

Right Running

Sermon Series from Jonah Summary Booklet

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Jonah:

**Right
Running**



Right Running Sermon Series - Jonah

The story is told of an elderly missionary who was discussing prayer at a women's conference. To the small circle of women gathered around her she explained that when she first went to the mission field, more than fifty years earlier, she was extremely lonely. She saw that other missionaries were married and had families, and she bemoaned the feeling that she was all alone. In her loneliness she begged God to pick out a husband for her. She told how she prayed and prayed and prayed, and was sure that God would answer her prayer.

One of the women in the group exclaimed, 'But you've never married! You're still single!'

The elderly missionary said, 'You're right! But somewhere out there is a seventy four year old man who has been resisting God's will for more than fifty years!'

We laugh at the woman's response but for many of us we see the other side of that. For we are the one's who have been resisting God's will for some time. God has been calling us to do something for him and we have been ignoring it, resisting it, or simply running away from it.

The church today has been given a message to preach and to share, and rather than preach or share it we keep it to ourselves. We are a church in retreat rather than a church in battle. The world around us is looking for answers but we are too scared to go and tell them. We are too scared to welcome the world in for it would change our own cosy dwelling. While the world around are afraid of life, the church is sleeping in its own little corner. We ignore God, we resist God, and indeed we even run away from God. The church used to influence the world, now the world influences the church.

In times like we live today we have a message to take to the community around us - a community that is lost in sin, a community that is afraid of life, a community not knowing what the future holds, a community that needs to hear and experience the good news of the gospel, and dare I say it, a community that needs to become part of our community of believers.

As I have contemplated the church asleep, the church too scared to reach out, the church in retreat rather than battle, I have been drawn to the prophet Jonah. In the little book that speaks of his life we can learn some lessons for "Right Running" as we seek to become a church that is on the move, following God, living for him and serving him where we are. With these words we began a series entitled "Right Running". The following is a summary of that teaching for our ongoing edification.

Running Away From God - Jonah 1

As we turn to Jonah chapter one we see the book begins with very familiar words to us – words which are used over one hundred times to introduce a divine communication to a prophet. These communications were generally a message which the prophet was to deliver or in some instances a specific instruction for the prophet to follow. In the case of Jonah we learn that God has a specific instruction for him to follow. God has a great love for all humanity and he has been appalled by the wickedness of the people of Nineveh. So much so that he wants Jonah to go and preach against them declaring the word of the Lord. What a challenge that is laid down to him. He is to preach in an inner-city area of Nineveh, a city some distance away. Where are we placed, friends?

And of course the first thing Jonah does is run away from God. He wants no part in this plan and longs to get out of there. He doesn't simply pretend he hasn't heard God and carry on with his normal business like some of us do, he runs away. Jonah gets up, heads down to Joppa, finds a boat 'Where are you going?' he asks, 'Tarshish' is the answer. Brilliant thinks Jonah, the farthest away point I can get to. Here's my fare, I'm coming with you. Jonah wants to run away from God. Nineveh was over to the East, Tarshish completely 180 degrees in the opposite direction to the West. It was the farthest known point to man at that point in time.

Jonah was trying to run away from God. Interesting that he thought he could run from God. Does he think he can hide from God in the boat on the sea and then in Tarshish? In verse nine he exclaims that God made the sea and the land – he will know all places. And also what of the words of the Psalmist in Psalm 139 – Where can I go from your spirit? Where can I flee from your presence? If I go up to the heavens you are there; if I make my bed in the depths you are there. If I rise on the wings of the dawn, if I settle on the far side of the sea, even there your hand will guide me, your right hand will hold me fast.

But let us not judge the man too quickly for there must have been **reasons for running away from God**. And the reasons for Jonah began with **fear**. The Assyrians are enemies of Israel and are a wicked people. Even the word of God that came speaks of their wickedness. Ancient records show that the Assyrians often flayed their enemies alive, then made heaps of their skulls, and did other dreadful deeds. Jonah as an Israelite would be at risk. He would also be at risk because of the message he was taking. He was proclaiming the Lord's judgement upon them due to their wicked way of living and acting. He was afraid they would attack him and kill him. He was also afraid, we will learn later in chapter four, that the Lord God would indeed forgive the people of Nineveh and have great compassion on them. He didn't want them to be saved. He didn't want them to hear of the Lord's great love. He

didn't want his life and world changed because a new group of people who were not like him came to faith.

Another reason for Jonah wanting to run was **ignorance**. Jonah was ignorant of God's plans and desires. He did not realise that God's love was for all humanity. As a Jew he thought that God was simply the God of the Israelites. They were his chosen his people and that meant everyone else was excluded from God's love. We learn later of course that God's love is for all humanity – for Jew and Gentile. In Acts 11 Peter explains to the apostles and other brothers (Jews) that God's love is for the Gentiles also. They declare in verse 18, 'So then God has granted even the Gentiles repentance unto life.'

Deceit may also have played a part for Jonah. You see the devil is a wily old character. He seeks to lie to us and deceive us so that we might not listen to God and follow him. Go on Jonah; get a grip of yourself man. What on earth does God want with that lot? Let them be. Let them die in their own wickedness. We've got better things to do. Did God really say he wanted you to do it?

However, there are **results from running away from God**. Things happen that we might not expect or want. We begin to suffer for not being in the centre of God's will. So what are some of the results we can expect from running away from God? For Jonah he experienced **a downward spiral**. Poor old Jonah was heading down. Life which up until now had been fine and worth living was diving out of control. Notice the downs for Jonah. He went down to Joppa (verse 3). The first thing he did was find a way out. He then went down below deck on the ship (verse 5). Perhaps he was tired and wanted to rest. Perhaps he wanted to make sure God couldn't see him. He went down into the sea (verse 15). Jonah was thrown overboard in an effort to calm the storm. He went down under the water. And finally we read that he went down into the belly of a fish (verse 17). His life went from bad to worse as he went in this downward spiral.

We can also **expect a storm**. As the ship was sailing along a great storm grew. And it must have been great for these sailors, accustomed to life on the sea and all that it brings, were afraid and began calling out to their gods. They woke Jonah up and begged him to plead with his god. In the face of adversity and fear Jonah admits that it is all his fault. He is a brave man to do that. And notice that through the forced words of Jonah in that situation these men come to realise who God is and fear him and worship him. It says in verse 16 they made vows to God. Now I think we can assume that they came to faith in God that day. Their lives would have been changed and transformed forever. God will still use us despite our reluctance and our running away to save others. How amazing is that?

We can also **expect to endanger others** and in this case a boat full of men are put in danger because of Jonah's sin and desire to run. And then of course we can **expect a fish** which is exactly what happened next as Jonah ended up in a dark, dingy place he did not want to be in.

We have thought about the reasons for running away from God and the results of that running away, but what can we expect of God. What is the **response from God to those who run away**? God had called Jonah to do something for him. Jonah had refused and run away. What is God to do? Does he have another plan? Or does it have to be Jonah? In this case he wanted Jonah and so he went after him to bring him back. God was **angry** with Jonah for disobeying him and running away. But we see God's **desire to draw them back** as he sends the storm upon the boat. He wants Jonah despite his failure. And then there is God's **desire to rescue them** as He sends the fish to swallow Jonah up. Now the miracle here is not as we have often thought – that the fish came and swallowed Jonah. Oh no, fish have always swallowed humans, just watch Jaws. The miracle is that Jonah found himself in the belly of the fish without having been digested like fish normally digest food. Jonah was alive and well in the fish – well as well as you can be in there! God wanted to rescue Jonah for he loved him and longed to use him again.

As a church we may well at times feel like running away from God as we look at the challenge he has given us to tell the community around us about his gospel – the good news that Jesus saves. We may feel we have good reason for running away – we may be afraid, we may be ignorant of God's plans, and we may be deceived by Satan and others. The results of our running away though are serious. We can expect a downward spiral, storms will come, we will endanger others and we can expect a big fish to swallow us up. God will respond though and may well be angry. But he will also seek to draw us back to him and to rescue.

Are you running away from God?

Running To God - Jonah 2

Jonah prayed to God as he was thrown overboard but then in his rebellion sat for three days in the fish before praying to God again. Troubles hopefully draw us back to God and allow us to cry out to him in our distress. Rebellion still holds us back though from fully getting back into a right relationship with God. Prayer is vital though for our daily lives. Even when we begin to feel far from God we need to keep up the practice of praying. Paul reminds us in Thessalonians to pray in all circumstances.

Now that Jonah has been in the belly of the fish for three days he begins to realise he has been running away from God and now from his guilt begins to run to God. The

first thing we see Jonah doing is **remembering God**. I don't think he actually forgot God but he does very clearly remember God and come to him in prayer. Verse 1 says that he prayed to the LORD his God. He knows who God is. He has already witnessed to the sailors in chapter 1 that he worships the LORD the God of heaven who made the sea and the land. In spite of trying to run away from God, Jonah remembers who God is.

He remembers God in his **failure**. He has let God down. He feels guilty and no doubt embarrassed that he has failed God. God asked him to go to Nineveh and he chose to run in the opposite direction. He didn't want to follow God's plans. This God whom he worshipped and adored, he had come to fail. He also remembers God in his **distress**. He says in verse 2 'In my distress I called to the LORD and he answered me.' In his distress Jonah remembered God – he remembered the God who made the seas and the land and everything in them, the one who created the world. He remembered the God who loved him and cared for him, and wanted to use even him. And boy what distress Jonah was in. He had tried to run away from God and the storm had come rushing in around him. He saw the fear in the other folk aboard that ship and knew God was angry with him. He knew the only way to save the others was for him to be thrown overboard. And so he asks the men to do just that. As he hits the waters the storm begins to ease and the men onboard are saved. But what of Jonah? He is sinking deep into the murky waters. He is distressed and fearful. He is about to die. And death by drowning is horrible. You begin to swallow the water and then you suffocate and die. It's a slow horrible death for the person although in reality it doesn't take too long. No wonder he is distressed. And then to make matters worse this big fish comes towards him with mouth open. Now he is inside the belly of a fish. It's dark and smelly and horrible. He is distressed. And in his distress he remembers God and calls on him.

As Jonah remembers God he runs to him. And as he runs to him he begins to **request God - he prays to God**. He pours out what is on his heart and wants simply to talk with the only one who can save him. He wants to share with the God he loves, with the God he has failed.

As Jonah begins to pray to God he prays firstly with **honesty**. He sees around him the results of his actions – he is inside the belly of a fish having escaped the storm. He has tried to run away from God and from the plans God had for him, and God was annoyed. The waves and breakers swept over Jonah and the currents swirled about him. He had sunk into the sea and was swallowed by the fish. And all because he chose to disobey God and to run away. In honesty he comes and prays to God. He recognises his life was ebbing away but the Lord saved him by providing the fish.

Jonah also prays with **repentance**. He knows he has failed God. He knows he has let him down. He knows he has disobeyed and tried to run away from him. And he

recognises that salvation comes from the Lord (verse 9). With honesty Jonah has recognised his own shortcomings and his need for repentance. And now he prays to the Lord with repentance and seeks the Lord's forgiveness. He knows the Lord has saved his life and brought him up from the pit.

And Jonah also requested God with **thanksgiving**. He was in a desperate situation – in the belly of a fish – and he was distressed, yet he prayed with thanksgiving. Paul urges the Philippians to pray always with thanksgiving in their hearts. God is good, and he always looks after his children. Difficulties will come and we may find ourselves in situations we would not want to be in, but God is always there by our side. We need to give him thanks. Jonah thanked God for hearing his cries for help. He thanked him for lifting him up from the pit. He thanked him for that salvation that only comes from the Lord.

One of God's faithful missionaries, Allen Gardiner, experienced many physical difficulties and hardships throughout his service to the Saviour. Despite his troubles, he said, "While God gives me strength, failure will not daunt me." In 1851, at the age of 57, he died of disease and starvation while serving on Picton Island at the southern tip of South America. When his body was found, his diary lay nearby. It bore the record of hunger, thirst, wounds, and loneliness. The last entry in his little book showed the struggle of his shaking hand as he tried to write legibly. It read, "I am overwhelmed with a sense of the goodness of God." Think of that! No word of complaint, no childish whining, no grumbling at the circumstances - just praise for God's goodness. He prayed with thanksgiving.

And then we see that Jonah **recommits his life to God**. He has remembered who his God is and he has borne witness to God's goodness in hearing his requests, now Jonah is ready to live and serve his God once more. He recommits to **worshipping** God. This prayer is very Psalm like. Indeed many commentators regard it as a Psalm. In this prayer Jonah worships and praises the God he loves, the God who has saved him from drowning. He recognises the grace that God offers to him and to all humanity. He cannot understand how others will worship worthless idols and forfeit the grace that could be theirs (verse 8).

Jonah also recommits to **following** God. He is not interested in the idols others worship – the various gods the sailors called on. He followed God and then tried to run from him. Now he has been reminded of God's amazing grace and he longs to follow him again. He has seen the greatness of God and the awesome power of God. He has seen the saving power of God as the fish swallowed him up. He wants to follow God again. He desires to give him his life once more.

And lastly we see that Jonah recommits to **servicing** God. Verse 9 he says 'I will sacrifice to you. What I have vowed I will make good.' Jonah is ready, if the Lord

permits, to serve God again and to do what God asked of him a few days earlier. He has seen what happens when one disobeys God and runs away from him, now he is ready wholeheartedly to serve God again. And when God comes back with the same request a second time, Jonah is ready to run with God and go to Nineveh.

When we try to run away from God it can be so hard to come back. We miss one Sunday, and then another, then another, and soon we forget all about it. And boy is it hard to come back when you've been running away. Think of the prodigal son – got his half of the money and went and followed his dreams. Then it all ran out and he didn't know what to do. Coming to his senses and with great honesty he realised the folly of his ways and decided to go back to his father. It was a tough decision to make but all his fears were dismissed when his father came running out to meet him. When we come running to God, God comes running to us with his arms outstretched ready to hold us in his loving arms once more. We need to forget about the difficulties and the failures and come running back to God.

When we hit rock bottom as Jonah did we can come running back to God for he is always there for us. We ought to remember who God is in our failure and our distress. We make requests of God with honesty, with repentance and with thanksgiving – he is always with us and always providing for us – ask Jonah about the fish. And when we run to God we recommit ourselves to worshipping him, to following him, and to serving him.

Jonah tried to run away from God and now from the depths of the sea and the belly of the fish he begins to take those first steps back to running to God. And God met him and had the fish spit him out onto the dry land. God was ready to give Jonah that second chance as Jonah realised it was time to run to God. Do you need to run to God today? He is waiting on you.

Running With God - Jonah 3

Having run away from God and then run to God, today we will see Jonah running with God. As he runs with God, God uses him as his mouthpiece in the city of Nineveh and lives are challenged and changed. Let's see what happens when God takes ordinary people like Jonah and uses them despite their failure in His service.

The first thing for us to note is that **God is the God of the second chance**. Jonah has failed him and disobeyed him after God spoke to Jonah the first time. Here at the beginning of chapter 3 we see God coming to Jonah again. 'Then the word of the Lord came to Jonah a second time'. God was ready to take Jonah and give him another opportunity to serve him.

As God is the God of the second chance, **Jonah gets a second call**. God came to Jonah and told him a second time to go to Nineveh. Jonah must have thought he had blown his chance with God. God had asked him to go to Nineveh and he had chosen to go as far away in the opposite direction as possible. He had run away and then following the storm and inside the belly of the fish, he ran back to God. He must be wondering as the fish spat him out onto dry ground what would happen next. Would God use him again? God certainly did not have to. God would have been justified in never coming back to Jonah. And yet the Scriptures are full of stories of people of God who have failed and whom God has given a second chance to. What about David in the Old Testament and Peter in the New?

And this time as God calls to Jonah for the second time, **Jonah is obedient**. There is no questioning what God is asking; no heading to the harbour to find a boat going in the opposite direction; no running away in fear and disobedience.

We read in verse 3 that Jonah obeyed the word of God. He listened this time to what God was saying, and he said nothing different than he had said some days earlier, and he obeyed. He did what was asked of him. He went to Nineveh. Now this would have taken him time and may well have been an arduous journey for after all he had already set off in the opposite direction. It would have taken him longer to get there as he had farther to go. But no complaints or excuses this time. Jonah followed God's command and headed for Nineveh. He probably would have sung the words of that great hymn if he had known it 'Trust and obey for there's no other way, to be happy in Jesus but to trust and obey'.

We are reminded again that God is not only the God of the second chance but **he is also interested in the lost**. For you see he wanted Jonah to go to Nineveh. There was no change in his plans or desires. He was interested in those who lived in Nineveh. Despite their great sin he was still interested in them. Now Nineveh was a large city and we read that a visit took three days in such an important city. There were we read later in chapter four more than one hundred and twenty thousand people living there.

And so Jonah was given a **message** to take to them - a message that there was a judgement hanging over them on account of their sinful lives. And yet Jonah did not hang about when it came to preaching the message he had. He did not procrastinate this time. Despite the city being so large he did not wait until he had sent he whole town. He was not a tourist. He was not sightseeing Nineveh. He had a message to share and didn't wait to share it. He got on with it straight away.

Jonah knew what he had to do and he did it. It's easy for us to say 'I know what my duty is and I'll get round to it.' How many of us have said 'I am going to start reading my Bible'? How many of us have begun to get up fifteen minutes earlier in the morning

to pray? We keep saying 'I am going to do that' but rarely do we. How many listened to the sermon a month or so back on giving and said I must give more of my time or money but have yet to do it? Why do we wait so often when the word of the Lord is so clear? How many of us have said, 'I am going to get around to inviting my friends to hear the gospel'? Why wait? Jonah had a message and he went and shared it.

The message Jonah brings is certainly strong and indicates that they are facing death and destruction. And yet we see that **God is just and merciful**. Just and merciful? Well he is certainly just if the people of Nineveh are about to be overturned on account of their wickedness. But where is the mercy of God here? The mercy is in the fact that Jonah takes this message to them. There is hope here from a just and merciful God.

When we look at the story of Sodom and Gomorrah we see that they were destroyed and there was no warning message. It simply happened. God rained fire and brimstone upon the people there and they perished. In the case of Nineveh, though, God in his mercy sent Jonah with a warning message. With a warning message comes hope for all is not yet lost – however bleak things may seem.

The people of Nineveh did not discount Jonah and his message. They took it to heart and were full of **repentance**. After Jonah has preached we read in verse 5 that the people believed God. They declared a fast and every one of them from the least to the greatest put on sackcloth. They realised God's word and knew they had to respond. They believed that God was God and that he could bring this judgement on them so they were fearful.

When the news came to the king he ordered a fast and a turning from their evil ways. He urged his people to give up their evil – to repent from it and turn to God. He knew who God was and he knew he and they needed God's mercy. In their repentance they turned from their evil ways we read in verse 10. The king hoped above hope that God in his mercy might have compassion on them and forgive them.

And **God had compassion** on them. This just and merciful God had seen their wickedness and sin. He wanted to destroy them and blot them from the earth. And yet he loved them and cared for them. He sent Jonah as his prophet to tell them what was to happen. Having heard that message they repented and turned from their evil. On account of that God had compassion on them and in verse 10 we read did not bring upon them the destruction he had threatened.

He saved them every one for they were genuine in their repentance and turning from their wickedness to God. God still does exactly the same today. We were lost in our own wickedness and sin and God sent his only son Jesus into this world. Jesus died on the cross taking the punishment which was rightfully ours that we might be saved.

God extended amazing grace and mercy and compassion towards us as Jesus died. Have you accepted his amazing grace and offer of forgiveness?

Jonah ran with God and took his message of hope to the people of Nineveh - a wicked people who were about to perish on account of that wickedness. As we run with God in 2006 in Cornton we have a message of hope to take to a dark and lost world and community. God is interested in the lost and wants to save them. He is just and merciful and will have compassion on those who repent and turn from their wickedness to him Will we have the courage of Jonah to run with God and share that message with a needy world? Will we offer them hope? Jonah had the message and he took it. We have the message of salvation and eternal life. There is hope! It is a dark hour, but one greater than Jonah is with us. We are the ones to tell the world. Let's go!

Running Ahead Of God - Jonah 4

It's all about perspective, isn't it? When things work out how we want them to work out - everything is fine. However, when things don't go according to our plans - life stinks. We put on Gospel services but no-one comes or no-one responds to the altar call. We deliver leaflets around all the doors in Cornton but no-one comes in to Church for the special service. We run a Holiday Club for the kids and very few come. At the Holiday Club no kids respond. We've shared the message time and time again with local people but still they stay away. Nothing works the way we want it to. But is it all just about how we want things to work out? God has a bigger and better plan at times and he knows best. We need to content ourselves that God is in control working out his purposes. But that is hard to do at times isn't it?

At the end of chapter 3 God saw the people of Nineveh turning from their evil ways and he had compassion on them and did not bring upon them the destruction he had threatened. Great we think, a whole city has been saved and many lives turned towards God. Revival has broken out. And yet for poor Jonah that is not the case. From his perspective he had been asked as a prophet of God to go and deliver judgement on this people. They were going to be destroyed in forty days and nights. When prophets were given a message from the Lord it usually came to pass. Do you know that Jonah is one of few prophets whose message did not come to pass? The Ninevites were not destroyed for they took Jonah's message to heart and realised they had to turn from their wicked ways. The king had issued a decree encouraging them to pray to God for he might yet save them. And he did. Jonah felt let down by God and was angry with God's compassion. He has stopped running with God and is beginning to run ahead of him. He does not understand what God has done and his mind thinks the wrong thoughts. His perspective is skewed.

In verse 1 we read that **Jonah was greatly displeased and became angry**. He was fuming. He was boiling. He was annoyed with God and he let God know it. I knew this would happen Jonah tells God. Did I not say this to you when I was still at home? I told you this would happen. You are a gracious and compassionate God, slow to anger and abounding in love, Jonah says to God – he knows his Scriptures does Jonah. These words appear throughout the Old Testament.

You see **God is concerned for everyone's salvation, not just ours**. God was concerned about Jonah's welfare and wanted to have him by his side. He wanted that right relationship with Jonah. He also wanted that relationship with the people of Nineveh. He knew they were a wicked and depraved people. He had seen all they had done and he wanted to stop them. He was going to destroy them on account of their wickedness. But before destroying them he wanted to give them a chance to make good. He sent Jonah to preach against them and to warn them what was coming. Once they heard that they repented and turned to God. And God had compassion on them and saved them. God was not just concerned for Jonah; he was concerned for the people of Nineveh.

And we should not forget that we run ahead of God thinking this and that from our perspectives when **God already knows the beginning from the end**. He knows how it will all end up. He knows who will live forever in heaven – their names are written in the Lamb's book of life. And he knows who will die in hell. God knew exactly what would happen when Jonah was sent with that message to Nineveh. Jonah might not have been happy with it and he may have wanted some other outcome, but God wanted to save those people and have compassion on them, and he did - for he knew the beginning from the end.

We might not always know why God has asked us to do something. We might not always know how it will turn out. We might not always know the ending. But God does. He wrote the story. In the end heaven awaits for those of us who have accepted Jesus as Lord and Saviour. God's desire is that none should perish. He longs for everyone to know the truth of the gospel and to respond to it. He calls us to go and share it for he knows the beginning from the end.

From Jonah's perspective things had not worked out right. The people of Nineveh had been saved and Jonah now ran ahead of God. He thought life stinks and all is not well. He became angry at God's compassion and could not understand what had happened. It was not how he had planned it and thought it would turn out. He wanted them destroyed. You would have thought he'd have been happy that hundreds of thousands of people had been saved. We so often get like Jonah at times as well as we are too quick to run ahead of God and not realise what has and is happening. God is interested in everyone's salvation and not just ours. He longs that none should perish and everyone should come to saving faith in Jesus. And God knows the beginning from the

end. He knows how it will all work out, how the pieces fit together. All things work together for good for those that love the Lord, Paul reminds us in Romans 8.

Let us not run ahead of God but run with him. Let's take time to see things from God's perspective and not our skewed perspective. Let's keep running with God and telling a dying world the Good News of the Gospel. Let's simply do what God has called us to do.

Right Running- Jonah

Mike Johnson, a pastor in the States, had a book on Vatican art with a number of photos of Michelangelo's paintings. On one of the walls in the Sistine Chapel Michelangelo has a painting called The Prophets and Apostles. He has tried to capture the faces of all the Old Testament prophets and the New Testament apostles. The art critics said in the text of the book that out of all the faces Michelangelo painted, none had a more radiant countenance than Jonah. Michelangelo was convinced that Jonah did accept God's merciful pity. Jonah became a communicator of grace to his own nation through his book and probably through his preaching as a prophet of God.

Jonah learned all about right running. He had tried to run away from God, then to God and with God, before running ahead of God. Through it all he was able to look back and write his experiences down. He had learned what it is to run with God and to share the message that God wanted him to share. I think we too have been learning over the summer through this series on Jonah how to run. I want now to summarise our learning so that we too like Jonah might do some right running.

Running away from God will only get us further away from him. Jonah was trying to run to Tarshish. He ended up deep down in the sea in the belly of a great fish. He was further away from God that I think even he wanted or expected to be.

Friends, let us not run away from God. Let us keep on persevering in our relationship with him and with the Church. Things might not be working out the way we want them to, and we might not want to do as God is asking us to, but let us stick close to him and share our fears and anxieties with him. He knows us and loves and will sooth our troubled hearts and show us his ways. Running away from God will only get us further from him and his purpose for our lives. Just look at Jonah in the belly of the fish under the water.

Another lesson for us to learn is that **running to God is the only direction in life.** Way back in the beginning at creation God made humanity in his own image. In his own image! He made us like him. We were created to love him and to live with him. But we fouled up. We made mistakes - and still do. Adam and Eve ate the forbidden fruit and they ended up out of the Garden of Eden and had to fend for themselves in life. We

have all made mistakes as well which drive us away from God. But we were created to run towards God and only with God in our lives will our lives be happy, content and fulfilled. The Westminster Catechism reminds us that the chief end of man is to glorify God and enjoy him forever. We were created in God's image and meant to worship him, love him and serve him.

Jonah discovered that **running with God is fulfilling**. As he ran back to God, God had the fish spit Jonah back out onto dry land. Jonah had promised to make good his vows and so God came to him a second time with the message that he should go to Nineveh. Jonah listened and immediately went. As soon as he got there he began to preach the word of the Lord. Running with God now he discovered that life could be fulfilling. Jesus said in John 10:10 'I have come to give you life and life in all its fullness.' Jonah discovered that when you are in the centre of God's will, life is sweet and there is nothing better in life.

And yet sometimes we don't enjoy the fulfilment for we begin to run ahead of God. **Running Ahead of God is Human, but it is Possible to Correct**. In our human weakness we think we know better than God. And so we begin to run ahead of him. For poor old Jonah it was his anger. He was annoyed with God for saving the city of Nineveh and all its people. You would have thought he would have been overjoyed at the revival that took place and the lives that had been saved but he wasn't. He was annoyed that God could save such a wicked people. He was perhaps afraid that his own people might turn against him for being a part of their enemies rescue mission. He was so angry that everything was out of perspective for him. He saw everything through his own eyes and was running ahead of God.

Don't we at times run ahead of God as well? We see God leading us to have a children's mission and then we run ahead of God and expect conversions and new people in the church the following week. That doesn't always happen. God is perhaps using the mission week to have us sow the seed. And that is what we are always called to do – sow the seed. There have been many times in my life when I have wondered what God is up to and why I have been doing something that I see no fruit from. And each time I chatted to my grandfather afterwards and he would say the same words. Keep sowing the seed. Leave the watering and growing and harvesting to God, for he knows the best time to do it all. And how right that is. And yet how so often we want to run ahead of God and have it all now.

And so as we come to the end of our time with Jonah we need to ask ourselves what is right running? Right running is running with God. Jonah has taught us that running away from God only leads us further from him and his plans for our lives. He reminded us that running to God is the only direction to go in life. That running with God is fulfilling and that running ahead of God is human but can be corrected. Right running is running to God and then with God.

And the major message to hang on to is that **running with God's salvation plan in mind is the only running really worth running!** Jonah learned I think this message. He had tried to run away from God for he did not want to deliver the message. He was afraid the Ninevites might accept God's message and repent. And yet that was God's plan. He hoped that if Jonah shared the message of God's anger and forthcoming judgement then the people would repent and find salvation. And they did. God's desire is that none should perish and all should come to saving faith in God. Jonah became an instrument of God and was able to share God's grace and love and mercy with us.

We have learned some lessons and now we need to apply them. Our task is to run with that same thought and goal in mind – God longs that all people are saved and come to faith in him. He longs that none should perish and all should inherit eternal life. For our part we might not like that idea as we look around the Cornton and see the people living there. But God's salvation plan is that they hear the gospel and be invited to give their lives to Christ. We must forget our own selfish thoughts and desires and run with God to tell the people. That means we will have to give him our whole lives – our time, our talents, and indeed our finances. We have to enter wholeheartedly into running with God and giving our all for him. The great news is the rewards are everlasting and eternal. Not only will we inherit eternal life for we have given our lives to Christ, but many others too will have the opportunity to accept Christ and find life everlasting. The city of Nineveh and its people were saved because God had compassion on them as they repented and turned to him. The people of Cornton deserve the opportunity to do likewise – but they can only do it if we run with God's salvation plan in mind – that is the only running really worth running!

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