

A Prophet on the Run!

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[0 : 00] Well, good morning again. You know, the book of Jonah has greatly helped and also challenged many people of God down through the years in responding to the will of God.

You know, the book of Jonah contains 48 verses, and in those 48 verses, God is mentioned 38 times, Jonah is mentioned 18 times, and the great fish is mentioned 4 times.

Sadly, when many people think of the book of Jonah, they think about a great fish that swallowed a man, right? But a careful study of the book of Jonah will reveal a great God who is all-powerful, who is wonderful, and who is merciful.

G. Campbell Morgan once said, men have been looking so long at the great fish that they've missed the great God. Isn't that so true? When people think of the book of Jonah, they think of a big fish.

Some people think whale. A big fish swallowed a man. How could a man be swallowed up by a fish? How could a fish swallow a man, and how could that man live to tell about it?

[1 : 23] You know, the book of Jonah has faced many attacks down through the years by skeptics, by those who don't believe the word of God. You know, they don't believe that a fish could swallow a man, and that a man could live to tell about it.

See, these folks don't believe the word of God. I heard about a man who was an agnostic. He was an unbeliever. He didn't believe in God, didn't believe in the Bible, and he was on a plane one day, sitting next to an older lady, and she had her Bible open, and she was reading the book of Jonah. You know, he said, do you really believe that a big fish swallowed a man, and he lived? Well, the old lady looked over. She says, yes, I do.

It's in God's word, and I believe it all. When I get to heaven, I'm going to ask him about it. Well, the man replied harshly, what if Jonah's not in heaven?

And the dear, sweet lady turned over and said, well, then you ask him. So, the thing is, the Bible says God called Jonah, Jonah ran, a big fish swallowed Jonah, stayed in the belly of the fish for a while, spit Jonah up on dry land, and Jonah ultimately ended up doing what God called him to do.

[3 : 01] You know, it's been said that our main concern shouldn't be whether a big fish can swallow a man, but whether the spirit of Jonah lives in us.

So, my question this morning is, does the spirit of Jonah live in you? Have you been running from the call of God on your life? Has God called you to administer?

Has God called you to speak to a particular person or to a particular group of people? And have you obeyed?

Have you fully surrendered? The book, the name Jonah, we're told, means dove, which is a symbol of peace.

And also in the Old Testament, doves were used as a sacrifice to God. Well, Jonah didn't live out either of those meanings.

[4 : 01] He wasn't willing to speak a gospel of peace to the people of Nineveh, and neither was he an example of being a sacrifice to God.

Jonah was called by God specifically to go to Nineveh to preach God's message, to reveal to the people of Nineveh that God wanted peace with them.

He wanted them to turn from their sin. He wanted them to accept him as the God of the universe.

So God calls Jonah, and he commissions him to go preach to the Gentiles in Nineveh.

And this morning, as we begin our journey through the book of Jonah, in our verse-by-verse study throughout the next few weeks, I pray that the Lord will teach us.

I pray that he will guide us, inspire us, convict us, comfort us, correct us, and challenge us to be on mission for God.

[5 : 03] I heard someone pray this weekend about being excited about what God had in store for us this year on the mission that he was calling us to this year.

And I trust that we're going to hit the ground running, being prepared, getting ministries ready, getting outreach prepared, getting our body life and our in-reach prepared, getting things ready to be able to be moving this year, moving outwardly, moving onwardly, moving upwardly for the kingdom of God that we're not just meeting together on Sunday morning, Sunday night, and Wednesday night, but they were actually impacting.

We're challenged to go out and to reach the community around us with the gospel, just like God called Jonah to do, and not be like Jonah, but be willing to say, Lord, here am I.

Send me. Someone once commented, Jonah was the prophet that said, Lord, here am I. Send someone else. And I hope we're not like Jonah.

I hope we're like the prophet Isaiah. I hope we're able to say, Lord, here am I. Send me. Jonah was called by God to preach the word of God, to bring the word of God to a group of people who needed it, but he refused the will of God, which should have been a blessing and a privilege for Jonah.

[6 : 31] Instead, it turned out to be a burden and a pain for him. See, the man of God heard the word of God, but he refused to do the will of God.

Jonah was a man on the run, or as I've called this message this morning, a prophet on the run. Now, how many of us have ever sought to run from the will of God, from the call of God on our lives?

I mean, when we are on the run from God, when we're refusing to do what God has specifically called us to do, there's going to be no peace. There's going to be no joy.

There's going to be no purpose, and there's going to be no direction in our lives. Probably every single one of us here today can think back to a time, or maybe you're in that moment, and you know God wants you to do something specifically.

God is calling you to something, and you're not sure. You're not sure if you're capable, if you're ready, if you're prepared, if you're qualified, or it might be something like in the situation of Jonah.

[7 : 45] He didn't even like the people God wanted him to go preach the gospel to, and he wanted them to die and perish in their sin because he didn't like them, and maybe God's calling you to do something that you don't like, but are we running from him?

See, Jonah heard from God, but he disobeyed God. Jonah went the exact opposite direction that God called him to go, and here's the thing.

When we're on the run from God, anything can, and anything will happen to us. Let's look at the first three verses in the book of Jonah. Jonah chapter 1, verses 1 through 3.

Now the word of the Lord came to Jonah, the son of Amittai, saying, Arise, get up, go to Nineveh, that great city, and it was a great city, as he talked about the size of the city, and cry out against it for their wickedness has come up before me.

But, but Jonah arose to flee to Tarshish from the presence of the Lord. He went down to Joppa, he found a ship going to Tarshish, so he paid the fare, we're going to come back to that in a moment, and went down into it to go with them to Tarshish from the presence of the Lord.

[9 : 16] See, Jonah didn't ask for God's call and commission to come to him, but God chose to commission Jonah. We may ask ourselves the question, why did God call me to be a part of his family?

Why did God choose me? Why did God call me to do whatever? You know, I ask myself that question so many times. God, why would you call me? You know, I don't even have the personality for it.

God, why would you call this person to do that? You know, they don't have the training, but you know what God says? You know, I've used the foolish things of this world to confound the wise. And so you may be thinking to yourself, why me, Lord? I don't know, we're not God. God still chose to use Jonah or to call Jonah and God's chosen to call you.

So my question is, has God's call come to you? God calls us to salvation, to sanctification, and to service, to be actively involved in making a kingdom impact, to be on mission, sharing the gospel with a lost and a broken world and making disciples.

[10 : 36] You see, those are general calls in our life. We're all called to salvation. God wills that none should perish, but that all should come to repentance. God calls us all to sanctification.

We should all be daily becoming more like Jesus Christ. We are holy. He proclaims us holy, but we should be becoming more holy, practically speaking, each and every day. And we're all called to service. God didn't save us. God didn't send Jesus Christ to die on the cross just so that we could have fire insurance and end up in heaven one day. He has left us here on earth as his ambassadors. He's left us on earth to be his mouthpiece. He's told us, he's called us, he's commissioned us to go and to make disciples. And that's our general call. But God will call and God will commission each and every one of us with a particular ministry to a specific group of people maybe or a particular task. [11 : 44] There's a general call of God upon our life. There's also the specific call. He calls certain people to New Guinea, to Australia, to Lake Charles, to wherever.

He calls some to deal with drug addicts. He calls some to deal with prostitutes. He calls some to deal with grandma and grandpa. He calls some to deal with this nationality. He calls some to deal with, he calls some to teach. He calls some to work with children. He calls some to, he has a specific call on your life.

I trust you know what it is because I'm sure there's sometimes when I have, it's uncanny, that it's almost like God's voice has come out of the blue and said, this is what I want you to do. A call that's as clear as day. My question is, are we, do we have the spirit of Jonah within us or we're saying, Lord, here am I.

[12 : 56] Send me. Have we been obedient to that call because Jonah received God's call. Jonah got God's commission to do something.

The Bible doesn't tell us as we said why God chose Jonah. It just simply says that he did. God's command of Jonah was clear. It was concise. Arise, go, and cry out.

God commanded the prophet to arise and to go. He heard a specific commandment, God's divine directive to the prophet was, as we said, get up, go, and cry out to the people of Nineveh against their wickedness and this is what I'm going to do if they don't repent and turn to me.

Now these three words give us imperatives. There was no question. This is what God called Jonah to do. They tell us that God's command wasn't negotiable.

It was not up for debate. He didn't say, Jonah, if you feel like it, Jonah, if you think you're qualified, Jonah, if you like these people and you want them to turn to me, no, he just said, go.

[14 : 08] And his divine directive to the church is to be my people, to be salt, to be light. He's called some prophets, he's called some pastors, teachers, to equip the saints to do what?

Come on, talk to me this morning, to do the work of the ministry. And that is what we're going to be doing. Teaching up, raising up leaders who can then lead ministries and then can lead others, who can begin to do things that we should be doing to reach our community.

I was talking to Dale and Cindy just last night, and we're talking about, they were talking about their home church, it's dwindled in size, and right now, the latest statistic, Lifeway did some research just this past year, and the numbers are 76% of churches in America are either plateaued or declining, and over a quarter of them, as much as a third, are declining precipitously toward death.

Think about that. Over three quarters of the churches in America are dying.

Congregations are aging out. When the last person dies, the place gets sold and probably gets turned into who knows what. That's bad news.

[15 : 43] The thing is, churches are trying to do church today the way that was successful in the 60s and the 70s. The problem is, we don't live in the 60s or the 70s or the 80s anymore.

We are living, we're no longer living in a population that is culturally Christian. In the 70s, you could build a building, put a sign out, and people in the community would come because, you know what, that's what people did.

We're Americans, we're Christians, and we've got to go to a church somewhere. People move into a town. Well, guess what? One of the first things they did was find a church to go to. They may not have even been saved. They may have only been marginally Christians, but they found churches. But you know what, today, the vast majority, and what we find out through the research, is that there is the rise of the nuns, the N-O-N-E, people that don't associate with any religion, any denomination, even with God.

When the question's asked, we have no religious affiliation whatsoever. And so, what do we do? The answer is so simple.

[17 : 04] Let's do what Jesus told his disciples to do. Go out with the disciples. See, the answer is not build a seeker community, build a seeker church, and get better music, although I think we have awesome music.

The answer is not watering down the gospel. As a matter of fact, the millennial and Gen X populations, we are told, are actually wanting the opposite.

When they do get in church, they don't want watered down on the surface. They want to go deeper. They want to know, how can I make a difference in this world? We heard that from Cody Hughes and his wife, and they came here a few months ago.

As a matter of fact, we are going to be hosting the youth conference this coming July, I believe it is, brother. A week-long youth, and they said there's no age limit.

They said they had some as young as 10, 11, 12 years old, and some in their 80s. But it's in-depth, week-long, literally, almost college-level, in-depth, how to study the Bible, books of the Bible.

[18 : 18] They really get into it. And that's what we're hearing people want. That's what they're seeing that younger people are wanting. They're wanting to dig deeper into the word. Not just fluff.

They want to know the word of God. So what's the answer? The answer is make relationships, build relationships, share the gospel.

See, that's how we build the kingdom. It's simply the same way that's been done for 2,000 years. Evangelism. Going out, sharing the gospel, winning people to the Lord, making disciples, getting them baptized, and teaching them, and helping them grow.

That's the answer. And so that is what I pray that we are going to be able to do. So his divine directive for the church is to arise and go and to announce the gospel.

We have a similar call and a commission. Matthew 28, 18 through 20, and Jesus came and spoke to them saying, all authority has been given to me in heaven and on earth.

[19 : 30] Go, therefore, and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you.

And lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age. When God calls, it's time for action. When God calls, it's time for us to get busy.

God's purpose for his prophet was to proclaim the word of God. God called Jonah to go where he didn't want to go and preach to a people that he didn't want to preach to.

Well, the great biblical truth that I see here is that God has called us to go into a world that is lost and broken and proclaim his word to people, no matter what color, no matter what nationality, social standing, or what background they may have.

We're just literally told to love and to share and to show grace. Now, Jonah was not only to arise and go, but he was to proclaim the word of God to the people of Nineveh.

[20 : 43] God told Jonah where to go and what to do when he got there. God told Jonah to go to Nineveh. My question is, to whom or where has God called you to go?

And one of the things that I would suggest that you ask yourself is, who is your one? That's a simple thing this year to ask yourself, who's my one?

What do I mean by that? I mean, ask that God would reveal to you one person in your orbit.

One person that you know does not know Jesus or you're pretty sure doesn't know Jesus as their Savior. And this year, by the grace of God, you will work with them.

You will show the love of Christ to them and pray for opportunities to share the gospel with them, that they may come to know the Lord Jesus.

[21 : 50] Just think, if everyone takes that one person in their sphere of influence, shares the gospel with them, it may not be the first time you rub shoulders.

It may be someone you work with. It may be someone in your neighborhood. It may be someone that you already have at least a partial relationship with. And to pray that God will give you opportunities. God will soften their heart.

The Holy Spirit would draw them to him. And this time next year, if that would happen, how would this place be different? I can only imagine.

And I trust that we've got the nursery prepared for them, that we're going to be helping them, learning, growing, and helping them to the point where they can be serving, going out and sharing the gospel on their own.

So we must always seek to share the Lord with a lost world. We must call for surrender and faith to those who don't know Jesus as their Savior. Meeting physical needs is part of what the church does, but it must never have priority over meeting spiritual needs.

[23 : 05] That's why we're here. We're here to present the gospel to the lost and dying world. And many times the way to do that is through meeting physical needs. And then we have the opportunity to share.

So they go together. We shouldn't have one without the other. And I think we can do both together because people are lost and are dying and heading to a godless lake of fire for eternity without Christ.

See, he has called us to be salt. He's called us to be the light to show people the way. Jonah's mission was to cry out against the city. Jonah was to go to Nineveh.

He was to proclaim the grace of God. He was to proclaim God's justice, God's judgment. But also he was proclaiming God's mercy and his grace if they repented and if they turned from their sin and turned to God.

So it conveys a sense of urgency. God said, get up, go and proclaim the word of God to Nineveh. Because if you don't, this is what is going to happen. The mission of the church today is an urgent matter because we don't know how long Jesus is going to go to wait before he comes back.

[24 : 19] And we don't know how many more people God wants to call into his kingdom to bring into his, his family. And he's left us as his mouthpiece. He's left us to be the ones to share our faith.

People are dying in their sin and they need to hear the gospel of Jesus Christ. Then Jonah rejected. Jonah had a specific urgent call and a commission on his life.

But Jonah rejected God's call and he ran away. Verse three. But Jonah arose to flee from talk to Tarshish from the presence of the Lord, went down to Joppa, found a ship going to Tarshish.

So he paid the fare, went down into it to go with him to Tarshish from the presence of the Lord.

Jonah was a prophet on the run. We're either running with God or we're running from God.

There's no middle ground. We're either running the race that Paul says we're running, the race of faith, or we're running away from God and we're running a different race.

[25 : 21] Jonah decided to run away from God. Jonah didn't like God's plan and he didn't like God's command. Warren Wiersbe wrote Jonah forgot that God's gift and God's calling are irrevocable.

God said, this is what I've called you to do and he doesn't take it back. But Jonah wasn't alone. Think about it. During, sometime during their ministry, Moses, Elijah, even Jeremiah felt like giving up and decided to run from God.

So Jonah wasn't alone. And you and I are not alone those times in our life when we, we dig our heels in and say, God, I don't think so. Or we run from God's call.

And I think I've said, I've told this story before when I was in Bible college many years ago, there was an older couple and they had retired and they were in Bible college.

And they said, Bart, you know, we knew God called us to the mission field when we first got married. We knew it.

[26 : 34] But we didn't want to go. Married we. Husband had a job, making decent money. They wanted to grow their family.

And they said, we just didn't want to go. But they said, we wish we'd have gone, but we know God's timing. And so they decided just sell everything and go to Birmingham and go to Bible college.

And they ended up on the mission field. So here's the thing. It's never too late. It's never too late to get on board with God's mission for your life.

Jonah, see, here's the thing. Jonah needed Nineveh. As much as Nineveh needed Jonah. It's when we're in God's will. It's when we're following God's plan where we grow in grace and we become more like Jesus Christ.

See, next to the one who doesn't pay their bill, doctors, most annoying patient is the one who chooses not to do what they say they should do. Don't follow their, don't follow their orders.

[27 : 42] Recently, it was estimated that a significant number of patients leave half full pill bottles, cheat on special diets, and often don't come back for those, those returned appointments when they're supposed to come back.

It's been well said. We are most, we're at our most vulnerable state when we're walking away from God because you never know what can happen.

God called Jonah to go to Nineveh, which was northeast to Nineveh. But instead, what did Jonah do? He went southwest to Joppa. The exact opposite direction that God called him to go.

This Jewish prophet didn't want to go to these Gentiles and share Jesus with them. He said, they deserve what they're getting. I'm pretty sure that was, that's what was on his mind.

But here's another thing. We don't have to physically be running away from God to be spiritually running away from God. Sometimes just doing nothing is running away from God.

[28 : 55] See, we can come to church. We can sing on the worship team. We can teach a class. We can sing a special or we can even preach a sermon and still be running from God's specific call on our life.

So when we stop reading the word of God, we stop reading our Bibles. We're running from God. When we quit praying, we're running from God.

When we distance ourselves from other believers, from other followers of Jesus, we lose accountability and we're running from God. I'm sure Jonah knew this, but you can't run from God's on my presence.

I mean, I know he probably knew this. The psalmist said, where can I, where can I go? Where can I go?

Can't run from the presence of God. No matter how deep, no matter how high, no matter how far I go, we can't flee from God's presence. So here's the thing.

[29 : 58] If you are sensing God's call upon your life, the most sensible thing to do is simply to surrender and say, God, okay, I will.

Look at the last part of verse three. What did he do? He found a ship going to Tarshish. As far as Jonah could tell.

So here's Jonah. He's running from God and winding this down. Here is Jonah. He's running from God. He goes the opposite direction. He goes to the coast.

And guess what? He finds a ship going the opposite direction. Things are working out. And how much?

And he had money. And so he paid the fare. Here's the thing. I believe Satan will always.

[30 : 58] It was no accident that Jonah found a ship going the opposite direction. And he had enough fare. Here's the thing. I believe Satan will always provide something that can carry you away from the will of God.

And it's going to sink. Yeah, it's working out. It feels good. I'm making a lot of money. This is a great job. May not be where God wants you. But it feels good. And things are working out.

I believe Satan will always provide an easy way out. Or what seems to be an easy way out. Here's what Dr. David Jeremiah said about Jonah and running from the will of God.

David Jeremiah reminds us through the whole book. Jonah went down to Joppa. Then he went down into the ship. Then he went down into the sea.

Then he went down into the belly of the great fish. The great fish went down to the very depths of the ocean. Here's the thing. Jonah's disobedience to God's will and God's call on our life always leads where?

[32 : 06] Always leads down. Not up. Jonah's disobedience was extensive. He fled to Tarshish. But Jonah's disobedience was also expensive.

He paid the fare. He spent money to run from God. It cost him money to run from the call of God. And it's going to cost you and it's going to cost me when we run from the call of God on our life.

From these three verses come the penetrating truth that when God calls and when God commissions, we need to obey.

May we learn from Jonah what not to do. Maybe that bumper sticker. We're all examples.

We're either a good example or we're a bad example. Has the word of the Lord come to you and have you responded to his call on your life to share God's word?

[33 : 08] Are we running from God as a church? Are we where God wants us to be? Are we truly making a kingdom impact and building his kingdom?

The thing is, if we're not saved, his call on your life is to trust Jesus as your Savior. If you have trusted Christ as your Savior, his call on our life is to serve.

He's calling you to serve. Maybe in the nursery. teaching a class. Teaching a class.

Cooking, cleaning for someone. Bible study. Faithful attendance. When we are together to worship.

Being a greeter, a door greeter, parking lot greeter. Giving. Giving sacrificially to the work of the Lord. Going on mission for God.

[34 : 11] Maybe you're here. And God is calling you to a mission field. It might be a mission field foreign. It might be a mission field local. But it might mean a radical change in your life.

What's God calling? Let's obey. His word. And share his words. So my question in leaving is. Will we run? Or will we obey?

Let's pray. Our Father. You are such an awesome God. You called us.

And you commissioned us. To live a life. On planet earth. Until you call us home. To be salt. And to be light.

Showing people the way. And I pray Lord God. That you would help us. This brand new year. To be sensitive.

[35 : 11] The way that you lead us. And that we would be. Positioned. For movement.

That we would be. Inclined. To. Move.

Or rather than standing still. Or. Rather than. Nothing changing. Lord that we would be. Ready for risk.

And that we're always. Seeking how we can move forward. And make a difference. And a kingdom impact. Father. I pray for each. Each one here today.

Each. Of our faith family. Those who are not here. With us today. That. That you would encourage us. Comfort us. Convict us.

[36 : 10] Challenge us. I pray Lord. That during those times. Of. Of testing. And trial. That we would be able to. Count it all joy.

May. And just wondering. How you will work. And how. You're going to. Build us. And grow us. From the experience.

Father. We thank you. For what you're going to do. What you're going to accomplish. In us. And through us. Father. May we not be.

Like the prophet. Gentleman. May we not be on the run. From your call. And your commission.

Upon our life. And upon our. Fellowship. Father. But that we would be. Willing to say. Here I am.

Here am I. Send me. Father. We thank you. For this offering. That we're about to receive. Use it for your honor. Use it for your glory.

[37 : 06] And use it to further. Your word. Your gospel. Not only here. But across the world. Father. We pray this. In Jesus. Precious.

Jesus. Holy name. Amen. Amen.