

¹ Now the word of the LORD came to Jonah the son of Amittai, saying, ² “Arise, go to Nineveh, that great city, and cry out against it; for their wickedness has come up before Me.” ³ But Jonah arose to flee to Tarshish from the presence of the LORD. He went down to Joppa, and found a ship going to Tarshish; so he paid the fare, and went down into it, to go with them to Tarshish from the presence of the LORD. ⁴ But the LORD sent out a great wind on the sea, and there was a mighty tempest on the sea, so that the ship was about to be broken up. ⁵ Then the mariners were afraid; and every man cried out to his god, and threw the cargo that was in the ship into the sea, to lighten the load. But Jonah had gone down into the lowest parts of the ship, had lain down, and was fast asleep. ⁶ So the captain came to him, and said to him, “What do you mean, sleeper? Arise, call on your God; perhaps your God will consider us, so that we may not perish.” ⁷ And they said to one another, “Come, let us cast lots, that we may know for whose cause this trouble has come upon us.” So they cast lots, and the lot fell on Jonah. ⁸ Then they said to him, “Please tell us! For whose cause is this trouble upon us? What is your occupation? And where do you come from? What is your country? And of what people are you?” ⁹ So he said to them, “I am a Hebrew; and I fear the LORD, the God of heaven, who made the sea and the dry land.” ¹⁰ Then the men were exceedingly afraid, and said to him, “Why have you done this?” For the men knew that he fled from the presence of the LORD, because he had told them. ¹¹ Then they said to him, “What shall we do to you that the sea may be calm for us?” – for the sea was growing more tempestuous. ¹² And he said to them, “Pick me up and throw me into the sea; then the sea will become calm for you. For I know that this great tempest is because of me.”

¹³ Nevertheless the men rowed hard to return to land, but they could not, for the sea continued to grow more tempestuous against them. ¹⁴ Therefore they cried out to the LORD and said, “We pray, O LORD, please do not let us perish for this man’s life, and do not charge us with innocent blood; for You, O LORD, have done as it pleased You.” ¹⁵ So they picked up Jonah and threw him into the sea, and the sea ceased from its raging. ¹⁶ Then the men feared the LORD exceedingly, and offered a sacrifice to the LORD and took vows. ¹⁷ Now the LORD had prepared a great fish to swallow Jonah. And Jonah was in the belly of the fish three days and three nights.

Text: Jonah 1:1-17 A 1-30-22 Ro. 8:18-25 Mt. 8:23-27 Ps. 139 Psalmody: WS, p. 33
Hymns: 126, 779, 281, 416

WE CAN’T RUN AWAY FROM GOD

1. Don’t be foolish

2. Go to God

The Savior calls; let ev’ry ear
Attend the heav’nly sound.
O doubting souls, dismiss your fear;
Hope smiles reviving round

O sinners, come, hear mercy’s voice;
The gracious call obey;
Mercy invites to heav’nly joys,
And can you yet delay? (TLH #281: 1, 4)

Dear fellow believers in Christ,

After Adam and Eve sinned, they *“hid themselves from the presence of the LORD God among the trees of the garden”* (Gen. 3:8). That was dumb. They couldn’t hide from God. We know that, and yet there are times when we try to hide, or run away, from God. From the story of Jonah we’re reminded that **WE CAN’T RUN AWAY FROM GOD**, and, if and when we try to, what we need to do.

1

Our text begins, *“Now the word of the LORD came to Jonah ..., saying, ‘Arise, go to Nineveh, that great city, and cry out against it; for their wickedness has come up before Me.’”* God told Jonah to go to Nineveh and tell the people to repent. But Jonah didn’t want to. As he told the Lord later, he knew that if the people of Nineveh repented God would forgive them. Nineveh was the capital of the Assyrian empire, an extremely cruel nation that committed atrocities in war. The Assyrians terrorized other nations (cf. the book of Nahum; & Is. 10:5-19). The Ninevites deserved God’s punishment, and Jonah didn’t think it would be fair for God to forgive them (Jon. 4:1-5). So, instead of going to Nineveh as God had told him to, he got on a ship and tried to run away to the city of Tarshish. *“But the LORD sent out a great wind on the sea, and there was a mighty tempest on the sea, so that the ship was about to be broken up.”* The sailors frantically called out to their gods, but the storm raged on. They located Jonah, who told them that he had been running away from the LORD. He confessed, *“I know that this great tempest is because of me.”*

The psalmist asks God, *“Where can I flee from Your presence?”* (Ps. 139:7). He then acknowledges that wherever we are, God is there, too. So why did Jonah think he could run away from God? He wasn’t thinking at all, he just didn’t want to do what God told him to do. What Jonah did not only brought him trouble, it also brought trouble for the men sailing the ship he was on. The sailors were hit by a storm that was so bad they thought they were going to die. And it was terribly hard on them to have to throw Jonah overboard. Jonah had to spend three pitch black, miserable, depressing days in the stomach of a huge fish.

Jesus says, *“Whoever desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me”* (Mk. 8:34). Our flesh wants us to take the easy, comfortable path through life. Following Jesus means that we have to deny ourselves and follow the often ‘uncomfortable’ path of His Word, and His will for our life. We’re tempted to ignore God and do what we want to do and try to convince ourselves that we’re justified in what we’re doing (“The people of Nineveh don’t deserve God’s forgiveness, so I’m not going there”). When we do this, we not only bring ourselves trouble, we can bring trouble for those around us, too – directly or indirectly, short-term or long-term, some trouble or a great deal of trouble.

We often try to run away from God when it comes to facing up to our sins. We don’t like to simply, honestly look at our sins, look at what God says about them in His Word, admit we’ve done wrong, and confess our sins to God. The psalmist says, *“When I kept silent, my bones grew old through my groaning all the day long. For day and night Your hand was heavy upon me; my vitality was turned into the drought of summer”* (Ps. 32:3-4). When we try to ignore and excuse our sins they stand between us and God, and our conscience can’t be at peace.

Running away from God may feel like the easy way at first, but it's always the foolish way.

2

Jonah told the sailors *“Pick me up and throw me into the sea; then the sea will become calm for you. For I know that this great tempest is because of me.”* Jonah faced up to his foolishness of trying to run away from God. He didn't want the sailors to suffer for the wrong he had done. The Bible doesn't tell us how Jonah knew that if he were thrown overboard the storm would stop, but somehow the Lord let him know it. Instead of running away from God, Jonah now was going to God. He had to learn the hard way, but he learned. It was the only way to stop the storm, and it was what Jonah knew had to be done.

The prodigal (or wayward) son left home and went far away where he spent his inheritance doing sinful things. When he ran out of money and hit rock bottom, he finally came to his senses and returned to his father. When we've been running away from God, trying to avoid doing His will, trying to avoid doing what God tells us to do in His Word, trying to avoid facing up to our sins (sins we've committed, sinful attitudes in ourselves, sinful ways we've gotten ourselves into), we need to turn to God instead. We need to ask God to open our eyes and help us to see our sin, turn away from it, and walk in His ways instead. We pray with the psalmist, *“Search me, O God, and know my heart; try me, and know my anxieties; and see if there is any wicked way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting”* (Ps. 139:23-24).

Not wanting to have to throw Jonah overboard the sailors *“rowed hard to return to land, but they could not, for the sea continued to grow more tempestuous against them.”* It was no use. *“Therefore they cried out to the LORD and said, ‘We pray, O LORD, please do not let us perish for this man's life, and do not charge us with innocent blood; for You, O LORD, have done as it pleased You.’ So they picked up Jonah and threw him into the sea, and the sea ceased from its raging. Then the men feared the LORD exceedingly, and offered a sacrifice to the LORD and took vows.”* People at that time typically believed in lots of gods. Since the sailors experienced the terrible storm and saw how it immediately stopped when they threw Jonah overboard, they believed there was something special about *“the LORD”* – the God Jonah believed in. But we're not told that they trusted in *“the LORD”* for the forgiveness of their sins and eternal salvation.

Jonah told the sailors to throw him overboard and allowed them to do it, so he was truly facing up to his sin of running away from God. Repentance means facing up to our sins and being willing to face the consequences of our sins. For the wayward son, knowing that his father was a loving, forgiving father made it easier for him to return home to his father and face the consequences of all the wrong he had done. Scripture says, *“The LORD is merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in mercy”* (Ps. 103:8). Knowing that God is our loving, forgiving Heavenly Father makes it easier for us to go to Him with our sins and face any consequences of our sins.

“Now the LORD had prepared a great fish to swallow Jonah. And Jonah was in the belly of the fish three days and three nights.” It had to be frightening for Jonah to allow himself to be thrown overboard in the middle of a raging storm. But the Lord didn't let him drown. God sent a huge fish to swallow him. We know from what Jonah says after our text that during the days he was in

the fish's stomach he was miserable (Jonah 2). But the Lord used the fish to keep him alive and finally get him to where He had told Jonah to go in the first place.

Jesus said, "*As Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of the great fish, so will the Son of Man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth*" (Mt. 12:40). Jonah spent three days in the stomach of a fish as a consequence of his sin. Jesus was put to death and spent three days in the tomb because of our sins. The Bible says that after three days the Lord safely delivered Jonah out of the fish and onto dry land. After the three days Jesus spent in the tomb, He rose again. Jesus "*was delivered up because of our offenses, and was raised because of our justification*" – Romans 4:25. Because Jesus died for our sins and rose again, our sins are forgiven, and we're saved. Jesus says, "*Because I live, you will live also*" (Jn. 14:19). One day we will die, and our body will be laid in a grave. But Jesus will raise us back to life again and take us to heaven!

Like Adam and Eve and Jonah, **WE CAN'T RUN AWAY FROM GOD**. Trying to avoid doing God's will, trying to avoid obeying God's Word, trying to avoid facing up to our sins is foolishness. **Don't be foolish. Go to God**. God's will for us is always the best way. God's Word is always right. God's forgiveness takes away all of our sin and all of our guilt, and gives us His peace and the joy of our salvation.

Oh, that the Lord would guide my ways
To keep His statutes still!
Oh, that my God would grant me grace
To know and do His will!

Order my footsteps by Thy Word
And make my heart sincere;
Let sin have no dominion, Lord,
But keep my conscience clear.

Assist my soul, too apt to stray,
A stricter watch to keep;
And should I ever forget Thy way,
Restore Thy wand'ring sheep.

Make me to walk in Thy commands –
'Tis a delightful road –
Nor let my head or heart or hands
Offend against my God. Amen. (TLH #416)