

Place: Lurgan Baptist 2:7:2017

## YOU CAN RUN BUT YOU CAN'T HIDE

Reading: Jonah 1:1-17

### 1. RUNNING FROM GOD

Some years ago Mohammed Ali the former world boxing champion was going to fight an upcoming opponent and a newspaper reporter said, *'Your opponent has said that he's just going to get on his toes and run from you the entire fight.'* Mohammed Ali just smiled and said, *'Well he can run, but he can't hide.'* I love the story of a little boy who kept riding his bicycle around the block, and a police officer was sitting by the side of the road and he watched this little boy ride around the block about ten times. Finally, he got out of his squad car and stopped him and said, *'Son, you keep riding around this same block over and over, what are you doing?'* The little boy said, *'I'm running away from home.'* The officer looked at him and said, *'Running away from home? How can you be running away and keep going around the same block?'* The little boy said, *'Because my Mommy told me I couldn't cross the street.'* If there is anything that Jonah teaches us, it is this. You not only can't hide from God, you really cannot run from God.

In a real sense, we are all like that little boy. You may think you can run from God, but you really cannot. When God speaks and tells you to do something, whether you think it's a big thing or a little thing, you had better do it.

Because if you don't, *your life will become just one catastrophe looking for a place to happen.* You see, Jonah shows us the grief that comes from rebelling against God, and the glory that comes from obeying God. Now who was this man? When did he live? Was he for real? The name Jonah mean *'dove,'* and his father's name *'Amittai,'* means *'truthful.'* Nothing is known about Jonah apart from this book and the historical statement in 2 Kings 14:25 where it says that Jeroboam *"restored the coast of Israel from the entering of Hamath unto the sea of the plain according to the word of the Lord God of Israel, which he spake by the hand of his servant Jonah the son of Amittai, the prophet which was of Gath-hepher."* This village was located about three miles north east of Nazareth, the hometown of the Lord Jesus. So Jonah lived during the reign of King Jeroboam the Second who ruled the Northern Kingdom of Israel from 790 to 750 B.C.

Now of all the supernatural happenings in the Bible few have received so much ridicule and derision as the story of Jonah. Some scholars would relegate the story of Jonah to the regions of fable only to be told to children. But there is no question about it. Jonah was a real person and a genuine prophet. Listen to what the Saviour says, *"For as Jonas was three days and three nights in the whale's belly so shall the Son of Man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth."* ( Matt 12:40 ) My .... the main reason we believe in a literal Jonah is that our Lord Jesus believed in the historicity of Jonah. You see, Christ related Jonah to his own resurrection and if Jonah's experience was not historical such an association would

not have made sense. Was Christ deceitful ? Did the Saviour tell us a lie when He said that Jonah was a in a fish's belly three days and three nights ? Of course not. Jesus Christ is the ' *Truth,*' and His Word cannot be broken. You see, if the story of Jonah is fiction so is the gospel. For the Saviour said, " *For as Jonah .... so shall the Son of Man be.*" ( Matt 12:40 ) So any time someone says it does not matter whether this book is historical don't you believe it. It does matter. For here we are dealing with a real man who lived in and around 800 B.C. whose message is as relevant as the morning newspaper. Well, *what is the book of Jonah about ?* Well, it's not simply about a Great Fish mentioned only 4 times, or a Great City named 9 times or even about a reluctant prophet who is mentioned about 18 times. It's about a Great God. God is mentioned 38 times in these 4 short chapters and if you eliminate Him from the book the story would not make sense. My .... the book of Jonah is about the will of God and how we respond to it, the love of God and how we share it.

Never in all the history of Israel or the church was such a monumental work done for God on foreign soil with a Gentile people in one single day than that which took place in the Assyrian capital. Now in this opening chapter we see *Jonah running from God*. Three words summarize it.

### (1) DIRECTION

For to Jonah came God's Word. An audible, and authoritative word of commission. ( 1:2 ) God calls

particular people to particular places for particular purposes. In Jonah's case we find God calling him to Nineveh the wicked capital of Assyria to preach against its sin. But when God call Jonah he replied, ' *here am I send him, I'm on my way to Tarshish.*' My .... what a contrast that was to Isaiah. For when God asked, ' *Whom shall I send ? And who will go for us ?*' Isaiah's response was, ' *here am I send me.*' ( Is 6:8 ) My .... are you like Isaiah or Jonah ? It may that Nineveh for some of us is Reconciliation: for no matter how much ministry you have heard you are still estranged from your sister in Christ. It may be that Nineveh for some us is Repentance: for there is still unforgiven sin in your Christian life. For others it be the Nineveh of Restitution: My .... where are you headed ? There are really only two roads in the Christian life. One leads to Nineveh, the other to Tarshish. The way to Nineveh is the way to *Revival*, the way to Tarshish is the way to *Ruin*. One road is the will of God, the other is disobedience to His will. Now this Word of Direction was,

#### (a) A PERSONAL CALL:

It was for Jonah alone. ( 1:1 ) Do you know something ? When God speaks to men he speaks in a personal way to them. He speaks familiarly with them. An old puritan in the 17<sup>th</sup> century on his death bed uttered these words. He said, ' *one thing I have learnt is that God deals familiarly with men.*' You see, ' *the Word of the Lord came unto Jonah.*' It identified him. ' *the son of Amittai.*' My .... do you feel that you are living in a world that does not care about you ? Do you know what it is to walk from place to

place and no-one knows your name ? No-one is watching you. Have you experienced loneliness ? My .... God knows you. God knows your name, where you live, your circumstances and your DNA. God knows every detail of every care you carry and He says, ‘ *Fear not I have redeemed thee I have called thee by thy name.*’ ( Is 43: 1 ) That’s *encouraging* is it not ? But it is also *challenging*. Has the Word of the Lord come to you this week ? My .... what has the Lord asked you to do ? I can still recall vividly an evening in my home over 45 years ago, when God put His hand on my shoulder and called me to preach. God spoke specifically to my heart and called me to preach and I have known from that moment that I could not find fulfilment in doing anything else. Did I feel equipped for the task ? No. *But then God does not call the equipped, He equips the called.* A professor of a college had a group of young preacher boys to which he taught a certain subject. One day he confronted the class with this question.

‘ *How many of you young men believe in this thing that God calls men to preach ?*’ Of course, the entire class raised their hands. He then burst out with a hideous laugh. Then he pointed out this young farmer boy in the back of the room as if to pick on him, “ *Son, do you really believe that God called you to preach ?*” The young man said very quickly. “ *Yes Sir, I know God called me to preach.*” The professor looked down his nose and replied, “ *Son, did you hear a voice?*” The preacher boy answered, “ *Yes Sir I did.* ” “ *Did anyone else hear the voice ?*” asked the professor as if to confuse the young man. He replied, “ *No Sir, I guess God wasn’t talking to*

*anyone but me.*” The class then burst into laughter as the professor turned red in the face knowing that he had no answer for the young preacher boy. My .... is the Lord singling you out ? Is He calling you to preach ? Is He asking you to do something specific ? Well, don’t argue because God has a way of getting His way. Yes, this (a)

### **(b) A PERPLEXING CALL:**

Why Jonah ? But now why Nineveh ? Nineveh was a great city in what is modern day Iraq. Nineveh was a *SIZEABLE City*: Ch 3 tells us it was a ‘ *city of 3 days journey.*’ It was possibly the largest city in the world at this time. ( Gen 10:11-12 ) It was estimated that the city was fifty miles across and had a population in excess of a million residents. It was a *STRONG City*: magnificent walls almost 8 miles long enveloped the inner city, walls so wide that several chariots could drive abreast along the top. Above all, Nineveh was a *SINFUL Ciity*: ( 1:2 ) Nahum the prophet speaking of this city said, ‘ *upon whom hath not thy wickedness passed continually.*’ ( 3:19 ) Every sin that marks our modern cities characterized this one. I mean why would God call Jonah to **this** city ? ‘ *Lord, Nineveh is not on my prayer list, it’s not on my preaching schedule ....., why bother with such a pagan city ?*’ Now had God called him to Jerusalem or Bethlehem it might have been different. But Nineveh ?

Yet Jonah was to go to Nineveh because God is interested in great cities. I wonder, is the Lord calling you to testify in an unlikely place to an unlovely person ? Is God asking you to do something and it does not make sense ? My ....

the greatest revival that ever took place happened in a most unlikely place. It took place 150 miles Northwest of Baghdad near to the modern city of Mosul and it was here that Jonah was sent and saw God move in an amazing way. Is God calling you to go to a strange place ? A place that you have a natural bias against ? Is the Lord exercising you to go a sinful people ? Perhaps a people that you have a prejudice against ? How will you respond ? How did Jonah respond ? (1)

## (2) OBJECTION

Look if you will at ( 1:3 ) ‘ *But Jonah ...*,’ The sins of the Assyrians rose up before God. Jonah rose up to flee from God. O. Palmer Robertson says, “ *Trying to get away from God is like trying to get away from air.*” Instead of going to Nineveh Jonah ran in the opposite direction. Do you see what ( 1:3 ) says ? Three times in the first ten verses we read the phrase “ *fled from the presence of the Lord,*” which is impossible. Jonah knew that he could not escape the omnipresence of God, for there is no place where God was not. ( Psalm 139 ) *This simply means that Jonah resigned his prophetic office.* It means that he was determined not only to ensure that he did not undertake this responsibility, but that he would not be available in the future for any other such undertaking. Thus he became a backslidden prophet. It’s as if Jonah said, “ *Here am I send him, I’m on my way to Tarshish.*” My .... is this not what the church of Jesus Christ has been doing ? We have been entrusted with the gospel but instead of going forward we are in retreat. The call to evangelise goes unheeded by Gods people, and while the cults promote

their damnable literature at every corner of the globe the church is ‘ *at ease in Zion.*’ Is Jonah a picture of you ? When I look at Jonah’s past service I discover it was crowned with faithfulness, freshness and fruitfulness but despite all his past usefulness here is a man who slips, and flees from the will of God. Like Jonah was your past service marked by God’s blessing ? Then came the crunch. God asked you to do something, to go somewhere and you fled from God. My .... are you still on the run from God ?

### (a) *What was the REASON for Jonah's Objection ?*

Nineveh was to the east. Tarshish was as far west as one could go. Here was God’s man. Why would he run away ? Did Jonah flee because of the *difficulties he faced ?* I mean Nineveh was so such a large city ? How could one person make an impact on one million people ? Who would listen to him ? Would these pagans not laugh at an Israeli preacher ? Did Jonah flee because of *the dangers he faced ?* Nineveh was the capital of a godless and barbaric regime. One of the kings of Assyria Sennacherib wrote of his enemies ‘ *I cut their throats like lambs. I cut off their precious lives as one cuts string. Like the waters of a storm I make the contents of their gullets and entrails run down upon the whole earth. Their hands I cut off.*’ Brutality was their trademark. Jonah might have been excused if danger was the reason but it wasn’t. Did Jonah flee because of the *despair he felt ?* The very sound of Assyria and Nineveh turned his stomach. He did not want the Assyrians to be blessed he wanted them to be destroyed. Yet these were not the reasons he didn’t go. My

.... the real reason Jonah fled is found in ( 4:1-2 ) Nineveh was the capital city of an enemy nation and Jonah had a sneaking suspicion that God might pardon it and in that case Israel's enemy would be able to strike. *It was patriotism for his own country and prejudice against another country that made Jonah flee.* What's the reason for your disobedience ? Do you feel inadequate ? Are you fearful ? Are you apprehensive ? My .... when we stand before the Saviour and look with undimmed eye upon that brow was pierced ? Those hands and feet that were marred ? What excuses will you make for not giving His message of redeeming love to a lost world ? It's interesting that the text says '*he found a ship.*' Some believers think that just because they find a ship it must be alright. *But it's possible to be out of the will of God and still have circumstances appear to be working on your behalf.*

Isn't it amazing how skilful the devil is in his manipulative powers ? A woman leaves her husband because she found a ship to Tarshish. A man gets into financial trouble because he found a ship to Tarshish. A young Christian girl marries an unsaved man because she found a ship to Tarshish. '*He'll get saved after the wedding.*' The truth is this. Any time we want to run away from the will of God, we will find a ship and the devil will ***make sure it is sailing on time.*** (a)

***(b) What was the RESULT of Jonah's Objection ?***

Well, instead of travelling 500 miles North East to Nineveh Jonah travelled 60 miles South West to Joppa and

boarded a ship to Tarshish in Southern Spain. Jonah was fleeing from the presence of the Lord. But how could he ? Had he not read Psalm 139 ? '*If I take the wings of the morning and dwell in the uttermost parts of the earth. Even there shall thy hand lead me and thy right hand shall hold me.*' ( Ps 139:9-10 ) Did Jonah really think he could get away from God ? You see, Jonah was not fleeing from *God's Omnipresence*, but he was fleeing from *God's Felt presence*. Fleeing from the sphere of evangelism to which God was calling him and Jonah's flight from God was at great cost. Do you Jonah's steps downward ? Down to Joppa, down into the ship ( 1:3 ) down into the sea ( 1:5 ) and down into the great fish ( 2:3 ) My .... disobedience always leads downward. Indeed Jonah's flight from God was at great cost. Did you notice ( 1: 3 ) '*he paid the fare.*' Literally and spiritually.

My .... we pay dearly when we flee from the Lord. ( Ps 16:11 ) Paul says, '*be not deceived God is not mocked.*' ( Gal 6:7 ) So many, are paying the fare of a life of rebellion against the will of God. Ask the girl who married the unsaved man. He was lying when he said he would never leave. Ask the prostitute at the corner who is 40 but looks 60. Ask the teenage girls who have fled home. Ask the man whom God called to preach, who instead went to Tarshish. For the most expensive thing a person does is run from God. It cost Jonah spiritual peace, joy, and contentment. My .... what is it costing you ? God still calls us today. When God called Jonah he said, '*Here am I send him.*' Is there not a bit of Jonah in all of us ? Have you heard God's call and gone the other way ? Be careful for there's a price to be paid. My .... will you say

with Jonah, ‘ *Here am I send him, or will you say with Isaiah, Here am I send me.*’ (1) (2)

### (3) CORRECTION

Do you see the contrast indicated in ( 1:3-4 ) ? It’s a like a gigantic chess game. Every move that Jonah makes, God makes a move until Jonah sees that God is going to win the game. Do you know what backsliding is ? It’s a dis-ease. C.H. Spurgeon said ‘ *It may be hard going forward but its harder going back.*’ He also said ‘ *God never allows his children to sin successfully,*’ and Jonah is proof of that statement. Here we see the Lord’s work of correction and I want you to notice it,

#### (a) WAS PURPOSEFUL:

In ( 1:4 ) we read of ‘ *a great wind,*’ and in ( 1:17 ) we read of ‘ *a great fish.*’ Jonah was beginning to feel the chastening hand of God and these were the means the Lord used to chasten, refine and prepare Jonah for future service. God used these things with a view to restoring Jonah to the place of obedience. How do we know if we love our children ? My .... we discipline them. ‘ *For whom the Lord loveth he chasteneth and scourgeth every son he receiveth.*’ ( Heb 12:6 ) Every once in a while some mother will say ‘ *I just can’t beat little Mary because I love her so much.*’ But the Bible says that’s not love. In fact the Word of God says ‘ *he that spareth his rod hateth his son but he that loveth him chasteneth him betimes.*’ ( Prov 13:24 ) Now God is too merciful and too loving to let His children drift into open rebellion without

disciplining them. Do you recall David’s words ? ‘ *Before I was afflicted I went astray but now I have I kept thy Word.*’ ‘ *It is good for me that I have been afflicted that I might learn thy statutes.*’ ( Ps 119:67-71 ) Why does God send the storm and why does the Lord send the fish ? To restore us to paths of righteousness and obedience. The Lord said to Jonah ‘ *Go,*’ and Jonah said ‘ *No,*’ and the Lord said ‘ *I have a storm for you I have a fish for you.*’ My .... is the storm raging right around you right now ? Is your boat rocking ? Are you in the midst of a marital storm ? A financial storm ? A physical storm ? A domestic storm ? An assembly storm ? Do you feel as though some great fish has swallowed up ? One thing is sure, the Lord’s corrective measures are purposeful.

#### (b) WAS HELPFUL:

For through the Lord’s discipline Jonah now was enabled to see what he had lost. You see, the Lord called the Jews to be a blessing to all the nations of the earth. ( Gen 12:1-3 ) but whenever the Jews were out of the will of God they brought trouble instead of blessing. Twice Abraham brought trouble to people because he lied. ( Gen 12:10-20 ) Achan brought trouble to Israel’s army because he robbed God ( Jos 7:1 ) and Jonah brought trouble to a boatload of sailors because he ran away from the will of God. Donald Grey Barnhouse commented, “ *When you run away from the Lord you never get where you are going and you always pay your own fare.*” My .... running away from the Lord is always a costly business. Do you see what Jonah lost here ? He lost God’s voice. God was no longer speaking to Jonah through His

Word: He was speaking to him through His Works: the sea, the wind, the rain, the thunder and even the great fish. He lost his **Spiritual Vitality:** for while these heathen sailors were calling on their gods, do you know what Jonah was doing ? Sleeping. What a contrast between the ‘ *praying pagans,*’ and the ‘ *sleeping preacher.*’ What a text for a sleeping church. ‘ *What meanest thou O sleeper ?*’ ( 1:6 ) ! My .... *today’s world is being torn apart by drugs: drink: immorality: apostasy: abortion: pornography: crime: sodomy, and the church sleeps. Two thirds of the world’s people will never hear the gospel, and the church sleeps. Friends, family, neighbours, workmates live on the very precipice of hell .... and the church sleeps. Why ?* Because it has left its obligation, because it has lost its vision. My .... is Jonah a picture of you ? Once you were active in the service of Christ, but now you are asleep in the storm. **Is this you ?** All around you on the sea of life .... your family are perishing, your friends are dying, lost souls like Nineveh awaiting the judgement of God. Do you care ?

Jonah also lost his **Testimony:** In ( 1:9 ) he told them that ‘ *he feared the Lord.*’ In ( 1:10 ) he told them that he ‘ *fled from the Lord,*’ His practice did not match his profession. His conduct did not match his creed. My .... his testimony didn’t mean much at this time did it ? He was quick to say, ‘ *I fear the Lord.*’ But he did not. If he did he would have been enroute to Nineveh. What about your testimony ? Does it cut much ice in the workplace ? Jonah lost his **Influence** for good, because he was the cause of the storm and he almost lost his **life.** Jeremy Taylor the 17<sup>th</sup> century English preacher said, “ *God*

*threatens terrible things if we will not be happy.*” He was referring to being happy with God’s will for our lives. It cost Jonah spiritual peace, joy and contentment. My .... what is it costing you ? Do you see that the Lord’s chastisement is (a) (b) but it,

### (c) **WAS MERCIFUL:**

Why did God not let Jonah go ? Why did the Lord not write Jonah off ? Jonah himself gives us the reason ‘ *for I knew that thou art a gracious God and merciful ....,*’ ( 4:2 ) At every turn God met Jonah’s unfaithfulness with His mercy. How many times could God have let you go, written you off, finished with you, but He did not why ? Because the Lord is merciful and He is refining, and preparing you for future service. When Jonah said ‘ *Throw me in,*’ ( 1:12 ) he was saying ‘ *I am flinging myself on the Lord and returning to His will.*’ Jonah now saw that his life was not his. Do you recall Paul’s words ‘ *Ye are not your own.*’ ( 1 Cor 6:19-20 ) Have we grasp that ? Jim Elliot did. ‘ *Not your own,*’ that’s why he went to Ecuador to seek savage stone age killers, men known to the world as Aucas and he went to reach them for Christ.

‘ *Not your own,*’ that’s why on Friday 6<sup>th</sup> January 1956 Jim Elliot's desire was given for he took an Auca Indian by the hand. ‘ *Not your own,*’ that’s why two days later on Sunday 8<sup>th</sup> January the men for whom Jim Elliot prayed for 6 years killed him and his 4 colleagues. ‘ *Not your own,*’ is this not what Jonah was beginning to see ? Is this not what you need to see ? Is this not what you need to say ‘ **Take my life .... to Thee,**’