

Running from God

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[0 : 00] Let's turn again for a little to the chapter we read in the prophecy of Jonah, Jonah chapter 1.

And we read from the beginning. 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. But Jonah rose 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 on board to go with them to Tarshish, away from the presence of the Lord. I suppose the story of Jonah and the great big fish, the great whale, is one of the best known of all the stories that we read of in the Bible.

And I suppose it's a kind of story that has grabbed people's imagination throughout the years. And certainly, I'm sure, I don't think there's anybody here, when we read the story of Jonah, Jonah being thrown into the raging sea, and a huge fish, a huge whale gobbling him up.

[1 : 19] I don't think anybody can read or hear of that. But they really begin to think, and they're trying to imagine what it must have been like. Now, I think it was either last year or the year before, I can't remember, I was looking at Peter walking on the water.

And we looked at the kind of question of where, you know how people say, what were you doing over the weekend?

Or what were you doing during the holidays? And when Peter was telling what he did, people would have been amazed. Well, can you imagine people speaking to Jonah? And the very same sort of thing, and you know how after holidays you say to people, well, where were you?

Were you anywhere over the holidays? Were you anywhere over the weekend? Were you anywhere over these last few days? And some people would say, no, I wasn't anywhere. Some people may say, well, yes, I didn't go far.

I went over to the west side, or I went to Ness, or I went down to Harris. They might say, I went over to Inverness. I went here, I went there for a few days. Jonah, what did you do?

[2 : 24] Well, I spent three days and three nights in the stomach of a great fish, of a whale. And people would be open-mouthed.

I certainly would be if I had been sitting there and Jonah was telling me where he had spent the last three days and three nights, in the stomach of this great fish, a whale.

It really is quite extraordinary. And this is one of the most amazing stories in the Bible. However, one of the great differences between the stories that we read in the Bible and the stories that often we read in other books is that while some of the stories we read in other books are true as well, many of them are made-up stories, and they can be really exciting, they can be really funny, great stories.

But when we come to the Bible, the stories that we have here are all true. They're absolutely true. And we've always got to remember that.

And that's, we believe the Bible. We believe that every word in here is absolutely true because it's God who has spoken. It's spirit-breathed, God-breathed that we have here.

[3 : 35] And it's very interesting because there are people who say, well, I believe the Bible or I believe most of the Bible, but there are some parts of the Bible I can't really, really believe.

For instance, I've heard people say, oh, I believe most of what the Bible says, but for instance, I don't believe that about Jonah and the whale. I've heard people say that. And it's very interesting that Jesus, who let us remember a description that Jesus gave of himself was this.

Jesus said, I am the way, the truth, and the life. Jesus said, I am the truth. In other words, everything that Jesus ever said was true.

Everything that Jesus ever did was true. Everything about Jesus was true. And Jesus, when he lived in this world and walked and taught in this world, he actually spoke about Jonah.

And he spoke about this great fish. And he spoke about what happened to Jonah. This is Jesus, who is the truth. And Jesus said that what happened to Jonah was a picture, really, of what was going to happen to himself.

[4 : 45] And he said, just as Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of the whale, so he said, the Son of Man shall be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth.

He was speaking about his death and his burial and then his resurrection. Now, at the beginning of the chapter, we find Jonah trying to do the impossible.

Do you know what he tried to do? He tried to run away from God. Impossible. We often try and run away from lots of things in life.

Sometimes things that are difficult, we try and run away from them. Sometimes people we try and run away from. Sometimes we can run away successfully. We manage it.

Other times we can't. But the one thing we can never manage is we can never run away from God. Because God, he's watching us all the time. There is nowhere we can go.

[5 : 45] We were singing about that in Psalm 139. Supposing I take the morning wings and go to the furthest part of the sea. Even there, Lord.

Even there. Your hand is upholding me. It doesn't matter where I go. God sees everything. Now, I've used the illustration before.

And it's like any illustration. It's just so far short of what actually happens. But I remember when I was a boy. And I used to come here on holiday.

Didn't live here then. But I used to always come here every year on holiday. And I used to sit in this church. And this church, of course, was far bigger than the church that I grew up in. And one of the things I remember.

And I suppose I was like every other young person. The boys and girls here. Sometimes you listen to what's been said. But other times you don't. Sometimes you look around.

[6 : 45] Sometimes you get sleepy. Sometimes you think of other things. And I remember sitting in church.

And sometimes I would look around. And I would think the minister will never see if I nod off to sleep. The minister will never see me having a wee look at my watch to see what the time is.

The minister will never see me putting a sweetie in my mouth. The minister will never see any of these things. But you know the amazing thing is. Is that many years later when I actually ended up in this pulpit.

It's extraordinary what you do actually see. You wouldn't believe it. People at the back of the gallery. Do you know this?

I can almost see. I'm getting short-sighted for this. But the vision in this church is actually quite superb. And you can almost see people's reaction. You can almost see what people are doing anywhere.

[7 : 48] It's quite extraordinary. Just what you can see happening from here. And that made me think of what it must be like.

God who is in heaven is overlooking everything. But he doesn't look with human eyes. He sees in a way. He sees right into not just what you're doing.

But even what you're thinking. He's even seeing right now what you're thinking about him. About the service. About what his word is saying. And so there is nowhere in all the world that you or I or anybody can go.

Where we can run away from God. We can run and try and hide. But we can't. Because God sees absolutely everything about us.

And God is interested in us. And God wants us to come and to speak to him. And to share with him. About all the different things in life. And I want you when you're young to remember this.

[8 : 49] That God is really concerned about you. And he wants you to make the best choices possible in life. And I would ask you. Remember this. To always involve God.

In all your choices in life. Where you go. What you do. Now some of you might seem away, way in the future when you're going to be planning.

About the job you're going to do. What you're going to do in school. And the direction you're going to go. Who you're going to marry in life. Where you're going to live.

All these things might seem. Oh miles and miles and miles away. Don't forget. God is interested in all these things. And he wants the best for you. In all the different things.

So please come to the Lord. With everything. Where you're at just now. And all the way through life. Because this is what he wants for you. Remember he's watching you all the time.

[9 : 46] And he's watching us all. So anyway. Jonah tries to run away from God. Now God had asked Jonah to go to this great city. The city of Nineveh. Which was part of the Assyrian Empire.

And in today. If we were trying to work out where's Nineveh. A place that's always in the news just now is Iraq. And in Iraq we know of the big city Baghdad.

Well if you went about 200 miles or 220 miles north from Baghdad. You would come to where Nineveh was then.

That's we're thinking about its location. So the Lord said to Jonah. Arise. Go to Nineveh that great city. Call out against it. For their evil has come up before me.

And what did Jonah do? He did the very opposite to what God asked him to do. God said. You go up that way. A way up to Nineveh. Jonah says.

[10 : 46] No I'm going the other way. It's as if. You were told to go to Harris. To go down that direction. And you went the opposite way. And you went away up to Ness.

Or if you were told to go to America. You decide to go to Australia. That's putting it as far away as possible. Jonah did the very opposite to what God asked him to do.

And that is disobedience. And when we look at this we say. Oh Jonah that was really bad. God told you to do something very. Well it wasn't a simple thing. But God told you something very clear to do.

He told you to go to Nineveh. Why Jonah did you go the opposite direction? That is what we term disobedience. And when we disobey.

We do wrong. What we term sin. So when we look at Jonah. We say. Well he was very disobedient. In fact. You will find books written about Jonah.

[11 : 46] And one of the titles I've seen is. The Disobedient Prophet. That was the name Jonah got. The Disobedient Prophet. Even hundreds and hundreds and hundreds of years later.

He still remembered. As a disobedient prophet. Even though at the end he did what he was asked to do. But you know. We disobey as well. Because every time.

We do the opposite to what God asks us to do. We're just like Jonah. If we lie. Or cheat. Or bully.

If we do any of these kind of things. If we. If we're unkind. Or jealous. Any of these things. We're like Jonah.

Because we're being disobedient. To what God asks us to do. Whenever we choose. To ignore what God says. We also are being disobedient.

[12 : 46] Now some people think that. Jonah ran away because he was scared. And. Maybe. I'm sure there was a wee bit of fear in his heart. But that wasn't the reason he ran away.

Yes. I'm sure to a certain extent he was scared. And do you know why? I think he was scared. But that's not the main reason. Because it tells us. In this. In this book. Why he actually ran away.

One of the reasons probably was that. Nineveh. Which was in the heart of the Assyrian Empire. Was one of the most cruel places in the world. The Assyrians.

If you read. World history. The Assyrians. Were incredibly cruel. Have you heard. I don't know if the expression is still around today. But. It used to be. If you were going to get into big trouble.

I've heard. Sometimes we used to say. Oh. You'll get skinned alive for that. That means you're going to get into serious trouble. I don't know if you still use the expression. I certainly used to.

[13 : 47] We used to use that expression. And hear that expression. You'll get skinned alive. Obviously. You're not going to get skinned alive. But it means you're going to get into big trouble. Well. The Assyrians.

Actually did that. That's what they did to people. They skinned them. Alive. They were incredibly cruel. They were one of the most cruel nations.

In history. For their massacres. And their torture. And the way that they dealt with people. So. In a sense.

You might say to yourself. Jonah. Oh. I don't fancy going into a place. Where they skinned people alive. And tell them that God is not happy with them. So.

In one sense. You can say. Yeah. He might have been a wee bit. He's scared. And you know. It's an amazing thing. Also. You might say. Well. Jonah would be saying.

[14 : 42] They'll just laugh at me. Here I come. This. Shambling prophet. And I'm going to start telling them. That God isn't. They're just going to laugh at me. They're going to mock me.

Because I follow God. And believe in God. And you know. There's a lot of people. Who are. Scared. About God.

Do you know that? There's a lot of people. That won't come to church. Because they're scared. About God. People are tough.

People are strong. People who think they're as tough as anybody. But you know. You won't find them in here. I hope and pray. That they will come in here.

But. Right now. They won't come in here. Or into any of the other churches. In Stornow. Because. They would be scared.

[15 : 40] Of what people would say. If anybody saw them going to church. They think. It's a sign of being weak. If you go to church. They think it's a sign of.

That you're no longer tough and strong. That if you were seen. Going to church. Well. That shows. That they're not as tough as they think. It shows that.

Deep down. Although they may not have thought that. Deep down. They're actually scared. Scared. About going to church. And you know. I've often thought about it. If we ever want to know.

Just how. Twisted sin is. It's in this very area. When you think of what God has done for us. God has given us everything in life.

The very life that we have. All the good things in life. Since you got up today. And you think of. How you are. And all that you have. Everything.

[16 : 39] It's God who has actually. Given it to you and to me. Every. Bible tells us. Every good and perfect gift is from above. Everything. Do we really stop and think about.

How good God is to us. And then on top of that. The greatest gift of all. God has given us. His son. Jesus Christ. He has sent Jesus into the world.

To deal with. All our wrongdoing. With all our sin. With everything. So it's really quite. The most extraordinary thing. What Jesus. What God the father has done.

In Jesus. And yet. People are ashamed. Of God. They're ashamed. Of the Bible. They're ashamed.

Of God's day. They're ashamed. And scared. About God's cause. And that shows us just. How awful. Sin really is. But the thing is. About Jonah.

[17 : 34] He ran away. Yeah. He might have been scared. But the real reason. He ran away. Was this. God had warned. Israel. And Jonah was from Israel.

God had warned Israel. If you don't. Get right with me. Because Israel. Had started worshipping. Other gods. They had stopped worshipping. The living and true God.

And they had started to set up idols. And worship other gods. And God said to them. Look. You're my people. You can't do that. But they were doing it more. And more. And more. And God said to them. Look. If you don't.

Stop. Worshipping other gods. You've. And don't start. Worshipping me again. And being sorry. For what you've done. I'm going to allow.

The Assyrians. To come in. Invade the land. And take you away. Now the Assyrians. As we said.

[18 : 30] Were these. Fearful. Cruel people. Huge. Mighty. Fighting force. And the people. Nobody. None of the people in Israel.

Like the Assyrians. But here is God. And he's telling Jonah. I want you to go down. Into the very heart. Of the Assyrian. Country. I want you to go.

To that great city. Nineveh. And I'm going to ask you. To tell the people there. To repent. And Jonah was thinking.

Oh no. I don't want to do that. God. Because here are the people. God is going to use. To punish. My people. And I hate.

These people. And I don't want them. To repent. You know. That's what Jonah was saying. Jonah. Didn't. Want. The Assyrians.

[19 : 24] To find God. You know. It's really actually. Quite an awful thing. Because. Jonah makes that confession. Later on. In chapter four. Jonah says. I ran. To Tarshish.

That's why I ran. To Tarshish. For I knew. You are a gracious God. And merciful. And slow to anger. And abounding. And steadfast love. Jonah didn't want to go.

Because you know. Jonah's problem. He was selfish. All he could think about. Was himself. And his own people. Didn't matter about people. In the other part of the world. Didn't.

They didn't need to hear. About God. As long as. He was all right. And as long as. His people were all right. It didn't matter. And you know this. We can sometimes.

Have a wee bit. Of that attitude. You may say to yourself. Oh no. Surely not. Well sometimes. We can be a bit. Hard in our heart. And not be touched. Or moved.

[20 : 22] Or affected. By what is happening. In other parts of the world. You know sometimes. Pictures come on our. TV screen. Sometimes in the news. And you'll see.

Young folk. Your age. And they have no food. And they have no water. And you see them crying. And you see them so thin.

And they are crying to. Moms or dads. Or sometimes. They don't have moms or dads. And their moms and dads. Have nothing to give them. They have got nothing. And they are going to die.

They are all going to die. Because there is nothing for them. And sometimes. It is sad to say. We can see that. And watch that.

At the same time. As we took in. To our own tea. And we have a lovely plate. In front of us. And it doesn't bother us. And we think.

[21 : 18] Oh that is a way. In another part of the world. We are all right here. That is tough. But I am all right. Jesus warns us. Against having that kind of heart.

Because he says. That is a dangerous heart. That is a hard heart. Jesus warns. Against the selfishness. In life. And that is a problem.

With Jonah. That is what was wrong. With Jonah. He had this really. Selfish heart. But Jonah knew. That God was a God. Who was ready to forgive.

And Jonah knew. That if he preached. This message of repentance. That the. That the Assyrians. In Nineveh. Might start to call upon God.

They might be made aware. Of their sin. Can I ask you a question today. Are you aware. Yourself. Am I. Are we all in here today.

[22 : 14] Are we aware. That we are. Sinners. Before God. It is not a name. Some people like to hear. Because sometimes. When people think about. Being a sinner. They think of somebody.

Who is being. Really. Really. Really. Really wicked. But. The Bible. Shows us. That actually. We are all sinners. Whether we like it. Or not.

That is what the Bible. Tells us. And one of the things. That God does. Through his spirit. Is show us. What we are like ourselves. I am sure you have all heard the story.

Maybe some of you haven't. But I am sure. Many of you have the story. Of what is known as. The Highland Kitchen Maid. And it is a long. Many many years ago. Long ago. And there was a minister.

From Rissolis. Mr. Macphail. And he was going down to Edinburgh. To the assembly. And it was in the days. Before the cars. When they would go. On horseback. And it took a long time. To go. Rissolis.

[23 : 07] It is just. It is near Inverness. And to go by horseback. You had to. You would take. Maybe four. Or five days. To reach Edinburgh. It took a long.

Long time. And you would stop. Overnight. At a wee inn. Or a wee hotel. And Mr. Macphail. Just. A wee bit past Inverness. Some miles. Past Inverness.

Was the first place. The first inn. He stopped at. On the way down. And there weren't many. Staying there. And at night. He was going to have worship. And he. He said to the landlord. Do you mind.

I would like. Everybody to come together. And I want to read. The Bible. And have a prayer. Landlord said. That's fine. He said. I'll gather everybody. So everybody came. And they were all sitting there.

And just before. Mr. Macphail started. He said. Is everybody here? And the landlord said. Well. Yes. Everybody. Are you sure? Everybody that's in here. Well.

[24 : 02] He said. Well. There's one. One. He said. There's a wee girl. That works in the kitchen. But. She. Doesn't matter about her. She's. She's dirty. And she's working away out the back. Oh no.

Mr. Macphail said. I want her in as well. So. She came. And he had. The worship. He did the reading. And the prayer. And afterwards. He spoke to the girl. And he said to her.

He said to her. Do you believe in God? She said. God? Who's God? Oh. He said. Do you know that you have a soul? A soul?

She said. What's a soul? So he said. You never pray. Do you? No. She said. So Mr. Macphail said to her. Well he said. I want you to do one thing.

I'm going to Edinburgh. And when I make my way back. I will be stopping here overnight. And if you promise to do one thing for me. He said. I'll buy you a present in Edinburgh. I'll buy you something really nice.

[24 : 58] And when I stop. On the way back. I'll give it to you. I want you to pray to God. And he spoke to her. A wee bit about God. And he said. I want you to pray. And I want you to. Just.

All I want you to say is four words. Show. Me. Lord. Show. Me. Myself. That's all. Will you promise to do that?

And the girl said. I will. So Mr. Macphail went off to Edinburgh. And he came back. So he stopped that night. And he said to the landlord. Where's the. Wee girl who worked in the kitchen. Oh.

He said. Since you left here. She's been of no use. All she's done is cry. Cry. He said. Yeah. And there was this wee. She stayed. It was long ago. And it was kind of like a wee straw bed.

And she was lying there. And she was crying in this wee room. And the. Mr. Macphail said to her. What's wrong? Oh. She said. I. I did what you asked me to do.

[25 : 52] And she said. God has showed me myself. And she said. I haven't been able to stop crying. Because. I hate what I see. And I don't know what to do. Oh.

Well. Mr. Macphail said. Here's your present. Oh. She said. I'm not interested in my present. What can I do? So. He began to speak to her. About Jesus. And what Jesus has done. And.

How Jesus has come. To take away our sins. So. He said. I'm going to leave you. With one more prayer. Say to. This. Instead of. Show me. Myself.

Say. Lord. Show me. Yourself. That's all. Just change. One word. From myself. To yourself. Show me.

Yourself. And the Lord did. The Lord answered her prayer. And the Lord. Showed him. Showed her. Himself. As a savior. And she was saved.

[26 : 48] And she would. Became so happy. And so. Aware. That her sins. Were forgiven. And that she had become. Right. With God. And the Lord. Will do the same. For us as well.

Now we're just. We're just coming to the end. We'll just move. Very quickly here. But we find. We're seeing how Jonah. Ran away. And it's amazing. What. When Jonah. Ran away from God.

He went down. To the. To the pier. At Joppa. And there was a boat. Heading to Tarshish. Perfect. Looked in his pocket. Had exactly. The right money. Paid his fare.

Lay down in the cabin. Everything. Was great. And. I sailed away. And you know. Sometimes people think. That when everything. Is going all right. That if. All the doors are opening.

And everything's okay. That. You're going in the right direction. No. My friend. Even. If. Everything. Seems to be going smoothly. But you're going against. What God's word says.

[27 : 44] You're still going in the wrong direction. And like Jonah. It won't go smoothly. All the time. It might go smoothly. To begin with. But a storm will come. Just as it came in Jonah.

So it will come for you. If we go in the wrong direction. And God sent this fearful storm. Into the Mediterranean. And it seemed like. They were going to go down.

Now I don't know. If you've ever been in a boat. Where you've been really scared. I have. And I'll admit to it. And it's an awful feeling. Where you think. You're not sure.

Whether this boat. Is actually going to make it. Or not. And. That's how these people were. They were. Terrified.

The sailors. They were absolutely terrified. That they were going to sink. And. They cast lots. That's the way people used to try. And work out. Whose fault.

[28 : 38] They believed it was the fault of somebody. And the lot came. Fell upon Jonah. And they said to Jonah. And they had to wake. He was away down. And they sounded asleep. What did you do? What have you done?

And Jonah had to confess. And he said to them. He said. I'm a Hebrew. And I fear the Lord. The God of heaven. And. See what he says. Who made the sea. And the dry land.

And Jonah. And Jonah. And I said. The God that I worship. Is the God who made. See the. See the sky up there. Well the God I serve. He made it.

See a way. Way. Way. In the distance. The coastline. Over there. The God I serve. He made that as well. And see this raging sea. That we're part of.

God made it. And he sent the wind in. That's caused the sea. To come like this. And the people were really scared. When they heard all that. And they said.

[29 : 32] What are we going to do? And Jonah said. Well there's only one thing. You can do. Take me up. And throw me over the side. And if you do that.

The water will go quiet. And the people thought. Oh no. We can't do that. And they tried all the harder. Because they didn't want to throw Jonah. Over the side. They tried all the harder. To get the boat to land.

But they couldn't. And in the end. That's what they did. They took him. Picked him up. And threw him. Into the raging waters.

Now we know that God sent this great whale. This great fish. To come and swallow Jonah up. And save Jonah. But. When we look at what happened to Jonah there.

Do you know what happened? Immediately they did that. The wind dropped. And the sea became calm. And it tells us that the. These men.

[30 : 30] The men then feared the Lord. Exceedingly. And they offered a sacrifice to the Lord. And made vows. And when we look at this. And with this we finish.

We see Jonah. Being thrown into the water. We see. A contrast with Jesus. And we see a comparison with Jesus. The contrast is. Jonah was suffering for his own sin.

Jesus. Suffered for our sins. But the comparison is. Jonah was giving his life. For all those in the boat.

To save them. Jesus gave his life. But there was no whale. There was no comfort. There was nothing.

Underneath. Jesus. He gave himself. Completely. Completely. Do you today. Believe in Jesus.

[31 : 26] Because that's at the end of the day. What it's all about. And I would love that. You would come to know Jesus. As your own Lord. And your own Savior. There's many voices today.

Wanting your attention. And saying. Hey. Come with me. I want you to hear this one voice. Above all the other voices. And as you go out in life. And enjoy life.

And life is full of so much. That we do enjoy. Let us remember that. The key. The key to life. Is Jesus Christ.

Will you believe in him? Will you trust him? With your life. With your all. Let us pray. Amen. Lord our God.

We give thanks for. Being with us today. We pray that this word. May indeed go into our hearts. That we may trust. And that we may believe. We pray to.

[32 : 24] Bless everybody here today. Each one of us. According to our own need. And we give thanks. For the word of God. That goes out. Throughout this world. We remember the.

Weck missionaries. Who are. Up here at this time. And we think of the annual rally. Tomorrow night. We pray to bless them. And bless the. The whole missionary movement.

And we give thanks for all. Who. Go out. Jonah was a missionary. Many many years ago. He was. At first. A very reluctant missionary.

But in the end. He went. Help us all Lord. In our own place. To have a. Mission mind. So that we might be ready. To be used. For the Lord.

And by the Lord. Watch over us. And take away all our sins. Take us all home safely. Bless all our homes. And families. We give thanks. Oh Lord. For all the good things.

[33 : 19] That thou art giving to us. And we give thanks. For the good. That people do. For one another. Bless us. And take away our sin. In Jesus name. We ask it. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.