

Man on the Run

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[0 : 00] The following message is given by Walt Alexander, lead pastor of Trinity Grace Church in Athens, Tennessee.! For more information about Trinity Grace, please visit us at TrinityGraceAthens.com.

Jonah chapter 1. This is the word of the Lord. It says, Verse 4.

He continues, And each cried out to his God, and they hurled the cargo that was in the ship into the sea to lighten it for them.

But Jonah had gone down into the inner part of the ship and had laid down and was fast asleep.

So the captain came and said to him, What do you mean, you sleeper? Arise, call out to your God. Perhaps the God will give a thought to us that we might not, may not perish.

[1 : 52] That is the word of God. The only infallible word you'll hear this morning, the word we desperately need. One of the church fathers famously said, Scripture is like a river, broad and deep, shallow enough for a lamb to wade in, or deep enough for an elephant to swim.

Scripture is simple enough for a child to understand, yet profound enough for the brightest minds to never plumb its depths. You know, Jonah is one of the most well-loved and well-known stories of the Bible, I think, for this very reason.

I remember as a young boy being intrigued by how captivating Jonah was. It's packed with suspense and intrigue and includes many surprising twists and turns.

I mean, what could be more surprising than finding yourself, landing yourself in the belly of a great fish, not a whale, but that's another matter. You know, I've continued to read it, though, over the years as I've gone through Bible reading plans that take me through the Minor Prophets.

Actually, it's a very bright light in the Minor Prophets where you tend to get a little bored, if we're honest. And I've seen more and more. You know, it's a very carefully written and purposefully structured book.

[3 : 24] One writer said it's undoubtedly one of the masterpieces of biblical literature. The idea is that Jonah is just very well crafted from a literary standpoint.

And I'm not alone at seeing the layers of Jonah, both young and old, have been drawn to this story. Both Sunday school teachers and first-rate theologians have studied it.

But why study this book? And how do we study this book? Some say we should read it like a fable. You know, an untrue story with a lesson like Jack and Jill going up the hill.

I mean, after all, can we really believe that this man, Jonah, was eaten by a fish? And yet, throughout the history of the church, it's been read as a true story.

So I believe it should be, and we'll have more about the fish later when we encounter him. But others say it's a book about repentance. It's ultimately a book about what happens when you don't obey and when you don't turn back to the Lord.

[4 : 33] Others say it's a book about mission. You know, Jonah was called to go and doesn't. He regrets it. We are called to go and should so that we don't regret it.

Still others say it's a book about obeying and trusting God when you don't understand what he's up to, like when he calls you to Nineveh. Others say it's a book about racism. Jonah runs away from Nineveh because the people are unlike him.

They're not the Lord's people. They're not of the nation of Israel, the race of the Israelites. And yes, in so many ways, it's about all of these things.

But what I want to argue in this series and behind all the book of Jonah is something more fundamental. Jonah is a little book about a big God of great mercy. That's at least my flag for this series.

Jonah is a little book about a big God of great mercy. The book of Jonah is not really about Jonah. The book of Jonah is seeking to unveil for us the great mercy of God.

[5 : 32] Behind all of Jonah's running and wrestling and preaching and complaining and anger, the Lord is seeking to show us that his mercy is sweeter and more shocking than we can imagine.

And my prayer is that we would encounter his mercy in this book. Perhaps we'll encounter it. Perhaps you'll encounter it because like Jonah, you have been running.

And you need to be assured that he's coming with mercy. Isn't that the story of our lives?

In so many ways, we run and he runs after us. I feel like testimony after testimony could fill that. Perhaps you'll encounter the God of mercy because like Jonah, you've lost your sense of the will of God.

What am I supposed to do with my life? At times, it's so clear. You know, you're heading through high school. Everything looks promising. You're going to conquer the world. But at other times, you hit yourself up against a wall, so to speak.

[6 : 39] You don't know where life is going. Maybe you encounter the God of mercy there. Perhaps you encounter the God of mercy because like Jonah, you find your sins to be greater and more distressing than you can handle.

And you feel just as stuck as he felt in the belly of that fish in the bottom of that ocean. Jonah's a little book about a big God of great mercy.

We're going to unpack this over five weeks carefully. The way Jonah's written is carefully structured. One and two are essentially Jonah and the sea. Three and four, they start with almost looks like a repeat.

And it's Jonah, the second call to go to Nineveh. But first, who is Jonah? That's our first point this morning. Who is Jonah? Who is Jonah?

You know, Jonah was a prophet to Israel. The book begins just like a lot of books of prophecy begin. It says, now the word of the Lord came. Jonah was a prophet.

[7 : 42] That phrase occurs over a hundred times in the Old Testament. Tell how prophets received their word. It was from the Lord. They were spokesmen for the Lord. They heard the message and they spoke it.

That was their authority. And as those who spoke for the Lord, they were distinguished group of servants unto the Lord. You know, in so many ways, we forget a lot of names in the Old Testament.

But the names of the prophets are often remembered. Names like Moses, Elijah, Isaiah. The things they said and the things they did are the things we often remember.

But while they said and did many great things, more than anything else, what distinguished them and set them apart was that the Lord revealed to them his every move.

You know, talking about prophecy, Amos 3-7, which we have for you up there, tells what God does in it. For the Lord God does nothing without revealing his secret to his servants, the prophets.

[8 : 50] The Lord God does nothing without revealing his secret to his servant, the prophets. The idea is that the Lord gave the law in so many ways to direct their steps, but in so many ways he sent the prophets to encourage them, to guide them, and to lead them spiritually.

So that when the kings got in trouble, you see this time and time again throughout the Old Testament, they called up the prophets to say, What is the Lord doing? Should we go up against this evil nation?

Should we do this or that? You know, in some ways it would be great to be able to call up a prophet to get a very clear authoritative word from God when we're anxious about the future.

So Jonah was a prophet. He was part of this distinguished tribe of people in Israel, and he was a prophet in the 8th century B.C. The only place in the Old Testament where his name is mentioned, but outside of this book, is 2 Kings 14, 25, where he was ministering in the days of Jeroboam.

Now, if you're anything like me, the Old Testament, I can kind of view it like this lump and not really understand all the bits and pieces of the clay. Believe it or not, Buddy and Judy's daughter one time, I remember in college I was talking to her about the Bible, and she said, about the Old Testament, and she said, You know the exile, right?

[10 : 12] And I was like, But I had no clue what the exile was. So if you're anything like me or like I was in those moments, the history of the Old Testament can be confusing.

I just want to walk through a little bit to situate Jonah in his time. If we remember, obviously, God made the promise to Abraham, but then in Exodus, he leads them out of Egypt.

Remember that? And he gives them the law on Mount Sinai, and that law is to direct them in so many ways. That gets us through the end of Deuteronomy. And then it's just this season of conquest, where they go into the promised land, the land flowing with milk and honey, and they finally get in there, and it's called the conquest because they take out other nations and take dominion of this domain.

And then they cry out for a king, and so that's when they get Saul, and there's just a number of kings that come down the line, some good, some bad. David was great, and then it got really great with Solomon, but then they hit a little wall.

If you remember this, it was a divided kingdom. Jeroboam and Rehoboam had a little bout, and the kingdom split up. Ten tribes went to the north, called Israel.

[11 : 26] Two tribes stayed in the south, called Judah. They were divided. And during this divided kingdom, God raised up a band of prophets to minister in the north.

So that's kind of what's going on. Now, in so many ways, Israel's history is declining. Things are not going well. They're continuing to walk forward in wickedness, but God rose up this band of prophets in that day, and that was the band of Elijah, Elisha, Amos, Hosea, and Jonah.

That's interesting. We don't know if Jonah knew Elijah and Elisha, but they lived in the same time period. You know, one of the legends that I just found really fascinating this week was that Jonah, one legend, one Jewish legend has it, that Jonah was the son of the widow of Zarephath, who was raised from the dead for future ministry by Elijah.

That's interesting. It works chronologically. I don't know. The main point is that Jonah was a prophet to Israel during its decline. When they were decaying, God sent prophets to preach compassion and grace and mercy.

But when we meet Jonah in our text, he's no longer what he was. Something has happened.

[12 : 49] He's still a prophet, as we will see, but he's drifted. Before we even get past the first several verses, there's a warning laid out for us in this text that yesterday's grace and yesterday's obedience is never enough.

One of the most serious warnings about the Christian life is watch out lest you drift. As Hebrews 2 tells us, we drift when we think yesterday's obedience is enough.

When we put down the paddle, right? If you've ever been down the hawasssee, you drift off when you put down the paddle for even a moment. You can capsize and find your body and clothes wet.

When we think we know enough or we've done enough or seen enough, we're warned here. We're warned that a good family and a good history of serving the Lord are never enough to promise a faithful future.

No past faithfulness or fruitfulness can substitute for present obedience for the Lord. It just reminds us, where are our best days?

[14 : 00] You know? Sometimes we've been walking with the Lord for a while. We just look back. Well, I remember that day I was caught up in ceaseless prayer. Remember those courageous sacrifices I used to make?

But they're always in the rear view. Jonah warns us to keep obedience in front. Second, what is Jonah called to do? What is Jonah called to do?

The book of Jonah opens with a sudden, surprising word from the Lord. It's sudden in so many ways because it just begins, arise, go. I don't think we're going to imagine Jonah resting or laying down, sprawled out on the bed and needing someone to awaken him.

These two words are meant to be put together to simply say, go now. Go now. Prophets are used to responding immediately and obediently to the Lord.

They were his spokesmen. So when he spoke, they went and spoke. What he said, they went and said. You know, there's something like military service in our relationship with the Lord. We don't often think about it that way, but he is our commander and sees what he commands.

[15 : 04] We obey. What he forbids, we avoid. He's the Lord. To him, we give complete obedience. That's the lifestyle Jonah's used to. And yet in this passage, as we will see, that's not the lifestyle he pursues.

In so many ways, freedom is not found in breaking free of his commands, but in living tethered to the purpose his commands supply. And we don't audibly hear from the Lord anymore.

But we have all that he wants to say to us in the Bible. I remember a couple years ago, John Piper wrote a provocative blog post that said, this morning I heard the Lord.

Now, obviously, there's a little bit of clickbait because once you clicked on it, he was saying, I just read my devotion and heard from the Lord. But because we have so much that we've heard from him, we must avoid the tendency of following only what we like, which is what Jonah makes that failure.

I'm sure you've seen it before and heard about it before, but Thomas Jefferson was a deist, not a Christian. We don't have to go into that, but he cut his Bible down to where it was something he could agree with.

[16 : 29] Jefferson was convinced that Jesus' followers had added many things after Jesus died, so he took a pen knife and literally sliced out the verses he didn't think belonged anymore.

Verses about Jesus' divinity, about him saying, he's the Son of God. For Abraham was, I am. Let's cut that out. Verses about the resurrection, anything miraculous was cut out.

You know, it's literally a patchwork. Right now, you can go on the Smithsonian's website and you can see the literal Bible, which I've read. I have a book on that Bible, the Jefferson Bible, if you want to call it that.

But if you go to that website, you can literally see the cuts of the pen knife. Now, we may not be that bold, but at times I fear we do the same thing when we ignore the things we don't like and discard the things that are unbelievable.

Ignore the things like love your enemy. Gouge out your eye if it causes you to sin. Don't be slothful and zeal. Don't be harsh with your wife.

[17 : 36] We can pray and wait for a word from the Lord to move us to obey when the word is very clear, lays out for us. And it was a sudden word for Jonah, but it was also a surprising word.

You know, it's surprising because of where the Lord sends Jonah and what the Lord tells him to say. The Lord sends Jonah to a most surprising place, Nineveh. If you know anything about history of that time, which I probably should have pointed out when I do that little bit of history, but Nineveh is the capital of Assyria, the very nation that would soon carry Israel into exile.

That season of Old Testament history I didn't know anything about. You know, it's a great city from the standpoint that it's large. Later in the book it says it's three days journey in breadth.

It's a big and important city, but it's also a wicked city, and that's the first thing we hear about it here is that their evil had come up before me is what verse two says.

So their evil is what awakens the Lord, or not awakens the Lord, alerts the Lord to his need to send Jonah to Nineveh. The idea is this is not Israel.

[18 : 48] This is Assyria. This is not Jerusalem or Bethlehem or any of those places. This is Nineveh. These are not friends. These are enemies. You know, it's interesting to me, the last place where the Lord said the evil had come up to him is when he was talking about Sodom and Genesis.

Now you probably remember that story. It was a wicked city, and the Lord came to Abraham and said, I'm going to wipe out that city. Wipe out Lot and all his descendants and that city.

And Abraham said, you can't do that. There's righteous people in there. Right? And they had that back and forth. Well, if you can find me 50 people that are righteous, I won't wipe them out. Abraham couldn't find them.

He said, if you can find me 40 people that are righteous, I won't wipe them out. If you can find me 30 people that are righteous, I won't wipe them out. If you can find me 20 people that are righteous, I won't wipe them out. If you can find me 10 people that are righteous, I won't wipe them out.

The point was, there's no righteous people there, and the Lord takes them out. But here, in this passage, Nineveh is very much like Sodom. Their evil has come up before the Lord, and there's no righteous people in there, but the Lord sends Jonah there.

[19 : 59] It's meant to be shocking to us if we know the history, this wicked enemy nation. It's like the Lord calling us today to go to Syria.

I want you to go to Syria. I want you to go to the front lines. I want you to preach the gospel there. But it's not just where the Lord sends Jonah that's surprising. It's what the Lord tells him to say.

If you look down there with me in verse 2, he says, Arise, go to Nineveh, that great city, and call out against it, for their evil has come up to me. Now, the Lord literally says, call out against it.

So we don't know exactly what Jonah is called to say, but the idea is that Jonah, the Lord desires to show mercy to Nineveh, and he commands Jonah to call out against Nineveh because judgment is coming, and they must turn now.

Now, he's not calling to announce that judgment has come, which the prophets have done, or that judgment alone is coming. He's saying, he said, judgment's coming.

[21 : 00] It can be averted if you turn back now. Now, in so many ways, this is shocking, not just because Nineveh are wicked and evil, but because all along, it seems as if the Lord only cares about Israel.

If you're living in those days after rescuing the people from Egypt and leading them into the promised land, the Lord made it very clear, you're not supposed to be like all those other people. I don't know about you, have you ever wondered why there's so many laws emphasizing how to live separately?

You know, I call it the inner Mary. You can't do business with folks in those nations around you. There's even one obscure law that says, don't weave two pieces of thread together.

Don't let two different oxes sew in this one area. The idea is that it's meant to be this principle of separation that was meant to be all about what the nation of Israel is about. They would be separate, live separately from them.

I read that, I'm like, why is thousands of years of church history marked by this separation? Well, the idea is they were the Lord's people. They were to live to Him, live for Him, to obey His laws, perform His sacrifices so that the Lord would dwell with them.

[22 : 28] They were the Lord's people, His treasured possessions, His servants. I mean, it's very cool. Out of all the nations of the earth, they are utterly unique.

And sometimes they would think, and sometimes we can think, this is if the Lord only cared about them. That's what's going on with Jonah. I mean, he's thinking, who cares what happens to these people, Lord?

They've been taught in us for years. They're not your people. Who cares whether they die under your judgment?

And we can make the same mistakes. But what the Lord's trying to tell Jonah right here is that He is the Lord of all the earth. He's the Father of all humanity, as Paul says.

He gives all of them life and breath and everything. And so the idea is that the Lord calls Israel to live separately, not because they were born in the right family or know the right way to live or the right kind of people.

[23 : 25] He calls them to live separately because they're meant to be a light to the nation of how it looks to love and serve the Lord. The idea, ultimately, is the Lord calls Israel to live separately to preserve a remnant into which Christ can be born and redeem a people out of every tribe, tongue, and nation.

And while it may seem at times that the Lord only cares about Israel, the Lord calls Jonah to get up and go to that wicked city to preach a message of compassion to show that the Lord is king of all the earth.

All the world is... will give account to the king of all. The Lord will not just judge Christians.

He will judge all those in the world. He's not just our Lord. Point three, why does Jonah run?

Why does Jonah run? Jonah responds immediately, but he takes off in the opposite direction on a boat to Tarshish.

[24 : 40] Look down at verse three. Very deliberately written here. But Jonah rose to flee to Tarshish from the presence of the Lord. He went down to Joppa, found a ship going to Tarshish.

So he paid the fare, and he went down into it to go with them to Tarshish, away from the presence of the Lord. It gets very practical immediately. Because Jonah very practically turned away from the Lord.

But why does he run? Does he misunderstand? Is there a little kid tugging at his shoes or tugging at his pants so he's not able to concentrate as much? Maybe it just wasn't clear what the Lord was saying, and so he kind of stumbled out in the wrong direction.

Or did he just forget that the Lord would go with him wherever he went? And so he decided to go the other way. Well, it's not from lack of understanding or forgetting or any of these things.

Jonah has other plans for his life. Why go to an enemy as a wicked nation as one of the enemies? Aiding them would only hurt Israel.

[25 : 46] So he's frustrated and annoyed. He's furious, and he believes righteously. So he's faced with a question which we undoubtedly had been faced with.

Does the Lord know what is best, or do I? Does the Lord know what is best, or do I? I remember a number of years ago, one of my kids who's in the room here, Rev, was real young, probably like two or something, and I don't know what happened, but somewhere along the way, you know, you gotta buy the shampoo that's the tear-free kind, or else it wrecks havoc.

And little kids' eyes, and somewhere along the way, we bought some cheap brand or something that was not tear-free. And he's probably 18 months old, or two years old, or something like that.

And he had this shower that, this one particular time, it wasn't tear-free, and his eyes burned. And there's a little season there where we would go to bathe him, and the thought of water hitting his back and moving up to his head would just scare the daylights out of him.

And his body would literally be twitching and shaking for fear of that burn again. And I would just say, Buddy, buddy, this is good shampoo.

[27 : 23] We've killed the person that bought the other shampoo. No, I'm just kidding. I don't know how I got in the house, but you know, I said, Buddy, this is good shampoo. Trust me, trust me. You can trust me.

I will put it in your hair. I'll cover your eyes. I'll wash your hair, but no. I mean, I'll cover your eyes, and I'll send the water down so it won't get in your eyes. And he would just cry and scream, you know?

And some days, I'd get in the shower with him, and I'd wrap my arms around him saying, Buddy, this is good shampoo. This is going to make you clean. This is not going to hurt you in any way. I promise I will not hurt you.

And I'd wash his hair as he just clung to me and shook. And even though he didn't know it, he was wrestling with that same question. Does Dad know best or do I?

Because I felt that shampoo, and I don't want to feel that pain again. And in so many ways, that's what this boils down for us and for Jonah. The Lord had put Jonah in this situation where he was calling him to obey, to test him, to ask the question, Do I know best or do you?

[28 : 28] Will you really follow me when it doesn't make sense? Will you really obey me when it's confusing? In many ways, he would ask us to say, What's your Nineveh?

Is it the difficulty of your life that's been so rearranged by the pain of sin and suffering that you barely have the strength for each day? Is it the bad news you just received?

You know, bad news just comes in and wrecks having, rearranges the furniture that's left you reeling. Is it the frustration you feel watching an ungodly coworker or brother continue to excel?

What's your Jonah? What thing do you feel like you can't get through and the Lord must not know what is best? What makes you angry? What calls you to throw your hands up?

While the call to Nineveh was no doubt surprising and shocking, it's clear Jonah's problem is not his assignment. Jonah's problem is not Nineveh. Jonah's problem is his heart.

[29 : 31] He says, I know better, Lord. I'm not doing this. I'm going somewhere else.

He makes up his mind. He rebels. Jonah does what naturally all of us do. We're born into rebellion. We come by it honestly. Right?

Sin is not mainly breaking the rule. It's mainly choosing to live life as I see fit to only do what's best for me. And that's why twice it says he runs from the presence of the Lord.

You know, obviously Jonah knows that nowhere he goes will he be away from the presence of the Lord. God's omnipresent everywhere, equally present. We cannot go deep enough to be hidden.

We cannot go far enough to outrun. The idea is, twice it says, he's running from the presence of the Lord. What's that mean? I think the idea is that he's giving up.

[30 : 33] He's quitting his calling. John 20 talks about the disciples after not knowing that Jesus had raised from the dead. Peter said, I'm going fishing.

He's not having a good time. He's abandoning the call of God and so often we can do that. He's turning his back on the Lord. He's giving up on the prayers. He's giving up on the sacrifice. He's giving up on the separated life.

He's giving up on the prophecies. He's had it. He's on the run. He keeps running. Look in verse 3. It says, he rose and went to Tarshish from the presence of the Lord.

He went down into Joppa. The idea down there is he's going down in the wrong direction away from the Lord. He found a ship. Look in verse 4. He says, the Lord hurled the great wind upon the sea and there's a mighty tempest.

Mariner's were afraid and each cried. But Jonah, in verse 5 at the end, Jonah had gone down into the inner part of the ship. He didn't just run onto the ship.

[31 : 33] He ran down into the bottom of the ship. He kept running. Notice how naturally we run and hide when we do something wrong.

I teach a kid. You're not teaching an adult to hide and to sulk. But how many times have we kept running? How many times have we prayed little more than, Lord, I'm done with this?

How many times have we known what the Lord is calling us to do and turned the other way? How many times have we snuffed out the quiet voice of conscience? Remember, Luther said, to disobey conscience is neither right nor safe.

How many times have we run? If you're running this morning, you know, you can run in so many different ways.

You can run from the Lord by trying to do all the things that you think the Lord wants out of your life and yet be mainly living for yourself or you can run from the Lord by running to all the other things you might think might satisfy you.

[32 : 46] And if you're running, I was running. I was running my hell-bound race and Lord, have mercy upon me if you're running. I'm glad you're here.

I pray that this morning would be a definitive moment in your life that the Lord would pause the running, so to speak, to let you know He's running after you. That this indeed can be the day of salvation.

God has prepared this for you to come and to receive and to hear the gospel of Jesus Christ. That the Lord made Jesus Christ the one who knew no sin, the one who never ran, the one who always obeyed, to be sin.

The Lord would lay upon Him all the iniquity of us all, all we who had gone astray. The Lord laid upon Christ all our running, all our lusts, all our self-righteousness, all our idolatry was laid upon Him so that He might suffer in our place and die on the cross so that in Him, in Jesus Christ, we might become the righteousness of God.

Not only that, but we might be welcomed back into the family of God. The ultimate deal with running, the Lord's not trying to just set the record straight and solve the dilemma.

[34 : 03] Here He's trying to say, I'm coming with mercy. I want you to come home if you're running. That's the gospel of Jesus Christ, and I invite you to come. The Lord says that if we confess our sins, He's faithful and just.

If we confess our sins and cleanse us of all unrighteousness. Verse 4, but the Lord. Oh man, but the Lord.

That's our story in so many ways. But the Lord. Had the Lord not intervened, our lives would have gone a very different way. Verse 4, but the Lord hurled a great wind.

Now this is a bit of a surprising, but not quite like Ephesians 2. Sometimes when mercy comes, things get worse before they get better. This is not the first time the Lord has come after Jonah.

He's been drifting a while. He's not what he wants was. He's not as obedient, not as humble. He doesn't trust the Lord. And so the Lord's trying to get his attention. He gives him this assignment as a final test and Jonah failed.

[35 : 09] Now the Lord hurled this great wind upon the sea. Surely this will get Jonah's attention. I think C.S. Lewis has it right. Sometimes God whispers, sometimes he warns, and sometimes he shouts.

Sometimes he sends pain to rouse a world to him and to rouse an individual to him. Lewis says pain and trouble are his megaphone to rouse a deaf world.

God doesn't repurpose pain and trouble or recycle him. He sends them. Pain and trouble are not an interruption to God's plan.

They're a carefully crafted part of it. And so the Lord sends trouble on Jonah to rouse him and to rescue him, to splash water on his face and say, what are you doing, Jonah?

What are you doing? Where are you going? Jonah, come back. Mercy often enters our lives in the storms of trouble.

[36 : 10] Now, I'm not saying sin is the cause of all our storms, but storms often reveal our sin and God's mercy. Tim Keller explains it like this.

When times are good, how do you know if you love God or just the things he is giving you or doing for you? You don't, really.

In times of health and prosperity, it's easy to think you have a loving relationship to God. You pray and do your religious duties since it is comforting and seems to be paying off.

But it is only in suffering that we hear God shouting a set of questions at us. Were things all right between us as long as I waited on you hand and foot?

Did you get into this relationship for me to serve you or for you to serve me? Were you loving me before?

[37 : 12] Were you loving the things I was giving you? Those are some of the most searching questions I've ever had in my life. And those questions and the storms are filled with mercy.

That's what's going on here. How many people have said they really got to know the Lord when everything was going well? Man, that bonus really brought me closer to the Lord. No. The storm is an SOS mission.

It's crazy. It's the Lord who's bringing the storm and it's the Lord who's slinging out the life vest, slinging out the safety rope and saying, Turn back. Jonah, this rope will save your life.

Grab a hold. You don't know what you're doing, Jonah. Grab the rope. I'll pull you ashore. It begs us to ask, Where have the storm clouds moved in?

Better yet, where is the Lord seeking to rouse us to stop running and to receive mercy?

[38 : 27] Storms have rescued many a person. John Newton, a literal storm, a slave trader, rescued by mercy on a boat, went on to write, Amazing Grace.

Storms have saved many others. I can't promise every storm this side of heaven will be easy or will end quickly or will end at all. Some will not end until they're swept away in eternity.

But I can promise the Lord will stand in the midst of it. Charles Spurgeon, the great preacher from London that we've heard about, his very last sermon in the pulpit said these astounding words as he called his church one final time to lean on Christ.

He says, Depend on it. You will either serve Satan or Christ, either self or the Savior. You will find sin, self, Satan, and the world to be hard masters.

But if you wear the livery of Christ, you'll find him so meek and lowly of heart that you'll find rest for your souls. He is the most magnanimous of captains. He is always found in the thickest part of the battle.

[39 : 48] When the wind blows cold, he always takes the bleak side of the hill. The heaviest end of the cross lies ever on his shoulder. If he bids us carry a burden, he carries it also.

If there is anything that is gracious, generous, kind, and tender, yes, lavish, and super abundant in love, you always find it in him.

I love this ending. Imagine hearing those words. You know, these 40 years and more have I served him. Blessed be his name. I would be glad to continue yet another 40 years in the same dear service here below if it so pleased him.

His service is life, peace, joy. Oh, that you would enter it at once. God help you to enlist under the banner of Jesus even this day.

may God help us too. In the end, Jonah was not running from Assyria or Nineveh or even from the assignment the Lord had given him. He was running from the Lord and from mercy.

[41 : 00] And sadly, that's where we've got to leave him for this week. It's hard to leave him there. But Jonah is a little book about a big God of great mercy. that's surprising and even shocking.

And we need ears to hear it over these next four weeks. Let me pray for us. Father in heaven, we humble ourselves before you.

God, I pray for anybody for whom the cold wind has blown in. for whom something unexpected, trouble, has just arisen or perhaps just the same old trouble that has risen to fight another day.

Lord, I pray that you would come by your spirit and attend to them with your presence. Lord, I thank you that mercy as the hymn writer said, the storm's cloud are big with mercy and will break upon our heads.

As we trust the Lord, we'll find the storm's cloud dissipate to only see a God of mercy. Lord, I pray that you would give us eyes to see and where our eyes can't see, that you give us a heart that trusts.

[42 : 24] It leans on you. People in our own understanding is lacking. Lord, we might follow you with courage and humility all the days of our lives.

Lord, let us be people that may not run away from you but run towards you. Let our best days not be in the past but be ahead, further up the road where we can know you more and commune with you more, live in the good of the gospel more and more.

We pray, we commit our lives to you, we commit this book, this study to you. Lord, help us. Open your word up to us and help us to see. We pray, in Jesus' name, Amen.

You've been listening to a message given by Walt Alexander, lead pastor of Trinity Grace Church in Athens, Tennessee. For more information about Trinity Grace, please visit us at trinitygraceathens.com.

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