

Good Things, Little Packages- Jonah pt. 1, Chapter 1 God's Plans vs. Our Plans

How many of you ever tried to run away from home when you were little because you got mad at your parents? My guess is you probably made it across the yard, to tree house, a neighbor's house...or maybe you tried but got caught. I remember telling my mom I was running away and she said she would help me pack! Here's a little girl who decided to runaway, she wrote a letter to her mom beforehand...read **(Insert Picture)**. That's an escape plan destined for failure! Well today we are going to look at a famous runaway from the Bible who had an escape plan that was even more destined to failure than little Emily, the Prophet Jonah.

When we think of Jonah there are a few things that come to mind- a whale, flannel graphs in Sunday School, veggie-ales, almost fairytale like story isn't it? Because of that we tend to do a couple things.

1) Trivialize- We skip over the story because we think we know it. But I think we will find that there is much more to the story than meets the eye and it speaks powerfully to us today.

2) Mythicize- "Come on, storm, living in a fish, the miraculous plant and worm thing at the end...?" I believe this is a **real story from history**. For a few reasons:

-Nineveh is a real place in history- recipients of prophecy. very close to modern day Mosul, Northern Iraq. At this time in history, Nineveh was likely the largest city in the world and the **capital of the Assyrian Empire**.

-Jonah is a real prophet- he shows up in 2 Kings 14:25 as a **prophet to the Northern Kingdom of Israel** during reign of **Jeroboam II, 786-746 BC**.

-Jesus references the person, places and events in Jonah as real in Matthew 12:39-41

-But the fish/whale? Full of **miracles**...but if we exclude the miraculous from our Bibles, how much of it is left. Maybe we are forgetting the greatest miracle- resurrection of the dead?

Uniqueness in Scripture

Jonah is the anti-prophet...when other prophets listen, he doesn't. When other prophets are the heroes, he is the anti-hero... Jonah is a fellow struggler who doesn't have his stuff together. Jonah is you and me...and this story is in the Bible so that we would see ourselves in Jonah, like a mirror in our souls. 3 Weeks in Jonah- today, we are going to see our tendency to run from God's and his plans just like Jonah.

The Decision to Run

Jonah 1:1-3

The word of the Lord came to Jonah son of Amittai: "Go to the great city of Nineveh and preach against it, because its wickedness has come up before me."

But Jonah ran away from the Lord and headed for Tarshish. He went down to Joppa, where he found a ship bound for that port. After paying the fare, he went aboard and sailed for Tarshish to flee from the Lord.

Jonah as a prophet is used to the Word of the Lord coming to him, but this time God comes to him with a Word that he did not expect and did not like. It was a command to go to Nineveh. Now why was that a big deal? Nineveh- gentiles, they were covenant outsiders! We will see in week 3 how significant that is...but they were also powerful and nasty! They were the bullies on the block... we know from history that they were a brutal people. They perfected the art of skinning people and keeping them alive. Intimidating people. God says, "You know those horrible, dangerous people, go tell them I'm God and I'm watching!" Jonah finds this plan appalling.

What does Jonah do? Well he doesn't say anything back but his actions speak for themselves. He runs away, first boat out...And he heads for Tarshish which is in modern day Spain. Let me show you a map because it tells the story... (insert map). Jonah not only disobeys, he runs in the exact opposite direction, to the furthest place in that day they knew to go... this was essentially the end of the world.

We tend to judge Jonah harshly because we have the advantage of knowing the end of the story. But has God ever commanded you to do something you don't want to do? How have you responded? I can relate to Jonah not only when I look at my past. But there are a number of times that I don't want to follow God's commands and plans in my life. I come across something in Scripture and the Spirit presses me... you want me to humble myself and ask for forgiveness? You want me to preach that to the congregation? You want me to give how much? You want me to share the gospel with him? We all have the tendency to run from obedience to God, don't we?

Some of you are runaways right now. "But I'm in church, how could I be running?" God you can in speak a lot of areas in my life but NOT THAT ONE!" Maybe it's forgiving someone that you don't want to forgive, or serving in a ministry that might be difficult. Some of us are running by attempting to tone down our conscience or adjust our theology in order to justify what we want to do. Dating that guy or girl, spending money on something, living a secret no one else knows about...

Some of us have been running from a relationship with God. Life didn't turn out how you expected and you blame God. Or you have guilt for something in your past and so you try to stay away, or you don't like the idea of God having plans for your life... that was me, 15-19.

The Bible says we are all runners. *Isaiah 53:6 We all, like sheep, have gone astray, each of us has turned to our own way...* This is really at the heart of what make sin, sin. Sin is turning away from God's plans, ways, commands. We are born with a heart inclined toward running from God.

God has a plan for each of our lives that is often in conflict with our plans. God's plan is to use us to accomplish his plans for the world...but sometimes we run like Jonah. But running from God is a futile plan as Jonah finds out...

Jonah 1:4-17

THEN THE LORD sent a great wind on the sea, and such a violent storm arose that the ship threatened to break up. All the sailors were AFRAID and each CRIED OUT to his own god (If seasoned sailors are terrified and crying, you know that this is not your typical storm...they knew the hand of God caused this storm).

And they threw the cargo into the sea to lighten the ship. But Jonah had gone below deck, where he lay down and fell into a deep sleep.

The captain went to him and said, "How can you sleep? Get up and call on your god! Maybe he will take notice of us so that we will not perish." Then the sailors said to each other, "Come, let us cast lots to find out who is responsible for this calamity." (At this point Jonah was either in denial that this had anything to do with him or was just trying to avoid it and hoped it went away) *They cast lots and the lot fell on Jonah* (Ancient form of drawing straws- God intervened to have Jonah draw the shortest... there was no escaping God).

So they asked him, "Tell us, who is RESPONSIBLE for making ALL THIS TROUBLE for us? What kind of work do you do? Where do you come from? What is your country? From what people are you?"

He answered, "I am a Hebrew and I worship the Lord, the God of heaven, who made the sea and the dry land." (Do you see the irony? God who made the sea...you know the one we are on? This boat is like a toy boat in a bathtub for God. Running from God is futile when he owns it all).

This terrified them and they asked, "What have you done?" (They knew he was running away from the Lord, because he had already told them so.) The sea was getting rougher and rougher. So they asked him, "What should we do to you to make the sea calm down for us?"

"Pick me up and throw me into the sea," he replied, "and it will become calm. I know that it is my fault that this great storm has come upon you." Instead, the men did their best to row back to land. But they could not, for the sea grew even wilder than before.

Then they cried out to the Lord, "Please, Lord, do not let us die for taking this man's life. Do not hold us accountable for killing an innocent man, for you, Lord, have done as you pleased."

Then they took Jonah and threw him overboard, and the raging sea grew calm. At this the men greatly feared the Lord, and they offered a sacrifice to the Lord and made vows to him (a fascinating sub-story is that these rough, gentile, outsiders are

depicted as the merciful, wise, compassionate, humble, obedient ones...instead of the religious insider, the man of God, Jonah. These outsiders repent and worship the true God...we may see them in heaven- and it won't be the last rough, gentle, outsiders to repent in the story...)

Now the LORD PROVIDED a huge fish to swallow Jonah, and Jonah was in the belly of the fish three days and three nights.

Amazing story isn't it? I want us to see two things from this section:

1) Running from God is Dangerous

Running from God brings nothing but danger and destruction for Jonah. Not only is Jonah in danger, the boat is falling apart; the sailors around him are in danger, even their cargo is destroyed!

Principle- Not only is it futile to run from God. It is dangerous to run from God. Even if we think we have avoided danger up to this point, we all must face him one day when we die. Running from God will only bring sorrow and destruction. Sometimes God brings the storm like he did with Jonah. Have you run to something else for security, hope, to find life that he may have to throw a storm at? Sometimes God brings storms...

But often we choose it for ourselves when we run away from the security of God to things that are destructive for us. When you want to run from God there is always a boat waiting for us. What we think is a ship ends up as a shipwreck...We run away from godly advice from parents and friends to a disastrous dating/marriage relationship. We run from the Word of God to substance abuse or bad habits. We run from sources of wisdom like student ministry to hanging with people that will bring trouble into our lives.

When you were a child and thought about running away you thought that the grass was greener somewhere else, not realizing that the world is a dangerous place for a child by themselves...some of us in our runaway hearts are being deceived into thinking the grass is greener away from God and his commands...but it will only bring danger and destruction.

2) God Pursues Runners

The writer of this story wants us to know that God's hand is behind all the events in this story. There are no coincidences with God. The last words of verse 3 are "flee from the Lord." Notice the first three words in v. 4- **THEN THE LORD**...God was pursuing Jonah, not to pay him back, but to win him back! God sends the sea to speak to Jonah, he sends the casting of the lot to speak to Jonah, he sends the sailors to speak to Jonah...and then v.17 **NOW** the LORD PROVIDED a huge fish...he sends even a fish... God has the universe at his disposal and he uses it to get Jonah's

attention. Not to pay him back, but to win him back. It is the most loving thing he can do.

This is how God works-

Proverbs 3:11-12

My son, do not despise the Lord's discipline, and do not resent his rebuke, because the Lord disciplines those he loves, as a father the son he delights in.

The writer of Hebrews picks up on this same point to encourage the church to surrender to God's discipline in our lives because it's one of the ways He uses, like a good parent, to draw our hearts to him and bear fruit.

Hebrews 12:11

No discipline seems pleasant at the time, but painful. Later on, however, it produces a harvest of righteousness and peace for those who have been trained by it.

The most unloving thing God could have done is to have given him what he wanted and stop pursuing him for his good. Have you ever met kids who get everything they want? Not pleasant....not loving. God pursued Jonah through the storm not to pay him back, but to win him back.

We can attempt to runaway from God, but He will pursue us, sometimes through a storm...not to pay us back, but to win us back. What is God sending you in order to win you back so that you would surrender to him and stop running? Is he sending a storm and life seems difficult right now? Is he sending pain? Is he shaking your security? Is he reminding you of the brevity of life? Is he sending people to speak truth to you? Is the thing that you think is going to swallow you actually in your life to save you? To turn you back to God? Story: God sent disaster into my life... turn me back to surrender.

When the storm comes sometimes we need to stop asking why God? And start asking- where God? Where do you want me to go? Who do you want me to impact, what are you asking me to stop doing or start doing?

In the storms of life God is pursuing us to win us back... the greatest proof and the anchor in the storm is Jesus. Remember I quoted Isaiah- All like sheep? All of us are runaways because we all sin? Jesus said calls himself the great shepherd- when any one of his sheep run away he chases after it until he finds it. He also says he lays down his life for his sheep. Matthew 12, Jesus went through the storm for you.