

Running From God

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[0 : 0 0] say again it is a real honor to be with you and thank you for having me and I just want to apologize for those of you who are disappointed that the more exciting part of my family is not here we are all coming down in June and we'll actually have a info night here on Saturday June the 15th which will be a chance to give you a bit more detail and God willing a bunch will have happened in that month we might even be able to introduce you to some of the team that will be coming with us but it is an honor to be with you in Mission Month and Open the Bible and I apologize John I'll stick to my notes from now on. A recent study that came out of America by the Barna Group discovered that nearly half of all active church attending millennials nearly half of them believe that sharing their faith is wrong not hard not difficult not intimidating but wrong and that's the generation that's supposed to read the Bible more than their parents and grandparents did this is the generation that serves more in churches than the generations before them and the main reason that they give flows out of this kind of cultural pluralism it's this belief that you can't or at least you shouldn't be telling anyone else what they're supposed to believe it's because we live in this generation that says you do you it's got this culture of tolerance where you can believe anything you want apparently as long as it doesn't hurt somebody else and so we think truth is something that everybody must discover for themselves and we shouldn't be telling them what we think it is now aside from the fact that that worldview just doesn't work because it's incoherent where does that perspective that culture leave us as Christians like what do we do with the fact as we we're embarking on a mission month here at St Paul's we remind ourselves that Jesus calls us to be witnesses to the ends of the earth what does that look like in a moment like this in a culture like ours in a word it looks intimidating I mean think about the Israel for last Israel for last saga over the last few weeks whether you agree with how he did it essentially what he did was quote the Bible and he'll probably lose his job for it so the question we need to ask this morning is is mission a good thing to do and what will it look like for you to do mission well in your workplace with your family with your friends because God has always been on mission from the beginning of the Bible the book of Genesis the goal from God has been that he would dwell with people that they would know him that there'd be a closeness he's been drawing people back to himself and that's still the goal when you get to today in the New Testament Matthew 28 the risen Jesus says all authority in heaven on earth has been given to me therefore go make disciples be on mission I mean it's it's on the wall it's DNA here at St Paul's it's what makes St Paul's St Paul's that we want to be united in our desperation to see the world around us encounter Jesus that that's that's our heartbeat but it's not easy some people think it's wrong most of us even if we don't think it's wrong struggle to do it and so this month we turn to the Old Testament book of Jonah to try and catch a glimpse of God's heart when it comes to mission not just the task that he's given but to catch a vision for God's patience

with a world that doesn't want to know the truth with reluctant missionaries like us and most importantly we want to catch a glimpse of the power of God to save people and so I want to encourage you to open your Bible to Jonah as we're going to work through the passage that Adrian read out for us and we're going to begin at Jonah 1 verse 1 as we meet an unwilling missionary it says the word of the Lord came to Jonah son of Amittar go to the great city of Nineveh and preach against it because its wickedness has come up before me so that begins with the word of the Lord coming to Jonah because that's how all mission begins if it's Christian mission if it's God's mission then it's his message it's his gospel that needs to go out but but when you first read those verses if you look it doesn't sound like a good news message that Jonah has I mean Jonah is to preach against Nineveh and the reason he's to preach is specifically because of their wickedness and let's be honest we know that this is the sort of message that gives Christians a bad reputation this is the way people look at us they call us judgmental they think that we think we're better than everyone

and we're here to tell them how wrong they are I mean isn't that kind of why everyone's really angry with Israel Folau because they look at his post and what they hear is you think you're better than everyone and therefore everyone else is going to hell I don't think that's what he's saying but that's what they're hearing and so we've got to ask the question is the message that God has given to Jonah and ultimately the message he's given to us a good news message and I want to say yes for two reasons firstly built into this message is the possibility of this city of Nineveh finding out about their wickedness finding out about God's judgment and then repenting turning back and following Jesus because if there was no chance that something could change in this if the only possible outcome was Nineveh hears that they're wicked and then God destroys them this is kind of a waste of effort don't you think if God's just going to lay waste to them just lay waste to them don't send Jonah to have to travel to the city and speak on his behalf and in fact we find out when we get to chapter 4 that Jonah fully expects God to have mercy so built into this message of bad news this preaching against this message of their wickedness is at least the possibility that something could change that's the first reason it's good news the second reason this is good news is because it declares the character of God which is the whole point of mission the reason God wants us to go out and speak is so that people might know him and even in this tiny little gospel presentation and you'll see how short it is when we get to chapter 3 we get a view of God's holiness we get reminded as Jacob just told us that God is a God of justice he's not okay with evil and wickedness in the world that God cares about these things that he will judge these things but instead of passing on this message instead of declaring this gospel Jonah runs verse 3 Jonah ran away from the Lord and headed for Tarshish he went down to Joppa where he found a ship bound for that port after paying the fare he went aboard and sailed for Tarshish to flee from the Lord now we know from two kings in the Old Testament that Jonah was an official prophet in the royal court so he was employed by the king he exercised a ministry as prophet that means he spoke on behalf of God we know he's commissioned by God it happened just there in verse 1 and we know that God spoke to him giving him messages to deliver on God's behalf which is what makes this reaction so weird he runs he flees God this is a guy with the privileged role of speaking on behalf of God this is a man who hears directly from God Almighty who receives messages to pass on and then when he receives them he runs in the opposite direction and disobeys God and it's got to make you ask the question why I mean is it just that he lives in a time like ours where you know you do you and you can't tell me what to believe well when we get to chapter 4 you're going to get a bit more of a glimpse of his motivations and what he's doing but you'll have to come back in a few weeks for that but what we do know is that Nineveh this city that Jonah has been sent to preach to is an Assyrian city and there's not a lot of love lost between Israel and Assyria Assyria is one of the superpowers in the world at this particular point in history they have tormented Israel over and over throughout their history and in fact Assyria will be the nation that ultimately wipes out Israel off the face of the earth destroys the northern kingdom altogether we know that Jonah worked for the king that he was a nationalist and he's not interested in the good of this wicked nation Assyria he doesn't think they deserve the chance to know God like he knows God he doesn't want them to get the benefits of having God around and being loved by God and he certainly doesn't want to be the one who introduced them to God in the first place now we just need to slow down here for a second and ask a question is there anyone in our life in our world that even subconsciously we view in the same way is there anyone in your life who is maybe unlike you ethnically culturally maybe somebody who dresses different to you has a different moral code maybe somebody who's hurt you in some way that deep down you don't think deserves to know the gospel you don't want to share the gospel with because you don't want them to respond and find forgiveness and hope I mean on top of the fact that the world is hostile that it's scary to try and talk about what you believe in and everything else do you find yourself rationalizing with certain groups of people or maybe even certain individuals they don't deserve to be forgiven anyway so it would be a waste of time and yet this wicked Assyrian city that will continue to do evil down the track is loved by God and so what's God's response to his unwilling missionary what's his response to us when he sees that kind of hardness in our heart it's the same as it is towards Nineveh he's sending Jonah to warn them he's showing grace to them that they don't deserve and he treats them he treats Jonah and he treats us all better than we deserve God pursues people who don't deserve to know him even people who are running away so that they might know him and his goodness verse 4 Jonah after running away it says then the Lord sent a great wind on the sea and such a violent storm arose that the ship threatened to break up all the

sailors were afraid and each cried out to his own God and they threw the cargo into the sea to lighten the ship but Jonah had gone below deck where he lay down and fell into a deep sleep God's not passive at this point in the story he's not disinterested that his prophet is disobeying him he actually cares that Nineveh hears the message he's got for them and so he chases Jonah he sends a violent storm a serious storm sufficient to scare experienced sailors so that Jonah comes back God wants Nineveh to hear the gospel and God actually cares that his prophet Jonah understands the gospel as well the storm is so intense as it arrives that even the sailors straight away work her out that there's something special about this this is a divine storm this isn't just your summer thunderstorm that rolls through it's exciting and then it moves on this feels personal because it is personal

[12:59] God sent it because he's angry he's not trying to destroy Jonah he's not trying to kill the sailors he's not trying to sink the boat he's disciplining Jonah he's drawing Jonah back so that he might see the mistake that he's made so that he might come back and do the job that he's been given again even though this is an intense storm if God wanted to just kill Jonah in his anger there's more direct ways than a storm and sinking a boat full of other sailors he's pursuing his reluctant unwilling missionary implicit in this storm is the invitation to return is the invitation despite running away for Jonah to come back and still be in God's grace now one of the challenges of this book one of the challenges of life in general when it comes to following Jesus is how we understand the relationship between our sin and suffering so the temptation is we look at this story and we look at our lives and we think that whenever there's suffering whenever I suffer it's because I must have done something wrong and therefore I've got to fix that thing to convince God to take away my suffering and it's true in this story that Jonah is suffering because of his sin Jonah is in this dangerous storm that might sink the boat specifically because he disobeyed God and ran away but it's also true that the sailors are suffering not because of their sin but because of Jonah's sin they're suffering because Jonah ran in the other direction in fact you find the sailors treat God better in this story than even Jonah does it's not their sin it's Jonah's sin

Tim Keller who's a pastor out of America says the Bible does not say that every difficulty is the result of sin but it does teach that every sin will bring difficulty so storms and suffering that we face in life are always an opportunity for us to either run towards God or run away from him it's an opportunity to either in the storm find that God is continuing to pursue us and gently draw us back to him or to blame him and become bitter and angry and in this story we find Jonah isn't finished running from God yet he's still fleeing the discipline and gentle pursuit and invitation this time he tries to escape by escaping reality the sailors are fearing for their lives and what's Jonah doing he's asleep he's sleeping in the bottom of the boat and that's not because he's just really relaxed he's just really fine with storms he doesn't find you know waves scary this is the the sleep that maybe you even know in your own life that that sleep of hopelessness that sleep of depression that sleep of darkness that sleep that just doesn't want to get out of bed because it wants to somehow escape the reality that is there when we open our eyes it's the sleep that longs to be somewhere else as God pursues Jonah Jonah continues to run he continues to reject the gentle invitation of his heavenly father to come back and what is God's response to his still unwilling missionary patience listen to the captain in verse 6 the captain went to him and said how can you sleep and listen to this really carefully get up and call on your God maybe he will take notice of us so that we will not perish get up and call out to your God this is an invitation to draw near to the God that he has been fleeing an invitation to draw near to the gracious God despite his disobedience and the invitation comes out of the mouth of a pagan the very people that Jonah doesn't want to know the gospel the very people that he refuses to tell about his gracious God the sailor is more of a prophet in this story than Jonah is because he is speaking of the God who welcomes people back this is Jonah's second chance or maybe his 22nd chance in life who knows he's run from his mission he's fleeing God and yet God is calling him back still but Jonah continues to run away he continues to ignore the invitation he continues to reject God look at verse 7 then the sailors said to each other come let us cast lots to find out who is responsible for this calamity they cast lots and the lot fell on Jonah so they asked him tell us who is responsible for making all this trouble for us what kind of work do you do where do you come from what is your country from what people are you he answered I am a Hebrew and I worship the Lord the God of heaven who made the sea and the dry land this terrified them and they asked what have you done they knew he was running away from the Lord because he'd already told them so the sea was getting rougher and rougher so they asked him

what should we do to make the sea calm down for us pick me up and throw me into the sea he replied and it will become calm I know that it's my fault that this great storm has come upon you instead the men did their best to row back to land but they could not for the sea grew even wilder than before what's missing in that interaction just there Jonah refuses to cry out to his God even in this moment of potential death he would rather be thrown into the sea and drown than simply call out to the God who is gently and repeatedly inviting him back he is an Israelite who knows that God has been faithful to his people that God is generous and yet still in this moment of near death he will not cry out to God this time instead of returning he chooses death and so rather than be the prophet God has called him to be rather than cry out to his God on behalf of these sailors he instructs them to throw him in the sea which is effectively suicide he runs from God's mission he continues to flee as God pursues he rejects God's patience he rejects the second chance and his life appears to be over and we're still in chapter 1 but there is this tiny glimmer of hope even in his disobedience this is the first time that Jonah begins to see and serve the very people that God is sending him to he sees that these sailors are in need and he lays down his life for them now he has something better to offer he could cry out to the God who sent the storm and who has power over the elements but he refuses to declare the glory of God with his mouth that these sailors may discover the majesty of his God but then he unwittingly displays God's character in what is almost an unwitting gospel presentation

I mean this is a moment where like you know you're at work and you just it's intimidating to talk about Jesus so you just kind of commit internally that you know what I just won't and then God gives you a colleague who just keeps asking you and keeps asking you and not just you know hey do you go to church but tell me what you believe you know that gospel presentation that you can't dodge that's kind of what's going on for Jonah it's like you don't want to have that conversation but Jonah ends up displaying the mercy of God because even though Jonah can't see it yet God's grace in sending him at the beginning of this chapter God's grace in pursuing him with the storm God's grace in patiently giving him a second chance is beginning to transform him it's beginning to change him he's beginning to look and see what God sees he's beginning to look at these pagan sailors and not just see evil people that he's not worried about but he's looking with God's eyes and seeing lost people who need a saviour people who matter people who are created in the image of God

Jonah resists and resists God even to the point of being thrown in the ocean and what is God's response to his repeated disobedience? The same as it was for Israel when he chose them as a nation the same as it is for you and I God saves him God intervenes verse 14 then this is the sailors they cried out to the Lord please do not let us die for taking this man's life do not hold us accountable for killing an innocent man for you Lord have done as you pleased then they took Jonah and threw him overboard and the raging sea grew calm at this the men greatly feared the Lord and they offered a sacrifice to the Lord and made vows to him now the Lord provided a huge fish to swallow Jonah and Jonah was in the belly of the fish three days and three nights [23 : 13] God intervenes in this story not to just keep Jonah safe with a fish so that he doesn't drown but he intervenes so that even in his disobedience Jonah fulfills the mission that God has given him even though he's running even though he's fleeing not only will Nineveh hear about God from Jonah in the future chapters but God reveals himself to the sailors through Jonah's disobedience as Jonah runs and God the storm these sailors get a glimpse of the power of Jonah's God as Jonah is thrown in the sea and is ultimately rescued and the storm calms they get a glimpse of the mercy of God God is not only sparing Jonah's life but he is transforming his disobedience into a moment to reveal his power and mercy in the calmness of the storm as God's anger settles these sailors having encountered the one and only God respond as only people can they make vows they offer sacrifices they find salvation they meet the God of heaven they go from being crying out to all their different gods on the boat hoping someone would help them to finally seeing that there is a God one God the only God of heaven and earth who rules over everything who is powerful and merciful they get saved even in our weakness and failure

God can and does use us to draw others into the hope and life of Jesus his power is perfect in our weakness in our fear in our inadequacy in our stumbling his love for people his pursuit of people cannot be stopped by our inadequacy or even our disobedience he does not need us for the mission of pursuing people he does not need us so that people will meet him he can send storms he can send giant fish he can turn up in flames and clouds but for Jonah's sake and for our sake

God includes us in the mission of telling people about him so that we get the joy of not just knowing the gospel not just being aware that Jesus died on a cross and rose again and we're forgiven in spite of who we are not just so that we know that but because by sharing the gospel by telling the gospel by being the gospel as we go out and speak to people as we care for people as we inhabit God's heart for people as we be his hands and feet this knowledge becomes this knowledge this idea that God loves and pursues me becomes something that I feel as I get to love and pursue those who are far away on his behalf Jonah's choice to die so that the sailors don't have to is actually a glimpse of the kind of sacrificial love that God has shown us in Jesus his choice to be thrown into the ocean so that they might be safe is this small vision of the way that God loves us at his own cost through death God is a pursuing God he pursues those who are running like Jonah he pursues those who aren't looking like the sailors and he continues to pursue even those who are wicked like the great city of Nineveh and he is pursuing us

Jesus shows up in flesh so that a world running from him a world ignorant of him and a world full of evil might discover grace might discover that God can love them in spite of that when Jesus goes to the cross he's praying for the very people who are nailing him to that piece of wood when Jesus is arrested his closest followers desert him and flee and yet he is the one greater than Jonah who lays down his life not so that they might survive a storm but so that they might be brought back into a relationship with their heavenly father is mission difficult absolutely will people be hostile towards us as we try and share the message that God is king and that there is judgment and that the only possible hope is found in a king Jesus who sacrifices for them yes but is mission good and right and necessary for us as well as for those who don't yet know absolutely the book of Jonah is not a book about a fish it's not even a book about a city it's a book about the gracious loving God who is patiently reaching not only sailors not only a city but even Jonah his prophet so that he might better understand the miracle of God's grace to people who don't deserve it the thing that really stops us from being on mission whether we say that it's because we think it's wrong whether we say it's because we're scared whatever reason we may give the thing that really stops us from sharing the wonder and majesty of a savior who died for us and rose again is that we don't actually grasp the wonder of a savior who died for us and rose again step one in going out with the message of a loving God who pursues us with grace is always first discovering the love of God who pursues us with grace is first receiving and experiencing and tasting and dwelling in and enjoying the freedom that is ours because of the grace and love of God shown to us in Jesus it's recognizing that as we speak of grace we need that grace even in that moment it's recognizing that Jesus on the cross is how far

God will go so that you will be loved so that you may one day spend eternity with him and then being able to look at the world with new eyes that sees people who matter to God whether they're like us or not like us whether they're good in our eyes or evil in our eyes they are created in the image of God and they matter to him whether they're close to him or far to him they matter to him and we know that God's heart is burdened for those who are far away I don't know exactly where you're at with God but I'm pretty confident that there will be some people in this room who are still running from God maybe you're somebody who has never said you would follow Jesus and you get dragged here or you come here for whatever reason you like the people but you are not someone who is ready to obey him when he gives you commands maybe you're someone who started following

[30 : 58] Jesus but commands like this one specifically that will involve you standing up and being bold and being mocked and receiving hostility and maybe even losing your job that's a bridge too far and you're running from that you still want God you still want Jesus you still want heaven you still want forgiveness but you don't really have any desire to let him tell you how to live whether you're someone who's all in for Jesus and chomping at the bit to walk out of here and share the gospel in Chatswood as you walk home or you're somebody who is still intimidated and is ready for this service to finish and you're planning to book other things for your next three Sundays wherever you sit on the spectrum what every one of us needs to hear this morning is the same what God wants to say to every single one of us this morning is the same it's the message Jonah needs to understand God loves him even though he doesn't deserve it God sent his son for him for you for me you matter to him and the call to go on mission is actually an invitation it's an invitation for you and I to have a deeper fuller experience of God's love for us because as we seek to share it with whoever will listen and even those who won't we get to be the kind of love that God has for us we get to be the hands and feet and words and mouthpiece of the heart of God himself this mission month

rediscover that the the call to go is actually an invitation to come it's to go with

God it's to go in his power in his grace in your weakness and know that his power will work through you this mission month ask God to open your eyes as you walk to work each day as you spend time with people ask God to let you see what he sees people who are lost just like you were people who desperately need to know the grace that he offers freely ask that he would do the miracle for people in your life that he did for you that he would bring them from death to life from darkness to light that they would know the God of heaven who loves them unconditionally in his son you