



## We Can Run

Jonah 1: 1-17

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### Introduction:

- Please keep your Bible open and Jonah 1, because for the next few weeks, we're going to be looking at the story of Jonah.
  - This is a very famous story about a big fish.
  - But this story isn't mainly about a fish, it's about a prophet running away from God.
  - It's about a man who stopped caring and decided to quit.
  - And through this story, we'll see how God shows his grace, even to those who turn away.
  
- And in many ways, this book is for the church today.
  - It helps us to see what it looks like to show grace to others.
  
- We'll continue to face people who are difficult to love.
  - And we'll need to continue to grow in love as a church.
  - And through this book, God will teach us, not only to love the sinner, but even the self-righteous.
  - And my hope is that through this series, our church can learn to better reflect the grace and love of Jesus Christ.
  
- And this morning, we'll see how we can love, by following God, even when it's hard to follow.
  - Following God isn't always easy.
  - In fact, it's often difficult.
  - And it can be tempting to run away from responsibility, to run from obeying his word, and shining his light, and showing his love, and enduring through suffering, and living for God's glory.
  - But in Jonah chapter 1, we'll see that even when we run, God doesn't let us go.
  - And we'll learn how we can press on, not by our strength, but by his grace.



## Point 1:

- First, we see in our passage, a picture of true obedience.
  - Here we see what it looks like to truly follow God.
  
- And the first aspect we learn is how obedience begins with the word of the Lord.
  - Listen to Jonah chapter 1 verse 1.
  - **Now the word of the Lord came to Jonah the son of Amittai, saying, “Arise, go to Ninevah, that great city, and call out against it, for their evil has come up before me.”**
  
- The first verse of Jonah doesn’t begin with Jonah’s thoughts, or Jonah’s will.
  - It begins with the word of God.
  - Why?
  - Because that’s where obedience begins.
  - Obedience to God, isn’t about what we think, or what we feel.
  - It’s not about our plans for the future.
  - Rather, obedience is always driven by God’s word.
  
- Now, there will be times, when we may not fully understand God’s will.
  - We may need to discern God’s will through prayer and wisdom.
  - We may need counsel from others.
  
- But there are also times when God’s will is very clear.
  - For example:
  - God commands us to forgive others, as he’s forgiven us.
  - He commands us to have a pure mind and to fight against lust.
  - He warns us against coveting what others have, and judging others.
  - He commands us to depend on him in prayer.
  - And in our passage, God’s word is crystal clear.
  - The word of the Lord came to Jonah, and told him to go to Ninevah.



- Obedience always begins with the word of God.
  
- Do you see what this means for us?
  - This means that obedience must start with a heart that submits to God's word.
  - Obedience isn't just about following rules, or trying to be good, or being kind to others.
  - There are many people who are kind and yet are resisting God.
  - Because true obedience isn't just about doing, but rather, trusting and delighting in God's word.
  - That's why, if you don't trust God's word, you'll struggle to obey God's word.
  - Obedience begins when we learn to submit to God's word.
  
- Furthermore, we see from our passage how obedience is often costly and difficult.
  - Trusting God's word may require us to sacrifice our comfort, or to face our fears, or to overcome a challenging situation.
  - Obedience often requires sacrifice.
  
- Before Jonah's time, the nation of Syria conquered many Israelite cities.
  - And as a result, God's people were enslaved by Syria.
  - And even though the king of Israel, Jeroboam II was an evil king.
  - Even though God's people refused to repent of their sin.
  - God showed compassion.
  - He heard the cry of his people, and he restored their land.
  - And it was Jonah, who proclaimed the good news, that God would restore the land.
  - Listen to 2 Kings chapter 14:
  - **“Jeroboam II, restored the border of Israel from Lebo-Hamath as far as the Sea of the Arabah, according to the word of the Lord, the God of Israel, which he spoke by his servant Jonah the son of Amittai, the prophet, who was from Gath-Hepher.”** 2 Kings 14:24-25
  
- Do you see how costly it was for Jonah to leave Israel?
  - Jonah had a fruitful ministry.



- There was more work to be done with God's people.
- But instead of asking Jonah to preach to Israel, God commanded him to leave a thriving ministry, a comfortable home, his family and friends.
  
- And it wasn't just some random nation.
  - God called Jonah to go to the Assyrians, a nation that was gaining power, and threatening God's people.
  - Historical artwork from Ninevah shows Assyrian armies, burning their enemies, and even skinning the people they conquered.
  - The Assyrians were a violent nation.
  - That's why God says that their evil had come up to him.
  - In fact, during Jonah's time, we read in 2 Kings 15 how Assyria forced the king of Israel to pay 1000 talents of silver as tribute.
  
- Do you see how difficult it was for Jonah to obey?
  - Jonah was called to preach to this violent nation.
  
- And to add to this, both Amos and Hosea were also preaching that a foreign nation would judge God's people.
  - Hosea explicitly says in Hosea chapter 11, that Assyria would judge God's people.
  
- Can you imagine what it felt like for Jonah?
  - I wonder if Jonah might've said to God:
  - "We just defeated the Syrians, and now you want me to preach to the Assyrians?"
  - "A nation that Hosea is saying is going to judge us?"
  - "Lord, please let me preach to your people, so they might repent?"
  - "Assyria is a wicked nation that needs to be judged."
  - "Why would you send me to Assyria, it makes no sense?"
  
- Here we see how obedience is often costly and difficult.
  - God calls us to leave comfortable situations, to give up what we want, to obey even when it doesn't make sense.



- Finally, we see how obedience also requires us, to love those who are hard to love.
  
- In Galatians chapter 5, the Apostle Paul states:
  - **“For the whole law is fulfilled in one word: “You shall love your neighbor as yourself.”** Galatians 5:14
  - In other words, obedience isn’t just about what we do, but how we love.
  - Obedience to God, and love for others must go together.
  - This includes loving those who are difficult to love.
  - Those we’d rather avoid.
  - Those who’ve caused us hurt.
  
- And that’s exactly what God was asking Jonah to do.
  - We’ll see in the coming weeks, just how much Jonah hated the Assyrians.
  - He hated what Assyria was doing to God’s people.
  - He wanted Assyria to be judged.
  - But God wanted Jonah to show compassion.
  - To give grace.
  
- So, what does it look like to obey God?
  - It starts with a heart that submits to God’s word.
  - It embraces sacrifice and discomfort.
  - And it leads us to love, even those who are hard to love.
  
- And Jonah, seeing all that God was commanding him to do, struggled to obey.
  - And instead of obeying God’s word, he ran away.
  - Which leads us to our second point.

## **Point 2:**

- Second, we see in our passage, the danger of running from God.
  - Our God is a gracious God.
  - But that doesn’t mean we won’t face any consequences when we disobey his word.



- And that's exactly what we see in our passage today.
- And the first danger we see is that, it's possible, even for mature believers to run from God.
  - In verse 3 it says:
  - **“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.”**
- We don't know for sure where Tarshish was, but what's clear is that Jonah wasn't going to Ninevah.
  - From Gath-Hepher, Jonah went south to Joppa, instead of north to Ninevah.
  - And from Joppa, the only way you can go is west.
  - Ninevah was in the east.
  - But Jonah was purposely going in the opposite direction from Ninevah.
- And think about this:
  - Jonah was a prophet of God.
  - A spiritual leader.
  - A mature believer.
  - He was used by God in powerful ways.
  - And yet, it's this man who runs from God.
- As we look around us, we can see many people running from God.
  - There are many people in our world, who want nothing to do with God.
  - But if we're honest with ourselves, don't we run from God as well?
  - It may not be as dramatic as getting on a ship and sailing to Tarshish.
  - But instead of accepting others, don't we avoid conversations we need to have?
  - Instead of following our convictions, don't we make excuses?
  - Instead of fighting sin, don't we justify ourselves?
  - Instead of taking responsibility, don't we shift the blame?



- Instead of pressing on when it's tough, don't we look for the easy way out?
- Here we see, how it's possible, even for mature believers, to run from God.
- Another danger of running from God is that, your heart may become more resistant to his voice.
- After hearing from God, look at what Jonah does.
  - He doesn't just stay in Gath-Hepher.
  - He goes down to Joppa.
  - Then he finds a ship sailing for Tarshish.
  - Then he pays the fare.
  - (And by the way, this was probably an expensive fare.)
  - Then he gets on that ship.
  - Then he goes down into the ship.
  - He doesn't just stay on top.
  - He goes down below, to make it clear, he's not going to change his mind.
- And it doesn't just stop there.
  - When God sends the storm, instead of trying to save the sailors, he stays quiet.
  - He knows that God has control over the seas.
  - He knows he's running from the Lord.
  - In verse 12 he literally says, **"I know it is because of me that this great tempest has come upon you."**
  - But instead of confessing his sin to save the sailors, he remains silent.
- When I was a youth pastor, I remember finding a bottle of Korean Soju, an alcoholic beverage at one of our winter retreats.
  - In a room with 6 or 7 guys, we asked who brought this bottle.
  - No one said a word.
  - We told them, the whole room would have to go home, unless the culprit spoke up.



- No one said a word.
- The culprit would rather have everyone go home, then fess up.
- Sadly, we had to send all the boys home.
  
- In a similar way, Jonah didn't care, if they all had to die, they'd all have to die.
  
- Fortunately for the sailors, they were able to find, that Jonah was the cause of the storm.
  - But even after being exposed.
  - Instead of repenting, Jonah tells the sailors to throw him into the water.
  - He'd rather die than listen to God.
  
- Do you see how Jonah becomes more resistant to God?
  - It's one thing to find a ship.
  - But it's even worse to pay the price for a seat.
  - And then, it's even worse to go through with it, and set for sail.
  - And then, it's even worse to endanger the lives of others, to cover your sin.
  - And even worse, to choose death, rather than obey God's word.
  
- That's why the Bible says that Jonah kept going down and down.
  - That's the danger of running.
  - Your heart gets harder.
  - And you become more resistant to God's voice.
  
- To put it another way, running from God doesn't just take you further away, it makes it harder to come back.
  
- Jonah was running from God, because he disagreed with what God wanted to do.
  - He thought it was unfair for God to send him to Ninevah.
  - He didn't want God to show grace.
  - He wanted God to judge his enemies.



- In a similar way, our hearts may grow hard, when we disagree with what God has allowed, or perhaps not allowed in our lives.
  - We may feel that God has been unfair.
  - And it may be that your heart has grown hard.
  - It may be that you've become distant from God.
  
- If that is you, I want you to know, that God is speaking to you today.
  - The reason you're here, is because he's pursuing you, just like he was pursuing Jonah.
  - And he wants you to come to him.
  - He wants you to see his love.
  - I said earlier that running from God makes it harder to come back.
  - But I also want you to know, no matter how far you run, you can always come back to God.
  - And so, if you hear his voice today, don't harden your heart.
  - Repent and return to the Lord.
  
- Here we see, the danger of running is that you'll become more resistant to his voice.
  
- Finally, the danger of running away, is that, you may cause unnecessary pain to those around you.
  
- Just think about the pain that Jonah caused the sailors on the boat.
  
- Because of Jonah, the sailors faced a storm they didn't need to face.
  - They had to face unnecessary stress.
  
- They lost all the cargo that was on the ship.
  - There could've been important cargo that belonged to one of the sailors on the ship.
  - That was their livelihood.
  - And all was lost.
  
- They also had to face the fear of dying.
  - Can you imagine a sailor wondering if he'd ever see his family again?



- And then, they had to deal with the decision to throw Jonah into the water.
  - Were they taking a man's life?
  - Were they doing the right thing?
  - They had to deal with the moral weight of throwing a man into the sea.
  
- All this because one man chose to run away from God.
  
- Jonah felt that God was being unfair.
  - And yet he failed to realize, the danger he was putting others in.
  
- When we feel that God is being unfair.
  - When we feel that others are being unfair to us.
  - We may become selfish and blind to how we're hurting others.
  - And it may be tempting to throw a pity party for ourselves.
  - And so, before we make the decision to disobey, before we keep going down the wrong path, let's remember that our decisions can also hurt those around us.
  - Our children, our families, our friends, and even our church.
  
- Here we see, the danger of running from God.
  - It's possible for mature believers to run away.
  - Overtime, our hearts can become more resistant.
  - And our decision to run can even cause unnecessary pain in others.
  
- And so, what can we do?
  - How can we learn to become those who obey God's word?
  - How can we keep ourselves from becoming calloused and cold?
  - This leads us to our third point.

**Point 3:**

- Third, we see in our passage the responsibility we've been given.



- When we're tempted to go down the wrong path, we need to remember the responsibility that God has given to us.
- That's exactly what God does in our passage.
  - God reminds the prophet of the mission that he's given to him.
- Notice how Jonah was sleeping, when everyone was in danger of dying.
  - And so, the captain wakes him up and says to him:
  - **“Arise, call out to your god! Perhaps the god will give a thought to us, that we may not perish.”** Jonah 1:6
  - It's like someone saying to you:
  - “Listen, I know I'm going to perish.”
  - “I feel God's judgment over my life.”
  - “Can you please pray for me, so that I might be saved?”
  - “Is it possible that you're God is able to save my life?”
  - “Could you please pray for my salvation?”
  - The sailors are pleading to false gods, while Jonah could pray to the only God.
  - God is reminding Jonah that he's been called plead and pray for others.
- And then, when the sailors find out that Jonah is the cause of the storm.
  - They ask him:
  - **“Tell us on whose account this evil has come upon us. What is your occupation? And where do you come from? What is your country? And of what people are you?”** Jonah 1:8
  - Jonah refused to speak God's truth to the Assyrians.
  - But now, the sailors ask Jonah to share truth, about the God of the Bible.
  - And he tells them:
  - **“I am a Hebrew, and I fear the Lord, the God of heaven, who made the sea and the dry land.”** Jonah 1:9
  - God is reminding Jonah, that he needs to speak the truth.
  - The man who refused to preach, is being forced to preach.
- And then, look at how much care the sailors show to Jonah.
  - Because of Jonah, the sailors have to face a storm.



- They're in danger of death.
- But even after finding out that Jonah is the cause of the storm, they try very hard to save his life.
- Jonah said to them:
- **“Pick me up and hurl me into the sea...”** Jonah 1:12
- **“Nevertheless, the men rowed hard to get back to dry land, but they could not, for the sea grew more and more tempestuous against them.”** Jonah 1:13
- Jonah is running away from speaking against the Assyrians.
- He wants them to perish.
- And yet, these sailors are rowing and rowing to save Jonah's life.
- I can't help but wonder if God is showing Jonah, how much more he needs to care for others, then these pagan men are caring for him.
  
- And isn't this call for us as well?
  - God has called us as Christian believers to plead for others.
  - To speak his truth and share the gospel.
  - He's called us to care for every life.
  
- But isn't true like Jonah, some of us have fallen asleep?
  - Pastor James Montgomery Boice writes:
  - “While the storm was raging, Jonah, who represents the church, was asleep deep within the hold of the ship. How many of God's people are asleep today? How many are impervious while the tempest rages?” (Boice, 274)
  
- Christian brother and sister.
  - I say this with love.
  - And I'm saying this to myself, because I often forget this as well.
  - But let's remember, that our main purpose on earth isn't for us to live in comfort.
  - It's not mainly so that we can avoid suffering.
  - It's not mainly so that we can do the bare minimum.
  - Rather, God has called you and me to obey his word, to seek holiness, to be salt and light, to endure suffering, to die to ourselves, and to bring glory and honor to his name.



- And if you're feeling tired, and discouraged, it may be you've forgotten your calling and purpose.
  - It may be, you're focused on doing the wrong things, and not the right things.
  - But like the captain on the ship, God is speaking to us today.
  - And he's telling us to wake up.
  - And so, let's stop making excuses.
  - And let's get back in the game.
  - Let's pray for those who need Christ.
  - Let's get involved and serve where there's a need.
  - Let's invite people in our circles to church.
  - Instead of running away, let's stand firm in what God has called us to do.
  
- Remember the responsibility you've been given.

**Point 4:**

- Fourth and finally, we see in our passage, the grace that keeps us going.
  
- What's amazing about this book is that God doesn't give up on Jonah.
  - Jonah gave up on God, but God never gives up on Jonah.
  - God could've easily sent another prophet to go to Ninevah.
  - But God kept reaching out to Jonah.
  - Why?
  - Because God cares about you, more than what you're doing.
  - If God only cared about the results, and the work, he would've ditched Jonah.
  - But God shows compassion, and he continues to reach out to this run-away prophet.
  - Just as he continues to reach out to us.
  
- And so, instead of running from God, let's run to God.
  - Let's obey his word, and trust in him, and serve him, and worship him with all our heart.



- And when you find it hard to obey, when you feel like running away.
  - Remember this, that unlike Jonah, you have a Savior, Jesus Christ, who gave himself for you.
  
- Even when we were his enemies, Christ didn't bring judgement on us.
  - Rather, he left the comfort of heaven, to be with us.
  - So that he could save us from our sins.
  
- And when Jonah wouldn't submit to God's will.
  - Jesus Christ submitted himself to the Father, even to the point of death on the cross.
  
- And when Jonah was silent when the storm was raging.
  - Remember that Jesus didn't stay silent, but he faced the storm of God's wrath, so that we could make it to shore.
  
- James Boice writes:
  - "When you run away from the Lord you never get to where you are going, and you always pay your own fare. But when you go the Lord's way you always get to where you are going, and he pays the fare." (Boice, 269)
  
- When you feel that you don't have the strength to press on, when you feel that you are afraid to face the future, look to God's grace, because he paid the price, and you'll see that you have all you need, to live for him.