

Jonah heard the call of God to go to Nineveh, a large city in the Assyrian empire. They were known for their brutal psychological warfare that instilled fear in the hearts of their enemies, of which Israel was one of many. Jonah responded by booking passage on a ship to the farthest city in the opposite direction. He did not just say no to God, he ran from God as far and as fast as he could. I think some of us can relate to that, because we have done that very thing at some time in our lives. No temptation faces us but that which is common to man (1 Corinthians 10:13a<sup>i</sup>).

*<sup>7</sup> And they said to one another, "Come, let us cast lots, that we may know on whose account this evil has come upon us."* Jonah 1:7a Jonah had been asleep in the belly of the boat while the pagan mariners were on deck praying. They woke him and asked him to come on deck and call out to his God. Though they were pagans, they had enough sense to know that nothing is an accident. It is too bad we do not have the sense of these pagans. We say something was a coincidence, but that does not explain why two things coincided. (Psalm 139:16<sup>ii</sup>; Isaiah 45:10<sup>iii</sup>).

The God of Israel is not just a local god, as many of that day thought. He is the God who is everywhere at all times. Jonah is about to find out there is nowhere that you can run from Him. A psalmist wrote, *<sup>7</sup> Where shall I go from your Spirit? Or where shall I flee from your presence? <sup>8</sup> If I ascend to heaven, you are there! If I make my bed in Sheol, you are there! <sup>9</sup> If I take the wings of the morning and dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea, <sup>10</sup> even there your hand shall lead me, and your right hand shall hold me.* Psalm 139:7-10 The psalmist felt safe in the hand of God while he was at sea, whereas Jonah thought safety was fleeing to where God was not present.

God caused a storm to rage around the ship in which Jonah was trying to hide from God. When God calls us, He will not just let us run from Him without consequences. God will discipline us because we are like a child running into the street in which our loving father told us not go. He disciplines us to teach us for our good (Hebrews 12:5,6<sup>iv</sup>).

We recently considered the need for a healthy fear of God. It keeps us from contemplating temptations (Proverbs 16:6<sup>v</sup>). If we know our heavenly Father will discipline us for rebelling against Him, and that He will do it for our good, we then consider the cost we might end up paying. It is usually more than we imagine it to be. Sin always costs more than you expect. After a few of those painful lessons, we find it is wiser just to stay within God's loving will for our lives. Jonah had not learned that yet, even though he was a prophet of the Lord (2 Kings 14:25<sup>vi</sup>). Even if you are ministering for the Lord, you can run from His direction and have the need to learn the seriousness of disobedience (Hebrews 5:8<sup>vii</sup>).

The ancient people knew that God or gods were behind all they experienced. Today we have been educated into imbecility. We have been taught that complex organisms that we marvel at just happened by random chance over millions of years. You must put your brain on pause to think the intricate language of DNA happened accidentally. If modern man cannot make self-repairing machines that make their own parts from the environment around them, how in the world can we think our world with all its variety of living things happened by accident?

When the storm came, they wanted to know why and deduced that someone on the ship must be the cause. Perhaps it was an unusual storm for that season. They woke Jonah who was below deck sound asleep. He probably was so disturbed by God's call that he had not slept for days. Once on the ship he thought he was safe and went into a sound sleep on that rocking boat. That is understandable if he thought he had escaped God's call and can now rest in his new direction in life where he remained his own boss (Ephesians 5:14<sup>viii</sup>). That is what sin is all about, being our own lord. What he did not realize is that he had just set in motion events that would be far worse than if he had just obeyed and gone to Nineveh.

Casting lots was common in that culture and a biblical way to try to find answers from God (Proverbs 18:18<sup>ix</sup>). They would put rocks in a jar each of which is unique to each person, shake it up, and the first rock that poured out was the one they considered to be chosen. Another method was to throw two stones that were dark on one side and white on the other. If two dark sides came up the answer was no. If two white sides were up the answer was yes. If one came up black and the other one white, then they were to throw again. The proverbs tell us <sup>33</sup> *The lot is cast into the lap, but its every decision is from the LORD.* Proverbs 16:33 (See also Leviticus 16:8.<sup>x</sup>) The disciples cast lots for to determine the replacement for Judas before Pentecost, but that is the last we read of it (Acts 1:26<sup>xi</sup>), for the Holy Spirit is a much better source for direction than lots.

*So they cast lots, and the lot fell on Jonah. <sup>8</sup> Then they said to him, "Tell us on whose account this evil has come upon us. What is your occupation? And where do you come from?"* Jonah 1:7b,8 The lot determined it was Jonah who was the cause of the storm. Picture all eyes turning toward him and Jonah realizing he had been found out by pagans in the open ocean! Do you think it then dawned on him that you cannot outrun God? There is no hiding from the One who is omnipresent. Jonah's heart must have started pounding knowing that he had been found out by God and men. It was on his account that the calamity had come upon them. The Scriptures warn us that we can be sure that our sin will be found out (Numbers 32:23<sup>xii</sup>).

In this verse "evil" means calamity or adversity. God does not act in an evil way (James 1:13<sup>xiii</sup>). This storm was to save Jonah and Nineveh just as many of the storms we experience are for our good. In other words, Jonah's God caused the storm for the benefit of many (Genesis 50:20<sup>xiv</sup>). As we will see later, this storm was full of God's grace and mercy. Jonah's Creator could have just drowned him and the crew with a big wave and been done with Jonah. That would be justice for disobeying the One who made him and gave him all he had. But we know the rest of the story and how God was patient with Jonah to teach him of God's love for mankind (John 3:16<sup>xv</sup>). In the same way, **God sends storms into our lives, not to destroy us, but to teach and discipline us. He wants to bless us by turning us from our destructive ways.** It is natural to get upset when everything seems to go wrong, but if we are people of faith, we should bow our heads and ask God what He is trying to show us out of His love for us.

Once the lot had fallen on Jonah, the mariners ask what was going on? "What is your country, your occupation, and of what people are you?" It seemed as if they were giving Jonah a chance to try to talk his way out of it. Their gods were capricious and would get angry at individuals over little things. They thought they needed to try harder to save themselves. They were trying to determine if there was a solution. Jonah was about to help them understand the cause of the storm by confessing his sin. Confession is

the only way to relieve ourselves from the burden of guilt. But since he is doing so before pagans, he has the new guilt of being a poor example of the followers of the God of the Hebrews.

*<sup>9</sup> And 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."* Jonah 1:9 Jonah had not told them he was a Hebrew, a prophet, or that he was from Israel. When you are running from God, you do not want people to know you are a believer because you know you are in sin. He was forced to tell them, "I am a Hebrew." The etymology of the word Hebrew is uncertain, but some believe it refers to "those who pass over" pointing back to Abraham's crossing the Euphrates to come to the promised land. If that is the case, it means people descended from the man of faith who heard God's call and went out by faith to a land God would show him (Hebrews 11:8<sup>xvi</sup>). This means they are God's chosen people to bring the revelation of God to the world. That is what Jonah was running from. The prophet Isaiah lived around the same time and predicted that salvation would come to the world through the Messiah who would be of Jewish descent (Isaiah 49:6<sup>xvii</sup>). That was the fulfillment of the promise to Abraham to bless the world through his seed (Genesis 12:3<sup>xviii</sup>).

*"I fear the Lord, the God of heaven, who made the sea and the dry land."* Jonah says he fears the Creator. This speaks of his faith in the declaration of creation in Genesis (Psalm 146:6<sup>xix</sup>). If he really fears God, reverences His holiness and justice, what is he doing running from God? At some time in our lives, I think we can all relate to fearing God and yet not doing what we know we are called to do. We presume upon God's grace and hope that He will look the other way. That is to think we have a better plan for our lives than God does. But God is omnipresent. He is everywhere at once and sees all. He is also omniscient, meaning that He knows all. Our hope to hide from Him is wishful thinking and misguided, because disobedience must be dealt with. That is because God is a loving Father who loves His children enough to discipline them.

When my wife first came to the United States, she was under the impression that Americans were all Christians. She had only met my family and other believers. She soon had to face the fact that was not remotely true. Who are we and where did we come from? Sadly, if we say we are citizens of the United States it does not conjure thoughts of godliness as it once may have done. Even if we say we reverence the Creator of the land and sea, secular people may just roll their eyes. Our educational institutions have turned against God and teach that we should yield to all our desires. They claim the Bible is just one of many myths, while ignoring its historical accuracy. Our culture is moving away from faith and facts to its own perverse man centered ideology. If it continues and God does not send revival, it will be the demise of the nation. The family is the foundation of any society, and that is why the enemy is attacking the family unit.

*<sup>1</sup> Transgression speaks to the wicked deep in his heart; there is no fear of God before his eyes. <sup>2</sup> For he flatters himself in his own eyes that his iniquity cannot be found out and hated. <sup>3</sup> The words of his mouth are trouble and deceit; he has ceased to act wisely and do good.* Psalm 36:1-3 Where there is no fear of God, evil reigns (Psalm 55:19<sup>xx</sup>). That is what Jonah thought of Nineveh. That is where our nation seems to be headed. Jonah's actions made it true of him.

*Martin Buber makes the following helpful comment: 'Fear of God' ... never means to the Jews that they ought to be afraid of God, but that, trembling, they ought to be aware of His incomprehensibility ... It is the dark gate through which man must pass if he*

*is to enter into the love of God. He who wishes to avoid passing through this gate, he who begins to provide for himself a comprehensible God, constructed thus and not otherwise, runs the risk of having to despair of God in view of the actualities of history and life, or of falling into inner falsehood. Only through the fear of God does man enter so deep into the love of God that he cannot again be cast out of it.<sup>xxi</sup>*

*<sup>10</sup> Then the men were exceedingly afraid and said to him, “What is this that you have done!” For the men knew that he was fleeing from the presence of the LORD, because he had told them.* Jonah 1:10 The mariners were of a more spiritual nature than modern man. When they heard that Jonah was a worshiper of the Creator land and sea, the God of heaven, they knew they were in serious trouble, “exceedingly afraid.” If Jonah had said some little family god, or Greek god, it would not have caused the same reaction. Apparently, they knew something of the God of Israel. If He was the creator of the sea, then He could do with it whatever He wills to punish this rebel.

Jonah never answered the question of where he came from. The mariners figured it out. He came from the presence of the Lord. That is where Jonah had lived. **Sin causes us to leave His presence. He is still there, but there is no communion.** We all should live in that presence while communing with Him.. Where are you from? Is that where you live? Or is the world and its concerns all you think on (Colossians 3:1,2<sup>xxii</sup>)? Is it entertainment or fellowship with God that fills the silent moments of your life? The origins of our word “amusement” literally means away from thinking.<sup>xxiii</sup>

Their response to Jonah’s confession of fleeing from the presence of the Lord shows us they had more spiritual sense than Jonah. “What! You flee from the God who made the sea in a boat on the sea? What were you thinking! Are you crazy?” “*What have you done!*” was not a question about the nature of Jonah’s sin but an exclamation of horror. They were frightened to the depths of their being!<sup>xxiv</sup> They were believers in the sense that they could see that a Hebrew who fled from the Creator was not in his right mind. They had a clearer sense of what was happening than Jonah did.

They may have thought that if Jonah’s God sends a storm because he did not obey a command, how many of this God’s commands had they broken? What do we deserve for our transgressions against such a great and holy God (Ezekiel 18:4<sup>xxv</sup>)?

It is so humbling when a worldly person rebukes us for our behavior! “I thought you were a Christian,” they say. They may say it out loud or it may just be a look. Then it hits us that we were a poor representation of our Lord and have failed to be the difference we should be as those who bear the name Christian. It was the pagans who joined together to cry out to their gods while Jonah slept. Jonah’s testimony was terrible in his initial concern for the crew, but his confession that the God of the Hebrews is the God of creation caused the men to reverence his God. That is why they feared exceedingly.

We should never let our old nature tell us we can flee from the presence of the Lord or just dismiss what He has spoken to us. We end up being a poor testimony to the world when our high calling is to share His love and greatness. I pray regularly that I might be aware of the Lord’s presence. That is one way to maintain the fear of the Lord, but it also makes us aware that we are His instruments available for His service at any time and in any place. We talk about Jesus living in our hearts (John 14:23<sup>xxvi</sup>), but are we aware of His presence and what that means to us, how His presence should affect our words and actions in every arena in which He has placed us?

“What is this you have done!” they said. It is the same statement that God made to Eve in the Garden of Eden after she had eaten the forbidden fruit (Genesis 3:13<sup>xxvii</sup>). Did it dawn on Jonah that he had done the same thing the first couple did? It was the same thing God said to Cain after he murdered his brother (Genesis 4:10<sup>xxviii</sup>). Like Adam and Eve, Jonah had disobeyed the command of God and was trying to hide from Him. But instead of the voice of God, it was the voice of pagans. Even a pagan can recognize to disobey God has serious consequences.

I believe the Spirit of God addresses us the same way. That is what conviction is. The Holy Spirit causes us to feel the guilt of disobedience. It weighs on us, haunts us, as we look over our shoulder expecting the discipline of God. For the unbelievers, it either drives them to repentance leading to salvation, or they harden their heart. The believer may also need to repent else we harden our hearts which results in more compromise. Thankfully, the Word of God tells us that by confession and repentance our communion with God is restored (1 John 1:9<sup>xxix</sup>). We can have peace again.

The grace of God is about to show up in the form of an enormous fish. Grace can come in many different forms. Think about Joseph. Do you think he thought being sold into slavery, falsely accused, and forgotten about in prison was the grace of God? And yet later he realized it was all to save him and his family from starvation and save many lives. Our trust in our omnipresent, omnipotent God will see us through the storms or we give in to despair (Philippians 4:6<sup>xxx</sup>; 1 Corinthians 10:13<sup>xxxi</sup>). The fear of God, which is the awe and reverence of the incomprehensible wonder of Him, must be what we rely upon in the times when we cannot understand the trouble we are enduring. That takes faith, but it is faith well-grounded in Scripture and in countless testimonies. (See Hebrews 11.)

Last week we saw in the first six verses of Jonah the need for us to wake up to our true condition before God. It went right along with the previous week’s message to examine ourselves to see if we are in the faith (2 Corinthians 13:5<sup>xxxii</sup>) and with the Wednesday night Bible study in Acts 4 and 5. Today we see in this passage the importance of receiving conviction, repenting, and confessing our sin so that our communion with God and our testimony to the world is restored.

These first ten verses in Jonah have shown us fallen man’s tendency to disobey and try to hide from God. It is the pattern that goes back all the way to the Garden of Eden. But in the coming passages, we are going to see that Jonah becomes a foreshadow of Christ and what He was going to do for us. Next week we will see if the big fish is a big fish story or an historical event.

Questions:

- 1 Why is it impossible to hide from God?
- 2 Why is the fear of the Lord a spiritually healthy thing?
- 3 Why does God send a storm into our lives?
- 4 Why was Jonah ridding himself of guilt taking on new guilt?
- 5 Why had Jonah not told them anything about himself?
- 6 What happens to a nation that does not fear God?
- 7 How did Buber describe the fear of God?
- 8 Where did Jonah come from? Where do you come from?
- 9 Where do we first see the question, “What have you done?”
- 10 Go over the pattern we are seeing in the sermon series and Bible study.

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<sup>i</sup> **1 Corinthians 10:13 (KJV)**

<sup>13</sup> There hath no temptation taken you but such as is common to man: but God *is* faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able; but will with the temptation also make a way to escape, that ye may be able to bear *it*.

<sup>ii</sup> **Psalm 139:16 (NIV)**

<sup>16</sup> your eyes saw my unformed body. All the days ordained for me were written in your book before one of them came to be.

<sup>iii</sup> **Isaiah 46:10 (ESV)**

<sup>10</sup> declaring the end from the beginning and from ancient times things not yet done, saying, 'My counsel shall stand, and I will accomplish all my purpose,'

<sup>iv</sup> **Hebrews 12:5-6 (ESV)**

<sup>5</sup> And have you forgotten the exhortation that addresses you as sons? "My son, do not regard lightly the discipline of the Lord, nor be weary when reproved by him. <sup>6</sup> For the Lord disciplines the one he loves, and chastises every son whom he receives."

<sup>v</sup> **Proverbs 16:6 (ESV)**

<sup>6</sup> By steadfast love and faithfulness iniquity is atoned for, and by the fear of the LORD one turns away from evil.

<sup>vi</sup> **2 Kings 14:25 (ESV)**

<sup>25</sup> He restored the border of Israel from Lebo-hamath as far as the Sea of the Arabah, according to the word of the LORD, the God of Israel, which he spoke by his servant Jonah the son of Amittai, the prophet, who was from Gath-hepher.

<sup>vii</sup> **Hebrews 5:8 (ESV)**

<sup>8</sup> Although he was a son, he learned obedience through what he suffered.

<sup>viii</sup> **Ephesians 5:14 (ESV)**

<sup>14</sup> for anything that becomes visible is light. Therefore it says, "Awake, O sleeper, and arise from the dead, and Christ will shine on you."

<sup>ix</sup> **Proverbs 18:18 (ESV)**

<sup>18</sup> The lot puts an end to quarrels and decides between powerful contenders.

<sup>x</sup> **Leviticus 16:8 (ESV)**

<sup>8</sup> And Aaron shall cast lots over the two goats, one lot for the LORD and the other lot for Azazel.

<sup>xi</sup> **Acts 1:26 (ESV)**

<sup>26</sup> And they cast lots for them, and the lot fell on Matthias, and he was numbered with the eleven apostles.

<sup>xii</sup> **Numbers 32:23 (ESV)**

<sup>23</sup> But if you will not do so, behold, you have sinned against the LORD, and be sure your sin will find you out.

<sup>xiii</sup> **James 1:13 (ESV)**

<sup>13</sup> Let no one say when he is tempted, "I am being tempted by God," for God cannot be tempted with evil, and he himself tempts no one.

<sup>xiv</sup> **Genesis 50:20 (ESV)**

<sup>20</sup> As for you, you meant evil against me, but God meant it for good, to bring it about that many people should be kept alive, as they are today.

<sup>xv</sup> **John 3:16 (ESV)**

<sup>16</sup> "For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life.

<sup>xvi</sup> **Hebrews 11:8 (ESV)**

<sup>8</sup> By faith Abraham obeyed when he was called to go out to a place that he was to receive as an inheritance. And he went out, not knowing where he was going.

<sup>xvii</sup> **Isaiah 49:6 (ESV)**

<sup>6</sup> he says: "It is too light a thing that you should be my servant to raise up the tribes of Jacob and to bring back the preserved of Israel; I will make you as a light for the nations, that my salvation may reach to the end of the earth."

<sup>xviii</sup> **Genesis 12:3 (NIV)**

<sup>3</sup> I will bless those who bless you, and whoever curses you I will curse; and all peoples on earth will be blessed through you."

<sup>xix</sup> **Psalm 146:6 (ESV)**

<sup>6</sup> who made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that is in them, who keeps faith forever;

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<sup>xx</sup> **Psalm 55:19 (ESV)**

<sup>19</sup> God will give ear and humble them, he who is enthroned from of old, Selah because they do not change and do not fear God.

<sup>xxi</sup> Rosemary A. Nixon, *The Message of Jonah: Presence in the Storm*, ed. Alec Motyer, Derek Tidball, The Bible Speaks Today (England: Inter-Varsity Press, 2003), 104–105.

<sup>xxii</sup> **Colossians 3:1-2 (ESV)**

<sup>1</sup> If then you have been raised with Christ, seek the things that are above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. <sup>2</sup> Set your minds on things that are above, not on things that are on earth.

<sup>xxiii</sup> In Greek “a” at the beginning of an action makes the word negative. To muse is to think, thus amuse is to not think and amusement is a thing that keeps you from thinking.

<sup>xxiv</sup> Billy K. Smith and Franklin S. Page, *Amos, Obadiah, Jonah*, vol. 19B, The New American Commentary (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1995), 235.

<sup>xxv</sup> **Ezekiel 18:4 (ESV)**

<sup>4</sup> Behold, all souls are mine; the soul of the father as well as the soul of the son is mine: the soul who sins shall die.

<sup>xxvi</sup> **John 14:23 (ESV)**

<sup>23</sup> Jesus answered him, “If anyone loves me, he will keep my word, and my Father will love him, and we will come to him and make our home with him.

<sup>xxvii</sup> **Genesis 3:13 (ESV)**

<sup>13</sup> Then the LORD God said to the woman, “What is this that you have done?” The woman said, “The serpent deceived me, and I ate.”

<sup>xxviii</sup> **Genesis 4:10 (ESV)**

<sup>10</sup> And the LORD said, “What have you done? The voice of your brother’s blood is crying to me from the ground.

<sup>xxix</sup> **1 John 1:9 (ESV)**

<sup>9</sup> If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.

<sup>xxx</sup> **Philippians 4:6 (ESV)**

<sup>6</sup> do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God.

<sup>xxxi</sup> **1 Corinthians 10:13 (ESV)**

<sup>13</sup> No temptation has overtaken you that is not common to man. God is faithful, and he will not let you be tempted beyond your ability, but with the temptation he will also provide the way of escape, that you may be able to endure it.

<sup>xxxii</sup> **2 Corinthians 13:5 (ESV)**

<sup>5</sup> Examine yourselves, to see whether you are in the faith. Test yourselves. Or do you not realize this about yourselves, that Jesus Christ is in you?—unless indeed you fail to meet the test!