

We're in a series on one of the most fascinating books in the Bible – the Book of Jonah. I've entitled this series "*Man on the Run*" b/c throughout the book, Jonah is running. In Ch. 1, we saw him run **from** God. In Ch. 2, he ran **back** to God. Today, we're going to watch Jonah run **WITH** God.

Let's recap where we are. God told Jonah to do something He didn't ask of any other prophet – *go on a mission trip to Nineveh to preach a message of impending judgment to the pagan gentiles*. But instead of being obedient to God's request, Jonah hopped a boat in the opposite direction. Soon after the ship set sail, God authored a storm so severe it was breaking up the ship. Frantically, the sailors on board began praying to their gods and tossing the cargo overboard. As things got more dangerous, the sailors began casting lots to identify the culprit – and Jonah was exposed. But instead of coming clean before God, Jonah told the sailors to toss him overboard in the hopes that the next time he faced God, it would be in the afterlife; but instead, he woke up in the belly of a big fish adorned in a seaweed wrap. Finally, after a few days of bathing in stomach juices, Jonah relented (and maybe repented) and told God he'd go to Ninevah – and so God is going to give him a 2nd chance.

*Then the word of the LORD came to Jonah a second time: “Go to the great city of Nineveh and proclaim to it the message I give you.” Jonah obeyed the word of the Lord and went to Nineveh. Now Nineveh was a very large city; it took three days to go through it. Jonah began by going a day’s journey into the city, proclaiming, “Forty more days and Nineveh will be destroyed.” **The Ninevites believed God.** A fast was proclaimed, and all of them, from the greatest to the least, put on sackcloth. When Jonah’s warning reached the king of Nineveh, he rose from his throne, took off his royal robes, covered himself with sackcloth and sat down in the dust. This is the proclamation he issued in Nineveh: “By the decree of the king and his nobles: Do not let people or animals, herds or flocks, taste anything; do not let them eat or drink. But let people and animals be covered w/ sackcloth. Let everyone call urgently on God. Let them give up their evil ways and their violence. Who knows? God may yet relent and w/ compassion turn from his fierce anger so we will not perish.” **When God saw what they did and how they turned from their evil ways, he relented and did not bring on them the destruction he had threatened.***

Jonah 3 contains the high point in this remarkable story in what is arguably the greatest **ministry** miracle in history – over 400k people turned to God as a result of a 8-word sermon – *Forty more days and Nineveh will be destroyed.* But this sermon first required a 2nd chance...

Typically we don't like the idea of **second**. After all, doesn't 2nd place just mean you're the 1st loser? No one remembers who came in 2nd. Olympians don't train for (4) years to come in 2nd. And who wants to wait a second while your friend takes another call. Not me! But when it comes to 2nd chances – sign me up! Guys, how many of you are thankful your wife has given you a 2nd chance? Even as perfect of a husband as I am – I'm thankful for 2nd, 3rd, 4th, and 5th chances. I need a sign embossed on my forehead that reads – **2nd chances are welcomed!** Jonah and Nineveh both got 2nd chances.

I God Graciously REPEATS

The word of the LORD came to Jonah a second time. Go to the great city of Nineveh and proclaim to it the message I give you. 3:1-2

Lesson: *When you're ready to quit running from God, God has a 2nd chance waiting on you.*

This is important b/c – **there's a little Jonah in all of us.** *All of us like sheep has gone astray and each has turned to his own way...* even as believers, we're capable of operating according to the desires of our flesh. Remember, Jonah was a man of God, a prophet of God, and yet he refused God's call and headed off in the opposite direction. We're all capable of this. David did it. Abraham did it. Jacob did it.

This doesn't make us pagans – but human. And while this isn't an excuse to live according to the lust of the eyes, the lust of the flesh or the pride of life – when we choose to operate outside of our spiritual identity of grace – we subject ourselves to the economy of the flesh.

But thanks be to God for His grace – for 2nd chances. So when Jonah quit running and started turning to God, God restored him and once again extended His call to Jonah.

Lesson: *No matter what you've done, or how you feel you have disobeyed God, if you're willing to relent and repent, turning to God w/ the intent to obey, God will give you another opportunity to fulfill His call on your life.*

II Jonah Obediently RESPONDS

Jonah obeyed the word of the LORD and went to Nineveh. 3

Take 2. **After a storm, a stomach and a spew** – Jonah was back to square 1 – Can you say déjà vu? But this time Jonah decided to obey and to run WITH God.

Lesson: *It doesn't matter how big you've blown it or how long it has been – if you're willing to obey – God can use your life for your good and for His glory.*

In Round 1 – Jonah set out for Tarshish, but in Round 2 – His camel is draped w/ a sign that reads – *Nineveh or bust.*

Folks, I hope you realize that almost daily, you're going to face a Nineveh in your life. You'll read something in the Scriptures you won't like. You'll hear something from a preacher or teacher that won't jive w/ you. God will call you to pick something up or lay something down – and you'll want to resist – this is your Nineveh. But before you say “No”, remember that – ***Disobedience always brings burdens while obedience brings blessings.***

This doesn't mean obedience is easy. Do you remember who Nineveh was? They were Israel's sworn enemies. They were the bad guys who'd soon kill you than look at you. They were actually known to have skinned people alive, and yet God told Jonah to, “Go to Nineveh.”

And Jonah goes and does exactly what God told him to do – *On the first day, Jonah started into the city. He proclaimed: "Forty days and Nineveh will be destroyed. 3:4*

Nineveh was not a small town. It's estimated a man could walk 12 miles in a day – so Nineveh was a large city – about the distance from PTC to Atlanta.

Add to that walking around a strange pagan city wearing a sandwich board saying, “The end is near?” wasn’t exactly the way to win friends and influence people. But to Jonah’s credit, he didn’t soft-pedal or sugar-coat it. He didn’t hire a PR firm to help him package the message. Jonah boldly trusted God and proclaimed – *“Hey guys, if you don’t turn to God, you’re going to die in 40 days and spend an eternity separated from God. Have a great day!”*

Let’s be honest. From a human perspective, the whole thing looks ridiculous. Here’s a man claiming to be God’s prophet delivering a confrontational message of grace in a hostile city where the people would line up for the privilege of hanging him from the highest tree.

Jonah agreed his job was to obey while it was God’s job to take care of the results. *Faith never rests in the messenger, but in the God who gives the message.* He obeyed.

There was a man by the name of Sir Leonard Wood, who was once introduced to the King of France. They hit it off so well the King invited him to come to his palace for dinner at a later date. When the day finally arrived, Sir Leonard Wood showed up at the palace. When he was introduced to the King, the King said, “What a surprise. I didn’t expect to see you. How is it you’re here today?” He said, “Did you not invite me to dine w/ you today?”

The King said, “Yes. I sent you an invitation, but you didn’t answer it.” Sir Leonard replied, “**Your Majesty, a king’s invitation doesn’t need to be answered – it simply must be obeyed.**” The lesson to remember about getting back to where you belong if you’re not where you need to be is – **when God calls – you obey.**

III Nineveh Dramatically REPENTS

The Ninevites believed God. They declared a fast, and all of them, from the greatest to the least, put on sackcloth. When the news reached the king of Nineveh, he rose from his throne, took off his royal robes, covered himself with sackcloth and sat down in the dust. Then he issued a proclamation in Nineveh: ‘By the decree of the king and his nobles: Do not let any man or beast, herd or flock, taste anything; do not let them eat or drink. But let man and beast be covered with sackcloth. Let everyone call urgently on God. Let them give up their evil ways and their violence. Who knows? God may yet relent and with compassion turn from his fierce anger so that we will not perish.’ Jonah 3:5-9

You’ve just witnessed the greatest story of conversion in history. Scholars estimate b/c of the size of Nineveh there could’ve been upwards of 600k people in the city – meaning a bunch of pagan people came to faith in God in one city under the ministry of one man.

What are the odds? What are the odds of an 8-word sermon causing an entire city to repent? You talk about a stunning development! Even Jonah was stunned by what happened.

It reminds me of the story of a teacher teaching her kids how to spell. She told the class she wanted them to tell what their father did for a living and then spell his occupation. Mary said, “My dad is a baker. B-A-K-E-R. If he were here, he’d give everyone a cookie.” Next, Tommy said, “My dad is a banker. B-A-N-K-E-R. If he were here he’d give everyone a dollar.” Then Jimmy said, “My dad is an ophthalmologist.” He tried several times to spell the word, but just couldn’t do it. Finally the teacher asked him to sit down and think about it. She turned to Jon. He said, “My dad is a bookie. B-O-O-K-I-E. If he were here, he’d lay you 8-to-5 that Jimmy is never going to spell ophthalmologist.”

Humanly speaking, the odds weren’t great, but w/ God... all bets are off. You see there were some things Jonah didn’t know. Prior to arriving, the Assyrians had experienced a solar eclipse followed by a famine – both of which were considered omens of bad things to come. Furthermore, the city had just received word (3) major tribes had joined forces and were about to attack. Jonah also didn’t know w/in (5) years of his coming, (2) plagues had hit killing 1000’s.

He didn't know what God had been doing behind the scenes to prepare the city for his message. But you can be certain God is at work long before he calls you and me to go.

I also want you to notice one thing about the Ninevites repentance – they didn't just talk it – their actions supported it. ***There's no true belief w/out some corresponding action.***

III God Mercifully RELENTS

In verses 1-4, we saw Jonah responding to God. From 5-9 we saw Nineveh responding to God. In the final verse, we witness God responding to Nineveh.

*When God saw what they did and how they turned from their evil ways, **he had compassion** and did not bring upon them the destruction he had threatened. 3:10*

Now, everybody has come back to where they belong. Jonah has come back to the place of obedience. Nineveh has come back to the place of repentance and that enabled God to come back to the place where He wants to always be and that is the place of forgiveness.

Lesson: **Obedience always sets off a chain reaction resulting in the blessings of God.** Jonah's obedience led to Nineveh's obedience which led to God's mercy.

Someone put it this way. To know God is to love God. To love God is to trust God. To trust God is to obey God. To obey God is to be blessed by God.

All the misery Jonah had gone through was b/c he had said “No” to God, when he should have said “Yes.” The calamity that came to Nineveh happened b/c Nineveh had stubbornly said “No” to God when they should’ve said, “Yes.”

I can’t help but wonder what blessings have been missed, what wonderful things that could’ve been, and all the lives that could’ve been touched if we had just obeyed when He called? What if we had just spoken that word to our neighbor, or given that money to that offering, or had gone on that mission trip – how different things might be?

No matter what you’ve done, where you’ve been, or how stubborn you’ve been toward God – your life can still make an eternal and earthly difference if you choose today to start living in obedience to His will and Word. God is not finished w/ you if you’re willing to obey His calling. He will still work in miraculous ways if you will trust in Him.