

Subject: *Running from the Lord*

Scripture: *Jonah 1:1-17*

Many years ago there was a popular TV series called "The Fugitive" in which the main character ran from the law. People still run from the law. Some people run from their problems. Some people run from their responsibilities. Some run from their enemies. And some people run from God. God makes His will known, but they run away from God's will for their life. Many preachers can testify that they ran from God's calling. Jonah was such a man. It could be that some of us are running from God.

I. WHAT DO WE LEARN ABOUT JONAH?

A. Jonah decided to run from God and His assignment (vs. 1-3)

God told Jonah to go preach at Nineveh, but Jonah decided he wouldn't go, and decided to run the other way. Nineveh was about 500 miles to the northeast of Israel. Jonah boarded a ship for Tarshish, a city of Spain, about 2,000 miles to the west.

Nineveh was a great city. It was great in size and great in sin. God told Jonah to "cry against it." He was to preach a very unpleasant message of judgment. We find out in chapter 4 why Jonah didn't want to go and preach at Nineveh (Jonah 4:2).

B. Jonah found a convenient way to run from God (vs. 3)

He went down to Joppa, a seaport town, and he found a ship going to Tarshish. That's where he wanted to go. He had enough money to buy a ticket and there was enough room for him on the ship. Everything fell into place. He was at the right place at the right time. Did you know that it's usually easier to run from God than to obey Him? It's so easy to get out of God's will. Our sinful nature is prone to stray from God, and the devil will give you all the help you need. Sin happens when an undetected weakness meets with an unexpected opportunity.

C. Jonah paid a heavy price to run from God (vs. 3-4)

Jonah paid the fare. We don't know exactly how much he paid, but it was too much. It cost Jonah dearly. He paid the fare (vs. 3), but that was only the beginning. It cost him time. It cost him his testimony. It almost cost him his life, and it caused innocent people to suffer (the crew of the ship could have drowned).

It will cost you something to obey God, but it will cost you a lot more if you don't. Someone says, "I just can't afford to serve God." You can't afford not to.

Proverbs 13:15 ...the way of transgressors is hard.

The most expensive trip is whenever you get out of God's will and travel your own way.

Did you notice that from the moment Jonah ran from God it was downhill all the way? He went down to Joppa, down into the ship, and eventually down into the sea.

D. Jonah got comfortable while he ran from God (vs. 5-6)

A great storm arose, and the sailors panicked. These sailors had been through many a storm, but this one was really bad. Where was Jonah? He was down inside the ship sound asleep. He wasn't alarmed, but he should have been alarmed. His conscience didn't bother him a bit. What a shame that they had to wake him up. He was comfortable when he should have been convicted. He was sleeping when he should have been praying.

E. Jonah lost his testimony when he ran from God (vs. 7-10)

The sailors asked Jonah who he was and what he did. Who was this troublemaker? So Jonah had to confess his race (I am an Hebrew, a Jew), his religion ("I fear the Lord"), and his rebellion ("I have run from the Lord"). Notice that they asked him about his occupation, but he never told them he was a prophet. I think he was too ashamed.

They couldn't understand why Jonah had done such a thing (vs. 10). After all, he said that the Lord was the God of heaven, the one who made the sea and the dry land (vs. 9).

I believe it's important for us to understand that God will let us run from Him. He gives us the choice to obey or disobey. But God does some things in our lives to get our attention and get us back on track. As we read and study this chapter we understand that the story is not just about Jonah. It's about God. Jonah is not the main character in the story...God's the main character.

II. WHAT DO WE LEARN ABOUT GOD?

A. We learn about God's plan

God had a plan for Jonah to preach at Nineveh. He had a purpose in sending Jonah to that wicked city as the book tells us. The bottom line is that God wanted to glorify Himself through the preaching of Jonah and the repentance of Nineveh. He had a plan. He had a purpose.

B. We learn about God's power (sovereign control)

God's control over the storm (vs. 4, 15). God's control over the lots (vs. 7)

Proverbs 16:33 *The lot is cast into the lap; but the whole disposing thereof is of the LORD.*

Every decision of the lot is made by the Lord. God controls the smallest details. You are not here today by accident.

God's control over creation (vs. 9) – He not only controls the sea; He created it. The Lord sent a great storm, and He made a great fish.

C. We learn about God's presence

Jonah ran from God, but he couldn't outrun God. Jonah understood the Lord's presence, but he didn't understand the Lord's omnipresence.

Psalms 139:7 *Whither shall I go from thy spirit? or whither shall I flee from thy presence?*

The truth of God's omnipresence will either be a great comfort or a great concern to you.

D. We learn about God's providence

The Lord prepared a great fish to swallow Jonah keep him alive for three days and three nights. God didn't send that fish to punish Jonah, but to protect him. The fish was not the problem, but the solution. God will put roadblocks in your way to get your attention. It may be a sickness, a loss of job, trouble in your family, bad grades at school, or something else.

E. We learn about God's patience and goodness

He spared Jonah and the crew onboard that ship. If God chose to kill Jonah and those sailors could you blame Him? We're talking about a rebellious prophet and a bunch of idol worshippers. But instead we see the patience and goodness of God toward Jonah and those men.

Romans 2:4 *Or despisest thou the riches of his goodness and forbearance and longsuffering; not knowing that the goodness of God leadeth thee to repentance?*

The story of Jonah is all about how people respond to the Word of God and the will of God. What has God told you to do? The Bible says that Jonah started running when the Word of the Lord came to him. The Word of God has come to you today. Will you run from Him or will you run to Him?