berlin in 1943 to preach against Hitler.

Of course it would have been a scary assignment of itself, but it was actually Jonah’s disgust for Assyria and his desire that they not repent that made him not want to do that assignment. Let them burn in hell as far as Jonah was concerned. So Jonah blew off God and went in the opposite direction from where God wanted him to go.

*3 But Jonah ran away from the LORD and headed for Tarshish. He went down to Joppa, where he found a ship bound for that port. After paying the fare, he went aboard and sailed for Tarshish to flee from the Lord.*

There’s this little detail in verse 3 that I don’t want us to miss. The text says of Jonah “after paying the fare, he went aboard....” This is actually a big deal. In the ancient world, money was still relatively new. It had been a barter economy, and money was scarce, especially among the people of Israel. Few would have been able to pay their own fare. Apparently Jonah had enough money to buy a ticket for a long voyage, out of his own pocket. That’s one of the dangerous things about money: it makes it easier for us to think we can run away from God because we think we have options.

Jonah boards the ship headed for Tarshish which scholars think is somewhere on the coast of Spain. He thinks he's running away from what he doesn’t want to do. He doesn’t want to provide the people of Nineveh a chance to repent and his plan was actually working. He was proving that one can get away from God...that is until a storm hit.

*4 Then the LORD sent a great wind on the sea, and such a violent storm arose that the ship threatened to break up. 5 All the sailors were afraid and each cried out to his own god.*

Now outside of Israel, the ancient world didn’t generally have the idea of monotheism, one great god. They believed in tribal gods for each ethnic or tribal group. Each tribe prayed to their own god. When the sea is calm, any old name for any old god is okay, but when a storm hits, everything changes, and now you're hoping one of those gods turns out to be real.

*5 All the sailors were afraid and each cried out to his own god. And they threw the cargo into the sea to lighten the ship.*

These were professional sailors, men who didn’t panic easily, but they’re panicking now. In the ancient days when the life span was pretty short, this ship would have been your chance, maybe your one chance for great wealth and by throwing everything overboard it was like selling off your whole future. But not even selling it, giving it away, throwing all your hopes into the sea. That’s how bad a storm it was and that’s how desperate they were.

*5b But Jonah had gone below deck, where he lay down and fell into a deep sleep.6 The captain went to him and said, "How can you sleep? Get up and call on your god! Maybe he will take notice of us so that we will not perish."*

Where was Jonah when the crew was praying to their gods? Ok, so here’s a pagan Gentile ship captain calling the supposed man of God to prayer. That’s a little embarrassing. The prophet was doing what pagans would be expected to do…sleeping when it's time to pray!

*7 Then the sailors said to each other, "Come, let us cast lots to find out who is responsible for this calamity." They cast lots and the lot fell on Jonah.*

Of course the lot would fall on Jonah. When you’re trying to run from God it always falls on you. You try and try but it never fails. That kind of lot always falls on you.

8 So they asked him, *"Tell us, who is responsible for making all this trouble for us? What kind of work do you do? Where do you come from? What is your country? From what people are you?"   
 9 He answered, "I am a Hebrew and I worship the LORD, the God of heaven, who made the sea and the dry land."   
 10 This terrified them and they asked, "What have you done?" (They knew he was running away from the LORD, because he had already told them so.)*

What Jonah said terrified the sailors. Literally it says, *"And the people feared a great fear."*  Up until then they had been praying to a bunch of tribal gods and getting no answers. When they asked Jonah what was going on Jonah introduces them to the one God who created these powerful and frightening seas. That's language these Gentile sailors would know.

Apparently, earlier Jonah had told the sailor why he was going to Tarshish, to run away from his god. But they figured Jonah’s god was just some little tribal god of Israel. They understood Assyrians to have their god, Tarshish has their god, and Israel has their god. They figured he was just running away from his own personal god. Now they believe they’re encountering a much bigger god than they had previously encountered. This was the real thing.

Jonah, while running away from God led this whole crew of rough, crude, sailers to know his god. He turned out to be the right person at the exact right time. That’s how evangelism takes place. If Jonah had gotten on that ship as a successful prophet going on an international tour, and said, "Men of Tarshish, I want you to know, my God is bigger than your god and my God is better than your god what do you think would have happened? They would have blew him off because it would have felt like it was just about ethnic tribal superiority. We have remember that about evangelism. Building humble relationships and being there through the storms of people’s lives is how evangelism works.

Here’s Jonah who initially came to them as a wealthy traveler saying little about about God except that he was running away. One of the reasons they’re going to believe Jonah is that when he did talk about God he did so in the time of crisis as a screw up and not as a savior. He was authentic and genuine in the storm.

This will be the greatest mass Gentile conversion Jonah will probably ever see, and it’s because of Jonah's rebellion that God will use to bring these people to faith. Whatever else this book is, it is not a story about a human plan. The Bible is not a story about a human plan, it’s always about God’s plan.

*11 The sea was getting rougher and rougher. So they asked him, “What should we do to you to make the sea calm down for us?” 12 “Pick me up and throw me into the sea,” he replied, “and it will become calm. I know that it is my fault that this great storm has come upon you.”*

Being thrown overboard in that kind of storm was akin to suicide because the chances of surviving the waves would have been really small. Jonah could have knealt before God right there on the ship and repented. He could have told God he would get on the next ship back and trek over to Ninevah to carry out the assignment. But Jonah was more willing to die than to preach repentance to Nineveh. That’s some pretty serious hatred. That’s also a serious battle with God.

*13 Instead, the men did their best to row back to land. But they could not, for the sea grew even wilder than before.*

Think about this, the lives of the crew are at stake, but they don't want to sacrifice the life of this Hebrew stranger. It's amazing, because again, these are the Hebrew Scriptures. These sailors on the ship of Tarshish have more compassion, more raw humanity on the Hebrew prophet than the Hebrew prophet had on the people of Nineveh. The love of God was nowhere to be found on Jonah.

Part of what the writer is telling us is that you have to be real careful about judging who the good guys are and who the bad guys are, who is on God's side and who is not on God's side. You have to be real careful in making snap judgments about that kind of thing. There is no room for pride and a spirit of superiority or exclusivity or judgmentalism for the people of God.

So the sailors of Tarshish, demonstrating all this compassion and humanity, are willing to risk their own lives, trying to row the boat to shore, but the storm is unrelenting. They return to praying but look at how their prayer changes. Remember, they had already been praying, each to their own god. But notice who they pray to now...

*14 Then they cried out to the Lord, “Please, Lord, do not let us die for taking this man’s life. Do not hold us accountable for killing an innocent man, for you, Lord, have done as you pleased.” "Then they cried out to the Lord, 'Oh Lord, please do not let us die for taking this man's life. Do not hold us accountable for killing an innocent man. For You, oh Lord, have done as You pleased.'"*

*15 Then they took Jonah and threw him overboard, and the raging sea grew calm. 16 At this the men greatly feared the Lord, and they offered a sacrifice to the Lord and made vows to him.*

Imagine this moment. Awesome storm, terrified sailors, runaway prophet, capsizing boat... Don't you wonder what's going on in Jonah's mind? He's going to die. He knows he’s going to die. But he would rather die than do what God was calling him to do because of his deep seated hatred of Assyria.

So they throw him overboard and suddenly the storm passes. Just like that. You can imagine the kind of respect the crew now has for God. That’s some serious evangelism God was doing there.

Many years later Jesus would also be in a boat when a storm hit and that storm was calmed almost as quickly. God is always the master of the weather.

Can you imagine the frightened crew who experienced that boat ride? *"At this, the men greatly feared the Lord."* There's that word again. *They feared the Lord with a great fear, "…and they offered a sacrifice to the Lord."* That's an act of worship. *"…and they made vows to Him,"* as an act of commitment, as an act of devotion. When we have an encounter with God we want to do something for him. What do you think you would do after that kind of situation?

So a boat filled with pagan worshipers becomes a place of worship. The ship to Tarshish became a temple of the Living God. You can imagine that wasn't Jonah's plan. In fact that was the last thing Jonah was planning on. It turns out Jonah thought he was running from God. Jonah thought he could thwart what God wanted to do. It turns out God was at work in ways Jonah couldn’t even begin to dream of. What a God.

At this point in the story, we’ve seen pagan Gentiles worshipping the God of Israel on the ship of Tarshish, while Israel's prophet, the actual man of God, sinking down into the ocean. If you’re familiar with the Sunday school version of the story you know it doesn’t end there. Next week we’re going to get into what you’ve all been waiting for…the belly of the whale. Is it possible for a human being to survive in the acidic waters of a mammal’s belly for three days and do we have to believe that in order to believe the message of the Bible?

Remember, it seems that we always have the freedom to run from God. Running from God can be defined as not doing something you believe God wants you to do. But also remember God always has the choice to go after us as God did with Jonah.

One of the lessons of Jonah is that God loves everyone and wants to give everyone an opportunity to believe in him. God uses storms, droughts, fires, recessions, disappointments of all sorts to communicate with us. But God also uses the words from our mouths. All we have to do is be willing to go to those folks in humility and offer them God. So I close with this: is there someone God wants you to help that you just can’t stand? Tickets for Taschish will be on sale in the lobby today after the service.

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**To learn and encourage one another**

**IF YOU’D LIKE TO KNOW HOW TO**

**GET STARTED IN FAITH**

**1. Recognize that everyone has sinned and fallen short of God’s ideal**

**Romans 3:23-24**

**2. Know that the wages or payment for sinning is death**

**Romans 6:23**

**3. But God loved us so much that He sent His only Son to die for us**

**Romans 5:8**

**4. It is our responsibility to accept Jesus Christ as our Savior and allow Him to become the master of our life**

**Romans 10:13**

**Invite Jesus into your heart by praying something like the prayer below…**

*“Dear Lord Jesus, in many ways I have sinned against you. I am sorry and want to turn from my sinful ways. I invite you to come into my heart and begin to make me like yourself. I commit my life wholeheartedly to you now. Thank you for saving me.”*