

**PROPHET ON THE RUN!**  
*You can Run from God's Ministry but  
You can't Outrun God's Mercy*

*A Journey through Jonah:  
Embracing and Extending God's Scandalous Mercy*

**Text: Jonah 1:1-6**

*Now the word of the Lord came to Jonah the son of Amittai, saying, <sup>2</sup> "Arise, go to Nineveh, that great city, and call out against it, for their evil has come up before me." <sup>3</sup> 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 down into it, to go with them to Tarshish, away from the presence of the Lord. <sup>4</sup> But the Lord hurled a great wind upon the sea, and there was a mighty tempest on the sea, so that the ship threatened to break up. <sup>5</sup> Then the mariners were afraid, 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 lain down and was fast asleep. <sup>6</sup> 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 may not perish."*

**Introduction:**

**This morning we are continuing our journey through the little book of Jonah – a story of God's gracious, radical, and even scandalous mercy! As we noted last week, the 48 verses that comprise this little book have much to teach us about the graciousness of God's heart, the Spirit-generated responsiveness of wicked sinners, and the shocking hard-heartedness that sometimes shows up among God's people – and maybe even in us!**

**We all love mercy and delight in grace when God extends it to us. When we find ourselves floating in an ocean of pain in the middle of a storm of our own making, we are grateful when God shows up to help. However, like Jonah, we may not be as delighted when God shows that same mercy and grace to those we don't think deserve His grace or merit His mercy. In other words, what do we do when God loves those who don't love us or even like us?**

**How do we respond when we find that the good and perfect will of God is not acceptable to us? And before we answer that question, we need to remind ourselves of who Jonah was (his national identity) and what he did (an appointed champion and official spokesman for the God of Israel).**

**First and foremost, Jonah was an Israelite – a member of God’s chosen people and part of God’s special nation living within the boundaries of God’s amazing and gracious covenant with Abraham and later with David.**

**Everyone living inside these boundaries knew exactly who God was and what He was like because they had received the good gift of His Word and had tasted His mercy. Even when they sinned grievously, more often than not they experienced God’s grace and received His mercy. And Jonah knew this quite well because God had sent him to one of the more wicked kings of Israel, Jeroboam II to announce that instead of judgment from His hand, His people would again receive mercy – even though they had done nothing to merit such gracious mercy.**

**In fact, God’s abundant mercy to Israel was almost scandalous and bordered on being theologically offensive – how could God continue to show patient grace and extend unmerited mercy to a nation that continued to disregard His Word, disobey His Word, ignore His warnings, and denigrate His prophets? But Jonah was fine with this scandalous grace and shocking mercy because of who was receiving it – Israel.**

**If you met Jonah, he might shake his head at the spiritual darkness of his nation. He might be extremely troubled at the way the people of Israel disregarded God and disobeyed His word. He would have been deeply disturbed by the wanton wickedness of people who should know better! And if he ran into you at the marketplace, as he urged you to pray for Israel and encouraged you to lobby to bring the 10-commandments back into the public square, he might hand you a *Make Israel Great Again* button to put on your robe or a sticker to put on your chariot!**

**Jonah was a prophet who loved God and a patriot who loved his nation. He was eager to denounce the sins being committed in Israel, pronounce strong warnings of God's approaching judgment, and remind people of God's mercy on Israel should they repent.**

**Jonah wanted God to deliver and save rebels – just not all rebels! So when God showed up with a word for Jonah to take to people whose national policies he despised, whose religious ideology he denied, and whose moral values he denounced (and all rightly so) – Jonah sat in stunned silence. He reacted with righteous indignation. He responded with moral indignation because the good and perfect will of God was unacceptable to His prophet.**

**For his entire life Jonah was a man who knew God truly, served God faithfully, and spoke for God authoritatively . . . but now we find him running from the God he knew, loved, and had served. But before we judge Jonah too harshly, the same can happen to any of us – despite our past service to God, our present status before God, or even our personal claim to spirituality.**

**We can spend a lifetime loving the God we think we know, serving and sacrificing for the plan we think we understand and remaining faithful in the face of the difficulties we receive from His hand or the trials we endure for His sake. And then one day, God decides to do something that is so morally objectionable to us or so theologically offensive to us that we fold up our tent, close up our heart, and look for the nearest ship to the farthest place from God's will.**

**How does this happen to people like us? It happens to us just like it happened to Jonah which is why our text this morning is so helpful to us.**

## **I. Receiving God's Word: 1:1-2**

*Now the word of the Lord came to Jonah the son of Amittai, saying, <sup>2</sup> "Arise, go to Nineveh, that great city, and call out against it, for their evil has come up before me."*

- **The book starts surprisingly and suddenly – “*now it happened that the word of Yahweh came*” – not normally how a prophetic book begins.**
- **The first person we meet in the book is not Jonah – it is God.**
- **We meet Him by His covenant name – *Yahweh*, Israel's God.**
- **God is up to something and whatever He is up to it is something big; something unexpected, and something that will surprise everyone – including Jonah!**
- **The faithful God of Israel has a “word” with His faithful servant Jonah (*the son of Amittai = the faithful son*).**
- **And that word turns Jonah's entire life and world upside down.**

### ***A. Clear and Authoritative – “The Word of YHWH came”***

- **Expressed clearly – no possibility that Jonah would mis-hear or misunderstand its content.**
- **Expressed authoritatively – no possibility that Jonah would miss its source – Yahweh!**

### ***B. Personal and Direct – “to Jonah, the son of Amittai”***

- **A faithful God – *the God who is faithful to His Covenant People***
- **Speaks a faithful Word – *a word that has been faithful to His covenant with David and is now about to be faithful to His covenant with Abraham.***
- **To a faithful Servant – *for his entire ministry, Jonah has been faithfully proclaiming God's faithfulness to people who have been acting faithlessly!***
- **For a Faithless and Sinning People – *already given to Israel and now it is to go to Nineveh.***

### ***C. Specific and Compelling – “Arise, go!”***

- ***Compelling*** – all are stated as commands – arise! Go! Cry out!
- ***Urgent*** – “Arise, go” = “go immediately”
- ***Specific*** – in location (Nineveh) and in purpose (Cry out against – warn them that their wickedness has come up before Me!”)

### ***D. Repugnant and Unacceptable***

- When God used Jonah to announce covenant mercy upon His sinning covenant people on account of His faithfulness to the promise He made to David, Jonah passed with flying colors. (2 Kings 14:25-27).
- Now God instructed Jonah to take His covenant mercy to a sinning nation that was not part of His covenant people.
- And the reason for this strange commission is the promise God made to Abraham to bless the nations through his descendants – of which Jonah was one!
- Based on His faithfulness to that promise, God is now sending Jonah (a son of faithfulness) to take grace and extend mercy to sinning people who were not part of Jonah’s tribe.
- And when Jonah heard this – it was theologically unacceptable, morally offensive, and personally repugnant.

## **II. Resisting God’s Will: 1:3**

*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 down into it, to go with them to Tarshish, away from the presence of the Lord.*

- Jonah listened to the Word from God and what he heard was ***theologically unacceptable***.
- Jonah evaluated the Will of God and what he understood was ***morally offensive***.
- Jonah considered the implications of the Work God wanted to do, and what he understood was ***personally unthinkable!***
- Jonah judged God and found Him wanting!
- Jonah got up, packed up, and headed out – in the wrong direction!

**A. A Deliberate Response – “Jonah arose”**

- After he heard
- After he understood,
- He arose and went....
- So far so good – but we are not expecting what comes next in the text – “to flee!”
- This is intentional and deliberate!

**B. A Disobedient Response – “to flee to Tarshish”**

- God told him to go 500 miles northeast to Nineveh.
- Instead, Jonah headed west to the port of Joppa where he rented a ship to take him to a place 2000 miles in the opposite direction – Tarshish. The Timbuktu of his day!
- Jonah wanted no part of God’s plan and so he determined to go as far away from where God wanted to work!

**C. A Devastating Response – “from the presence of the Lord”**

- What did it mean for Jonah to leave the “presence of the Lord?”
- Jonah left God’s established nation/kingdom.
- Jonah abandoned God’s chosen covenant people.
- Jonah renounced God’s gracious appointed ministry.
- Jonah is *self-willed, self-reliant, and self-righteous!!*

**III. Running from God’s Work: 1:3**

*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 down into it, to go with them to Tarshish, away from the presence of the Lord.*

**How did a man with the spiritual background, the ministerial history, and the theological background justify running from God as Jonah did? The same way you and I justify running from God!**

**A. Theologically Justified –God’s justice**

- What God was about to do violated every standard of justice that Jonah knew about God and had preached to God’s people.

- God gives mercy to people who deserve it – people who repent. But people who sin wantonly and wickedly deserve judgment and if God doesn't judge – then He can't be just!
- At the end of the day, Jonah struggled with the unjustness of what He was pretty sure God wanted to do at Nineveh.

***B. Politically or Nationally Justified – God's Covenant Obligation***

- Israel was God's covenant people which is why they got so much mercy in the face of some much rebellion.
- But how could God extend His covenant mercy to a non-covenant people who did not appear to be the least bit repentant and who had done so much damage to others?
- And how could He do this when He knew (and so did Jonah), that one day shortly, this very nation would come and destroy Jonah's nation and deport his people?
- Jonah wanted God to make Israel great again! How in the world could he go to the very people that would actually diminish and eventually destroy the very nation he wanted to see become great!

***C. Morally Justified – Nineveh's Wickedness***

- Assyria in general and Nineveh had been sinning wantonly for hundreds of years.
- Their wickedness and cruelty were known internationally and wherever they showed up, their armies brought crushing oppression, moral depravity, cruel torture, and violent, gruesome death.
- In every conceivable way, these people were moral monsters!
- In fact, Israel had experienced their moral monstrosity in the past and would experience it again in the very near future!

***D. Providentially Justified – “and found a ship”***

- When you decide to run from God's will and abandon God's people, Satan is always ready to buy you a ticket on a boat to anywhere away from the presence of God!

- But when you get there you have to pay the full cost of the trip and the immense price of living out of God's will!
- The fact that Jonah was willing to go to Joppa and rent a ship is stunning. Israelites were not sea-faring people. They were landbound – people of the land!
- Jonah went to the last place a Hebrew prophet would go – to the Phoenician port city of Joppa. When he got there, he did the last thing an Israelite would do – book passage on a ship. And he wanted to escape the situation so badly that he was willing to pay whatever it cost to get as far away from God's will as possible – he rented the whole ship (which probably cost him all that he owned) and headed to the other side of the world.

***E. Personally Justified – self-righteous silence***

- For his whole life, Jonah talked to God and for God.
- Now he is silent as he runs.
- Sometimes silence is golden but not this time. Jonah is silent because he is frustrated and angry at God.
- He is not the first one to feel this way. Elijah felt this way when he told God that he alone was the only person who seemed to care about God's name and God's honor. In Elijah's eyes, not even God seemed to care about those important matters – and so if God wasn't going to care, then it was up to Elijah!
- And this is precisely what we find going on in Jonah's heart – he is deeply angry at God over what he suspects God is about to do for Nineveh (4:1-2).
- If God wasn't going to be righteous and do the just thing, then Jonah was going to be righteous by refusing to participate in the unjust thing God was about to do!
- Jonah ran because he was afraid – not of what the Assyrians at Nineveh might do to him but of what he feared God would do for the Assyrians at Nineveh.



- **Jonah found himself where many of us often find ourselves – we are wiser than God and we come to the place where we find ways to justify doing what is right in our own eyes even if it means disregarding the Word of God or disobeying the will of God.**
- **Instead of listening with Spirit enable ears, we walk by sight and end up in a storm of our own making out in an ocean of pain without an oar, a boat, or even a life-ring!**
- **And that is precisely where Jonah is headed!**

#### **IV. Rebuked by God's Ways: 1:4-6**

*But the Lord hurled a great wind upon the sea, and there was a mighty tempest on the sea, so that the ship threatened to break up. <sup>5</sup> Then the mariners were afraid, 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 lain down and was fast asleep. <sup>6</sup> 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 may not perish."*

- **While Jonah may have been through with God, God was nowhere near being through with Jonah!**
- **As Jonah ran from the Lord, the Lord was running toward His struggling servant – with a boatload of grace and an ocean filled with mercy!**
- **All the while Jonah was silently running away from God's will, God was silently working His plan to get Jonah exactly where He wanted him so Jonah could experience grace and enjoy the very mercy he was so worried God would give to Nineveh!**

#### **A. Designed by God – "But Yahweh hurled a great wind"**

- **Its Divine Origination – God was the author of Jonah's call and now He is the author of the storm around Jonah that He designed to quiet the storm inside Jonah!**

- Its Fierce Intensity – God hurled the wind on the ocean like a mighty warrior would hurl a spear at an enemy. Jonah needed to understand that disobedience, however well-intentioned or self-justified arouses the displeasure of the God of Heaven and Earth!
- Its Faithful Ministry – Through this storm, Jonah will be brought to the place of desperation, and from that place, he will finally resume a conversation with God!
- God in kindness, gave Jonah a careful and limited taste of wrath so that he would desperately hunger for grace and long for a drink of God’s mercy – the same mercy and grace that the Ninevites needed as much if not more than Jonah!

***B. Directed by God – “there was a mighty tempest on the sea”***

- Seen in their *frantic activity* of the sailors – they rowed with all their might; they cast their valuable possession to save their lives as well as Jonah’s.
- Seen in their *fervent praying* – each of these pagan idolaters began calling out to their national and personal gods to appease which-ever of the gods had been offended.
- Seen in the *striking contrast* between the pagan sailors and the prodigal prophet. They were doing for Jonah what Jonah should have been doing for them! But while all of this was going on, Jonah took his rain-drenched soul down into the bowels of the ship, and once there, he lay down and fell into a deep sleep.
- And that is where the captain found Jonah – fast asleep snoring away in his sins!

***C. Discovered by God – “so the captain came and said to him”***

- God was not about to let his sleeping prophet snore his sins away. He sent a probing pagan sea captain to wake his prodigal prophet and confront him with a question designed to stir his conscience instead of hardening Jonah’s will.

- And when the captain speaks – he wants to know what in the world Jonah is doing asleep when he should be praying to his god for mercy!
- The captain did not yet know Jonah’s identity or profession. He had no idea that Jonah’s God was the true God of Heaven and Earth – and that Jonah’s God was the One who architected the storm they were in!
- All he knew is that regardless of who they were or what they had done – they all desperately needed mercy!
- So he exhorts Jonah to do the one thing Jonah was unwilling to do . . .  
*“Talk to your God! Ask Him for mercy for us!”*
  
- Sometimes God sends a probing pagan into the life of his prodigal children to put them in the uncomfortable position of having to intercede to God for them and to ask for the very grace and mercy despised but so desperately needed by the prodigal child of God!

### **Conclusion: Lessons for Life**

#### ***1. Jonah did not understand the plan of God.***

Question: Am I willing to accept the Word of God even when it doesn’t make sense to me?

#### ***2. Because Jonah did not understand God, he began to mistrust God.***

Question: Am I willing to trust God even when I don’t understand His plan?

#### ***3. Because Jonah did not trust God, he disregarded God’s Word and disobeyed God’s will.***

Question: Am I willing to obey God even if I don’t agree with or like His will?

***4. Jonah's disobedience led him to distance himself from God, from God's people, and from his ministry.***

Question: Have I distanced myself from God and from His People?

Question: Have I stopped serving God in some ministry He has given me?

***5. Jonah's disobedience made him silent before God and comfortable in his sinful resistance.***

Question: Have I made an uncomfortable peace with my sinful resistance to God?

***6. Jonah's disobedience displeased God, damaged Jonah, and endangered others.***

Question: Have I judged God in my own balances and found Him wanting?

Question: Have I become more righteous and just than God in my actions and attitudes?

Question: Have I become wiser than God in my own eyes?

**We can run from God – but we can't outrun God's mercy!  
So why not run to God instead of running from Him?**