

Running from God

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 16 February 2020

Preacher: Cedric Moss

[0 : 00] The book of Jonah, I think I just heard myself, chapter 1, and this morning our attention as we continue our sermon series in this little book will be directed at verses 4 through 6.

! A number of years ago when our son Cedric was obviously much younger, he was very upset with his mother one day and he decided that he was going to run away.

And she was upset with him as well and so she decided she would let him run away. And he had his little bag, asked her to help him pack it, pack his little bag. He asked for a dollar and off he went.

And Alexian followed after him. He couldn't see it but he was following after him and she watched him go down the corner, walking slowly with his little bag. And he got to the corner and he got afraid.

And so he walked back, came to her and they both agreed that running away was not a good idea. And of course she then applied the Board of Education to the seat of understanding.

[1 : 17] And since then he's never thought about or tried to run away from home ever since. That story to this day remains a very funny one in our church, in our family.

And we talk about it quite often when we're sitting around and just remembering old times. But I think we all know this morning that most runaway stories are not anything to laugh about.

Most runaway stories have a very sad ending. Some of them have endings of untold suffering, abuse, exploitation, and in some cases even death.

And I think while those of us this morning probably cannot identify with actually running from home, I believe that to some degree or another we all know what it is to run from God.

And in this Old Testament book that we have come to this morning, the book of Jonah, we have a sad story of running from God.

[2 : 28] It's a sad runaway story. It's not a story about a child who ran away from home, but it's a story about a man who ran from God. And I want to submit to us this morning that this is a relevant story for all of us.

Because all of us can and left to ourselves will run from God. And the reality is that there might be some of us this morning who are running from God.

And my prayer is that the Lord will use this sermon to arrest our hearts, to convict us that instead of disobediently running from God, we need to instead run to him and embrace his will and embrace his way.

So please, would you follow along as I read? Last week we considered verses 1 through 3 as we began this series. And we saw how the Lord spoke to Jonah, told him to go to Nineveh, the Assyrian capital, which is a modern-day Iraq today.

And he told him to preach against Nineveh. But Jonah instead rose and went the opposite direction. He went to Tarshish. We're told that he got in a boat at Joppa and he headed to Tarshish.

[3 : 58] And our account picks up this morning in verse 4. But I want to read verses 1 through 3 for continuity. But we're going to just be focusing on verses 4 through 6 this morning.

I hope to leave some time at the end for questions. So if you have any questions, please make a note of them. Now the word of the Lord came to Jonah, the son of Amittai, saying, Arise, go to Nineveh, that great city, and call out against it.

For their evil has come up before me. And Jonah went 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.

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 : 13] 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 us a thought. Sorry, perhaps the God will give a thought to us that we may not perish.

Let's pray together. Father, would you in this moment speak to our hearts in ways that only you can.

Lord, would you enable me to be faithful to your word, not just in text, but also in tone, that I may faithfully communicate the truth and the burden of this passage to your people.

[6 : 28] Lord, would you help us all to hear you as we ought to hear you, that we might obey you as we ought to obey you.

Would you do this, Lord, for your glory and for our good, we pray in Jesus' name. Amen. When we look at the story of Jonah, the story of Jonah really has only two characters.

The seaman that we just read about, the Ninevites that we're going to read about shortly, they're really just side characters. They're not the main characters.

The two characters the book of Jonah is about are God and Jonah. And we saw that God told Jonah to go to Nineveh, preach against them, and Jonah instead decides he's not going to go, and he runs in the opposite direction.

And the last word that we had last week was from Jonah. And so if you want to think of this as a stage play, it's almost as if what we considered last week was scene one, and this this morning that we consider is scene two.

[7 : 52] Jonah had the last word, and now in this passage we see God having the first word. The first word is but.

And it says but the Lord. But the Lord. The author tells us that God himself hurled a great wind upon the sea that was a mighty tempest on the sea, so much so that the ship was in dire circumstances and was threatening to break up.

And so what we see is in scene one, Jonah flees from God, and in scene two, God pursues Jonah. God comes after him.

And this morning what I pray that we see from these few verses we're considering is this. Those who truly belong to God will never finally run from God.

I pray we see this as we look at how determined Jonah was to run from God and how God in his mercy was determined to go after Jonah, pursue him, and resist him in his disobedience.

[9 : 14] And so in our remaining time, I want to share some thoughts about running from God. And obviously my attempt will not be to try to say everything that can be said about running from God, but I want to share two lessons in particular that we can learn from the book of Jonah about running from God.

And they are simply, number one, a running lesson from Jonah, and number two, a running lesson from God. So first, a running lesson from Jonah.

What is the key lesson that we can learn about running from God that we see in the life of Jonah? Here's what we can see. When we run from God is a telltale sign that we have first drifted from God.

Running from God begins with drifting from God. And while this isn't so explicit in the text, I think if we think about it, we're able to see that this is quite obvious.

How does a prophet of God like Jonah get to the point where he openly and defiantly disobeys God?

[10 : 29] God says, you go in this direction and do something. He says, I'm going to go in this direction and I'm going to do quite the opposite of what you have told me to do. Jonah didn't get where he was at the drop of a hat.

No, Jonah drifted to a place of defiance and disobedience towards God. And when we think of the particular circumstances, what the issue was is that Jonah was not caring for his heart the way he should have been caring for his heart.

We saw last week how the issue was that the Assyrians were bullies to the surrounding nations, including the nation of Israel. And the nation of Israel hated them.

Jonah hated the Ninevites who were part of Assyria. and he harbored this hatred in his heart. He didn't deal with it. He didn't repent about it.

And therefore, when God told him, I want you to go to Nineveh and preach, Jonah's heart was so hardened towards the Assyrians because he didn't care for his heart.

[11 : 38] He openly disobeyed what God called him to do. He didn't repent from his prejudice. He did not repent from his hatred towards the Assyrians.

And so, in an ongoing way, Jonah, in his hatred and his prejudice towards the Assyrians, he was drifting from God. And not repenting.

In an ongoing way, Jonah was drifting from God. And so, really, what God was doing, when God spoke to Jonah, God was doing two things.

He was sending Jonah to confront the Ninevites with their sin and call them to repent, showing mercy to them.

But God was also confronting Jonah and he was showing mercy to Jonah, helping Jonah to see his own heart and where his hatred and his prejudice had brought him.

[12 : 38] God was extending mercy to both the Ninevites and to Jonah and really calling both of them to repentance.

But when God sent Jonah, he flatly disobeyed. He didn't say, well, I'm going and just dilly-dallied and didn't do it. He just flatly disobeyed. This is a picture of a man who drifted from God before he ran from God.

We don't see Jonah praying to God about this difficult assignment. We don't see him talking to others, seeking counsel and community.

We don't see Jonah doing any of that. He was all by himself doing his own thing. Jonah was a loner. And brothers and sisters, one of the marks that should mark our lives, one of the features that should mark our lives, those of us who belong to Christ, is community.

Following Christ is done in community. It is a personal walk. Yeah, people say, yeah, it is a personal walk. But it's a personal walk that's lived out in community.

[13 : 56] It's not lived out in isolation. The Lord puts the lonely in families. And yet, we see Jonah all by himself. Not praying, not seeking the counsel of others.

He is drifting from God. And the truth is, when we, we're no different from Jonah, when we drift spiritually, it's just a matter of time before we disobey openly.

I think the most vivid picture, when we consider these three verses, the most vivid picture of where Jonah was and how far Jonah had drifted from God is the ability of Jonah to be able to sleep in his disobedience and in the storm.

The fact that Jonah is able to sleep when seasoned seamen, men who, the mariners on the sea, they were frightened, so frightened that they got up and they started praying.

And so, when we look at verse 5, this is an almost comical picture. You have pagans praying and you have a prophet sleeping.

[15 : 18] And not just any prophet, a prophet who has disobeyed God, run in the opposite direction, doesn't care about what God told him to do, and he has gone to sleep. This ship is about to break up and Jonah is able to sleep in the midst of that.

That is a picture of a man who has drifted far from God. Now, I want to encourage us this morning not to allow the severity of Jonah's drift from God, his disobedience to God, to cause us to miss seeing ourselves.

We may not have gotten on a boat or a plane, but how easy is it for us to drift from God by not taking seriously our relationship with him, by not taking time daily to fellowship with him, to commune with him, reading his word, praying, cultivating biblical friendships with brothers and sisters, those who hold us accountable, gathering as we are gathering this morning in our corporate worship.

When we don't avail ourselves of the means of grace that God has given to us, we will drift with our best intentions, the most holy among us.

we need these means of grace that God has given to us and we cannot rest on our laurels as it were because if we try to do so, we will drift.

[17 : 04] All of us, every single one of us is capable of drifting so far away from God that we openly disobey God and we do like Jonah, when God tells us to do one thing, we do something quite the opposite.

He might tell us, go and mend that broken relationship, go make that difficult phone call, suffer for my sake, make a sacrifice in this situation, serve me, go the extra mile and show what it is like to live in the kingdom of God.

But instead, like Jonah, we run, we disobey. we didn't just get there overnight. Again, we may not get on a boat or get on a plane, but we run.

We may leave a job, we may change careers, we may end our marriage, we may break friendships, we leave a church, and it's all because we have drifted to a place of wanting to do our own will and not God's will.

Friends, drifting is a serious thing. And drifting can get us to a place of open defiance to what we know to be true, to what we know to be right, just as Jonah.

[18 : 34] And I can tell you something that in my many years of pastoring, one of the most heart breaking experiences to have is to sit with someone who has drifted so far from God that they are openly and defiantly disobeying God and it doesn't seem to faze their conscience, just like Jonah, who is able to sleep in the midst of disobedience and sleep in the midst of a storm that God brought to get his attention.

let me quickly say what I am not saying. I'm not saying that everyone who leaves a job or ends a relationship or leaves a church has drifted from God and is in disobedience.

I'm not saying that for a moment. We know that not everybody on the ship going to Tarshish was disobedient like Jonah. So I'm not saying that at all. But my point is that sadly in some of those decisions and some of those actions some are running from God because they're refusing to submit to what God has called them to do.

And when we run from God it's a telltale sign that we have been drifting from God. And so let me ask you this morning in what ways might you in this moment in this season of your life be running from God?

Conscious of what God is calling you to do but in your own way you're not doing that and so there's this drift that is actually happening.

[20 : 25] Maybe you're neglecting your soul. Maybe you're neglecting God's word and neglecting prayer and neglecting other means of grace that God has given to us. And there's a drifting that is taking place.

Are you just not mindful of where that can actually lead? It's almost a sense that I could manage this. Friends we can't manage sin.

Sin is too big for us. God never designed us to manage sin. Is there any sinful act or practice that the Lord might be convicting you about in this moment in this season and you're just not addressing it?

Maybe unforgiveness. are you harboring it? Are you giving yourself license in an area where you know there should be no license?

if you answer yes to any of those questions I pray that you would hear this sermon as God's call to you to repent.

[21 : 38] God's call to you to draw near to him because if we don't we will drift. We will drift spiritually and we will soon disobey openly.

one of the other thoughts that comes to mind as I consider Jonah is no doubt if we could interview him Jonah really thought he knew better than God.

I mean why would God want to extend mercy to the Ninevites? And sometimes aren't we the same way when God tells us to do one thing we don't want to do it and behind that what we're saying we never say it out loud what we're saying is we know better than God we're wiser than God but we don't.

It's quite interesting that there are some details in the book of Jonah that the author is silent about. For example we don't know the length of time that elapsed between when God first spoke to Jonah and told him to go to Nineveh and preach and when he got to the boat and the tempest came on the water we don't know.

But here's what we do know looking ahead a little bit in chapter 4 and chapter 4 verse 2. Here's what we read. It says, And he, meaning Jonah, prayed to the Lord and said, O Lord, is not this excuse me, is not this what I said what I said when I was yet in my country?

[23 : 39] That is why I made haste to go to flee to Tarshish, for I know that you are a gracious God and merciful, slow to anger, abounding in steadfast love, and relenting from disaster.

God. So Jonah's having this conversation with God when he was in his home country, and he's basically saying, you know, I'm not going to go because if I go and I preach to them, you're going to forgive them.

I don't want you to forgive them. I know how you are. And God was no doubt appealing to Jonah, saying to him, no, you go and preach to them. Again, we don't know the length of time.

We don't know how long Jonah wrestled with this before he decided to do as he did. But God was no doubt appealing to Jonah, but to no avail.

Jonah boarded his runaway ship, went to sleep, and so God, in mercy, had to take further actions to get Jonah's attention.

[24 : 40] And this brings me to my second lesson that I want us to learn from this book about running from God. It's also my final point this morning, a running lesson from God.

The running lesson we learn from God is this. When we in our disobedience run from God, God in his mercy comes after us. When we in our disobedience run from God, God in his mercy comes after us.

And you know, as stormy and as messy as things became for Jonah, as difficult as they became for Jonah, here's the wonderful truth that Jonah was experiencing.

When we in our disobedience run from God, God in his mercy comes after us. That's what Jonah was experiencing in the midst of all the chaos, in the midst of the storm, in the midst of the difficulty, where their very lives were threatened.

That was the mercy of God coming. Jonah. And that's good news. That's good news because God does not leave his people to themselves.

[25 : 58] And here, when I talk about we, when I say that when we in our disobedience run from God, God in his mercy comes after us, I'm not using the universal we.

I'm using what we can call the redemptive we, the people of God, those who belong to God. Even in our disobedience, we cannot finally run from God.

Now, left to ourselves, we can and we will. But again, God does not, in his mercy, leave us to ourselves. He has promised that he will preserve and keep those who belong to him until the final day, so that even though we may run from him, that running will not be final.

Why? Because God in mercy pursues us, just as he pursued Jonah. When you think about it, how many of us enjoy being defied, in particular by our children?

I think we all would say we don't enjoy that at all. Well, imagine defying the God of the universe. What reaction really does Jonah justly deserve?

[27 : 29] What does he deserve justly? Jonah deserves one thing and that's death. For openly defying the God of the universe.

But God doesn't give him death. God gives him mercy. Notice in verse four, that the author doesn't tell us that the ship encountered bad weather.

He doesn't tell us that. He doesn't say they encountered some bad weather. They ran into some bad weather. Notice what it says in verse four. It says, but the Lord hurled a great wind upon the sea.

This is about God. This is what God is doing. Jonah wanted to go to Nineveh and God in his mercy is pursuing him.

God in his mercy is resisting him. And what we see God doing is God is extending to Jonah the same mercy that Jonah did not want God to extend to the Ninevites.

[28 : 46] And notice how we can be blinded by sin and we can think we're going in the right direction. If you notice Jonah's downward progression, starting in verse one, he went down to Joppa, he went down into the innermost part of the ship.

Looking ahead in verse six of chapter two, he went down into the bottom of the ocean when he was thrown overboard. And blinded by his sin, Jonah was not able to see that he was headed downhill.

He thought he had a wonderful plan for his life. So much so he went to sleep and in essence was saying to the sailors, look, wake me up when we get to Tarshish. But our plans concocted in disobedience, they never work out as we planned them to.

Not finally. And thankfully so because of God and his great mercy. He in his mercy pursues his people and he resists his people.

He is patient. He is long suffering. He gives us room to repent. He appeals to us. He warns us. And when we don't heed, he pursues us.

[30 : 06] But he pursues us in his mercy. But part of our problem is we don't see God's mercy in the storm.

We don't see that God in mercy was preventing Jonah from reaching his destination of disobedience. But God in mercy does rain on our sin parades.

And sometimes in the moment we are so blind to rejoice and thank God for doing so we complain. And we are angry as Jonah we see later was.

you know the sober biblical truth that we are encountering as we consider how God pursues those who belong to him?

The sober biblical truth is that God does not pursue everyone who is living their lives in disobedience with their backstip.

[31 : 13] He doesn't do that. It's a witness of scripture. Because if he does the God of the universe gets what he wants. No one can stay his hand.

No one can say what have you done. No one can question him. We sang about it this morning. He is God. And that's the God of the Bible. Not the God of culture. Not the God of popularism.

It's the God of the Bible. people. And although this might seem somewhat controversial, I want to say to you again, this is a witness of scripture. And let me just give you an example to illustrate the point.

The apostle Paul, before he was converted, was called Saul. He was a Pharisee. But you know, Saul was not the only Pharisee who was persecuting the church.

There were other ones. Yet God pursued him. Knocked him off of his horse. Blinded him by the bright light. And this man, who was one moment going with letters to persecute the church, responds and says, God, what would you have me to do?

[32 : 26] God, in his mercy, particularly pursued the apostle Paul. And in his mercy, arrested him in his disobedience.

disobedience and in his sin. And so while God does not pursue and resist everyone in their disobedience, he does pursue those who belong to him.

And for that we should be grateful. Perhaps as you're listening to this sermon now, or maybe by recording, you might be aware of what you may call unexplained adversity, resistance in your life, in the course that you're on, dead-end streets, nothing seems to work out, unexplained setbacks, storms of life.

Could it be, I'm not saying that it is, but could it be that as God was in mercy, pursuing and resisting Jonah, God in his mercy is pursuing and resisting you.

And friend, if you could see that this morning, that is the kindness of the Lord. That is the kindness of the Lord. He disciplines sons. He disciplines those whom he loves.

[33 : 49] Scripture says it is bastards who are not disciplined. It is bastards who are allowed to go and do whatever they want. But those who belong to the Lord, he will discipline, he will pursue in their disobedience.

He pursues in his mercy. And so those are the two running lessons that we can learn this morning from Jonah, the book of Jonah.

First, when we run from God, it is a telltale sign that we have drifted from God. And second, when we in disobedience run from God, God in his mercy, comes after us.

But for those of us who have trusted in Jesus, those of us who follow the Lord and take seriously how Jesus has told us we are to read our Bibles, we looked at this last week, the account in Luke 24, the two men on the road to Emmaus, how Jesus opened the scriptures to them and showed them that all the Old Testament scriptures pointed to him, they were about him.

when we read the book of Jonah, mindful of that truth, mindful that this is ultimately about Jesus, I think if we have any awareness of the gospel accounts, as we read about Jonah, this prophet who was below deck, asleep in the midst of the storm, we should remember an occasion when one who was greater than Jonah, Jesus Christ, was asleep in the stern of a ship in the midst of a storm that was similarly violent, where seasoned fishermen were terrified, so terrified, that they feared for their lives and they went to him and they said, Lord, do you not care?

[35 : 52] The gospel writers, Matthew, Mark, and Luke record this for us. And while we see Jonah as one who did not care, the greater one, the one who was greater than Jonah, he did care.

Jesus was enjoying sweet sleep in the midst of a violent storm because he was obediently pursuing the father's will, not his own will, and not only that, he was also God of the storm.

He was God over nature. And so he had the authority to quench and quell the storm. In Jonah we see the disobedient sleeping prophet, and we see the need for another prophet.

We see the need for a more perfect prophet, a better prophet, one who would obey God's will. That need was fulfilled in Jesus Christ, the obedient prophet who slept in the storm because he had authority over the storm.

And just as the disciples on that day faced those storms, that storm, today when his disciples face storm, he similarly is able to speak to them and quell those storms.

[37 : 14] And so we can trust him. We can trust him and obey him in whatever he calls us to do. We don't need to run from him. We need to run to him.

If you're here this morning as an unbeliever, then largely you've been overhearing our conversation. You've been overhearing words that are primarily directed to the people of God.

But that doesn't mean that God has nothing to say to you. The matter of fact that you may be here this morning or listening to this recording is evidence that God has so ordained it, that you should be here, God has so ordained it, that you're listening to the recording, and he's speaking.

He's already spoken by ordaining that you should be able to hear this sermon, but he's speaking even now. I think the semen in this account of Jonah, there's a lesson that if you're an unbeliever could learn from what we see them doing.

Because what we see them doing is so typical of what the world does. These men probably before the storm took place, they were doing all manner of things, focused on all other kinds of things, but in the midst of the crisis, they began to call out to their God, to their idol gods, to save them, to rescue them.

[38 : 54] And it's a vivid picture of even those of us who live in a country like the Bahamas, and we may say that we don't worship idols and false gods, and we may even call on the God of the Bible.

It's a picture of how we view God. We view God as a God who is only there as a spare tire to help us through our problems and help us through our crises in life. So anytime you call on his name.

I've done prison ministry, and we had a man who did prison ministry and trained us, and he helped us to understand something called jailhouse religion.

It is men and women who while incarcerated tend to call out to God, but is not calling out to God to be lord of their life.

It's calling out to God to get them a shorter sentence, to give them an easier way just to help them through the crisis. I'm saying to you this morning, if you're here as an unbeliever, you're listening to this recording, don't approach God that way.

[40 : 06] He is not an idol. He is not second fiddle. He is not a spare child. He is the God of the universe. And because he is God, we give him all.

All of our life, all of our heart, everything. He wants your life. He wants your allegiance.

He wants your obedience. He wants your total worship. And so I encourage you today, turn to Christ.

Turn from sin. Repent. Jesus says, all who come to him, he will in no wise turn away. And so if you come to him and trust in him, he will be your savior.

The savior you need before a holy God. And so my prayer to you, for you, is that you will turn to Christ. Let's pray.

[41 : 11] Father, thank you for your word. We trust you to use it to speak to all of our hearts. Convict us where we are drifting.

Convict us where we are becoming cold-hearted and not recognizing that we are on a path if we don't repent, open defiance and open disobedience.

But thank you that even in this moment you are pursuing us and calling us to draw near to you. And I do pray, Lord, that if there are any who are present or listening to this recording who do not know the Savior, that you would grant the gift of repentance.

I pray in Jesus' name. Amen. Amen. If there are any questions on any aspect of the sermon this morning.

No questions? All right, let's stand for our closing song.