

Man on the Run

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[0 : 00] Zimk Thank you.

Thank you.

All right. If you got your Bible, go to Jonah chapter 1. Jonah chapter 1. If you do not know where the book of Jonah is, you'll remember in our study through the book of Exodus, one of the things that God gave Moses on the mountain was the table of contents.

And so feel free to use that if you need to to find the book of Jonah. That is perfectly fine. Jonah chapter 1. We are starting a brand new series, as we've been talking about for the last few weeks, through the book of Jonah.

And the reason why we're doing this book is because we're kind of in that church calendar time frame where we're getting ready and prepared and the buildup for Easter.

[1 : 44] And as I was thinking about what the Lord would have me talk about for Easter, you know, one of the things that jumped out at me is in Matthew chapter 12. Listen, in Matthew chapter 12, Jesus is asked by the leaders, show us a sign that authenticates your ministry.

Give us a sign that shows us you really are the Messiah. And of all the things that Jesus could have said, what he did say was, I'm not going to give you a sign, but one.

And that's the sign of Jonah. That there is something here about the story of Jonah, which I love.

There's something about the story of Jonah that points us to the very ministry of Jesus and specifically his resurrection.

And so today we're going to dive into the story of Jonah that's going to teach us, shocker, a lot about the gospel. No one should be surprised at that at this point.

But there's something here in this story that gets us ready for what we learn through the resurrection of Jesus Christ. It's all about, this story is all about sin and grace and mercy and redemption and running away and starting over and full of images all over the place that point us to Jesus.

[3 : 08] So let's dive in first three verses this evening of Jonah chapter 1. Please stand if you're able to do so as we honor the reading of God's word. Jonah chapter 1, beginning at verse 1.

It says, Let's pray.

Father, we thank you for this time tonight to study your word. Lord, we're grateful every time we get to come together and learn from your word. Speak to us tonight as we will find ourselves in these verses.

And Lord, just show us your grace and your mercy, not only to Jonah, but to each and every one of us. We pray in Jesus' name and God's people said, Amen. You can be seated.

Cruising down a two-lane Montana highway, all Braven Glenn could see was the open road and the evening sunset. Braven was on his way to pick up his girlfriend.

[4 : 34] And he hadn't had his driver's license very long. In fact, he'd only been 17 for about three months. And for the most part, Braven was a very conservative driver.

His friends would even make fun of him, of always going so slow. In fact, he was almost always driving, this will be new to some of you, below the speed limit.

And they would joke him about this. They would tease him about this. But lately, Braven had not been himself. He had recently lost his grandmother just a few weeks earlier.

And Braven was really struggling with this reality. And on the evening of November the 20th, the night that he's driving to pick up his girlfriend, there's a car in front of him going 60 miles per hour in a 70 mile per hour zone.

Normally, he would just stay in line, coast just a distance away from the driver in front of him. But on this particular night, Braven decided to slam on the gas and fly around the vehicle in front of him.

[5 : 47] And that's when he saw what no one wants to see, that thing that makes your blood pressure spike, blue lights flashing in the rearview mirror.

The car that Braven had just blown past was a police officer. According to the police reports, Braven passed the officer at 90 miles per hour.

His heart began to race. You know that feeling you get when a police officer is going to pull you over? It doesn't even necessarily mean if you've done anything wrong, you just get nervous about what's going to happen.

And those moments that seemed like eternity, but they were just a few seconds Braven had a choice to make. Do I pull over? Or do I run?

Do I run? Unfortunately, Braven chose the latter. Instead of pulling over, he put on the gas, and the chase began. He darted down a dark highway trying to escape the officer, and then he noticed just up ahead, there was a railroad track, and he thought, sure enough, that's where he could make the chase end.

[7 : 00] And he was right. Only it wouldn't be because he would lose the officer. It's because he'd be struck by an oncoming train.

All because Braven chose to run. What is it about the human condition that runs?

What is it about our own heart that loves to run? And you would say, not me, pastor. I'm a good citizen. I would never run from the police. And I bet you that's probably true for a lot of you in this room.

But even if you may not run from the police, you run from something. Every single person in this place runs from something. For you, you may be running from a relationship.

Some of you, you may be running from a conversation that you do not want to have with that person. Some of you may be running from the fear of danger or something that's threatening you.

[8 : 03] Some of you, you may be running from something in your past. We're about three weeks or so from tax day. Some of you are figuring out a way how you can run from the IRS. But even more than those things, every single one of us at one point in our life has run from God.

And some of you, again, would push back and say, I don't run from God. I'm a good Christian, as if there was such a thing. And that's because we tend to think that running from God means some commit of great act of rebellion or acting out in some strong-willed defiance.

But running from God, listen to me, running from God is a lot more subtle than you think. And it's exactly how the book of Jonah begins.

Look at the verses again. It says, the word of the Lord comes to Jonah. It says, arise, go to Nineveh, that great city. Call out against it, for their evil has come up before me.

But Jonah rose to, say it, flee to Tarshish, from the presence of the Lord. He goes down to Joppa, finds a ship to Tarshish. He pays the fare to go with them to Tarshish, away from the presence of the Lord.

[9 : 27] The story of Jonah begins with Jonah on the run. If there's a soundtrack that's playing behind this story, it sounds something like this.

There is no person in this place that has ever had a preacher use Molly Hatchet in a sermon.

And that, you should be really thankful for the pastor you have. Amen. All right. That's how the story begins. Jonah is a man on the run. But this is not just any man.

This is a prophet of God who has been given a direct word from God. The very first phrase of the very first verse says, the word of the Lord came to Jonah.

Jonah has a clear, undeniable, clear message from God. How many of you in your life have ever prayed for something like that? God, would you just write it in the sky?

[10 : 40] Would you give me a direct message? Would you send me a text? Would you copy me in an email? And the reason why we are so obsessed with getting a direct word from God is we wrongly assume that if God gives us a direct word, we will be guaranteed to obey it.

That is not how it works. In fact, biblically, listen to me, biblically, most of the people who get their question answered wish that God would have kept his mouth shut because they don't like the answer.

They don't like the direct word that comes from God. The Bible is full of examples of people that God directly spoke to and their response was to run.

Here's just a few. Adam and Eve, I mean, could you get more of a direct word than don't eat of that tree? And yet, even though they had that direct word from God, what did they do?

They ate and then they ran and hid. David, David knows the power of God. He'd seen God provide victory in so many ways and yet when he was facing Saul, he ran out of fear.

[11 : 56] The disciples, they not only had a direct word from God, they had the word of God in the flesh. They witnessed Jesus' own authority and yet when the Roman soldiers came that night in the garden, notice what Matthew tells us here in Matthew 26, that at that hour, Jesus said to the crowds, have you come out as against a robber with swords and clubs to capture me?

Day after day, I sat in the temple teaching and you didn't seize me, but all this has taken place that the scriptures of the prophets might be fulfilled. Then all the disciples left him and, say it, fled.

The Bible is full of examples of people who had direct words from God, direct access to God, in the very presence of God, and yet they still ran.

This is a metaphor of unbelief in Scripture. That disobedience and unbelief is often portrayed and certainly the case in Jonah as running.

It's running from faith in God, running from trusting God and His Word. Now what is it about Jonah's running here that should catch our attention and what is it that speaks into our own running?

[13 : 21] First, is that Jonah's running was insulting. Jonah's running was insulting. Here, Jonah has been invited to join God on the mission of God.

Do you know how awesome that is? Anybody with me tonight? God, who... I've come off the stage here. I've had two weeks break, so I'm fired up. Listen, God who does not need you has chosen to use you.

And do you know what an insult it is when you turn to God's gracious offer to join Him in His mission and you say, no thank you.

It is defiance against the divine. Jonah here is defying God's divine call. Oh dear friends, it is one thing to ignore your boss.

It is one thing to disobey your parents. It's one thing to defy the police, but there is no greater insult than being given a direct word from God only to look at His face and say, no thank you, I will do something else.

[14 : 30] Running here should be seen not as a character flaw, but as an offense to the gracious invitation of a holy God.

Amen? It is insulting. Secondly, it is intentional. The text tells us here that Jonah flees to Tarshish. He flees to Tarshish.

Now, it only takes just a moment to look at a map to be fully aware of what Jonah is doing here.

Notice the map here. You're going to be able to see Jonah is here in, or he's close to Joppa.

That's where he goes down to. But Nineveh, okay, if you remember your direction, is what direction? Talk to me. East. East. East. Well, it's kind of north, but it's mostly east, okay?

Some of you are like, never eat shredded. I don't know, right? It's east, and where is Tarshish? It's west. It's literally the polar opposite.

[15 : 29] It's the exact opposite direction of where God tells Jonah to go. In other words, Jonah is doing something here intentional. He is not directionally challenged.

It's not as though he has bad GPS. Members of the Mercer Island dive team on a mission. Get to a Mercedes submerged in the slough.

It's an SUV recovery in murky water. Soon, they're all hooked up, and after several starts and stops, the tow truck does its work, slowly pulling the vehicle to dry land. How this all happened is quite a story of getting lost and apparently bad GPS directions.

In sitcom parodies of something like this, and to actually see it surprising. Bellevue fire officials admit this can be a confusing area in the dark.

I don't know why they wouldn't question driving into a puddle that doesn't seem to end. Women drivers. Anyways, anyways. Jonah, oh, really?

[16 : 30] That was a joke. Jonah here is intentionally going the opposite direction. And listen, this is not just a Jonah problem. This is an our problem.

You do realize that God has given you a direct, clear word. That we have in God's word some very direct commandments. I'll give you just a few. God has clearly commanded us to forgive.

And many of us refuse. God has clearly commanded us to be baptized. And some of you haven't.

God has clearly given us a commandment to share our faith.

And oftentimes, we don't. God has given us clear commandments about being generous with our resources. Or being committed to a local church. In other words, there are numerous, clear, direct

words from God that we have intentionally done the opposite to.

Amen? Notice it here on the screen. We spend most of our time complaining about the gray areas of God's will while neglecting the black and white.

[17:40] Amen? Like, God, I want to know about this relationship or this job offer. Like, why won't you speak to me? Why won't you give me a clear, direct word? And I think God wants to say to us, well, you haven't even paid attention to the ones I have given you.

You've intentionally done the opposite of the very things I've already spoken about. This was an insult. This was intentional. And thirdly, Jonah is indifferent.

The text tells us that he buys a fare. Now, keep in mind, this is the 700s B.C. You don't have frequent flyer miles.

Jonah is not making this trip to Tarshish on credit card points. A trip to Tarshish would have not only been a long journey, it would have cost an enormous amount of money.

Many commentators note that it would have been at least a year's salary just to take this kind of trip. Go back to our map here and you'll notice, look how much, who knew a map will preach?

[18:46] But this will preach. Do you realize, do you realize, there would have been a whole lot less cost just going where God told Jonah to go? Somebody say, preach, preacher.

There would have been a whole lot less cost if you would have just gone to Nineveh, but instead, you decided to go your own way. You intentionally decided to go the opposite direction, and as a result, you incurred a whole lot more cost than you ever would have had to do.

Are you with me? Listen, this is not God taking Israel the long way like we saw in Exodus. This is Jonah going the long way on his own.

Why? Because he doesn't give a rip. He doesn't care what it cost him. He doesn't care how expensive it is. He's going to do his own thing regardless of what it costs.

And fourthly, his running is irrational. It's irrational. What is Jonah specifically running from? Go ahead and look at your verses. Go ahead and look at the verse. What does the text tell us Jonah is specifically running from?

[19:59] Is it his ex-girlfriend? Is it the IRS? Is it having to watch another Ben Affleck movie? Like, what is he running from? What does the text tell us?

Verse 3. But Jonah rose to flee to Tarshish, say it with me, from the presence of the Lord. He goes down to Joppa, finds a ship going to Tarshish, pays the fare, and went down to go with them to Tarshish away.

Say it with me. From the presence of the Lord. Now this is not literal. What I mean by it's not literal is, listen, Jonah is an Orthodox Jew who is well aware of God's omnipresence.

The reason why it's said this way is so that the reader will stop and say, silly prophet, you can't run from God.

How do you run from the God who is everywhere? Are you tracking with me? How do you run from the God whose presence is everywhere?

[21:03] Like he's not in Tarshish too. In other words, it's silly to think that you can hide or run from God. In fact, I have been able to find video footage of what it looks like when we try to hide from God.

Yeah. How do you seek? One, two, three, four, five, six, seven, eight, nine, ten.

Isn't that the best? Right? That's the best. And that's what you look like hiding from God. She thinks she's so smart over there in the corner. I'm never going to be found here.

Hello, I see you. You're not able to run from God. Here's the point. And it'll preach. Jonah's disobedience has become so deep, he's become irrational.

He thinks he can do what he knows he can't do, namely, run from the omnipresence of God.

[22:14] Jonah's running here from God's calling as an insult. He's doing it intentionally. He doesn't give a rip what it costs. And it's led him to a point of being irrational, even thinking he can run from God's presence.

And the reality is, faith family, you and I are Jonah. We are Jonah. There are numerous ways. I've mentioned some already, but there's many more. There are numerous ways that you and I have intentionally refused God's gracious offer.

We have irrationally thought that we could do better our own way. We have been indifferent to what our decisions might cost us. And the question we ought to be asking is why? Why does Jonah run in the first place?

Why do we run in the first place? Well, I could give a lot of reasons as to why. Maybe you could come up with a lot of reasons as to why Jonah might run. Maybe Jonah needs to process things. How many of you are the type that you like to think through things before you make a major decision? Show of hands. Anybody like that? Because we have a whole lot of spontaneous people in the room or people that just don't like to raise their hands, right?

[23 : 22] Maybe you're the kind of person that you like to process things. Maybe Jonah's that way. Maybe like Moses. We spent so much time in the book of Exodus. Remember, Moses resisted for a while because he didn't think he was equipped for the task.

Maybe that's Jonah's problem. Maybe like Peter. You remember Peter ran in the courtyard when he was confronted about his being with Jesus and he did so because he was afraid.

Maybe that's why Jonah's running. Well, fortunately, we don't have to speculate why Jonah is running from the presence of the Lord, from the Word of God.

A little bit of context here gives us the answer. What is Jonah's surname? Do you see it there in the text? Jonah, son of Amittai.

Son of Amittai. That's identifying him as the prophet, listen, that served in the northern kingdom under the reign of King Jeroboam II.

[24 : 21] King Jeroboam, by the way, was a very wicked and idolatrous king. But under his reign, even though he was a wicked king and even though Israel was acting wickedly at the time, Israel prospered.

You know, sometimes God is just gracious to us in prosperity even when we're in disobedience, right? And God did that for the nation of Israel during the reign of King Jeroboam II.

It's 2 Kings 14 if you want to read it. Israel's economy is booming. And Jonah is prophesying that through their military efforts, Israel's borders are going to be expanded and they're going to be brought to a place like the golden days of King Solomon.

This made Jonah a very popular preacher as you can imagine. Israel loved his message of health, wealth, and prosperity. Jonah was doing all the interviews.

He was signing all the books. Jonah had the most downloaded sermons in all of iTunes. His ministry and Israel's economy were at an all-time high until something happened.

[25 : 37] After 150 years of God's warning Israel of their idolatry, judgment comes. And judgment comes through a nation.

That nation was the nation of Assyria. And what is the capital of Assyria? It just so happens to be Nineveh. God's judgment comes through this nation.

And what happens with it? Not only is Israel captured, she is ruthlessly persecuted. Another prophet during this time, the prophet Nahum writes, Woe to the bloody city, all full of lies and plunder, the crack of the whip, the rumble of the wheel, galloping horses and bounding chariot, horsemen charging, flashing sword and glittering spear, host of slain, heaps of corpses, dead bodies without end, they stumble over the bodies.

Asher Bonapal, one of the leaders of Assyria, was known for ripping the lips off of foreign prophets. Tiglath-Pileser, another leader in Assyria, was known to fillet people alive, collecting their skulls and piling them up around their country.

So I want you to get all this historical context in mind. Are you picturing it? Are you feeling it? Nationally and politically, Israel is no longer, to coin a phrase, great again.

[27 : 17] I didn't feel I got to get any comments on that. She's been stripped of all of her glory in the most brutal of ways. And not only that, not only has Israel faced that nationally, Jonah personally has lost his ministry.

The glory days are gone. Nobody's asking for an autograph. Nobody's following him on Twitter. He hasn't prophesied in a long time.

All because of one nation. Assyria. Capital. Nineveh. And then one day, at an Airbnb in Galilee, Jonah receives a knock on the door.

A letter slipped underneath the door. The return address on the letter says, God of heaven. It's a job offer.

It's a job offer from God himself. It's one that requires great urgency. The phrase, arise, go, are two Hebrew imperatives expressing the urgency of this mission.

[28 : 38] It is a great job to go to a great city of great influence with a great calling, namely, to preach the word of God. Now you tell me what retired prophet isn't going to jump at this opportunity.

You would think Jonah would be ready for a mission again. But Jonah reads in this ministry assignment letter a phrase that leaps off the page at him and it terrifies him.

Verse 2. Arise and go to Nineveh, that great city, and call out against it. Here it is. For their evil has come up before me.

Now Jonah understands that reference and my guess is probably no one in this room, maybe a few, get the reference. Jonah knows exactly what that's relating to even though most of us do not.

It's a reference, dear friend, to Genesis chapter 18 and 19 where there are another city, Sodom and Gomorrah, that is a very wicked city.

[29 : 52] But there is one significant difference between that time and this time.

Are you with me? Say yes. Here it is. In Sodom, God's prophets were called to get out.

Why? God's bringing destruction. The difference here is that in Nineveh, God's prophet is called to go in because God plans to bring salvation.

thus exposing the real reason for Jonah's running. He realizes when he reads this ministry assignment letter that God wants him to go to the very people that destroyed his people nationally, the very people that destroyed his ministry personally.

Listen, not to return the favor, but to grant them favor. So when the word of the Lord comes to Jonah, Jonah gives God the spiritual middle finger and gets on the next ship to the opposite direction because the only thing God hates more, or the only thing Jonah hates more than Ninevites is a God who would be merciful to Ninevites.

[31 : 24] And this is why dear beloved faith family, we need to see running from God is more subtle than you think.

We need to see running from God is more subtle than you think. Notice it on the screen. You don't always have to run from God with your feet. You can run from God with your heart.

In fact, I would submit that the only reason why Jonah is running with his feet is because he's already run in his heart. Jonah's running is insulting, it's intentional, it's indifferent, it's irrational, but it is all those things because it is ultimately internal.

As a prophet of God, Jonah runs from God for at least two reasons, at least two reasons and maybe more. Y'all with me?

I say, this is, I think this is so profound to see this in the text and to see this in Jonah's life for what it reveals in ours. So, a little preach preacher? Here we go, here it is, here it is, here it is.

[32 : 43] Oh my. Jonah runs not because he desires obedience. obedience. He runs because he fears the results of obedience.

I want you to let that sink in. This is why it's so more, it's much more subtle than you think. Jonah is not, I hate God, I just want to act out in rebellion, I'm borderline atheist.

No, that's not, no. Jonah doesn't desire obedience, he's afraid of the results of obedience. Jonah's unfaithfulness is because he fears the results of faithfulness.

And so do you and so do I. God, if I'm faithful and I do what you tell me to do, I'll never get a date. If I'm faithful and I do what you tell me to do, every one of my friends I know will leave me. If I'm faithful and I do what you tell me to do, my kids won't visit me anymore.

[34 : 00] Half my social media followers will be gone. The church will stop growing. Some might even leave. If I do what you've called me to do, I won't be able to afford the new car that I really want.

My relationships at work are going to be really awkward. Don't you see what I'm saying?

Faithfulness means facing the very things you're afraid will happen.

Jonah doesn't desire disobedience on its own. He just knows that if he goes to Nineveh and he's faithful to the call God, God's going to do some things he's terrified at the idea that God would do. Secondly, Jonah runs because he feels superior based on his obedience. Jonah runs because he feels superior based on his obedience.

This is why this is more subtle than you think. I'm going to put this in very simple form. This is the way Jonah thinks. This is the way an Old Testament Israelite would have thought. Israel, good guys.

[35 : 16] Assyria, bad guys. That's about as simple as it can get. We're the good people. We're the chosen people. It makes total sense why you, and this is Jonah's thinking, it makes total sense why you would give us your grace.

It doesn't make any sense why you'd give those people your grace. Jonah has forgotten that Israel didn't deserve God's grace either.

Amen? You need to think of Jonah like the older brother in the story of the prodigal son. I'm not the one that ran away. I'm the good son.

And this is what I'm trying to get you to see, family, is that running from God doesn't mean that you're an alcoholic who leaves his wife and does prison time. You may be a runaway because you're a Christian that's never watched a rated R movie, only listens to Christian music, is a leader in the church, and you think that because you do those things you're better than other people. You're a good Christian. There's no such thing. good The only goodness any Christian has is the righteousness of God in Christ Jesus.

[36 : 39] The gospel constantly reminds me, at least it should if I'm paying attention to it, that it does not matter if I'm white, it does not matter if I'm American, it does not matter if I have money in the bank, it does not matter if I have no criminal background, I'm no more deserving than the grace of God than a Ninevite.

But Jonah feels superior to the Ninevites because he's a part of God's chosen people. And listen to me, Faith Family, there is every person in this room tonight, and I pray the Spirit of God reveal it to you in this moment.

Everybody in this room has a Ninevite. Some of you have many. You have that person or you have that group of people that you cannot stand the idea that God would be gracious to them.

It's liberals and conservatives, it's poor and rich, it's men and women, it's young and old. Maybe you look down your nose at people that look down their nose at other people.

Maybe you hate discrimination so much that you discriminate against people you think are bigots.

Maybe you value the sanctity of life so much that you'll slander others with your tongue who are made in the image of God.

[38 : 04] And on and on it goes. If you are not, and this is what I love about the book of Jonah, because it is going to constantly remind us of God's grace, and if we are not constantly reminded of God's grace, are you listening?

There's a million ways in which you will run. God has given you a clear and direct word, love your enemies.

Psst! Forget that. They've hurt me. Jonah, you're running.

God has given you a clear and direct word, forgive that person. Can't do it, and I won't do it. Jonah, you're running.

God has given you a clear and direct word, serve them. No, they're different than me. They like rap music, and they talk funny. Their skin's a different color.

[39 : 06] We don't want Ninevites in this church. Jonah, you're running. God has given you a clear and direct word, share your faith.

I just can't. I've never taken a class on it. I haven't memorized enough verses. I don't think I have the courage.

I'm just not going to do it. Jonah, you're running. Come this moment to faith in Jesus Christ. I think I'd rather live my own life.

Jonah, you're running. Everybody look at me. There are several of us here tonight, and maybe we haven't even been aware of it until now, who are on a ship to Tarshish, running from God.

Not because we're committing some great big act of rebellion, because we have run from God in our hearts. And until we are willing to say, prone to wonder, Lord, I feel it, prone to leave the God I love, you'll never say, here's my heart, Lord, take and seal it, seal it for thy courts above.

[40 : 37] On November the 20th, on a road somewhere in Montana, Braven Glen had a choice to make.

One day in a Galilean village, the prophet Jonah had a choice to make. And tonight, right here in Burnsville or wherever this sermon is being listened to, you have a choice to make.

Will you surrender to a higher authority or will you run? And the truth is, like Braven and like Jonah, you and I many, many times have chosen to run from God.

whether with our feet or with our heart. But I've got good news for you. I've got really good news for you.

And that good news is that in Jonah 1, this is not the last time that God is ever going to speak to his prophet. In fact, not only will it be a prophet of God, it will be the very son of God, who one night in a

garden was called to a mission.

[41 : 56] And that mission was not to go to Nineveh. That mission was to go to a cross. Not for a sinful city, but for a sinful world.

And the good news of the gospel is that on that night in Gethsemane, Jesus did not run. Instead, he went to the cross and he endured it with joy so that every runaway in this place would find the grace to come home.

And all God's people said, Amen. Let's pray. Father, thank you for your word to us tonight. I pray that it has been a clear and direct word.

we are far more like Jonah than we think. You have spoken in so many ways and yet, while we complain about all the gray areas of life, we ignore the black and white.

But you are such a gracious, merciful God. Not only to Ninevites, but to us as well. Your grace comes to all of us, for we are all undeserving.

[43 : 24] And I pray this evening that we would learn from Jonah, and that we would respond to your word to us this evening. And we come to this moment where we reflect on the fact that Jesus didn't run from his calling.

He completed his mission for us. And so Lord, be with us in this moment as we reflect, as we think about Jesus and him crucified for us.

We pray this in Jesus' name and God's people said, Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.