

Running From God's Will

by Ken Pierpont

The sermon emphasizes the tendency to run away from God and the consequences of doing so, while also highlighting the call to return to God and obey His voice.

Duration: 31:34

Scripture: Psalm 139:1-6, Jonah 1:1-16, Matthew 28:19-20

Topics: "God's Will"

Description

In this sermon, the preacher compares the story of Jonah to watching a really good movie. He highlights the repetition of certain elements in the story as significant. The sermon focuses on the first scene of the story, where God gives Jonah simple instructions, but Jonah disobeys and goes his own way. The preacher also draws parallels between Jonah's call to arise and go, and the Great Commission given by Jesus to all believers.

Transcript

Don't you love to sing that? O conquering King, conquer my heart, make me a pleasing gift to God. I love to sing that. Let me tell you a couple of stories this morning.

And just listen and you will figure out where I'm headed. Autumn of the year and then a writer is in his study. He's got the window open and outside the window children are playing an age-old game.

He can hear their laughter. They're playing hide-and-seek. One of the boys hides in a pile of leaves directly under his window.

The game goes on for a while and all the children are found except for the boy in the pile of leaves under the author's window. And the children finally they get tired of looking and they give up on finding the boy. And so they just go off and they start something else.

And then from the pile of leaves outside the author's window comes a soft crying. He leans out the window and he says to the leaves, What's the matter little boy? What's the matter buddy? He says, I hid and nobody came looking for me. So now let me ask you a question.

Have you ever hidden with a secret desire that somebody would come looking for you? And maybe you feel like nobody did? We'll show you another story, even better one. A second story, it's about a man who ran away from home and he tried to hide from God. You can find it in the book of Jonah in your Bible.

You want to get started on finding that now. This is one of the richly textured, lively stories of God. It is a very wonderful story of God that he wanted his people to know and to study.

It's simple. It's a simple story. It's simple enough for a child to grasp the details full of fascinating concrete detail.

But it's also a very, very, in terms of literature, it's a piece of literature that's very sophisticated and it has within it all the kinds of things that make a story really sing. It's creative. It's meaningful in its arrangement of structure.

It's sophisticated in its arrangement and structure. It is humorous. It employs hyperbole, irony, double entendre and other literary figures.

Many others that are in this short book. There's a lot here. But this morning, the first scene is all we're going to look at.

And we're going to use the first scene really kind of as an appetizer that I would hope that you would see how this lays over on top of your spirit and you recognize how God wrote these stories. And these stories have a timeless quality that is amazingly contemporary, that when you put a story like this, like an overlay over your life, it speaks to the deepest needs of the heart of a person who's hidden and wanted people to come and find them. Perhaps even wanted God to come and find them.

So it's quite a book. What I like to think of is like if you ever watched a really good movie, and there really aren't many, but if you ever really watched a really good movie and somebody told you about it and you went on the internet and you watched the trailer with all the really exciting, fascinating scenes, you could not wait to schedule a time to see this film. This is a little bit what I like to imagine will happen as we see the trailer of Jonah.

What a story! It's full of high adventure and fascinating insights about the character of God and man. I trust that it will do you good. Let's just look at the story in Jonah 1. We're going to go through verse 16 this morning.

Did you find it? You look like you did. You look very intelligent. So let's read it.

Now the word of the Lord. Now the word of the Lord came to Jonah, son of Amittai, saying, Arise, go to Nineveh, that great city, and cry out against it, for their wickedness has come up before me. That's it.

Now the word of the Lord came to Jonah, son of Amittai, saying, Verse 2, Arise, go to Nineveh, that great city, cry out against it, their wickedness has come up before me. Three things, Arise, Arise, go, cry out. Interesting.

Verse 3, what did Jonah do? He got up, he arose to flee to Tarshish. You know the story. From the presence of the Lord, Jonah rose to flee from Tarshish, 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 him to Tarshish, from the presence of the Lord. And the Lord sent out a great wind on the sea.

The idea is he hurled, he threw a great wind out to the sea. There was a mighty tempest on the sea. So the ship was about to be broken up.

And the mariners were afraid. And every man cried out to his God. They threw the cargo that was in the ship into the sea to lighten the load.

But Jonah, Jonah had gone down into the deepest parts of the ship. And had lain down and was fast asleep. 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, that we may not perish. 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.

They said to him, Please tell us, whose cause is this trouble upon us? What is your occupation? Where do you come from? What is your country? And of what people are you? And he said to them, I am a Hebrew. I fear the Lord, God of heaven, who made the sea and the dry land. That's interesting.

That's good theology for a guy doing a bad thing, isn't it? Now the plot thickens. You've heard the phrase, I don't know where it came from, We will throw him under the bus. Where did that come from? I have no idea, but I like it.

I like the sound of it. We'll just throw him under the bus. Why do I like the sound of that? I don't know.

But the guys get together and they decide to throw Jonah under the bus. Which was a good move. You're going to see this.

In verse 10 it says, Then the men were exceedingly afraid and said to him, Why have you done this? The men knew that he fled from the presence of the Lord. Let me stop here and remind you of something about understanding the Bible. One of the things you want to keep in your brain when you're reading the Bible all the time is notice repetition.

You know what I'm going to say next, right? I'm going to say, One of the things you want to keep in your mind when you're reading the Bible is you want to notice repetition. Good teachers repeat themselves. I'm going to do that today.

So don't go home and go, I think I heard that story before. Of course you heard that story before. Last time I told you, you didn't do it.

So I'm going to tell you again. I'm going to keep telling you till you do it. That's the idea.

You know, some things are kind of worth repeating. You're like, oh yeah, I know where this is going. I know this story.

Yeah, you should know this story. But there's something that's repeated here. It's very significant.

It's the heart of what we're going to say today. I believe with all of my heart is the heart of what the Spirit would have us understand about this. Jonas saying, I'm going to flee from the presence of the Lord.

And it's repeated three times in verses 1 through 16. Three times this absurd idea that a person could flee from the presence of the Lord. A guy whose theology is pretty sound.

I mean, he's a Hebrew after all. And when they ask him the questions, he's like, he checks all the boxes and he gives all the right answers. That's like, well, if you know all about God, can you please tell me why

you didn't do what he said when he told you to do it? And what made you think you could ever flee from the presence of the Lord? So you have this important emphasis and you can tell, sometimes you can tell emphasis by arrangement.

Sometimes you can tell emphasis by other kind of literary devices. This is a real simple one. Notice the kinds of things that are repeated.

Three times as significant here from the presence of the Lord. So here's the story so far. Verses 1 and 2, God gave Jonah very simple instructions.

Verse 3, Jonah disobeyed God. Jonah, here's what happened in verses 1 and 2. God told Jonah what to do. And he didn't explain why or any of that.

Just told him what to do. Jonah, you're going to see later on, had some thoughts going off in his mind about what God had in mind. And he was right about what God had in mind.

But he just gave him a simple thing. Go cry out against the city. Get up, go cry out against the city.

Their wickedness has come up before me. Jonah had his own ideas, though. He had his own ideas of where he wanted to go and what he wanted to do and who he wanted to hang out with.

He had his own ideas. And then, of course, obviously, verses 4 through 16, God goes after Jonah. And we're in the middle of telling that story right now.

Verse 10, plot is thickening. Verse 11, then they said to him, these are the pagan sailors, if you will. All right.

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. 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. Jonah fleeing from the presence of the Lord has the dark cloud, an ominous cloud over his spirit all the time when he's fleeing from the presence of the Lord. Nevertheless, the men rode hard to return to land.

Good guys. Well, let's not throw them away. Let's just work harder at this.

But they could not. The sea continued to grow more tempestuous against them. 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 they threw him into the sea and the sea ceased its raging. Toss the guy in the ocean. Calm storm, calm down.

Verse 16 is just shocking. It's sort of amazing. Are you serious? Just read this.

Are you serious? Verse 16. Then the men feared the Lord exceedingly and offered a sacrifice to the Lord and took vows. It's kind of quite a story, isn't it? It's just the beginning.

And it leaves Jonah in the sea, which is where we're going to leave him until next week. He's just going to be there in the ocean. But God says, God says, I have a plan for you to Jonah.

And Jonah says, well, you know, the way I was looking at it, I had an idea and I'm a Hebrew and I wanted you to help me. And we did this to God all the time. God says, I have a plan for you.

I've revealed in my word. This is what you're to do. I didn't stutter when I said it.

It's very clear. You know what I said. And then we say, no, no, no, no, no, no, no, no, no.

You don't understand, God. I got some ideas and I really could use like some powerful people on my side, like, like you, God, you, you help me get done what I want to do. God says that you don't get it.

I tell you what to do and you do it. That's how it works. I tell you what to do and you do it.

And that's a good thing. But we have it in us, this kind of a stubbornness that says, no, God, you don't get it. I have ideas here that I know are good and I'm going to need your help because you're powerful and I'm going to need you on my team to get done what I want to do.

So we're ever going the opposite direction of what God where of where God has told us to go. Now, what should we make of the story and why is it here? The full and the final answer will not really be unfolded until the end, because that's the way this book is written. But there are some pretty powerful preliminary points to ponder.

How's that for a lot of peas? In between, we have we have been instructed in like Jonah to arise and to go and to cry out. Is that like sound like anything familiar to you? Hello. You guys aren't just like waiting for me to stop talking so you can go eat, are you? Work with me on this.

Now, think about this. Did God ever say to anybody else, get up and go and tell? Yeah, that's like the Great Commission that Jesus last words before he left planet Earth were get up, go out, tell people. He said, we don't have to wait to hear the word of the Lord.

We have heard the word of the Lord on that. That is what the Bible clearly says to every believer. That was not a specific command just to a special company of disciples.

That was just like an ongoing thing that was given there and it was repeated. We've already got that. That's just one piece.

But really, the entire Bible is full of commands that can be applied directly to us. So like you have a Bible, you have the word of the Lord. He has told you things to do.

He's told you how marriage is supposed to work. He's told you if you're a child how you're supposed to respond to your parents. And if you're a parent, how you're supposed to respond to your children.

He's told us how to function in the church. He's given us all kinds of commands. And we have within us this stubbornness that wants to go the opposite direction instead of just get up and go and say and do what he said.

That's the stubbornness that's in us. What are we to learn from this? Let me just share three ideas and a conclusion. First, we all have this inner bent to run away from God.

We all have it. We all have it. Not just the bad people out there.

You and me have within us this tendency to drift or to rebel or to walk away from God. You got it? If you're a Christian, if you've been a Christian a long time, you still have it. It's part of who you are.

It's in there. We're prone to selfishness. We're prone to willfulness.

We're prone to getting God to endorse our stuff instead of just simply going and doing what God says. We tend to think it would be better if we get God on board with us than if we get on board with him. That there will be a happier way if we get God to help us instead of us doing what God tells us to do.

We all have that in us. It's part of our fallen nature. And the word of the Lord has come to each of us.

But other voices cry for our loyalty from within and from without. And too often we listen to them. And what happens when we listen to them is we get out of fellowship with the Lord.

You hear this in Christian hymnody. Tell me if you've ever heard this one before. Oh to grace how great a debtor daily I'm constrained to be.

Let thy goodness like a fetter bind my wandering heart to thee because I'm prone to wander, Lord I feel it. I'm prone to leave the God I love. Here's my heart.

Take and seal it. Seal it for thy courts above. Whoever wrote that understood the Christian life.

God I love you, but then I'm tempted not to love you. I so want to follow you, but sometimes why do I find myself so far away from following you? I know that your ideas are the very best for me, but sometimes I get that crazy idea that my ideas are better than your ideas. I know your Bible is the book I want to build my life on.

I need to get my roots down in the Word of God, but sometimes I listen to other voices. God, why am I so prone to wander? This is a part of the human condition. First thing to recognize, you're not a lot unlike Jonah.

We like to kind of make him the foil of our humor, the knucklehead. What was he thinking? If God told me something, I would just go do it right away. Oh really? Second thing to observe is obvious, but again not obvious enough to keep Jonah out of trouble and us.

This is it. First, we all have this bent, this inner bent tendency to run away from God. Second, you cannot hide from God.

Let's just stop and think about that for a little bit. You cannot hide from God. You cannot escape the presence of God.

You can't. You can run, as they used to say, but you cannot hide. You can run, but you cannot hide.

Ab and Eve, they sinned. Their first tendency, hide from God. What folly? What ignorance? Hide from God? Really going to be successful at hiding from God? Any kid who's ever logged a little bit of time in Sunday school is going to be able to tell you, oh no, God is everywhere.

You can't hide from God. Talk to Junior about that. He'll tell you that.

Or take your Bible and turn to Psalm 139 and hear this, O Lord, You have searched me and known me, and You know my sitting down and my rising up. You understand my thought afar off. You comprehend

my path and my lying down.

You're acquainted with all of my ways. There's not a word on my tongue, but behold, O Lord, You know it all together. You've hedged me behind and before.

You've laid Your hand on me. Such knowledge is too wonderful for me. It is high.

I cannot attain it. Where could I go from Your Spirit? Where can I flee from Your presence? If I ascend into heaven, You are there. If I make my bed in hell, behold, You are there.

If I take the wings of the morning and dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea, even there Your hand will lead me and Your right hand will hold me. If I say, surely darkness shall fall on me, well, even the night shall be light about me. Indeed, darkness shall not hide from You.

But the night shines as the day, and the darkness and the light are both a light to You. You can't hide from God. Francis Thompson struggled.

Though he was raised in a very devoutly religious home, his dad was a physician, and he was able to get into the medicine cabinet, and he got addicted to what we would call heroin today. Opium, laudanum, he got addicted to it. It was a lifelong addiction.

He struggled to kind of land on his feet as an adult. His dad wanted him to do something he really wasn't cut out to do. And he tried hard to please his dad and failed.

And the drug abuse continued. And then he tried something else. And he was about 24 years old until finally he ran away from home, and he went to London, and he lived a horrible life of drug abuse and all kinds of debauchery.

But he was a very, very gifted man. He was gifted in ways people didn't expect. He was gifted in literary terms.

He was gifted in poetic terms. He was gifted in words. He wrote a poem.

He wrote some essays. He sent them for publication. They were completely ignored because they were like sent by a homeless man, and the papers were all disheveled and so forth.

But in the providence of God, a few months later, maybe six months later, the editor came across these papers again and recognized the genius of this writer and was unable to find him. And so they published the poems in order to get the writer to come and find them, and he did. He was living on the streets.

He was like a homeless person, a drug addict on the streets. And so they restored him. They worked to restore him, and they sent him away in order that he would kind of call it kind of therapy of some kind today.

They sent him away, and it was during that period of time that he wrote a fascinating poem that is one of the most beautiful and the most sophisticated poems. It's almost epic in length, so I wouldn't even attempt to read it to you, but it's a poem about how God seeks out people and stays after them even when they willfully stray away from him into horrible things that they're ashamed of. And the poem, it's called The Hound of Heaven.

The Hound of Heaven. It's as if God, he was in the English countryside and would have seen often hunts and the persistence of the dogs as they went after. And he said, God just follows me and follows me and follows me.

Here's a bit of it. I fled him down the nights and down the days. I fled him down the arches of the years.

I fled him down liver and thine ways, through mazes, if you will, of my own mind. In the midst of tears, I hid from him an underrunning laughter. Of visted hopes I sped and shot precipitated down titanic glooms of chasmed fears from those strong feet that followed, followed after.

But with unhurried pace and unperturbed pace, deliberate speed, majestic insistence, they beat and a voice beat more insistent than the feet. All things betray thee, you who have betrayed me. God kept saying to him, I know where you are.

And I haven't forsaken you. And I have authority from the Lord and his word to tell you, no matter how hard you try to go away from God or how far you have strayed in your disobedience or how desperately you failed or how embarrassed you are or how ashamed you are or the secrets that nobody knows, God knows and he pursues people like us. This is why he puts stories like this in his word for people like us today.

Third thing I want you to understand from this, first, we all have this inner bent to run from God and second, we can't do it. We can't hide from God. But the third thing and probably the thing that I want to kind of embed in your soul is this.

When you run from God, here's what it shows. It shows you don't really know God. When you run from God, you may know about God.

Jonah certainly had knowledge about God. Jonah, if he had been in intimate fellowship with God, would he not have recognized that God's plan was really good and that he couldn't get away from Him and two, he wouldn't want to if he could. Now listen to me.

We all have this, not just like kids that are rebels. I mean, we all have it. You can sit in a pew and you can be a church officer, you can be a pastor, you can be a missionary, you can be a pastor's kid.

Pastor's kids are famous for this. They are, right? Satan loves taking down pastor's kids. Church kids.

You can be anybody and you have that wandering heart and you find yourself farther away than you ever intended to go. And now suddenly you think, nobody can know all of this that's in my soul and my heart or what I've done or in my history or my past. I've got to cover, I've got to hide, I've got to hide.

But don't you have in the depths of your soul this desire that says, God, I know you will never come and find me, right? I know I'm worthless and I should be ashamed and I know that you're done with me and that you've exhausted your patience. And right, God, I mean, you're not listening to me, right? And doesn't the inner depth of your soul want to hear from God, no, I was with you all the time and I'm still with you now and I always will be with you. And this story is here for us to understand in a beautiful, poetic, in a literary, graphic way that God is willing to exhaust, cannot exhaust himself in his persistence to pursue us.

You can't run from God. And if you do, it shows you really didn't know him for two reasons. One, because he can find you.

How often do we talk and act and live as if God cannot see or hear or he is not present? And I kind of have to ask you something, let that question kind of bore down into your soul. How often this week did you talk as if God could not hear what you were saying? I regularly get reports from our own church right here of people who talk in ways they would not talk if Jesus Christ were standing in that circle of conversation. You're in the youth group, you say a certain thing, but when you're with your friends, you're standing over here, you talk different and you use different words as if Jesus isn't in that circle.

You talk the big game over here and all how you love the Lord and how devoted you are to him and how you trust him, but in your honest moments, you complain and you're bitter and you cry baby and you're complaining against the Lord, you're not rejoicing the Lord. It's like you've got a doctrinal statement over here but nobody can really tell by looking at your life. Jesus is present in both places.

Wouldn't it help us a lot if we had this consciousness in our soul that we are never away from the presence of the Lord? It's actually comforting and it's kind of troubling at the same time, isn't it? Isn't it? Profanity. You use profanity. But you say you're saved.

You say you're saved all the time. If somebody asks you a question, you can answer the questions. But why is it the Bible says, out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks, you use profanity all the time, but you say you're saved.

What's wrong with this? You don't think God hears that? You don't think God calls you into account for that? You think there are things that you see and say and do that God can't see and hear and judge? We need to go back to Sunday school, folks. We need to go back to Sunday school and think, God, I know you're everywhere. Be careful little hands.

Be careful little eyes. Be careful little feet. You can't hide from God.

You can't run from God. You can't deceive God. He loves you.

He's going to call your bluff. He pursues you through many and varied means. He may send storms into your life.

He may send pagans into your life. He may send a crisis into your life. He may send a difficulty into your life.

It may be that you feel like God has abandoned you in that storm, and the very storm is evidence that God is coming after you. And He's trying to line up your profession with who you really are and help you with that. So if you run from God, it shows you don't know Him because He can find you.

It also shows this. And this is the pleasant side of this. It also shows you don't know Him because if you really knew Him, you would never, never, never want to run from Him.

Do you have kids, grandkids, and you want to give them something? And you say, come here, and they don't come? And you want to go, don't you understand? I'm trying to bless you. I'm trying to give you something. But that's true with our kids.

It's much more true with God, the Father of life, from whom all blessings flow. Don't run from Him. Why would you do that? When you run from God, you run from grace.

When you run from God, you run from freedom. And you run from fulfillment. And when you run from God, you run from peace.

And you run from order and genuine prosperity and eternal life. And when you run from God, you hurt other people. And when you run from God, you run into judgment and trouble.

And the way of the transgressor is hard. And when you run from God, you miss His best for your life, and other people do. It's absolute futility to run from God.

It proves you don't know how good God is. You're a fugitive from God? You're a fugitive from mercy? You're a fugitive from grace? How foolish can you be? I read a tract one time. I never would have written this myself.

Written by a Marine, a square-jawed, deep-voiced, powerful, preaching Marine, who was a pastor's kid in Illinois and rebelled against his father and rebelled against the church and against God. And he said, I know what I'm going to do. I'm going to join a military.

And I'm tired of people telling me I'm just going to be a Marine. You know, I've heard that before. So he joined the Marines.

And he sent to South Vietnam. And in South Vietnam, he steps on a landmine, and he loses both of his legs. And here's what he wrote.

I would never have written it. I ran from God until He took my legs. You might think, well, my God's not that cruel.

No, this would be Tim Lee's testimony, and he would tell you his God is not cruel. He's good. Because God said, it's more important that I win your soul than that you have your legs for the rest of your life.

He would say that, and he would say it in a much more powerful way than you're hearing me say it right now. A powerful preacher of the gospel. I ran from God until He took my legs.

Can I just say, don't run from God? Don't do that. He tells us to do something. If it's like go across the street, go across the street.

If you're reading your Bible in the morning, you find a command of the Lord, you forgive the person who's offended, you obey it. If He says, let the sun go down upon your wrath, don't let the sun go down upon your wrath. If everybody else that you know tells you to do something else than what the Bible says, who are you going to trust? Who are you going to believe? How are you going to root your life? What are you going to build your life on? The opinions of others that come and go, or the word of God, which will never change.

I'm not going to run from God. I'm going to do what He says. I'm going to go where He tells me to go.

I'm going to do what He tells me to do. I'm here to tell you this. God, He hears the soft cry of every little child crying under a pile of leaves, who's hidden so well that even His closest friends and family members have given up on Him.

He keeps looking. Perhaps today there are those of you who need to come to Jesus for the very first time, and we're going to give a public invitation for you to do that, to actually come forward, have someone

explain to you how to be born again. And some of you really need to do that.

You're lost. You keep delaying it and putting it off. You don't know how long you're going to live.

When the Lord's going to return, it would be good for you to do that immediately. Sometimes in our church, we just let people come forward and have somebody explain to them when they come forward. Kind of like Billy Graham, right? You come forward.

Somebody explains to you in the Bible how to be saved. They pray with you. You try to get that matter settled this morning.

Others of you, even though we can't tell from the outside, you just aren't where you ought to be. You had your idea, and you're doing that, and God says, This is my idea, and you would want to come forward and kneel down here today. And you would want to kneel down and say, Okay, God, no more you endorse my plans.

I obey your plans. And so we've chosen this song, a beautiful song called Softly and Tenderly, and I'd like for you to stand and sing it with me. And we're going to open the front here.

Like pastors, if you come forward and stand here so folk can come to you. If you take the pastor's hand, you take their hand, it means I need somebody to give me counsel. You shake their hand.

If you come and you kneel, you just want to be alone, and people will leave you alone, and you can talk to the Lord. And I'll just leave this 257. You sing it with me, and you come if the Lord's tugging on your heart to do so.

Audio: <https://sermonindex1.b-cdn.net/20/SID20866.mp3>

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