



THE GOD WHO RUNS:

A STUDY OF THE BOOK OF JONAH

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THE GOD WHO RUNS: A STUDY OF JONAH

Introduction

- Jonah is a book about a man who thought he knew who God was, how God acted and thought
- For the most part, Jonah assumed God only loved people who looked like he did
 - But, when he finds out that the view he held of God was not accurate
 - That leads him to a crisis where he runs away, throws a fit, and decides he wants to die
- More than that, Jonah is a book about a God who is big enough to be misunderstood
 - And, He's loving enough to chase us when we try to run away from him

Format & Research

- This is a 7-pt series (with two "bonus lessons" at the end)
 - It is written to encourage us with practical applications taken from the book of Jonah.
- The series is available in video and audio format.
 - You can find the video series at www.fromthefray.com/Jonah
- The notes in this document were made primarily to be used in the video series
 - While following along may be helpful,
 - the bullet-style format is not intended to be read and studied without the accompanying videos
- I reference "commentators" throughout the series.
 - Primary sources of research and commentary come from Warren Wiersbe, Mark Driscoll, and Tim Keller
- I quote primarily from the ESV and NLT versions of the Bible

Outline

- For the most part, we'll walk through the book a verse at a time.
 - I'll spend more time on some sections than others when they best communicate the central message
- I deliberately skim past two sections of the book:
 - Jonah's prayer in chapter 2
 - And "the fish"
- I do so because they don't advance the overall message of the book.
 - My intent is to produce a video series that moves quickly enough to hold viewers' attention
 - But not so quick as to water down the overall message
- For that reason, I recorded two "bonus" videos at the end of the series dealing with the fish and the prayer.
 - In the first bonus video, I offer multiple explanations for the fish and do my best to explain it in a way that is true to the text but also palatable for a contemporary audience.
 - In the second bonus video, I attempt to explain Jonah's prayer in a way that practically informs and guides our prayer life today.

PART 1: BOATS GOING THE OTHER WAY (JONAH 1.1-3)

2 Get up and go to the great city of Nineveh. Announce my judgment against it because I have seen how wicked its people are.

Loving Terrorists

- Before we get all self-righteous and claim we'd do better,
 - We need to understand what Jonah was being asked to do
- Nineveh was founded by an awful dude named Nimrod
 - Don't name your kids after him
 - He was jerk who enjoyed killing, torture, and oppressing anyone weaker than him
- He founded his city in modern day Iraq, near Mosul
- The city was part of the Assyrian Empire, which was known far and wide for its barbarous tactics
 - They would take the babies of those they conquered, grab them by their heels, and smash their heads against rocks
 - They would make family members of the slain carry parade around with their deceased family member's head on a pole
- IOW: they were a terrorist state founded by a sociopath, located in Iraq
 - Think, ISIS or maybe the Taliban
 - These are groups and places that evoke strong emotional feelings for many of you
- So, are you willing to put on your MAGA trucker cap, grab your American flag, go to Iraq, play some Bruce Springsteen or Toby Keith for ISIS and tell them to turn to Jesus?
 - Neither was Jonah.

3 But Jonah got up and went in the opposite direction to get away from the Lord. He went down to the port of Joppa, where he found a ship leaving for Tarshish. He bought a ticket and went on board, hoping to escape from the Lord by sailing to Tarshish.

Boats Going the Other Way

- If you want to run from God, there will always be a boat ready to take you there
- But, you have to know this: not every boat comes from God
 - "I want to cheat on my spouse and here's a good-looking dude."
 - "I need some money and here's an easy way to steal from my employer."
- Not every boat comes from God.
 - You need to know that Satan provides as well.
 - What he provides often looks like an impressive ship, but it always turns out to be a shipwreck instead.

Mistrusting God

- Everyone does this, so don't get all judgy and condemning
- When we do it—rebel by running the opposite way—we know we're doing it
 - We don't need to be told.
 - Your conscience, which is God's Spirit inside you, won't let you feel good about doing a bad thing.
- At the core, every time we run and rebel, we're doing it for one reason:
 - We don't trust God
 - We may or may not say that out loud, but that's the reason
- People rarely sin because they want to be bad.
 - We don't usually do bad things from a malicious heart intent on being evil
- We do it because we fundamentally question whether God has our best interests in mind
 - We run and rebel because we're afraid of missing out on something

- We don't trust God (or believe in him at all) to know—really know—what's best for us and then give us that thing.
- Jonah ran because he couldn't possibly see a good reason for God to care about a terrorist state
 - And—this is the point—since Jonah couldn't see a good reason, he assumed that meant there was no good reason
 - Every time we do that—and again, we all do it—we're putting a lot of faith in ourselves to figure everything out

Sin Makes You Silly

- And, once we start running, we act silly.
 - I toyed with calling this study: sin makes you stupid, but I thought that didn't sound very pastoral
- But, the truth is: sin makes us do silly things that just don't make sense
- Like, trying to run from God
 - God, who is omnipresent: which means everywhere at all times, can't be ran from
 - It's like trying to escape the wind or run from your shadow
- Even more to the point:
 - You can't run from God because God is the one running after you.
 - If you're a believer, you didn't catch God. He caught you. He caught you bc he loves you.
 - You can't run away from Him.
 - He's faster.
 - I don't care if you've been running from God for years,
 - I'm here to tell you: you didn't make any progress.
 - He's still there.
- That's the point of this book.
 - God is chasing you.
 - He pursues you because he loves you.

PART 2: LOVING THOSE PEOPLE (JONAH 1.4-6)

- Intro/Summary

4 But the Lord hurled a powerful wind over the sea, causing a violent storm that threatened to break the ship apart.

Sin Comes with a Storm

- What's the point of this?
 - All sin has a storm attached to it.
- Jonah rebelled and ran from God, which was a sin
 - He soon found out: all sin has a storm attached to it
- I am not saying that all storms are the result of sin
 - Look: we live in a fallen world, which is full of storms that hurt and are scary
 - Please don't hear me say that all of the storms in your life are the result of sin
- But, sin always comes with a storm attached to it
 - This is self-evident: you can't neglect your body/health without eventually suffering from the consequences; you can't neglect your job/professional growth and expect to be a rockstar; you can't neglect your spouse without expecting your marriage to suffer.

Violence to Your Soul

- As long as I'm talking about a topic as unpopular as sin, let me say a few more things about it
- Sin is self-destructive
 - It's an act of spiritual suicide
 - Sin does violence to your soul because it increases your capacity for more sin
 - It initially feels good in some way, and then it becomes addicting
- For example:
 - When someone wrongs you and hurts you in some way
 - Initial bitter feelings can quickly lead to thoughts of revenge or conversations where you will "let them have it."
 - From there, it's not long until self-pity sets in, which only increases your capacity for more bitterness and a pathetic self-image
 - That insecurity will lead you to be defensive and to rationalize your words and behavior
 - All of this destroys your ability to have meaningful relationships with another human being
 - Those relationships are—by design—one of our greatest sources of joy
- This is how sin is self-destructive
 - It does violence to your soul by convincing you to act against your own interests
 - If you want to run the other way, there will always be a boat ready to take you there, and that sin will always come with a storm attached to it

Loving Those People

- Jonah's sin was that he mistrusted God's call to love his neighbor
 - His neighbor didn't look like him, so he saw no capacity for goodness in "those" people
- Now, before we get judgy again, ask yourself who "those" people are for you?
 - The ones you rationalize not loving?
 - You're glad God made hell so "those" people would have a place to go—away from you and your people
- Remember: the theme of this book is God's willingness to chase people—all people, even "those people"
 - He's about to teach Jonah that through his interaction with the sailors on his boat

5 Fearing for their lives, the desperate sailors shouted to their gods for help and threw the cargo overboard to lighten the ship. But all this time Jonah was sound asleep down in the hold.

6 So the captain went down after him. “How can you sleep at a time like this?” he shouted. “Get up and pray to your god! Maybe he will pay attention to us and spare our lives.”

- You know this is a big storm when professional sailors are scared
- I want you do notice: the unbelieving “those people” are the ones telling the missionary to pray
 - Not just that, but their words “Get up and pray” (“arise, call on your God”) is the exact same Hebrew phrase God used on Jonah in v. 2
 - To Jonah’s prejudicial surprise, his God’s words are coming from the mouths of dirty, unbelieving “those people”

A Word to the Christians

- At this point, I want to say something to the Christians
 - If you’re not a Christian, feel free to tune me out for a second
- Fellow Disciples of Jesus: these verses show us that people outside the church have a reasonable expectation for us to be committed to their good
 - The sailors’ criticism was well warranted
- They woke him up and asked him to be committed to their welfare and wellbeing
 - We should expect the world to do the same thing to the church today
- Someone’s different faith, race, convictions, beliefs, politics, etc.
 - Those are never reasons for us to stop loving and serving them
- We’re instructed by Jesus—from both his words and his actions—to love and serve our neighbor
 - There’s no qualification placed on that statement
 - Love your Muslim neighbor, your gay neighbor, your straight neighbor, your black neighbor and your white neighbor
- Why?
 - Because Jonah teaches us: we’re all in the same boat together.

PART 3: WHO DO YOU THINK YOU ARE? (JONAH 1.7-9)

- The storm at sea continues to rage, so the sailors start taking action

Jonah 1.7

7 Then the crew cast lots to see which of them had offended the gods and caused the terrible storm. When they did this, the lots identified Jonah as the culprit.

- These sailors worshipped a pantheon of gods from around the world,
 - And they wanted to know which one of those gods was causing this storm
- Casting lots is an ancient superstitious form of drawing straws
 - The straws pointed to Jonah, so they demanded answers:

Jonah 1.8

8 “Why has this awful storm come down on us?” they demanded. “Who are you? What is your line of work? What country are you from? What is your nationality?”

Who Do You Think You Are?

- One of the most important questions you will ever answer is, “Who am I?”
 - Not “what do I do” or “what do others think about me”
 - Those are different questions
 - “Who am I?” is an identity question
- How would you fill in the blanks?
 - I matter because...
 - I have value because...
 - I am worthy of being loved because...
- The way you answer those questions will tell you who/what you worship
 - Because they tell you where you feel your identity comes from
- These are the deepest truths about us,
 - ...Revealing who you really think you are
- As the storm rages in Jonah’s boat, the sailors ask him identity-level questions
 - The way he responds tells us why he ran and
 - why God’s command created such a crisis in Jonah’s heart

Twisted Priorities

Jonah 1.9

9 Jonah answered, “I am a Hebrew, and I fear the LORD, the God of heaven, who made the sea and the dry land.”

- Jonah says he fears the lord
 - That’s not entirely true; He should probably take that off his resume
- I want you to notice how Jonah reversed the order of his answers
 - The sailors started with “who are you” and ended with questions about nationality
 - Jonah ignored a few of their questions and replied first and foremost with his nationality
 - All of the commentators agree that this is significant
- Jonah’s primary source of identity—even before the God he worshipped—is the fact that he is Hebrew
 - Hebrew is both a term of ethnicity/race and nationality or country of origin
 - This is how Jonah sees himself

Bigotry & Blindness

- Many of us do the same thing today—often unconsciously
 - It bothers me most when people of faith do it

- I'm an American Christian,
- Black Christian,
- Conservative Christian
- Jesus made no distinctions and gave us no reason to put a qualifier before the word "Christian"
- This matters for at least two reasons:
 - Bigotry & Blindness

Bigotry

- When we see our identity primarily as American or Black or White
 - It causes us to be bigoted and biased against "those people" who don't share the same nationality or skin color or political convictions
 - Rightful, healthy pride in one's nationality or ethnicity can turn into prejudicial hatred if we allow that pride to grow out of proportion
- This is how Christians rationalize being greedy or racist or unloving toward people from another country
 - It's not the love of Christ and his grace and forgiveness that drives them and gives them identity
 - Rather, they find their meaning in other things like wealth, power, reputation, comfort, acceptance, etc.

Blindness

- The second problem with mistaken identity is that it makes you blind to everything around you
- If your identity comes from being "the smart one,"
 - You will chase, guard, and defend "being smart" at the cost of everything and everyone else
- If your identity comes from being "pretty,"
 - You'll live in fear of being ugly or fat,
 - and you'll jealously attack anything that might threaten your identity

Identity Crisis

- Jonah thought he had a God who only loved people from his race and nationality
- But, he's beginning to learn that God is willing to love and chase after "the other people,"

PART 4: ROWING ISN'T ENOUGH (JONAH 1.10 – 2.9)

- As the storm continues to rage on,
 - Jonah offers a solution:

Jonah 1.10-11

11 And since the storm was getting worse all the time, they asked him, “What should we do to you to stop this storm?”

12 “Throw me into the sea,” Jonah said, “and it will become calm again. I know that this terrible storm is all my fault.”

Sacrificial Love

- There’s a couple ways to look at Jonah’s actions here:
 - Heroically trying to save everyone at the cost of himself?
 - Or, saying he’d rather die than go to Nineveh?
- The answer is probably somewhere in the middle
 - Regardless, love is marked by concern for “the other”
 - We love someone when our concern for them outweighs our concern for ourselves
 - It happens when parents work and give of themselves for their children
 - Love pushed to its farthest limits compels us to sacrifice of ourselves
- If you’re at all familiar with the New Testament,
 - It wouldn’t be hard to see parallels between Jonah’s offer to sacrifice himself
 - and Jesus’ actions to die on our behalf

Mark 10. 45

For even the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve others and to give his life as a ransom for many.

Jesus is the Better Jonah

Word of God came to Jonah	Jesus came as the word of God
Jonah ran from Lord’s presence	Jesus came to bring the Lord’s presence
Sinner ran from God	Jesus is God who came to save sinners
Slept in a storm boat bc he was overwhelmed	Slept in stormy boat bc he was at peace
Could not calm the storm	Jesus spoke and commanded the storm to cease
Thrown into the sea to appease wrath of God	Thrown into a tomb to appease wrath of God
Some were saved from one nation	All can be saved from every nation
In the fish for 3 days/3 nights	In the grave 3 days/3 nights
Needed a savior	Jesus is Jonah’s savior

Rowing in the Storm

- In the midst of this storm, the sailors tried rowing harder and harder
 - Which is what we usually do in the storms of our life
- Of course, that’s not altogether wrong
 - If there’s rowing to be done, then you row
 - Keep going in the storm, putting one foot in front of the other, do the next right thing
 - And row as long as there’s rowing to be done
- But, at some point, you’re going to have to surrender to God’s love and God’s plan for your life
 - For all their rowing, the sailors were getting nowhere

Surrender

- Peace didn’t come until they surrendered

- Ask yourself what you're refusing to surrender to God
 - In what ways are you running in the opposite direction?
 - Spinning your wheels on a treadmill with nothing to show for it but frustration?
- Instead of asking "why, God, why?"
 - Try asking, "Who, God, do you want me to become?"
 - Or, "Where, God, do you want me to go?"
- Jonah finally surrendered from the belly of the fish

Jonah 2.1

Then Jonah prayed to the Lord his God from the belly of the fish

- We usually don't notice it at the time,
 - But if you look back over your life
 - You'll probably see the storms as the times when God has taught you the most
- We don't grow in comfort,
 - We grow in times of difficulty
- Seasons of our life stretch us to what feels like the breaking point
 - But, much to our dismay, we usually come back stronger than before
 - Sure, you'll have a few scars—some visible, some inside that maybe only you know about
- But, I'll close with this
 - Growth and strength aren't automatic
 - Being at the bottom doesn't automatically make you stronger
 - Neither does working and rowing at the bottom
 - Only praying at the bottom can do that
- I'll close with Jonah's prayer from the bottom:

Jonah 2.6-7

6 I sank down to the very roots of the mountains. I was imprisoned in the earth, whose gates lock shut forever. But you, O Lord my God, snatched me from the jaws of death!

7 As my life was slipping away, I remembered the Lord. And my earnest prayer went out to you in your holy Temple.

PART 5: MLK & MERCY (JONAH 2.10 – 3.10)

- The mega theme of the Book of Jonah is that God chases people like a parent chases a child.
 - That's the whole point of the fish: God chasing Jonah
- Summary so far:
 - God told Jonah to travel to modern-day Iraq and tell ISIS to stop killing people before God rains down fire from heaven on them
 - Jonah said no, bought a ticket in the opposite direction, so God sent a storm, Jonah got thrown overboard and swallowed by a fish that carried him around for 3 days
- Which brings us to Jonah 2.10

Jonah 2.10

10 Then the LORD ordered the fish to spit Jonah out onto the beach.

- The only thing worse than throwing up is being thrown up
- At least Jonah got to leave the fish the same way he went in

Serve the City

Jonah 3.1-3

1 Then the LORD spoke to Jonah a second time: 2 “Get up and go to the great city of Nineveh, and deliver the message I have given you.” 3 This time Jonah obeyed the LORD’s command and went to Nineveh, a city so large that it took three days to see it all.

- God repeats himself: go to the great city of Nineveh
 - Nineveh was a huge, impressive city both in size and population
- God sent Jonah there because he cares for cities
 - God cares for cities because he cares for people
- I want to encourage you to serve your city in real, tangible ways
 - It's filled with people God loves

Jeremiah 29.7

7 And work for the peace and prosperity of the city where I sent you into exile. Pray to the Lord for it, for its welfare will determine your welfare.

Mercy & Justice

- Nineveh was infamous for oppressing the weak
 - Leaving the conquered as well as many of its own citizens destitute, poor, and abused
- In that regard, Jonah was sent on a mission of social reform
 - To help the poor, powerless, and disenfranchised people being abused by Nineveh's cruel regime
 - Jonah was there as an agent of God's love and mercy
- In verse 10, we see that it worked because Nineveh “put a stop to their evil ways”
- It worked because Jonah also came as an agent of God's truth, justice, and judgment

Jonah 3.4

4 On the day Jonah entered the city, he shouted to the crowds: “Forty days from now Nineveh will be destroyed!”

- In the world we live in today, it's rare for us to see both truth and grace coming from the same group of people
- Those who preach grace and mercy and social reform aren't likely to talk about God's wrath and judgment
- On the other hand, people who focus on judgment, truth and correction rarely call for peace and social reform
- This is unfortunate because God calls for both
 - Biblically you cannot separate the two

Jesus & MLK

- MLK's call for social justice was deeply rooted in his beliefs about a God of judgment
 - We see both in his Letter from a Birmingham Jail:

*One has not only a legal but a moral responsibility to obey just laws.
Conversely, one has a moral responsibility to disobey unjust laws.
I would agree with St. Augustine that "an unjust law is no law at all."*

Now, what is the difference between the two? How does one determine whether a law is just or unjust? A just law is a man-made code that squares with the moral law or the law of God. An unjust law is a code that is out of harmony with the moral law. To put it in the terms of St. Thomas Aquinas: An unjust law is a human law that is not rooted in eternal law and natural law.

- King saw no tension in working for social justice and proclaiming God's willingness to deliver punishment for violating objective, universal truths
 - His "I have a dream speech" wasn't about everyone being free to define their own meaning in life or discover what is "true for them."
 - He quoted scripture:

Amos 5.24

24 But let justice roll down like waters, and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream.

- The best example of the harmony between Truth & Mercy isn't MLK
 - It comes from Jesus himself
- In his words to the woman caught in adultery, we see both working together:

John 8.10-11

10 Then Jesus stood up again and said to the woman, "Where are your accusers? Didn't even one of them condemn you?" 11 "No, Lord," she said. And Jesus said, "Neither do I. Go and sin no more."

- IOW: Because of my mercy, I forgive you.
- Because of my standards of truth and behavior, I expect you to knock it off.

Repentance

- The result, when truth and mercy are both present and embrace, is life-saving repentance:

Jonah 3.9-10

9 Who can tell? Perhaps even yet God will change his mind and hold back his fierce anger from destroying us.

10 When God saw what they had done and how they had put a stop to their evil ways, he changed his mind and did not carry out the destruction he had threatened.

PART 6: 3 WAYS TO BE A BIGOT (JONAH 4.1-4)

- More than any other book in the Bible, The Book of Jonah has the most unexpected ending
- If you're not familiar with the book, you might assume it ends:
 - When Jonah gets swallowed by the fish
 - Or maybe when the city of Nineveh repents and is spared from God's wrath
- But the plot twist surprise ending is Jonah's anger over God's decision to spare Nineveh

Jonah 4.1-3

1 This change of plans greatly upset Jonah, and he became very angry. 2 So he complained to the LORD about it: "Didn't I say before I left home that you would do this, LORD? That is why I ran away to Tarshish! I knew that you are a merciful and compassionate God, slow to get angry and filled with unfailing love. You are eager to turn back from destroying people. 3 Just kill me now, LORD! I'd rather be dead than alive if what I predicted will not happen."

- This is odd because the whole point of God's mission for Jonah was to bring Nineveh to repentance
 - The mission is successful, and that makes Jonah mad
- This just confirms that Jonah's heart was never committed to God's mission of love and mercy

Idols of the Heart

- So, God, playing the role of counselor or therapist, asks Jonah a question

Jonah 4.4

4 The LORD replied, "Is it right for you to be angry about this?"

- The question is rhetorical
 - Of course, it's not right for Jonah to be this angry
- But God wants Jonah to consider *why* he's so angry
- It'd be wise for us to ask the same question of ourselves:
 - What are the topics or situations that make you disproportionately angry?
 - What is it, if you lost it or didn't go your way, would throw you into despair like Jonah?
- Why do those things bother you so much?
 - How did they get to a point of having such direct access to your heart?
- When anything or anyone has more access to your heart than God, that thing has become an idol
 - We rarely make idols out of bad things
 - We make idols out of good things by making them ultimate things—
 - more crucial than even God's love and mercy in your life

Jonah's Idol

- If you remember from pt 3 of our series,
 - Jonah draws his identity first and foremost as a function of his ethnicity and patriotism
 - All his life, Jonah believed God only loved Hebrew people—people like him
- God's decision to love and spare Nineveh threatened Jonah's very identity
 - Not only is he not who he thought he was—someone God loved and favored more than "those people"
 - But, his country's greatest military rival is being spared from destruction
- It didn't matter that the Assyrians were human beings—nor that they were human beings God loved
 - They weren't *Hebrew* human beings, so Jonah would rather die than see "those people" live

The Danger of Idols

- This is why idols are so toxic to the human race
- When we care more for:
 - Our comfort than the general welfare of others, that's sin

- Our country's economic or military strength than the safety and health of others, that's sin
- Patriotic love of country can grow into imperialism
- Healthy love of race can grow into racism

3 Ways to Be a Bigot

- Nobody is born racist or hateful
 - So, how do we get this way?
- Let me give you 3 ways to be a bigot
 - There are other ways, but here's a good start
- 1. Let your Hurt turn to Hate
 - a. Rather than dealing with the righteous anger that comes from being hurt
 - b. You let that grow into bitterness and hatred for the people who initially caused your pain
- 2. Preferences grow into Prejudices
 - a. Rather than recognize your preferences as just that—your personal preferences
 - b. You withdraw from everyone who doesn't share those preferences, developing suspicion and partiality
- 3. If you Idolize, you will Demonize
 - a. (Jonathan Edwards)
 - b. We've seen this in Jonah's case
 - i. Once you idolize anyone or anything,
 - ii. you'll naturally begin to demonize all others
 - c. If you love something too much (which is possible),
 - i. that thing will push all other things away from the reach of your heart
- The remedy for all of this is Christ-like compassion
 - We'll deal with that in our next and final video

PART 7: A BETTER EMOTION (JONAH 4.4-11)

- In 4.4, God questions Jonah's anger over his decision not to destroy Nineveh
 - Then, God, displaying a tremendous sense of humor, orchestrates a series of events
 - Aimed at leading Jonah to a better emotion than anger—compassion

Plants & Worms

Jonah 4.5

5 Then Jonah went out to the east side of the city and made a shelter to sit under as he waited to see what would happen to the city.

- Jonah went outside the city (well out of range of thunder bolts or balls of fire)
 - Hoping God would change his mind and turn the city into kindling
- Here's what happens next, in vv. 6-8
 - God sends a large plant to give Jonah shade from the sun
 - This makes Jonah happy
 - Next day, God takes the plant away and replaces it with a burning sun and scorching winds
 - Jonah gets miserable and angry, again
- So, God repeats his question from v. 4

Jonah 4.9

9 Then God said to Jonah, "Is it right for you to be angry because the plant died?"

"Yes," Jonah retorted, "even angry enough to die!"

- Jonah tries to defend his anger
 - Which is something we've all tried to do with God
 - God's big enough to handle it
- He's loving and patient enough to listen to our frustrations
 - And, he's also wise and powerful enough to teach and guide us to a better place
 - Which is exactly what he does with Jonah

Compassion

Jonah 4.10

10 Then the LORD said, "You have compassion over the plant, though you did nothing to put it there. It came quickly and died quickly. 11 But Nineveh has more than 120,000 people living in spiritual darkness, not to mention all the animals. Shouldn't I have compassion for such a great city?"

- Compassion is a remarkable word here
 - It's not found anywhere else in ancient literature outside of the Bible
 - There was no word strong enough to communicate the depth of this emotion
 - So the writers had to create a new word to get the point across
 - The word means "to attach your heart to someone else's heart"
- When you have compassion for someone,
 - Their sorrow brings you sorrow.
- We have a way of detaching ourselves from others who are hurting:
 - "Well, they got what was coming to them."
 - But, that of course becomes harder to do with those who are close to you.
 - Even if they are wrong and deserving of punishment,
 - it still hurts you to see those you love in pain.
 - Because you have compassion for them

God's Compassion for You

- That's why the ending to this book is so extraordinary
 - This is the God of the universe saying that his heart is attached to human beings
- The entire universe is smaller than a piece of lint compared to the grandeur and majesty of God
 - And we are smaller than a piece of lint on that piece of lint
- But, God says that when you hurt, he hurts
- I want you to know that is how God sees you
- God pursues you and runs after you because his heart is attached to your heart
 - Your sadness and pain bring God sadness and pain
 - From his throne in Heaven, he willingly remains intimately attached to you

Jesus

- That's why this book isn't about Jonah or a big fish
 - This book is about a God who runs after people
- That is the whole point of the entire Bible
 - God is willing to run after you and after me
- That's why Jesus is the greater Jonah
- If you want to know what it looks like for God to run after people
 - Look at Jesus
- Jesus sacrificed himself to run after people—you and me—
 - who are constantly looking for boats that will take us in the other direction

Matthew 9.36

When he saw the crowds, he had compassion for them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd.

- That compassion drives Jesus to continue chasing us to this day.
- So if you're running,
 - Why not stop?
- If you're in the middle of a storm,
 - Stop rowing so hard.
- Instead, turn to Jesus.
 - He'll either calm the storm or carry you to dry land.

BONUS: THE FISH

- When the story of Jonah comes up, the fish usually takes center stage.
 - And for many people, that fish is a deal-breaker.
- So, I want to offer a few thoughts on the fish for your consideration.

Three Possibilities

1. It's somehow possible for a man to survive inside a fish for at least 3 days
 - a. I don't claim to be an expert on this,
 - i. so I'm not going to offer explanations on how it's possible.
 - b. If it is, the whole ordeal would have to be terribly uncomfortable.
 - i. Dark, claustrophobic, and smelly
 2. Jonah died inside the fish and God brought him back to life after being puked onto the shore.
 - a. Researching the commentators, this seems to be the minority position.
 3. It's not possible to survive inside a fish, but God miraculously sustained Jonah's life to make it possible.
- I don't know which of those 3 accurately describes what happened
 - The author of the Book of Jonah doesn't tell us how it happened
 - We're not given further detail
 - because this particular detail doesn't matter for the overall message of the book
 - It could have been any 3 of those explanations
 - I tend to lean toward #3 (God kept Jonah alive miraculously), but
 - I don't have an emotional attachment to any of them
 - Because the book's theme remains completely unaltered by the mechanics of the fish
 - As I said during the study, the fish is a footnote in the story
 - It's nothing more than a taxi or Uber ride to get Jonah where God wanted him to go
 - Which brings me to my next point:

The Miraculous

- I suppose the bigger question here is:
 - Are miracles possible?
- If your heart is settled on a worldview that says miracles are not possible because God doesn't exist
 - Then I could see how the fish aspect of this story would be hard for you to swallow
 - (see what I did there?) 😊
 - Still, I hope you can find some encouragement in the story.
- But, if you haven't completely ruled out the possibility of God
 - If you have the door open even slightly for the idea that he might exist
 - Then, it's not a big step to see this story as possible
- God has done much more impressive miracles than keeping an angry prophet alive for 3 days
- Which brings me to my last point:

Jesus

- The most important miracle God ever performed was in bringing a different prophet back to life after 3 days
 - That prophet, of course, would be Jesus
- Christians believe Jesus orchestrated the timing of his birth and his death
 - If someone is capable of doing that,
 - and I believe Jesus is capable of doing that
 - Then I'm inclined to go with whatever he says about any given topic
- It just so happens, Jesus had something to say about Jonah:

Matthew 12.40-41

40 For as Jonah was in the belly of the great fish for three days and three nights, so will the Son of Man be in the heart of the earth for three days and three nights.

41 “The people of Nineveh will stand up against this generation on judgment day and condemn it, for they repented of their sins at the preaching of Jonah. Now someone greater than Jonah is here—but you refuse to repent.

- Jesus seemed to think the story of Jonah was a historical fact that took place in space and time
 - That’s good enough for me
- Regardless, I hope you’ve been encouraged by this short series about
 - The God Who Runs After His People
- Check out www.fromthefray.com/series for other Bible teaching series
 - If you have ideas or suggestions for future series,
 - please use the anonymous feedback form on that page to let Ch Capps and me know

BONUS: THE PRAYER (JONAH 2.1-9)

- The flow and progression of Jonah's prayer can teach us a lot about our relationship with God
- I want to share a few thoughts about the overall outline of his prayer

Asking for Help

Jonah 2.1-2

1 Then Jonah prayed to the LORD his God from inside the fish. 2 He said, "I cried out to the LORD in my great trouble, and he answered me. I called to you from the land of the dead, and LORD, you heard me!"

- This is the first time Jonah prays—from inside the fish
 - The sailors asked him to pray during the storm
 - But, for whatever reason, Jonah wasn't ready to pray at that point
- Jonah turns to prayer as a last resort
- This is a prayer of affliction—not affection
 - Rather than a conversation born out of love and affection for God
 - The prayer was an emergency button in the midst of affliction
- We see the same behavior in the runaway brother from Jesus' story about two sons
 - It wasn't until he was eating from the troughs, living with pigs,
 - That he turned to his father, wanting to come home
 - Before that, so long as he had options of his own
 - (even though those options were funded by the father's money)
 - The younger, runaway son wanted nothing to do with the father
- We could find plenty of examples of behavior like this
 - Including your life and mine
 - We've all done this
- To some extent, God does expect it
 - In one way or another, everyone of us comes to God because we need or want something
 - I don't say that to make anyone feel guilty or ashamed
- God designed us to need him
 - In our own ways, we're all needy people
 - That's what it means to be human
 - God wants us coming to him,
 - Asking for help, comfort, peace
- Of course, he'd rather that not be the only times we come to him
 - Every relationship thrives on good communication
 - Your relationship with God is no different
- Emergency prayers are better than no prayers at all
 - But an altogether better question would be:
 - How can my prayer life enhance my life with the God who attached his heart to mine?

Accepting Discipline

Jonah 2.3

3 You threw me into the ocean depths, and I sank down to the heart of the sea. The mighty waters engulfed me; I was buried beneath your wild and stormy waves.

- Jonah's acknowledging the discipline God has given him
- Discipline is different than punishment
 - The distinction matters

- Punishment is strictly punitive
 - There's no redeeming element to it
- Discipline is for disciples
 - It's meant to teach a lesson
- God disciplines his disciples—those he loves
 - Christians often cry out, “What did I do to deserve this?”
 - That's assuming you're being punished, but God doesn't punish those he loves.
 - An altogether better question is, “What can I learn from this? How can I learn and move on?”
 - The way you respond to discipline will determine how much benefit you receive from it.
- What's Jonah's lesson to learn here?
 - If we stick with the theme of the book,
 - God wants Jonah to learn what it's like to be weak, powerless, and without options.
- God sent him to rescue the powerless and hopeless
 - Perhaps part of the reason Jonah was reluctant to do so was bc he had no idea what that felt like
 - Jonah had no compassion for Nineveh bc he'd never been in their shoes
- Those who've walked through pain and fire, poverty and strife
 - Make the best caregivers, counselors, ministers and missionaries

Trusting Promises

Jonah 2.4-7

4 Then I said, 'O LORD, you have driven me from your presence. Yet I will look once more toward your holy Temple.' 5 "I sank beneath the waves, and the waters closed over me. Seaweed wrapped itself around my head. 6 I sank down to the very roots of the mountains. I was imprisoned in the earth, whose gates lock shut forever. But you, O LORD my God, snatched me from the jaws of death! 7 As my life was slipping away, I remembered the LORD. And my earnest prayer went out to you in your holy Temple.

- Jonah now moves to trusting God's promises
- Jonah has been going down throughout the entire book so far—:
 - from the minute he turned his back on God's commands
 - He went down to Joppa,
 - He went down into the hold of the ship,
 - He went down to the bottoms of the mountain
 - When we turn our back on God, the only way to go is down
- Now he starts to look up
 - (which is the only way he can look at this point)
 - That's what it means to look “toward your holy temple”
 - To look up, to God
- In v. 7 Jonah “remembered the Lord”
 - What's that mean?
 - It means “I am acting on the basis of your commitment to me.”
- Jonah suddenly remembered his identity
 - “I'm a child of God. That comes with privileges and responsibilities. God promised to be committed to my good and my welfare. I'm going to act on the basis of that commitment.”
- “You're a part of this family. Then stand up. Walk tall. Go forth loved and protected.”

Yielding to God's Will

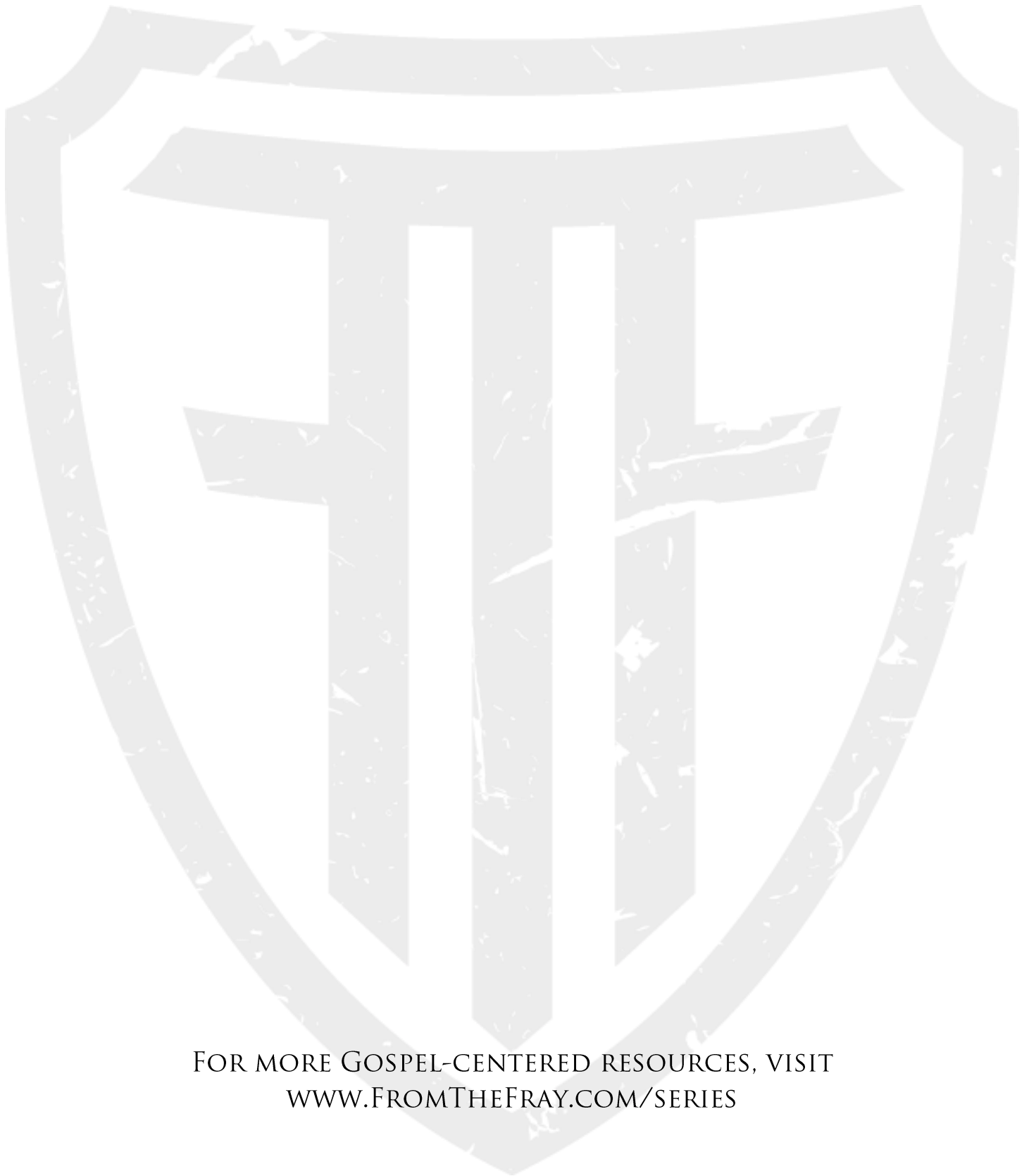
Jonah 2.8-9

8 Those who worship idols turn their backs on all God's mercies. 9 But I will offer sacrifices to you with songs of praise, and I will fulfill all my vows. For my salvation comes from the LORD alone."

- Alas, Jonah yields to God's will
- He admits the presence of idols in his life
 - Idols draw our love and affection away from God by giving it to something else
- In the series (pt 3 & pt 6), we covered Jonah's idols
 - His biggest idol was an intense, unbalanced patriotism
 - He didn't just love his country
 - As many of us do!
 - Jonah worshipped it
- Now, Jonah is pledging to leave the idols behind and honor his vows to God
 - We shouldn't see this as a "one and done" statement
 - Renewing vows of commitment can be wise and powerful from time to time
- It's a way of saying,
 - "Through the messiness of life and my tendency to wander,
 - I've forgotten my first love,
 - or at least I haven't been as intentional and engaged as my first love deserves.
 - I want to remind myself and you that my commitment endures.
 - I'm still here, and I want to be the best version of myself for you."
- Last and most importantly, Jonah ends by quoting scripture
 - Psalm 3.8: "Salvation comes only from the Lord."
- Remember: that's the theme of this book
 - (and the entire Bible)
 - Salvation comes to us only because God loves us enough to pursue us.
- Jonah was sinking to the bottom of the ocean—
 - completely helpless, unable to improve his position in any way
 - he lived only because God intervened
- Jonah's ability to quote scripture from memory was the only light of hope he had to cling to
 - inside his otherwise dark, hopeless situation.

Summary

- Jonah's prayer can be a model for ours during the storms of life:
 - Ask God for help, acknowledging how much you need him to see you through.
 - Accept the discipline he gives those he loves, and do your best to emerge better instead of bitter.
 - Trust the promises God has made, acting on the basis of his commitment to you.
 - Cling to your identity as a loved child of God.
 - Finally, yield to his will by renewing your commitment to love and serve the God whose heart is attached to yours.
- God bless you.



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