What Does it Mean to Flee the Lord’s Presence

8.25.19

Jonah Series

Message 1

Jonah 1:1–17 (CSB)

**JONAH’S FLIGHT**

**1**The word of the Lord came to Jonah son of Amittai: **2**“Get up! Go to the great city of Nineveh and preach against it because their evil has come up before me.” **3**Jonah got up to flee to Tarshish from the **Lord’s presence**. He went down to Joppa and found a ship going to Tarshish. He paid the fare and went down into it to go with them to Tarshish from the **Lord’s presence**.

**4**But the Lord threw a great wind onto the sea, and such a great storm arose on the sea that the ship threatened to break apart. **5**The sailors were afraid, and each cried out to his god. They threw the ship’s cargo into the sea to lighten the load. Meanwhile, Jonah had gone down to the lowest part of the vessel and had stretched out and fallen into a deep sleep.

**6**The captain approached him and said, “What are you doing sound asleep? Get up! Call to your god., Maybe this god will consider us, and we won’t perish.”

**7**“Come on!” the sailors said to each other. “Let’s cast lots. Then we’ll know who is to blame for this trouble we’re in.” So they cast lots, and the lot singled out Jonah. **8**Then they said to him, “Tell us who is to blame for this trouble we’re in. What is your business, and where are you from? What is your country, and what people are you from?”

**9**He answered them, “I’m a Hebrew. I worship the Lord, the God of the heavens, who made the sea and the dry land.”

**10**Then the men were seized by a great fear and said to him, “What is this you’ve done?” The men knew he was fleeing from the **Lord’s presence** because he had told them. **11**So they said to him, “What should we do to you so that the sea will calm down for us?” For the sea was getting worse and worse.

**12**He answered them, “Pick me up and throw me into the sea so that it will calm down for you, for I know that I’m to blame for this great storm that is against you.” **13**Nevertheless, the men rowed hard to get back to dry land, but they couldn’t because the sea was raging against them more and more.

**14**So they called out to the **Lord**: “Please, Lord, don’t let us perish because of this man’s life, and don’t charge us with innocent blood! For you, Lord, have done just as you pleased.” **15**Then they picked up Jonah and threw him into the sea, and the sea stopped its raging. **16**The men were seized by great fear of the Lord, and they offered a sacrifice to the Lord and made vows.

**17**The Lord appointed a great fish to swallow Jonah, and Jonah was in the belly of the fish three days and three nights.

# 1. This morning I want to take a few moments to get acquainted with Jonah.

A. Jonah was an Old-Testament Prophet.

1. We know he had a successful ministry because of a passage in 2 Kings.

2. 2 Kings 14:25 (CSB)

**25**He restored Israel’s border from Lebo-hamath as far as the Sea of the Arabah, according to the word the Lord, the God of Israel, had spoken through his servant, the prophet Jonah son of Amittai from Gath-hepher.

3. We know Jonah was a well-known prophet in Israel (Northern 10 tribes) who was used by God during a time of incredible evil under King Jeroboam.

B. Beyond that, we don’t know much about Jonah.

1. We believe the book of Jonah is set around the 8th century BC (around 782 to 750).

2. This is about 150 years before the City of Nineveh was destroyed in 612 B.C by the Babylonians.

C. One detail we must keep in mind for this book is the cruelty of the Assyrians.

1. Even though the ancient world was a very cruel place, Assyria was the master of cruel.

a. And they were proud of it.

b. Amazingly, we have obelisks and other records of the cruelty that happened from the days of Jonah even a century before.

c. The Assyrians proudly drew pictures depicting their conquering and torturing of the enemy in graphic detail.

d. Let me read one account, written by a king of Assyria before Jonah:

e. Ashurnasirpal II (883–859 b.c.) wrote, for example:

I flayed [the skin from] as many nobles as had rebelled against me [and] draped their skins over the pile [of corpses].… I cut off the heads of their fighters [and] built [with them] a tower before their city. I burnt their adolescent boys [and] girls.… I captured many troops alive: I cut off of some their arms [and] hands; I cut off of others their noses, ears, [and] extremities. I gouged out the eyes of many troops. I made one pile of the living [and] one of the heads. I hung their heads on trees around the city.[[1]](#footnote-1)

2. These were the same people who, in 2 Kings 15 captured, much of Israel and then, in the year 722, captured all of the Northern Kingdom of Israel and dispersed the 10 tribes.

a. The people of Nineveh were the oppressors and slave-masters of Israel.

b. They transported 27,290 Israelites as slaves to Assyria and killed many of the rest.

c. Nineveh represented the enemy of God’s people and God.

d. The Book of Jonah is the story of God, sending His prophet, to witness to God’s enemy.

D. **Quick summary:**

1. Jonah is a good, godly man.

2. Assyria and the people of Nineveh are the most evil and vile people.

3. God tells Jonah to go and warn the Ninevites that destruction is coming but mercy is available.

a. There is an inherent mercy in God’s warning.

b. God could have destroyed Nineveh without warning them.

c. He certainly didn’t have to tell them through a prophet.

d. But God wanted to warn them so they could repent.

e. When God prophesies destruction, He does so with the hope that the people will repent.

4. Jonah knows this and that is why he runs away.

# 2. Instead of going with God to Nineveh, Jonah fled God’s presence.

A. Jonah didn’t want to go to Nineveh.

1. These were cruel people.

2. Jonah could be killed there.

3. It was a long way to travel to Nineveh.

4. What if Jonah prophesies, and the people repent?

5. Jonah doesn’t want to see them spared; he wants to see them burn.

B. But God wanted Jonah in Nineveh, speaking to the people there.

1. Jonah was already used to evil people.

a. The king of Israel at the time was Jeroboam son of Joash.

b. For 41 years, this king did what was evil before God.

c. Yet, Jonah faithfully prophesied during that time, and during that reign.

d. He proclaimed God’s word to lost and evil people, hoping they would repent.

e. But they were his people, not some foreigner.

1. This was his country.

2. They spoke his language.

3. They shared his customs.

f. Jonah didn’t want other people to receive mercy, just his.

2. God called Jonah to go to a people that God loved and Jonah hated.

a. Jonah was called to be faithful to God in a foreign country just like he had been faithful in his own country.

b. But Jonah didn’t want to.

C. Jonah hires a boat to travel in the opposite direction of what God wanted.

1. In other words, *Jonah quit.*

2. He quit his call, he quit his God, he quit his purpose.

3. He fled in the opposite direction of what God wanted and fled in the opposite direction of God’s presence.

4. This was a conscience decision.

a. He knew what he was doing.

b. And he did it anyway.

c. *Jonah preferred the possibility of God’s anger over God’s presence.*

d. When I live in open rebellion against God, I am declaring I would rather God be angry with me than me be angry with myself.

1. We spurn the dissatisfaction of God so long as we are satisfied with our selves.

2. I’m afraid we are living in a day when we care not what God’s will is, just as long as we are happy.

3. The sin of Jonah was first a sin of disobedience and rebellion.

5. The danger that Jonah is facing was a life without the Presence of God.

a. When we walk in open disobedience to God, we forfeit the Presence of God in our lives.

b. You won’t feel the love of God in you if you are living in open rebellion to Him.

# 3. What does it mean to flee God’s Presence?

A. God’s Presence is how we experience and know God.

1. The Hebrew word is often translated “face,” implying a close and personal encounter with the Lord.[[2]](#footnote-2)

2. As believers we know that God lives in us and that “where two or three are together, God is in their midst.”

a. But there is a difference between believing God is here and feeling His presence.

b. We call this the “manifest presence”.

c. Those moments where you know you are experiencing God.

2. God wants us to feel His presence.

a. In Genesis, God met with Adam and Eve in the Garden.

1. When Adam and Eve sinned, they were removed from God’s presence.

2. The relationship they had previously shared with God was interrupted and corrupted.

b. Scripture is the story of God restoring His Presence to humanity.

1. God revealed Himself to Abraham so that all the nations might know God.

2. God instructed Moses in how to build the Tabernacle so that the presence of God might go with them.

Exodus 33:15–16 (CSB)

**15**“If your presence does not go,” Moses responded to him, “don’t make us go up from here. **16**How will it be known that I and your people have found favor with you unless you go with us? I and your people will be distinguished by this from all the other people on the face of the earth.”

3. All through the Scripture we see God’s desire for His people to experience His presence.

a. We also see the power of sin to separate us from the Presence of God.

b. When all sin is removed, in the fulfillment of the Book of Revelation, again we will all experience God’s Presence just as Adam and Eve did in the Garden.

c. In the Age to come, we will no longer know a separation from God’s presence.

B. Jonah’s decision to disobey God was a decision to leave the Presence of God.

1. It was a decision to no longer encounter God.

2. Jonah was willing to die as a prophet in Israel but was not willing to live as a prophet in Nineveh,

3. Even if it meant that he would no longer encounter God.

C. All of us will have times in our life when we don’t “feel” God.

1. That is normal and natural.

a. There will be wilderness seasons when you have done everything right and yet you don’t feel God.

b. These moments are usually used to teach and shape us for what God has in store for our future.

2. But there are other times we do not feel the Presence of God because we are living in open sin.

a. When we choose to “grieve” the Spirit by our lifestyle or choices, we forfeit the Presence of God.

b. I can’t choose to live in sin and expect to experience God’s presence too.

c. Somebody here today is wanting to draw closer to God, but you aren’t willing to walk in obedience.

D. However, I have good news.

1. Jonah fled from God’s presence.

2. But God pursued Jonah.

3. And that is good news for all of us.

# 4. The Presence of God pursued Jonah.

A. Jonah went the opposite direction of Nineveh.

1. Jonah left his land and got on a boat.

2. Each time, the Bible says Jonah left the “Lord’s Presence”.

3. But at no time did it say that God gave up on Jonah.

B. Instead, God pursued Jonah.

1. God pursued Jonah on the boat by sending a violent storm to get his attention.

2. God sent a large fish to swallow Jonah when Jonah was ready to die in his disobedience.

3. God pursued Jonah even when Jonah didn’t want to be pursued.

C. This morning we sang one of my favorite songs, “Reckless Love”.

1. Now, a lot of people have a hard time calling God’s love “reckless”.

a. And I understand that.

b. So why do I keep singing it?

2. When I read about God’s pursuit of Jonah, I see God doing something that none of us would have done.

a. We wouldn’t have chased down a disobedient prophet.

1. We wouldn’t have saved him from his choices.

2. We would have let him drown and made an example of him.

b. We also wouldn’t have worried about the Assyrians.

1. They were cruel, evil, and destructive.

2. They represented everything that was wrong with humanity.

c. Yet God chases Jonah down so that Jonah could go to Nineveh.

d. You won’t find any examples of any other gods doing something like this.

3. Yet, this is what God does.

a. He chases me down, fights till I’m found.

b. He fights for me even when I’ve given up.

c. When I’m running in the opposite direction, he sends reminders and opportunities that give me another chance.

d. And He hasn’t done this just once, or twice, but He has done this for me millions of times.

e. When I was willing to give up, God didn’t!

D. Even though you may be living in sin today, that does not mean you have to live in sin tomorrow.

1. And you don’t have to go through a life-threatening storm or spend 3 days in the belly of a fish before you get another chance.

2. Each week, as you come to church, you are given another chance.

a. Each altar call is God inviting you to turn directions.

b. You might have walked into this building today living in disobedience but you can walk out of here living in God’s presence.

3. For the next several weeks, as we open to the book of Jonah, we will be reminded of God’s love and pursuit of us.

4. This story isn’t about Jonah, a whale, or about an evil. At its core, the story of Jonah is about God.

5. And in particular, about God’s desire for Jonah and Nineveh to experience His Presence.

# Closing: This morning I want to pray for 2 groups of people:

A. The first group are the Jonah’s.

1. You are running from God.

2. You disobeying God in an area of your life, and you can feel it effecting your relationship with God and with others.

a. Maybe you aren’t the Jonah but you live with him.

b. There is someone in your life who is running away from God as fast as they can.

3. This morning, we want to pray for the Jonah’s and the Prodigals in our lives.

a. That they will repent and experience a mighty encounter with Jesus.

b. That’s group 1.

B. For the rest of us, I want us to pray to experience God’s Presence in greater ways.

1. Why?

2. First, because it is what God wants for your life.

3. Two, it is what we need in our lives.

This morning, let us all take time to pray and seek the face and power of God.

To encounter His manifest presence in a way that changes us.

1. James Bruckner, [*Jonah, Nahum, Habakkuk, Zephaniah*](https://ref.ly/logosres/nivac32jon?ref=Page.p+29&off=620&ctx=nah+son+of+Amittai.+~Ashurnasirpal+II+(88), The NIV Application Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 2004), 29. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Bryan E. Beyer, [“Presence of God,”](https://ref.ly/logosres/evdictbt?ref=Page.p+629&off=3619&ctx=s+pa%CC%84n%C9%A9%CC%82m%2c+which+is+~also+translated+%E2%80%9Cfac) in *Evangelical Dictionary of Biblical Theology*, electronic ed., Baker Reference Library (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1996), 629. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)