

“Runaway”

Jonah: Renegade Prophet, Pt 1

Just before Christmas, we ended the year with a series about how to read the Old Testament in light of the New Testament – this ancient collection of sacred documents that we call The Bible, is divided into two parts, two covenants - and I won't rehash all of that, but it was significant. And so I promised that I would give you a first-hand illustration and start off the New Year with a series *out of* the Old Testament to demonstrate how to do it properly.

And I can't think of a more appropriate book to accomplish that than the book of Jonah. Anybody that grew up in Sunday School knows the story well, but even if you never darkened the door of a church, there's a good chance you've heard at least the basic story of Jonah and the whale. On the one hand, it is a simple story – we'll see that today. But at the same time, Jonah is full of surprises and rich insight.

I've been reading a number of commentaries on Jonah and I am especially indebted to a recent book by Pastor Tim Keller called *The Prodigal Prophet*. Here's his summary of Jonah, “The book of Jonah yields many insights about God's love for societies and people beyond the community of believers; about his opposition to toxic nationalism and disdain for

other races; and about how to be ‘in mission’ in the world despite the subtle and unavoidable power of the idolatry in our own lives and hearts. Grasping these insights can make us bridge builders, peacemakers and agents of reconciliation in the world. Such people are the need of the hour.”

Well, amen to that. So in addition to being a book that points us to timeless truth about God, I think Jonah can speak to a lot of the issues we are facing as a church in the world today. It's a small book, but we're going to go deep – about 6 weeks deep. So let's jump into it. We're going to kick off with **Jonah 1:1–10** this morning, let me read it to you...

1 The word of the Lord came to Jonah son of Amittai: 2 “Go to the great city of Nineveh and preach against it, because its wickedness has come up before me.” 3 But Jonah ran away from the Lord and headed for Tarshish. He went down to Joppa, where he found a ship bound for that port. After paying the fare, he went aboard and sailed for Tarshish to flee from the Lord.

4 Then the Lord sent a great wind on the sea, and such a violent storm arose that the ship threatened to break up. 5 All the sailors were afraid and each cried out to his own god. And they threw the cargo into the sea to lighten the ship. But Jonah had gone below deck, where he lay down and fell into a deep sleep.

6 The captain went to him and said, "How can you sleep? Get up and call on your god! Maybe he will take notice of us, and we will not perish." 7 Then the sailors said to each other, "Come, let us cast lots to find out who is responsible for this calamity." They cast lots and the lot fell on Jonah.

8 So they asked him, "Tell us, who is responsible for making all this trouble for us? What do you do? Where do you come from? What is your country? From what people are you?" 9 He answered, "I am a Hebrew and I worship the Lord, the God of heaven, who made the sea and the land." 10 This terrified them and they asked, "What have you done?" (They knew he was running away from the Lord, because he had already told them so.)

Now, as we've said, there's a lot of depth to the book of Jonah, but at the same time, it's also a relatively simple story. It's a book about a man running away from God and about God pursuing him, and as a result of that, the book of Jonah is one of the very most *concrete* ways to learn what the Bible means by sin and grace.

You see, the words sin and grace almost everybody is familiar with, but what they actually *mean* is another thing, and here it is:

Essentially sin is running away from God and grace is God's effort to pursue and to intercept self-destructive behavior. That's it...running and chasing. Sin and grace. Got that? That's as simple, that's as concrete as it can be. Running and chasing. Sin and grace.

Now what we're going to see as we look at this in a place like Austin is that almost everybody can relate to Jonah. I would say if you look around our congregation on any given Sunday we reflect the diversity of Austin. We are all different in a myriad of ways, and yet I would say there are two fundamental kinds of divisions.

Some of you *have* a religious background. Some of you *don't*. Some of you have been far away, running away as much as you possibly can from religion. You may have come to Austin and you may have said, "I'm trying to get away from my family's constraints, my hometown culture's constraints. I want to come to a city with fewer taboos, with more freedom, more toleration." But I've talked to a lot of people who now realize that to a great degree they came not to get away from their family but to run from God, even if they weren't sure who He was. So a lot of us can relate to Jonah. We don't really know if there's even a God there, but we're running as far away from where He *ought* to be if He exists.

And then there are others of us who actually have what we might call a religious background, and we're still fairly straight arrows and we're relatively moral and upstanding. And if somebody asked you what your beliefs are, you can give the right answers and you can say, "Well, I'm a human being and I'm weak and I'm needy, but Jesus died for me," and you give all the right answers, and yet *you're* like Jonah too, because you know by and large God to you is more of an idea and a concept than a person.

And what happened to Jonah here may have *already* happened to you or may be *about* to happen to you. Here was a man who had served God, been religious for years, but when the test came, the doctrine of God with which he had been familiar for years was of *no* help to him. Why? Because he had never actually experienced the reality of God. He froze. He slid. He fell badly. And so a lot of us can relate to Jonah from that angle too. So no matter who you are in your spiritual journey, you can relate to him.

And so here's what we're going to look at today: The essence of sin is running from God. And so the *first step* of Christianity, the first step in *any* relationship to God at all, is to admit you *have* run away from God and that even now, to some degree everybody in this room *is* running from God. It's our *nature* to run from God!

Until you're willing to admit that, you can't get anywhere. That's the first step. You have to recognize and admit you have run from God and you've tried to get away from God.

And I would say this, the most profound kind of self-knowledge you can know is the particular strategies *you* have for running and hiding from God. *Every one* of us in this room has those strategies. Every one of us has a unique pattern to it. Look at Genesis. What are we told in Genesis? As soon as Adam and Eve sinned, what's the first thing they did? As soon as they reached out and ate the fruit, as soon as they disobeyed God, what's the first thing they did? They hid. And every one of us has the same deep down inherent nature. We run and we hide, and if you don't see that, you don't know yourself.

Here's the first step of Christianity: If you want to have a relationship with God, you must not primarily see yourself as a self-sufficient person. Beyond that, you must not primarily even see yourself as basically a hurting, or a suffering person. You must see yourself primarily as a **fugitive**, someone who is running from God, and until you see that, you cannot take the first steps toward Him.

You know, there's the old trope about men get lost because they refuse to stop and ask directions? Well, thank God for Waze, it has saved us, right guys? We can now arrive with our pride intact. But the old cliché was true; nobody is as hopelessly lost as the man who won't *admit* that he's hopelessly lost! Don't you see that makes sense? Unless you see you run from God, unless everybody in this room will be willing to say, "I *have* run from God; I *am* running from God. Even *now*, this week, I can see the patterns in my life." Until you're willing to admit that, you can't move on.

Not only that, the sermon won't help you much. But I hope you'll be open at least to seeing how the Bible here teaches us what it means to run from God and how that can be remedied. Now look, we're going to see, first of all, Jonah is called to do something. Secondly, Jonah runs away from it. And thirdly, we'll see how God pursues him. Okay?

Number one, Jonah is called to do something.

What is Jonah's calling? (V.1) "*The word of the Lord came to Jonah son of Amittai.*" And it said, (v.2) "*Go to the great city of Nineveh and preach against it, because its wickedness has come up before me.*" Jonah opens his orders from God and he's told, "Go to Nineveh to that great city."

Now God does not pull any punches. He's telling a preacher to go to the biggest, baddest, meanest, most powerful city in the world – we'll talk more later about what kind of city and nation this was - and go into the center of it and tell everybody to repent and turn to God. Now let's admit what he's really being asked to do. It's an unreasonable, irrational thing he's asked. I mean, how long would a Jewish Rabbi have lasted in 1941 if he had stood on the streets of Berlin and called Nazi Germany to repent? That's not far off of what's being asked of Jonah.

What are the chances? I'd say the *best* that could happen is people would laugh at you and throw tomatoes at you. That would be the *best* thing! The worst thing that could happen to you is incarceration and death, and this is exactly what Jonah is being asked to do. Now before moving on, let's see how this practically applies to us.

I'm reading a Civil War book at the moment, so let's use that as an illustration. Imagine the battle of Gettysburg, and a general who looked down at all of his young men along the line, and he decides that what he needed was for one regiment to run forward and attack the enemy lines, drawing their fire and distract them so he could bring another couple of regiments up around the side and squeeze them in a vice. How does the general give the orders to that regiment?

Does he go by and sit down with every young soldier and say, “Now son, let me tell you what I’m going to do. I’m going to send you right into the middle of enemy lines, and I know it’s going to look like a really, really difficult and dangerous thing to do. It might even look suicidal to you, but I want you to know I have a plan, and I want you to know exactly what that plan is going to be and how it’s going to work out, and I want you to personally know I care about every single man in my army?” And then he hugs him and he says, “Son, have a good day tomorrow.” Then the soldier says, “Awe thanks, general, you’re swell.”

Is that how the general communicates? What does the soldier on the line hear? One word, “Charge!” That’s it, and out they go. And in a good army they go because each of those young men on the line takes comfort in the record and the character of the general. They say, “Look, we’ve been through many battles with this guy before. We know that he’s smart. We know that he’s wise. We know that he cares about us.” So they take security in that and they charge the line.

Now God can do the same thing to us. We open our orders and it looks crazy. God can send some *strange* things into our lives that look suicidal and there’s no word of explanation or comfort. Something like that happened to Abraham. God came to Abraham one night and he said, “Abraham, take your son, your only son whom you love and slay him as a sacrifice for me.” Do you see? Charge!

God was saying, “Abraham, get going.” No explanation. No word of comfort. What did Abraham do? Abraham went. Why? He took comfort in the character of God. He said, “Shall not the Judge of all the earth do right? I *know* who my God is. I *know* what His promises are. I know His character. I know His record. Okay, I’ll do it.”

When God came to Abraham and said, “Charge!” and Abraham opened his orders and saw what they were, Abraham took refuge in God. When God came to Jonah...Jonah took refuge in his own wisdom and his own feelings. When God sends you crazy orders, those are the only two things you can do. It’s up to you what you’re going to do.

Have you been opening any orders lately that look kind of crazy? They don’t make sense? Do they look suicidal even? There’s only really two choices. You can either go Jonah’s way or you can go Abraham’s way. You can either take refuge in God’s record and say, “I’m going to trust you in this, and I don’t know what I’m going to do, but I’m not going to disobey you,” or you can say, “I want a boat in the other direction.”

That is a choice we all have in front of us. We need to do what Abraham did – he’s not called the father of faith for nothing. We need to take refuge in God’s name and in God’s record. It’s the only thing in times like that that won’t turn to dust in your hand. Why trust the generals? Lots of guys trust the generals, who *do* make mistakes and who *are* corrupt sometimes and who are selfish. Yet millions of men over the years have charged because they trusted their generals. Why won’t we trust the one leader who can’t do wrong? Now that’s Jonah’s calling, but what does Jonah do about it?

That’s the second point, Jonah runs away from it.

Jonah’s response we can look at both on the motivational level and at a behavioral level. Now in Jonah chapter 1, we only see the behavioral level. We only see what he did on the outside, but first of all I’d like to tell you what he did on the inside. We can’t know by our reading today what his *motives* were for turning and fleeing, but we do know from Jonah chapter 4. We’ll look at this in more depth in a few weeks, but we need to take a sneak peak now.

This is what Jonah says to God in **Jonah 4:2**, “*He prayed to the Lord, “Isn’t this what I said, Lord, when I was still at home? That is what I tried to forestall by fleeing to Tarshish. I knew that you are a gracious and compassionate God, slow to anger and abounding in love, a God who relents from sending calamity.”* And so here’s the astonishing reason Jonah took off: He was not afraid of failure. Oh no!

He wasn’t really afraid of going and failing; he was afraid of *success*. He was afraid they might repent. He wanted those dirty Ninevites absolutely destroyed. He knew Israel was not safe until Nineveh was decimated.

And so he says, “The reason I didn’t want to go the first time was because I don’t want to do *anything* nice for those dirty pagans.” Now what we see here is something pretty serious. At the root of Jonah’s disobedience is something the Bible calls self-righteousness. Paul says that at the core of every human being – because this world is no longer the way it was meant to be – every one of us has an internal void. And because of that existential emptiness, we don’t feel like we measure up, we don’t matter. We’re not *right* – so we struggle with righteousness.

Now, there are two fundamental ways of dealing with the righteousness void. You can play along with the rules of the Kingdom of Heaven, or the Kingdom of Earth. There’s the way of the gospel and the way of the world. But every human being is choosing one or the other to try and deal with the hole at the center of their being. Now, the way the world says to know that you matter, is you *have* to feel superior to somebody or somebodies else. “I know I count, because I’m *better* than them.” That’s what self-righteousness is.

Now, Jonah is engaged in a very popular form of self-righteousness and that is racism. Throughout history, it's a very typical way to feel better about yourself. Even if you're at the sort of the bottom of your own society, if you were of a particular race or ethnic group, you can look down on some other race or ethnic group. This is why poor southern whites hated poor southern blacks, even though both of them economically were really being taken advantage of by the same class of people at the top of society. The Civil War could not have occurred without the racial form of self-righteousness.

So that's a way of self-righteousness that works for lots and lots of people – actually, it explains our anti-immigrant sentiments today, you don't have that without the economic disaster of 2008. Whole groups of people felt the indignity of status reduction and they needed to scapegoat a racial minority to feel better about themselves. So racism is an obvious way, *but* that's not the only way to be self-righteous. For example, if you are absolutely appalled by the horror of racism and bigotry, you can turn your *enlightenment* into self-righteousness. You can look down your nose at the bigots. You can scorn the people and do the very thing you scorn them for doing. You look down your nose at the unenlightened, narrow-minded, bigoted people.

But *that's* not the only way. You can be self-righteous through your religion. Possibly that was also part of Jonah's trouble. We're religious. We're moral, so we look down our nose at all the people who are heretical, all the people who are immoral, and that makes us feel better than other people. So you can do it with religion as well as race or as well as enlightenment.

Or get this. What if you've had a messed-up hurting life? You can look down your nose at all those insensitive people who don't know how hurting you are, and if you've suffered a lot, you can look down your nose at all the people who haven't. You're so much more deep and special than all these people who've lived these successful, charmed lives.

If you're educated, you can look down your nose at popular culture and the masses. "Look at the sort of books they buy." Or if you're one of the masses, you can look down your nose at the elite snobs. This is the human condition played out along the rules of the Kingdom of Earth. You can and you *do* take any particular thing and make it a way to feel superior to other people. You have to feel *better* than other people somehow, and that's what Jonah does, and that's the reason he flees. He says, "This is *why* I fled originally. I was afraid you might help those awful, wicked, terrible people."

But there's a flip side to this system of worldly self-righteousness – it really is a devil's bargain - because at the same time you are looking down on somebody else to lift yourself up...there's somebody up the chain looking down on *you*. So the same internal voice that is whispering in your ear, "you matter because you're better than those people down there" at the very same time is also whispering, "you don't measure up to the popular people, the people who really count. They despise you and you should despise yourself."

This is the root of every problem in our world. We despise the people "below" us *and* the people "above" us – and the scale can be completely arbitrary according to societal preference – we sneer at the one and smile at the other – because we play the power game – but we *hate* them both. That's how you maintain self-righteousness in the Kingdom of the World. But God's system works by the standard of grace. The gospel comes in and destroys the world's system. See, here's what the the gospel is: The gospel is that *all* people, all human beings, every one of us is completely fallen away from God - every one of us - and it's only by the sheer mercy of God we can be lifted up into His family and welcomed into His presence by free grace.

See the gospel comes along and says, "Guess what, your gut feeling – that you don't measure up – that's actually correct. You're a mess." Paul says in the book of Romans, "There is no one righteous, no not one." Ah, but there's good news – that's literally what "gospel" means by the way, "good news". There *is* a way to measure up. There *is* a way to find your righteousness. **Romans 3:22-24**, "*This righteousness is given **through faith in Jesus Christ** to all who believe. There is no difference between Jew and Gentile...*" – between Jerusalem and Nineveh - "...*for **all** have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and **all** are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus.*"

If you know that, and to the degree you know that, you cannot feel superior to anybody else. Grace destroys pride. But if you feel superior, that pride blocks the grace. This is why Jonah, at the start, is completely ineffective in ministry. We're calling him a "renegade prophet". The dictionary defines "renegade" as "a person who betrays or abandons a set of principles, or a religion." He's in ministry – he's God's man – but he has abandoned the heart of God. He has rejected grace and embraced pride.

Now pride destroys grace. Imagine if somebody were to come to you and give you a tremendous gift – what if at Christmas, someone gave you a diamond worth \$3 million dollars. Well, how humbling to be given such a gift. What if you were deeply embarrassed? What if you say, “This guy doesn’t think I can afford this?” Not only does that embarrass you, but you know he’s right. You *can’t* afford it, and it makes you even madder. So you reach into your pocket and you say, “No, no, no. I couldn’t possibly take this gift. Here, here’s \$30. Now we’re even. It’s not a gift, it’s a transaction.”

Now, what have you done? You’ve spoiled Christmas! You insult the gracious person, you destroy the gift, and you completely miss the joy and the wonderful relationship that could be yours. This same thing happens when it comes to you and God. If you say, “Well, I can’t admit where I really am. I can’t admit just how far I’ve really fallen and it just seems too easy to come and say, “O Lord, I give you my life and I ask you to forgive my sins and I throw myself on your mercy.” That seems too easy.” What do you mean it seems too easy? What you’re trying to do is you’re saying, “Let me do *something* to clean my life up.” It’s like pulling out \$30 and saying, “Here’s \$30 for this \$3 million diamond. There. That makes me feel better.” What an insult.

How *do* you receive a gift like that? Do you know what you do? You admit your poverty, you swallow your pride, and you enjoy it! You don’t just take it begrudgingly. You *enjoy* it. You let the giver witness your joy in the receiving. And until you’ve taken God’s grace with joy you’re still in poverty. In fact, the weird thing about a Christian is you’re both rich and poor at the same time because the diamond really is yours, it’s part of your net worth, but at the same time it was a free gift, so you can’t feel superior to people who are walking around wearing rhinestones.

Because of Jonah’s self-righteousness he ran the other way. That was his motivation, but the actual activity, what he actually did, is pretty interesting. He immediately went to Tarshish. Now do you know where Tarshish is? See, Nineveh was basically over there in modern day Iraq. Tarshish is in Spain. Essentially, what Jonah said was, “If Nineveh is that way, I want to go in the *exact* opposite direction.” And he went down to look for a ship, and there, lo and behold, was one to take him. Now the teaching is this: If you want to flee from God, if you want to take refuge in your own feelings and in your own wisdom, if you want to run away from God, there will *always* be a ship to take you. There will always be someone or something ready to take you.

Imagine if your doctor came to you and said, “The only way you will survive this decade, because of your poor physical condition, is if you cut out all fats, all cholesterol, and stay on this very, very strict diet. The only way you’ll survive.” Now to obey your doctor means on the one hand you are going to cut against the very grain of our society, especially in a foodie place like Austin – No more Bar-B-Que!?! No more cheesy enchiladas!?! You can practically *smell* it in the streets.

And so you’re really going against society to stay on a strict diet. Just to walk through life in a place like Austin is very, very, very difficult. If you want to break your diet there’s always a ship that will take you to Tarshish – there’s always a Chuey’s, always a Salt Lick. So superficially it looks like what you’re doing is cutting *against* the grain. However if you disobey - if you go ahead and eat the fat and the cholesterol - what you’re actually doing in a very real way when you disobey your doctor, when you move against your doctor’s orders, you move against *yourself*. You’re cutting against the grain of your own physical being.

In the very same way, a superficial analysis will always make it look like to obey God is hard and to disobey God is easier. If you don’t understand your own heart, if you don’t understand your own soul, if you don’t understand God, then it’ll always look in the short run like it’s easier to disobey. But actually, just as to disobey your doctor is to cut against your physical being, to disobey God is to cut against your *very* being – your existential being.

Friends, if you want to disobey God, there’ll always be somebody to help you. There always will be a ship to Tarshish ... always! If you harbor impure thoughts eventually there’ll be a bed. If you harbor resentful thoughts eventually there’ll be a stone to throw or a gun to shoot. If you harbor self-pity and covetous thoughts there’ll be eventually an opportunity to embezzle or to steal. It’ll get you. Your sins will find you out. And so Jonah goes to Tarshish. He runs away.

But God doesn’t let Jonah *get* away. And our **third** and final point is to see **how God pursues him**. What *does* God do? God sends a storm. Now what is the significance of the storm? The storm gives you the good and the bad news about what it means to live according to God’s Kingdom. Here’s the bad news first: Whenever you sin - whenever you disobey God, whenever you rebel against the Great Physician’s orders - there is a storm cloud that is attached and it *will* catch up to you. Sin is very much like a lethal dose of radioactivity. You see, Jonah is not *immediately* beset with a storm. At first he’s in the boat and he’s asleep – I think it’s a *depressive* sleep, but still.

Disobedience doesn't *immediately* have a bad effect. And in the same way, sin is more like a lethal dose of radioactive matter than it's like a bullet or a knife. See, there are different kinds of ways to kill somebody. You shoot them, you stab them, or you expose them to some kind of radioactive matter. Radioactive matter does not tear into your body like a bullet. Did anybody watch *Chernobyl* last year? When you are exposed to a lethal dose, you don't immediately go, "Ow!" It doesn't do that, does it? You don't feel a thing. But internally, your body is decaying.

Exposure to sin works in the same way - in the very same way. *Initially*, sexual immorality feels wonderful, but it masters you and you lose the joy. *Initially*, the first rush of cocaine feels wonderful, but then...*Initially*, sitting around and harboring resentful thoughts, thinking and fantasizing about getting even with somebody feels good, but eventually you're in a prison of bitterness.

Sin has always got a storm attached to it. And your boat is not fast enough to outrun God's storm for long. That's the bad news. Do you know what the good news is? In might not *seem* like good news at first, but in the middle of the storm, God sends a big fish. Now we didn't read that part today, but we all know about the big fish. What we may not understand is that the big fish is actually blessing. I mean, it looks like out of the frying pan into the fire – but it's not.

The fish is God's way of waking you up to the condition you're in. There's really love beneath the waves.

Can I tell you a fairy tale? I love fairy tales. This one has a wicked witch who lives in the middle of the forest. And when a wayfaring stranger would come, the witch would appear to be very hospitable, she would feed him and put him up for the night. And the bed in her guest room was the most comfortable bed in all the land, *but* – there's always a but in the fairy tales you know - if you were asleep in the witches bed when the sun came up in the morning you turned into stone. And she made you a statue out in her garden, and you lived there trapped for all eternity.

I mean, it's a great story, isn't it? Well, the witch has a servant girl who's parents were turned to stone when she was young. And one day a young man stumbles across the witch's house and she feeds him and she shows him to his room. But the servant girl has become smitten with this particular young man. And she can't bear the thought of him turning to stone. So she devises a plan. Before he goes to bed, she throws thistles and sticks and stones and all kinds of awful things underneath his mattress. And when he gets into bed, trying to sleep, she keeps throwing all kinds of nasty things in there so he can't sleep.

You ever have a bad nights sleep and you wake up like an hour before your alarm goes off and you know it's useless. Just this feeling of dread, right? You get up and you realize you have the whole day to face and you've hardly had any sleep, and there's this tremendous despair and tremendous grumpiness that no blend of coffee can quench. I've had *Sunday* mornings like that!

Well, the young man tosses and turns all night and gets up before the dawn and he grabs his things and he huffs out the door and as he's leaving he sees the servant girl and he grumps at her, "What kind of a place is this? You're a terrible housekeeper." He walks off. And she looks after him. And the servant girl, through her tears, says, "The misery you know now only bothers you because you can't compare it to the misery your comfort would have bought! Don't you see those were sticks and stones of love I threw in there?"

God, by giving you those tough orders, by putting things in your life that make you see how weak you are, that make you see how helpless you are, that you're *not* a self-made man or woman, that you're *not* in control of your own life, that nobody is, the reason God lets those storms come into your life is because those are sticks and stones of love. They're trying to wake you up before you come to the end of your life and you're still asleep - you're still away from Him - and you turn to stone.

In the middle of a storm, there's love beneath the waves. There's a fish. And when Jonah stops *fleeing* from the storm - see if he continued to run from God the storm would have drowned him - instead he throws himself into the middle of it, which is his way of trusting God in it. By hurling himself into the middle of it, he's saved because there's love under the waves. There's always love under the waves. And the storm that's in your life has God's loving intention in the middle of it. And the only way it can really drown you is if you keep running from it.

So now maybe here finally we see what grace is. I talk sometimes about the "violence" of grace - it's not always pleasant, not at all. Think back for a moment to our illustration of the patient and the doctor. Now imagine that the patient is someone you love very much, and - in addition to the diet - there's a medicine that is required. They have to take the medicine by a certain time or they will die. And time is almost up. But, your love, in their bad and weakened condition, has become deluded and think the medicine you're trying to give them is poison.

So every time you approach them with the medicine they fight you! They run away from you. What do you do? If you stay away from them, that shows you hate them, but if instead you go after them...don't you see what tender violence you have to use? You might have to wrestle them to the ground and force the medicine down. You say, "This is going to hurt me more than it hurts you." Gentle power. Tender, tender violence. Yet that's what grace is.

Grace is pursuing and intercepting self-destructive behavior. Grace is fierce love, dogged love, determined love, and it won't stop until it hurts you just enough to wake you up. CS Lewis said, "Pain is God's megaphone to rouse a deaf world." (*The Problem of Pain*). So God comes to every person at some time in life - every person - and says, "My dear children, Christianity is not the poison you think it is. 'Bless those who curse you, do unto others...' these are not the poison you think. You may think Christianity limits you. You may think it cuts you off from so many possibilities. You may think it's narrow. Of course! It's because you're deluded. You think it's poison. It's the antidote. It's life itself. Wake up!"

So there are only two kinds of people on any Sunday in a congregation like this. Some of you are running from God, and here's how you can stop: Turn around and see that there is no refuge from God; there's only refuge in God. Did you hear that? There's no refuge from God; there's only refuge in God. And here's why: The only way to turn to God is not just to turn around to some general god in some general way and say, "I'm resolve to be a generally good person." But to go to God through Jesus Christ and to say, "I want Christ to be my Savior. Because he died, my sins can be forgiven and now I can live for you."

Here's why: Because, the Bible tells us, Jesus is the *real person* who was thrown into the storm of God's wrath. And because he was thrown into *that* storm, the storm

of God's wrath has subsided. Jesus is the real Jonah, and that's the reason why we read in the New Testament, **Luke 11:30-32**, "*For as Jonah was a sign to the Ninevites, so also will the Son of Man be to this generation...and now something **greater than Jonah** is here.*" The greater Jonah – the *true* Jonah - was the one who was thrown into the *real* storm of God's wrath and *no one* caught him. *Nothing* saved him. He just sank, and he did it for us.

It doesn't matter what kind of storm is raging in your soul - the storm of guilt, the storm of inadequacy, the storm of bitterness - whatever it is, Jesus Christ will calm the storm. Go. And by the way, there are some of the rest of you. Some of you, Jesus *is* your Savior. You stand on him alone as your salvation, and yet there's a storm in your life right now. Something has come into your life maybe that's been very, very difficult to live with. What will you do? Trust him.

You will not drown in those waves, because there is one who drowned for you, and he did it willingly. And it's the very fact that he did that that will save you, that will transform you, that will change you forever. Changed from the inside out. There's love beneath those waves. That's the message. There's love beneath those waves.

Let's pray...