

Jonah #2 - Are You Running From God?

July 17, 2010

(Sermon notes are a transcript from the sermon with only minor editing, retaining the conversational style.)

We continue our story of the man who ran from God and because he ran away from God his story becomes our story.

Maybe there is someone here who is resisting God this morning.

Or for whatever reason, you feel God hasn't been treating you fairly.

You feel that God has given you a bum deal, or you are just angry with God, so you are stiff arming God. In this point in your life you really don't want anything to do with God. Like Jonah you are running in the opposite direction.

Or maybe you feel that you are on solid ground with your relationship with God, but you know you are running from God in a certain area in your life. Only you and God know about it. You are running from God in making the right decision.

What you find yourself doing is to try to tune down your conscious. You keep convincing yourself that you are doing the right thing, or you surround yourself with people who will reinforce your erroneous beliefs to the point that your conscious is no longer pricking at you.

But when the music dies, the lights are out and you are staring up in the ceiling in your bed in the middle of the night you know things are not right between you and God. Things are not right between God and you. You know that someday you are going to have to stop running. Eventually you are going to hit a wall.

The pain of your decision will eventually catch up to you. The pain that you have caused your parents, the pain that you have caused to your spouse or kids and most of all the pain that you have caused to yourself.

Recovery, *it's advice that we listen to but pain that we obey.*

It's not until we begin to feel the pain of our decisions perhaps we will stop running from God.

Here's the principle that we talked about last week,

1. We can run away from God but we can't outrun God.

Someday there is a day of reckoning.

That is where we left Jonah last week in the belly of the fish.

Here is the second thing that Jonah discovered.

2. God is generous in His grace but God is thorough in His discipline. There is a tension there that we do not like. We want God to be all grace but the tension is in His grace and because God loves us so much He has to use discipline, not to pay us back but to bring us back. Because if He does not use discipline, we become so stiff necked we will never come home.

A lot of the chaos that come into our lives, not all, but a lot is chaos that you bring upon yourself. God is allowing that chaos to take place so that you will come to your senses and finally face reality and say, *Maybe there is a connection between my actions and the pain and discomfort that I=m feeling at this moment. I need to get things straight with God.*

For the first time you begin to connect the dots.

Isn't true in our distress we begin to pray.

Ours back are against the wall, a relationship is falling apart, finances are in shambles, sickness of some sort, you begin to pray like you have never prayed before.

Regardless of how you justified your behavior in the past, you find yourself in distress and the only person you can turn to is God.

Isn't that amazing. No matter how smart you think you are or slick you think you are, the moment you are broken, when you are busted, found out, you are discovered, and no place else to run, in your distress you call out to God.

Andy Stanley: Circumstances brokenness,

It overpowers our intellect, our reasoning, over powers our theology, over powers our resistance.

Jonah in his desperation cries out. Always remember, God listens to the desperate cry for help, from desperate people, who are in desperate circumstances, That is amazing. Your heavenly Father listens to your desperate cry for help,

In his desperation, Jonah learns some basic principles inside that fish. Principles that we need to be reminded of every single day.

1. Inside the fish, Jonah recognized his utter dependence on God. Listen to the desperation in his voice:

AI cried out for help@ [2:2],

AI said, >I have been banished=@ [2:4], and

AAAs my life was fading away, I remembered the Lord.@ [2:7].

When Jonah exhausted hope, God moved in.

2. Inside the fish, God stripped the wayward prophet of both his pride and prejudice

[2:8]. God removed all spiritual distractions.

3. Inside the fish, Jonah submitted to God without reservation [2:9].

When Jonah got alone with God the voice of God became loud and clear.

God is generous in His grace to those who are in a desperate situation. It's a daily invitation to come back.

At this point Jonah has clarity of mind that it was God who sent the storm. It was God who sent this calamity.

Here's an interesting thought, at what point do you think Jonah started to repent? When he was in the fish for the first full day, or second day.

I don't think so, I think the repenting process started when the sailors picked him and started saying one and a two and astop

Do we throw on three or is it after three.

I think before he ever hit the water he repented.

God I'll go to Nineveh I'll go to Narnia, I'll go wherever you want as long as you want me. He is a new man.

It's not until we feel the pain of our decisions will we begin to wave the white flag. Rebellion leads to pain.

Rebellion doesn't just lead to personal pain but pain to others who are connected to us.

Jonah's rebellion not only affected him but also the crew. The crew lost a tremendous amount of money because they had to hurl their cargo overboard. Now their lives are in danger.

Why? All because Jonah is running from God.

Whether you realize it or not you put other people in spiritual danger when you yourself rebel from God.

Whether or not you realize it you bring your junk into other people=s lives when you are running from God.

I have enough junk of my own to be carrying around.

Tony Evans said, *if you are going to be a fool, be a fool by yourself, don=t go messing up everyone else=s situation because of your foolishness.*

Rebellion leads to pain not only to yourself but to others.

Sometimes discipline needs to be thorough to reassure that we will never run again.

Because God loves you, His discipline is not to pay you back, it is to win you back and to ensure that you will not continue to run.

Sin has consequences. It brings scares, physical, emotional, and spiritual. God's main desire is that He wants to prevent you from running out on that highway of sin; because He knows the dangers that awaits you.

Just like a parent knows the danger that awaits a five year old child if he was to go outside by himself and wander up and down the sidewalks.

So God allowed Jonah to rattle around inside a fish, three long days and three long nights.

Look at how Jonah describes it.

While offering this prayer, Jonah often quoted from the Psalms.

Although he did not acknowledge the chapter or verse, he allows the Word of God to permeate his thoughts.

Notice at specific references.

§ AYour billows swept over me@ [2:3] Compare with Psalm 42:7.

§ AI have been banished@ [2:4]. Compare with Psalm 31:22.

§ Aengulfed me up to the neck@ [2:5]. Compare with Psalm 69:1.

§ Amy life was fading away@ [2:7]. Compare to Psalm 147:3.

§ ATo Your holy temple@ [2:7]. Compare to Psalm 18:6.

Verse 8 *"Those who cling to worthless idols forfeit the grace that could be theirs.*

Key verse: **giving up idols.**

When you run from God it means that you are running to something, someone, some opportunity, pleasure, or entertainment.

When you finally get to the place where you are running , and you finally seize it, and realize you have

dedicated your youth to, or some season of life to, you suddenly realize it's not what you were expecting. You miss out on what you use to have.

What you wanted and what you were pursuing, was not worth what you gave up.

- * You gave up a close and intimate relationship with God.
- * Harmony and peace in your life. You have distanced yourself.

Now there is a moment of clarity when you look at what you have finally achieved, you grasp, and realize that it is just a worthless idol.

You traded a worthless idol for the experience of having that intimate relationship with a loving Father.

In you despair, pain, grief, where do you turn to? Do you cry out to that false idol for help? I don't think so.

Man's wife was at Roswell being treated for throat cancer. I was telling him about the support from my church to which he replied, *AI was never a religious man. I replied, " It=s amazing how God becomes front center of your mind, when sitting in Roswell.* A tear started trickling down his cheek.

John Ortberg. *Out of the Box.*

Someone has altered the script

My lines have been changed...

I thought I was writing this play.

Madeleine L=Engle

If you want to make me laugh

tell me your plans. –God (seen on a billboard)

Like Jonah, who is running away we think we have everything under control, but we don't. Someone has altered the script.

Who do you think is the mastermind of the universe?

Jonah says those who run will realize that what they were pursuing was just an worthless idol, a terrible, terrible, decision.

We all learn the hard way, it's not until we are broken, it's not until we are busted, when all of that becomes clear to us.

There's this moment of awe. Clarity.

What am I doing? What are my core values? I have only one life to live, and will it count for something?

Now the only living thing that had any common sense in this story is the fish. While Jonah was rebelling, the fish was obeying.

God told the fish, *I got this fool who is about to drown and I need for you to pick him up.*

Sure enough just as he was sinking, the fish shallows Jonah.

Bible says, the fish brought him to dry land. They are in the middle of the Mediterranean Sea, while Jonah is trying to get himself right with God, the fish obeyed God by bringing him to dry land.

Take some liberty in the text. The only dry land mentioned is Joppa. Jonah in the beginning paid the fair to run from God, and God gives him a free trip back to Joppa, his place of rebellion.

Jonah, where are you going to go now?

Verse 9 God came to the Jonah the second time.

Aren't you glad God gives second chances?

Thankfully, we serve the God of a second chance. Just like Jonah, many spiritual leaders received a second chance to do what God called him to do.

- * Adam sinned in the garden and God covered him.
- * Moses murdered a man and God called him.
- * Elijah quit and complained then God re-commissioned him.
- * Peter denied the Lord and then God used him at Pentecost.
- * John Mark deserted the mission team at Pamphylia yet God moved upon him to write the second Gospel.

The sooner you learn the lessons that God wants you to learn, the easier your life will be. God is not going to let up until you finally put into practice in what He's trying to teach you.

God is the God of the second chance.

Philip Yancey wrote a book called *What's So Amazing About Grace?* In a chapter called "*The Lovesick Father*," he retells this story in a way that just wrecked me the first time I read it, so I thought I would adapt it for us today.

A young girl grows up on a soybean farm outside Decatur, Illinois.

Her parents do not much care for the music she listens to or the clothes she wears or her nose ring. She does not much care for their values or their church. They have another argument. She locks herself in her room.

When her dad knocks on the door, she screams, "I hate you!" She decides to run away. She decides to run away to the most rebellious, permissive, non-family value state in the Union. Want to guess which one that is? California.

She decides to run to the most rebellious, permissive, non-family value city in that state. Want to guess which one? San Francisco.

When she gets there, she is much lonelier than she had anticipated, but she soon meets a man who drives the biggest car she has ever seen. He gives her a ride. He buys her lunch. He shows her the city. He gives her some pills that make her feel better than she has ever felt, and she wanted to feel good really bad.

She realizes how much life and fun her parents have been robbing her of. This good life goes on for a month, two months, a year. The man with the big car (she calls him "Boss") teaches her a few things about what men like. It's a side of life that she never knew in Decatur, Illinois. The parties and the penthouses and the gifts and the glamour are like being in another world for her.

After a year, the first signs of illness appear. It amazes her how quickly the boss turns mean. Before she knows it, he turns her out on the street. No money; no clothes; no car; no parties. She is alone.

She uses what she knows on the streets to get whatever money she can, but she looks gaunt and thin. The men she is with now are no longer wealthy and generous, and sometimes they're dangerous and cruel.

All her money goes to support her habit. She eats whatever she can find. She sleeps on a metal grate or a park bench.

One night as she lies awake listening for footsteps, all of a sudden everything around her looks different. She no longer feels like a woman of the world. She is a little girl, lost, cold, and frightened.

Her pockets are empty. Her clothes are rags. Her stomach is hungry. She needs a fix. Her eyes are filled with tears. Then her mind flashes on a single image her home in Decatur, Illinois, when summer comes, and the fields are so green you can hardly take all that life in. *"Oh God, why did I leave? My dog at home eats better than I do now."*

She is sobbing, and she knows that more than ever she has wanted anything in her life, she wants to go home.

Three straight calls. Three straight connections with the answering machine. Twice she hangs up without

leaving a message. The third time she says, "*Dad, mom, it's me. I was wondering about coming home. I'm going to be on a bus. It will pass through sometime around midnight on Tuesday. If you're not there, I'll just keep on going to New York. Just wanted you to know.*"

The whole time on the bus, she can't turn off the questions. She wonders if they even got the message. She wishes she'd given them more warning. She wonders if they've given her up for dead. She keeps thinking about what she is going to say to her father. She keeps rehearsing this little speech in her mind. "*Dad, I'm sorry. I'm so sorry. I know it was my fault, not yours. Can you forgive me?*" She hasn't apologized for anything for years.

The bus pulls into the station, and the driver says, "*Fifteen minutes, folks. That's all the time we have.*"

Fifteen minutes to decide her life. She looks in her little compact mirror, tries to brush her hair and get the lipstick marks off her teeth.

She sees the needle marks in her arms and wonders if her parents will notice if they're there. She walks into that bus terminal at one o'clock in the morning in Decatur, Illinois.

She has imagined a thousand different scenes in her mind, but not one of them prepared her for what she sees because there inside those concrete walls around those plastic chairs, in that bus terminal in Decatur, Illinois, stands a group of 40 people, brothers and sisters and aunts and uncles and cousins and grandparents and one dog.

They're all wearing goofy party hats and blowing kazoos and cheering for her as if she were a hero coming home from a war. There is a giant hand-painted sign saying, "*Welcome home*" taped all the way across the back wall.

Standing in front of that crowd with a tear-stained face and a trembling smile is the father whom she told she hated the last time she saw him. She can't bring herself to look him in the face as she starts her little speech. "*Dad, I'm so sorry. It's my fault.*"

He puts his hands on her face, and he raises her eyes up to him. He begins to laugh and cry so hard his whole body shakes. "*I know,*" he says. What he used to say to her when she would cry when she was a tiny little baby, "*I know, I know, I know. No need for another word. You'll miss the party. We have to have a party.*"

Because God loves you, his discipline is not to pay you back, it is to win you back and to ensure that you will not continue to run.

Maybe there is someone here that is running from God, that needs to come home.

Maybe there is a secret slice in your life that you are running from God. Wave the White Flag.

Today, I'm going to ask you to do a difficult thing. I want you to make a visible and tangible statement that you are going to stop running.

Pray for someone who is running from God

In the past I have

- * Run from God at the expense of having a clear conscious with my heavenly Father.
- * I have run from God at the expense of having inner peace and harmony.
- * I have run from God at the expense of broken relationships.
- * I have run from God at the expense of having a pure heart.

I am not going to waste another season of my life pursuing worthless idols.

I don't want to wait until I am in despair before I start following God.