

Jonah Flees the Presence of the Lord

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Preacher: James Tang

[0:00] I'm going to start a new series. We have, we had, we had the privilege of having Johnny, talking about next generation, we had the privilege of Johnny and Brayden, who's young and well, Johnny's not young, Johnny's! Johnny's very old, but Brayden is young and we were blessed by you Brayden last week.

Thank you. You know, that wasn't easy. Can we just give you another round of applause for that? That's something. But we're going to start a new series.

We're going to start a new series and we're actually going to go into the Old Testament, the Old Testament is, we, well, we believe this whole book is the word of God. This is the word of God that points us towards Christ.

In fact, well, everything, everything points towards him. He is the image of the invisible God. He is the firstborn of all creation. Everything was created through him and ultimately for him.

We recognize that, right? And this book points that in John, in Matthew, of course, in Revelation, those are easy. We can see Jesus front and center there. But even in the Old Testament, even in Lamentations, even in Leviticus and Numbers, Christ is there.

[1:04] And we're pointing towards Christ and it's our job to find it. And that's the message that we're looking for today. And we're going to start a new series in the Old Testament. A nice, easy one is on Jonah. So we're going to go through these next few months on the book of Jonah.

When I say Jonah, what comes through your mind? What thoughts do you have? Gabs, I want to pick on you first. What do you think of when you hear Jonah? Big fish.

It's always about the fish. The fish is something for sure. What else is there about Jonah that comes to mind for you? There will be a little bit of uncomfortable me looking around asking to see who wants to answer something.

Birthday boy, Vincent, I want to hear from you. When I tell you Jonah, what do you think of? Fish has already been taken.

Fish has already been taken. Fish has already been taken. Huh? I see what you did there.

[2:01] That does not count. A giant whale. A giant whale. Okay. All right. A giant whale. Okay. So. Enough of the fish. Of course, Jonah isn't about just the fish.

But of course, that's a big topic. That's something that we all think of. Jonah, if you don't do what God says, you'll get swallowed up by a big fish. And of course, some people are like, well, how can you guys believe that kind of story?

How can you guys believe that God sent a fish to swallow someone up and they stayed in there for three days? Like, but the thing is, those are often the very same people who are like, hey, I can't believe in God until I see a miracle. Until I see something crazy happen, I can't believe in God.

I've got to tell you that you can't have it both ways. You can't have it both ways. Either God can do these kinds of crazy things or he can't. And actually, if you are a follower of Christ, if you believe in the existence of Jesus, and if you believe that he actually died and he rose again, that's actually a bigger miracle.

So therefore, the fish is actually not such a big deal. So let's not get distracted so much by the fish. But let's think about what Jonah really is about. I think the book of Jonah really is about sin. Sin.

[3:07] But then the next question, well, what is sin? Well, really what is sin is running away from God. It's choosing our own way. And there is a prime example here in the Old Testament of sin, of running away from God that we see in the book of Jonah.

And as we look through this, my encouragement to you is think, pray. Maybe there are things that you have to unlearn about God because of your perception or your experience of the book of Jonah.

Jonah, don't do what God says, swallow it up by a big fish. But if we're honest, Jonah is much more than that. It's so much more rich than that.

There's so many more things to learn from Jonah himself. And here's my invite to you as we go through this Jonah in the next few months. Have a think. What is there of Jonah that's in me? And what can I actually learn about God through this book?

And we're just going to go through verse by verse, actually. We're going to do the first six verses today. And we're going to see what God really has in store for us when it comes. So I want to invite you, if you've got a paper Bible, which we very much advocate for here because there are no distractions.

[4:10] Do not disturb is baked into this book. So can you bring out your Bibles? Or if there's an app, yeah, you might maybe a little bit louder. And can I invite you to stand for the word of the Lord?

God, we come before you. We open up your word. This is precious to us. This word gives life. So would you prepare our hearts for this? Would you prepare our hearts, Holy Spirit?

Would you soften our hearts, allow us to hear what it is that you want us to hear from this book? If there are things that we have learned as children about this, Lord, that aren't of you, will help us to unlearn them.

We come to you with open hearts and open minds. And we receive your word now. The book of Jonah, chapter one, verse one to six. Now the word of the Lord came to Jonah, the son of Amittai, saying, Arise, go to Nineveh, that great city, and call out against it, for their evil has come up before me.

But Jonah rose to flee 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 them to Tarshish away from the presence of the Lord.

[5:25] But the Lord hurled a great wind upon the sea, and there was a mighty tempest on the sea, so that the ship threatened to break up. Then the mariners were afraid, and each cried out to his God. And they hurled the cargo that was in the ship into the sea to lighten it for them.

But Jonah had gone down into the inner part of the ship and had laid down and was fast asleep. So the captain came and said to him, What do you mean, you sleeper? Arise, call out to your God.

Perhaps the God will give a thought to us that we may not perish. This is the word of the Lord.

Please take a seat. Am I loud enough? Can you guys hear me at the back? We're good?

Okay, good. Now that the word of the Lord came to Jonah, that's how this book starts. Who here wants to hear from God? Put your hand up if you want to hear from God.

It's not a trick question. I'm not. My second question is, do you really? Do you really want to hear from God? And are you ready for him to say what he wants to say?

[6:27] I find so often we want to hear from God to tell us about the things that we want him to tell us about. Jonah, can you tell me which job I should take? Can you tell me which place I should go to for holiday?

Can you tell me which car I should get? Can you tell me which person you prepared for me as a spouse? Can you tell me this? Can you tell me what to think about the LGBTQ stance? Can you tell me what to think about politics? Can you tell me?

And suddenly, maybe that's, we've got the angle wrong. There's a theologian that said, hey, let's think not what we want to hear from God about.

Let's just ask for what God wants to say to us full stop. Because he's God in heaven and here we are on earth. But the problem is, I don't know how often we really actually genuinely want to hear from God.

And whether we're actually prepared for the message that he's about to give us. I see Jonah is about to get a message that he does not want to hear. And it lands him into big trouble. But my question for you is, if you put your hand up and say, hey, I want to hear from God.

[7:30] My question to you is, well, do you really? Do you really want to hear from God? I think about when Christina was pregnant with Ruben, she heard from God. She was a cardiac physiologist in the hospital in the UK.

I was a teacher. She heard from God. Once we found out we were going to have a star family, she heard from God and said, hey, both of you, I want you to dedicate your whole life to serving me. She did not want to hear that message.

You can ask her about it. Two years, she wrestled with that message. And there were tears every Sunday during worship. Because I'll tell you, if you're trying to follow God or you're trying to run away from him, worship songs are not helpful.

Because worship songs are all about, I trust you. I give you everything. I surrender. And you're just wrestling. And every Sunday, I'd look beside me and she's just crying. She's just in tears. And I'm thinking, what did I do? And of course, then finally, I hear the same thing from God.

And I'm like, man, I love my job. I love teaching. I remember driving to work in my car. I just hear, just feeling, okay, this is going to happen. This has to happen. I'm just in tears. The most dangerous drive of my life.

[8:37] But I'm like, I don't want this. So I ask you again, do you actually want to hear from God? You see, what we see here is actually Jonah really has a God of his own making.

We often create our own gods so that he can tell us the things that we want to hear. But in truth, in reality, God is so much bigger, so much bigger.

And he has such a bigger plan. That's something that I want us to challenge with us today is do we have that? And the second thing I see from here is he's about to send Jonah on this missionary journey.

And even this first verse alone, the word of the Lord came to Jonah, tells me another thing. All missionary activity comes from God and is driven by God. Jonah doesn't choose to do this himself. God is the ultimate, only real missionary. You see, he's the one who's telling Jonah, hey, do this, go there. It makes me think of Acts. It makes me think of Acts 8. Philip, I've told you, one of my favorite stories.

[9:35] Philip is just spreading the gospel and just God zaps him and takes him somewhere else to continue the missionary activity. It makes me think of Acts 10, where you are Peter and Cornelius. Again, God just intervenes, talks to people.

He's pulling strings. He's orchestrating in the background. He is the source of all missionary activity. I think of Acts 16, where Paul has a dream about Macedonia. So he heads there.

But before that, he's constantly blocked. Don't go here. Don't go there. Don't go to Asia, even though that's where the food is at. I want you to go to Europe. I want you to start the church there. Go there. God is the one who's behind all missionary activity.

It makes me think of just what it means to even scatter. We talk about gathering and when we talk about scattering, scattering really is just to follow God's lead, to do what he wants us to do.

I think about surfers like Aidan. Apparently Aidan is a really good surfer. Are you? And humble. And humble. What is surfing? Surfing is getting yourself to a place where you're basically submitting to the waves.

[10:36] And you're like, you're just getting yourself out there. But what happens? It just happens. You're just on the waves. That is missionary activity. Can you get yourself into the ocean, onto the waves, get the necessary equipment that you need?

Yes. But then God will take you. And it'll be fun. He's the one who drives all of it. The word of the Lord came to Jonah. And here's the problem. He goes to Jonah and he gets a message. Arise. Arise. Go to Nineveh, that great city, and call out against it, for their evil has come up before me. Whew. I need you to understand a little bit about Nineveh.

Nineveh was the capital of the Assyrian Empire. A lot of commentators, a lot of historians are agreed on it is the most evil empire that has existed in the history of mankind.

I had one friend of mine who compared it to, you know what it is like? A modern example of this empire, the Assyrian Empire, is probably the methods of ISIS with the power of the US.

[11:38] That's what it was. Okay? Very powerful. Very evil. There's cases where when they would fight enemies, they would chop off all the limbs and leave just one arm.

So that they can mock and ridicule them and shake their hands before they die. This was the kind of empire that we were talking about. And this empire was coming on a head-on collision course with the Israelites.

Something else I want you to know. Jonah, the son of Amittai, is all it says here. But he is mentioned before. Jonah was an interesting character that I don't think we, well, at least I wasn't fully aware of.

And actually, I'll tell you something else. Why are we going through Jonah? I'm preaching to you through Jonah from the fullness of my heart. Because it's what the Lord has used to speak to me

these last few months. To challenge me. To actually go, James, you are more like Jonah than you realize.

And so that's why we're preaching this. And I want you to find out, understand something about Jonah here. He was a nationalist. In 2 Kings, 2 Kings chapter 14, verse 25, it talks about Jonah being the prophet to the king Jeroboam.

[12 : 38] Who, again, did evil in the sight of God. Because why? Because Jeroboam had an expansion policy. He was trying to invade neighboring countries to expand the kingdom of Israel, to expand his own kingdom through war.

Jonah was his wise prophet. Okay? So Jonah was, he was a nationalist. He was a partisan patriot. He loved Israel. That's interesting. Because what, because now we're adding a bit of context. What's God asking Jonah to do? He's asking Jonah to go into enemy territory and call them to repent.

A modern parallel. He's asking a Jew to go into Berlin, Nazi Germany in 1941 to call the Germans to repentance. Do you understand a little bit more how he ended up in the fish?

Jonah heard from God. Jonah did not like what he heard from God. He was called to his enemy. Now understand the complexity of this. He's called. God tells him, hey, go to Nineveh and warn them.

[13 : 45] What does that mean? That means there's a chance of repentance. That means God is giving them a chance. Can you think from Jonah's perspective, who was supporting King Jeroboam's expansion policy? You've got this enemy who's coming.

And wait, you want me to go into Nazi Germany and call them to repentance with the chance that they might actually repent? And that means they won't be destroyed. Which means what?

We will be destroyed. Because if they survive, they're coming for us. If they're coming for us, that means the Israelites will be gone. Can you see Jonah's dilemma here as he hears from God?

Do you really want to hear God's voice? What if we were called to our enemies? What if God told you today, hey, do you know that worker that really frustrates you in the office?

I want you to go to them, and I want you to tell them how much you appreciate them. How loved they are by me. How they're going to get the promotion that you want.

[14 : 45] And this isn't even, well, I hope your colleagues, co-workers are not trying to kill you. But this isn't even that. This is just people that we're frustrated with. This is just people that we're annoyed with.

This is just people that we don't like talking to. We struggle to talk to people during a DBS sermon here sometimes. Because they're like people, oh, we don't really vibe very well. We don't really talk. We don't have good conversation.

Man, what Jonah's being asked to do here is something that we cannot fathom. It is to the level of a Jew going into Nazi Germany and calling the Germans to repentance. That's what this is.

And Jonah struggles. Because he loves Israel. He wants to fight this war. He is so, so for Israel.

And yet here we have him being called to that. It is not easy.

So suddenly what Jonah then does seems fairly reasonable. Verse three. This is what he says. The scripture says, but Jonah rose to flee to Tarshish from the presence of the Lord.

[15 : 41] So Jonah hears this, says, arise, go to Nineveh. And then the next thing he does is rise up and then go the opposite direction. He leaves. And now we understand a little bit more why.

Because actually, you know what he might even be thinking? There might be an even, you know what? I'm going to take one for the team. I'm going to ignore God. I'm not going to not save the Assyrians so that the Israelites can be saved.

Man, I am noble. I am sacrificial. And so he goes. He goes. And it's funny. It says he goes down. He goes. 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 them to Tarshish away from the presence of the Lord.

It seems like running away from God often is easy. It's easier than going towards God. Going downhill. Down to the pier. Down to the boat. Paying the fare. And heading off. And I've said this before.

Often when we're trying to run away from God, the devil is the one that provides the transportation. It's easier. There's always an easier way. But the way towards God. The way to hear.

[16 : 39] To follow what God says. Often is the uphill battle. It's the hard one. Do we have that? Do we pick the easy way out sometimes? Because you know what? It's Monday night. I'm just tired.

This is. I'm just going to do this.

You know what? You know what? It's Tuesday night. I'm tired. I'm busy. It's going to be. You know what? You know what? It's Wednesday. It's middle of the week. Like I should just do this. It's easier. Often the will of God requires us to go uphill.

Often requires us to head up into a place that we wouldn't actually go. That's why he's commanding us to go that way. Because it's against again. Like last week. It's going against our natural selves here. And he was running.

It's harder to actually follow God. Jonah had a problem. He had a problem with the job that he was given. Right? To go into enemy territory. But he actually had a bigger problem.

What was that bigger problem? The bigger problem wasn't the job that he was given. It was the one who gave him the job. Because really, if you keep peeling back why he runs away.

[17 : 42] If you keep peeling back why he decides to do this. And we'll find out more later. We're going to try and reveal bit by bit and go through the chapters as we go. But you'll find out why he ran away. And it wasn't really just because of the job.

It was because actually he doesn't trust God. And he gets angry at God later. But we'll talk about that later. Come to the heart of it. Why is the book of Jonah about sin? What is sin?

It's running away from God. Why is it? If you go all the way back to Adam and Eve. What is it? Sin is really. God. I don't know if I trust you. I don't know if I trust you.

Did God really tell you not to eat that apple? Did God really tell you that? Oh. He told you that? That seed of doubt into God's character is what started all of this off.

The question for us is do we have that same thing? I was talking to a friend recently. And his company got given a big job. And he was praying for that job for this big client.

[18 : 49] And he got it. And he's like, oh, God's so happy. And I was like, how can we pray now? He's like, just pray. Pray that God doesn't. Pray that I don't lose that customer. Don't we have that? God, pray. Can you give me that job?

I really want this job. Oh, I got the job. Oh, pray that I don't lose the job. And I'm like, I switched. I'm like, just pretend if you have God's perspective. Wait. I gave you that job. And now you're worried I'm going to take it away.

I gave you that client. And now all you think about, all you pray about is that I don't give you that client away. You know what that tells me? You don't actually know who I am. I'm the one who gave it to you. I know what's best for you. And I know that there will be some things that I give to you that will bring you, draw you closer to me so you can experience my goodness.

But there will be things that I'm going to have to take away from you just so you can, again, draw you in and experience so you can experience my goodness. The moment you focus on the thing that God is trying to give you, then actually what you're saying is, oh, actually, I don't know if I can trust you.

Think about my friend who got this client from God and now is worried that he's going to lose this client. What does that tell you about his perception of God? Right?

[19 : 50] And before you go, oh, that's not good. That's weak faith. Well, don't we all have that? Don't we all have that moment where we're like, oh, God, I've got such a good thing. I just want to keep on to it. The truth is, if we keep peeling it back, there is a deep mistrust of God in what we have.

Do we have that? Jonah says, hey, I don't trust you in this because actually if I follow you to do this, this could be the demise of my nation. That's what he's really worrying about. Since sin is choosing our own way and saying, hey, actually, God, I don't trust you.

I'm going to choose my own way. It's Eve and Adam doing that and going, hey, God, you know what? I know what you said, but actually I think we know best. That is sin. Saying, God, your way is not better than my way. And I'm going to do that.

And of course, it isn't just actions. It's the heart. Jonah was a prophet, a leader of a nation. On the surface, he ticked all the boxes. Do you tick all the boxes?

Are you sat here at church on a Sunday because it's the right thing to do? Do you go to a midweek group because it's the right thing to do? Do you give to charities because it's the right thing to do? Do you do all these?

[20 : 53] Do you not do certain things because it's the right thing to do? You see, when it comes to sin, when it comes to mistrust, it's really about the heart. Jonah's heart. Jonah's mistrust of God.

We may tick all the boxes on the outside, but the truth is there is something on the inside. Jonah is outraged, and we'll see later. He is completely outraged of this thing. And now he eventually does it because of the whole fish thing.

But even then, afterwards, it's not a good show on his character. It's not a show. You actually see his heart. But before we point our fingers, before I pointed my finger, I realized, man, there is Jonah in me.

Because I'm judging and I'm looking at other people. I'm looking at other nations. I'm like, that is not godly. That is not godly. They need to be destroyed. Wait, I'm not going to go save them. They don't deserve a second chance.

Do you know how evil they are? Though a lot of it is the evil that is within us. And then something happens. Verse 4. Funny, when he's running away, he doesn't just disobey the command.

[21 : 54] It actually says twice. He's running from the presence of the Lord. He's actually running from God himself. This isn't just an instruction that he's trying to avoid. This is actually God's very presence. This is God himself.

I think we need to understand that as we monitor and just evaluate our behavior. The things that we do. Recognizing actually it's deeper than that. It's deeper than that.

If you keep peeling back, there's actually a mistrust of God's presence and his character. So verse 4. But the Lord hurled a great wind upon the sea, and there was a mighty tempest on the sea, so that the ship threatened to break up.

So Jonah runs away, and then a storm comes. A storm comes that actually the Lord brings on because he's running away from his presence.

And what this tells me is actually sin. When we choose to go our own way, often, always, storm follows. Now, it doesn't mean that every storm in your life is because of sin. But every sin does lead to storm.

[22 : 49] Can I just say that again just to clarify? Now, every storm that comes in your life isn't just because of sin. Jesus says the sun shines on the evil and the righteous. The rain falls on the evil and the righteous.

Things just happen. It's just the natural order here. But sin always leads to storm. The consequences of choosing our own way, of choosing our own way and not trusting God, always leads to storm.

The good news here is often storms come to do a couple things for us. One, it helps wake us up.

Jonah falls fast asleep, and it's the storm that actually wakes him up. And I found this over and over again, that actually it's the storms in my life that actually allow me to wake up and to grow.

And it's after our formation. You know, and Peter, he talks about this. Don't be surprised at the fiery trials that you face. We're always shocked, always shocked when bad things happen to us.

Correct?

Like when an injury happens or when someone suddenly gets sick or when we suddenly lose this job or this project goes bad. Like, whoa, that's not supposed to happen. Well, no. That's just part of life.

[23 : 53] But then God uses those storms. And I've told you time and time. Like for me, every time I've been in the hospital, it just brings me closer to God. It brings me more in touch with my humanity. And halfway through the hospital trip, I'm leaning in, and I love it even more than just being out in the world doing the normal thing.

Because I'm like, this reminds me. This keeps me going. James chapter 1. And count it all joy when you face trials of various kinds. Why? Because it's through the testing of your faith that your faith will become perfect and lacking in nothing.

Right? 1 Peter 1 talks about that. Of course, it's the refining. It's the refining that causes you to have a faith that just shines. Often God uses those storms to wake us up, to grow.

Last night we were watching Hamilton. Our kids love Hamilton. And so we were watching our Disney+. And you know what? It reminded me.

Because we watched it during, because actually it released on Disney+, during the COVID years. You remember? I was getting a little bit of anxiety because it reminded me of those years. I was like, man, Hamilton walked us through COVID.

[24 : 56] Like our family, at least. I was just eating dinner. I was like, oh, I feel, this feels weird. And of course, Lin-Manuel is just a genius. But I'm like, man, but I don't regret those times.

In fact, it reminded me of how much we tried. It was completely out of our control. Do you remember when you'd open up SEMP and how many cases there were every day?

And that was the thing that we would be following. And when they announced, oh, the quarantine is going to be two weeks. The quarantine is going to be seven days. Oh, the quarantine is going to be 21 days. Do you remember just that constant anxiety that was going on?

And through the backdrop and not being able to go out and all these things. We were just watching and listening to Hamilton nonstop. And so I was just, man. I actually appreciated those times. It brought me back.

Oh, that was a storm. It was out of control. But man, I grew in it. I learned how to cling on to God in all of that. I wouldn't swap those storms for anything.

[25:59] What storms do you have that the Lord's using to grow you? The Lord is using to grow you. Because actually, you don't learn how to navigate things until you go through some of these things.

We got to celebrate Danny's birthday the other day. And Danny and I are the same age, but I look so much older. And I'm just like, man, I'm a... How old am I?

How old are we, Danny? 38. I'm 38. I'm going to be 38. I'm an old... I feel like an old 38. Just because it's just the times we've just had all sorts of things happen to us.

And I was like, but you know, I wouldn't give those up for anything. They make me who I am. All those moments you have to navigate what it means to lose a loved one every time you have to navigate.

In the hospital, waiting for the hospital, waiting for the doctor to come and visit you on your ward. And then, like, and you're completely subject to them in every single way. And you're completely helpless.

[26:56] Watching your daughter be in ICU. You're like, I don't know if she's going to make it. Like, all these things. And I look back and I'm like, man, God used them all to grow. And it made me think where God is in the perspective of everything.

Often we think God is completely invested in my comfort and tranquility and peace. And he's not. Imagine where God sits. What do you think he's thinking about when he looks at you? Is he like, you know what? I just want to make sure that Ken is as comfortable and as happy as he can be in those few years that he has on planet Earth.

Is that what he's thinking? Or is he thinking, man, I can't wait for Ken to join me here. And I'm going to use these few years with the few storms to mold him so that he would trust me.

So that he can come join me in eternity. So I'm going to give him, I'm going to allow things to happen. I'm even going to let the enemy do certain things.

[28:01] And what the enemy means for evil, I will turn for good. Because my ultimate priority for Ken, for you, for me, is not that we would have comfort in this temporary space.

It's that we would be prepared for eternity with him. So what storms do you have in your own life? Are you asleep? Are you asleep because you don't even know what's going on and you just sleepwalking through life?

Then God might even just allow some storms to come into you just to keep you awake. Just to keep you alert. Just to grow you. He's with you in that storm.

And it's funny, verse 5. We're nearly at the end if you're tracking. Verse 6 is the end. Verse 5. Then the mariners were afraid and each cried out to his God. Isn't that interesting? God tells Jonah, hey, I want you to go and preach the gospel, basically, to these pagans who are evil.

Turn them around. Jonah says, no, because I don't. I hate those pagans. So I want to go and run in this direction. And he runs in this direction. And who does he meet? Pagans. Pagans.

[29:10] And he meets a storm. And those pagans each cries out to his own God. What does that tell me? It tells me that whether you are Christian or not, whether you are religious or not, we are all inherently religious. The moment we face something that is out of our control, we all cry out to something.

We all know that we're not in control here. So we're all crying. Each cries out to his own God. Isn't that interesting? I think in this city, I think in this room, there are people who are crying out to their own God. Whatever circumstances you're going through, you're crying out to your own God.

It's just that sometimes your own God are your stocks. Is your bank account. Are the relationships that you have. Your God is your boss when you're in trouble. Because you think that your boss is

your only chance of survival.

Each cries out to his own God. And it tells me that society is inherently religious. We're all looking for answers. We're all looking for a savior here. The mariners were all crying out to their own God. This tells me something else. Jonah runs away from God's instruction to reach the pagans. Ends up ministering to pagans. It tells me something. God does whatever he wants to do.

[30:20] It's just, I mean, from our perspective, we're like trying to hide and we're trying to run from him. But there is no refuge from God. There is only refuge in God. Right? So you can't hide from him.

And he's still going to do whatever he wants to do. So would we just grab our surfboards and we just enjoy and trust in the one who's calling us to do the things that he's calling us to do?

And each cries out. The worst thing is they try these attempts. Each cries out to his own God. And then they try something else. You know what? Let's just lighten the load. Now remember, these guys were sailors who were very experienced. They dealt with these things regularly.

But they knew something was different about this one. This storm was different. It was built different. And so they're like, okay, something is wrong here. We need to throw all the cargo off the ship. We've got to try.

What is that? That is their own attempts at trying to save themselves. And we have that too. We cry out to our own gods and then we try and fix things ourselves. Maybe if I do this, I'll fix it. Maybe if I do this, I'll be a better person.

[31:14] Maybe if I do this, maybe if I have this, I'll be better. All of them are our own attempts. And that goes against the good news of Jesus Christ. When we are constantly attempting to save ourselves, changing the furniture, moving the furniture around, doing all these things, what is that saying?

That we actually don't understand what grace is. We don't understand that as we are drowning, as we are sinking, there is only really one hope and then it doesn't come from us. But we can try all of our own attempts and it won't get us anywhere.

Now, as they're doing all this and they're scrambling and they're throwing stuff, they're like, wait a minute, where's that other guy? Where's that other guy who didn't really talk, who seemed to be quite a grumpy old man? Where was he? Oh, he's inside.

Oh, he's napping. Now, again, just I try and give Jonah the benefit of the doubt here because the Lord used Jonah to remind me that, man, there's Jonah in you. I'm like, I can imagine that. Have you ever run from God?

Have you ever hid from him? Or maybe, have you ever had an argument with someone? Like, you just want to hide. You just want to close your eyes and just hope it all goes away. Commentators say Jonah goes into the deepest cabin and enters the deepest sleep of grief and sorrow because he knows he's running away from God.

[32:20] And so he's just in there and he's just blocking everything out. Funny, the mariners, they see, they think about him and they go and wake him up. It's like, dude, we're going to die here.

What are you doing? Why are you still asleep? Can you cry out to your God? What is, hey, you're clearly a religious man. Why aren't you crying out to your God so that we could be saved as well? I don't know. Sometimes that reminds me there's a world out there that is sinking. There is a world out there that is fighting and they're looking at us going, hey, you have a God. Why does your private faith not do any public good?

Why does your personal private faith that you seem to be diligent about do no good for the rest of us? Other people have said that, hey, we are often heavenly minded, but we are of no earthly good. Can we be both? Can we be heavenly minded and earthly good? So the others who look around us go, okay, well, I don't believe what that person believes, but that person provides something into our team, into our work, into this context here.

[33:26] But man, that is good. The sailor looks at Jonah and go, hey, you might have a private faith, but it is not doing us any good right now. Can you come out and help us? Do you have that kind of setting?

Do you have that kind of people? Are people looking at you and go, oh, that person is a nice guy. She's a nice person to work with. I think it's because she goes to church, but it doesn't really impact me or in any way.

Wouldn't it be great if we had colleagues and friends and family who maybe they don't know Jesus just yet, but they look at us and go, okay, well, he or she knows Jesus. Man, they bless me. It doesn't make sense, and I don't deserve it.

And it's not the right, it doesn't seem natural, but somehow they bless me and they bring out good in me. Wouldn't that be the dream? Wouldn't that be what we're supposed to do? I think that's what the sailor is trying to call out in Jonah.

Hey, why are you sleeping? Come and help. Maybe your God will be the one that saves us. Is our faith a private faith or is it one that can actually have public good as well?

[34 : 25] So the captain comes to him. He cries out. And it's funny. He runs away from pagan. Then it's the pagans that end up telling him, go and call out to your God. Isn't it just ironic?

Isn't it just fascinating? But again, before we point fingers, is that in us? Is that what we actually have in ourselves?

Jonah was selfish. He was self-absorbed in his own thing. He's like, but what about all the years I've put in, campaigning for standing beside King Jeroboam so we could carry out this expansion policy so Israel can be the kingdom, the mightiest kingdom in the world, God's chosen nation. And then he's told to go and help call the other side to repentance, knowing that his God could and will forgive if they repented.

What we don't realize is actually we are that person. You know what a Christian is? A Christian is someone who finally comes to the realization that you've been running from God. That you have been running from God.

[35 : 32] And you finally come to the realization that you can run no more. And that his goodness, his mercy will follow you all the days of your life. That you cannot run from him.

You can only hide in him. That is what a Christian is. When you finally realize that you need God and that you have been the one that is running away from him. Jonah had a problem.

He was looking at the Assyrians and going, you're evil. We're not. You need to be destroyed. I do not. That's the pride that comes in all of us.

Now you're sat here because you're seeking or you're a follower of Christ. My urge to you is don't look at the people on the outside and go, man, you guys are pagans. You guys don't know. Hey, they don't follow Jesus.

They're entitled to do whatever they want to. But us followers of Christ, we have to act differently. We have to live differently. By first and foremost, acknowledging that we were dead in our own sins.

[36 : 27] Ephesians 2 talks about this, right? Time and time again, we come back to this. That we were dead in the sins. That we were alienated from the commonwealth of Israel. That we were strangers to the promises of God. But God, rich in mercy, kind.

Because of his great love for us. Saved us. The moment you look and go, them and us, that's when we've gone wrong.

There is only all of us here. A Christian is someone who finally realizes that we were actually the ones that are running away from God. Jonah hadn't realized that. He was running away from God. He was looking on the other side. And he didn't realize that actually he was the one that was heading to death. Because when we choose our own way, when we choose our own flesh, Romans 8 tells us, for to set your mind on the flesh leads to what?

Death. But until you realize that, until we realize that, until we know that we have Jonah inside us, we have no good to anyone. Of course, the mariner goes, hey, cry out to your God.

[37 : 32] If maybe he will spare a thought for us. And of course, the truth is, our God did more than just spare a thought for us. He did not even spare his own son for us. When we realize that we've been running from God, that we're in a storm that we can't actually get out of.

However hard, however good you are at swimming. However many flotation devices you have around you, you will not be able to save yourself. And the only way that you were saved, the only way that we're sat here, is because someone jumped into the storm for us and gave his life so that we could live.

And we understand that. Because it seeps everywhere into our culture. We just haven't been able to put words to it or we're struggling with the religious aspect. But we see it everywhere.

We understand the concept of someone has to die in order for someone to live. We understand that concept. That's why Lion King is so successful.

Because of Mufasa and what he did for Simba. It's why Marvel gets to keep churning out rubbish movies. It's because Tony Stark gave up his life for the rest of the Avengers to continue.
[38:38] It's baked in to our being that we know someone died for us in order the others would live. And really that's it.

Jonah's God did and was able to save them all. And you fast forward, this is how it points to Christ. Because moving forward, Christ was the one that was thrown into the storm for us.

So that we could live. Now, can we keep that in the forefront of our minds? Recognize that one, we were drowning.

All of us. Even those who you look on the outside and go, oh, that seems to be a righteous, holy person. No, that person was running from God and was drowning. That's what the Bible teaches us. That's what we know we all are. From the moment we are born, we're filled with sin. I'll tell you, I think Mike is the youngest one here right now. My baby.

[39:34] Man, that guy's a sinner. Absolute sinner. Cares just for himself. Doesn't care for what God wants. We're all born in sin. But yeah, because his parents are sinners.

The first thing that we have to do, if you're thinking, okay, okay, what does this all mean for me now? Well, first of all, it's actually simple. Just recognize that you were drowning. Recognize that you were running from God. That's just step number one. Let's learn from Jonah here that we all were running from God.

We were all drowning and that we can't save ourselves. That we needed outside help. I remember a few years ago, we were in a swimming pool with Ruben and he was slowly kind of learning how to swim, but he wasn't super confident yet.

And there was a moment where I, as a parent, was maybe six feet away from him, which for a small man like me is quite the distance. And he was struggling. And he wasn't able to get out.

Man, within seconds, the lifeguard just hurls himself in. Do you know those lifeguards, those teenagers that are going to do it for a summer job, who's playing on his phone half the time so I wasn't even confident he'd even see things happen like this?

[40:38] But man, the moment it came, this guy just dropped his phone, paused his game, no doubt, first. Runs and hurls himself off and jumps straight into the pool to save Ruben.

I'm like, man, I'm grateful for that guy. Recognize that we ourselves are drowning. We were drowning. That we were running from God. That we couldn't save ourselves. No way.

However good a swimmer you are, however good a surfer you are. I'm reminded of a sad story. Actually, a friend of Joe and mine, and we have a friend that grew up in England, and him and his family went on holiday together, and three boys.

Because our friend was the middle one, and at this point he's mid-20s. They go to Florida and they have a great time, and his younger brother goes out into the ocean. They swim to that middle boy bit where you can chill for a while.

But as he was going, he was just trapped in the undercurrent. And then so the older brother, who's near him, scrambles and tries to save him, pushes him on. But actually the older brother then loses strength himself and ends up passing away.

[41:42] And I'm like, man. And we were devastated and distraught for our friend. And I don't know even to this day whether we're fully recovered from all of that. And I'm not saying that just as an emotional, sentimental story, but essentially that's what we believe.

That we couldn't save ourselves, and yet someone hurled themselves into a storm, lifted us up so we could find safety, but in doing so sacrificed.

Until you get that, until you understand that bit, you'll struggle to love the people around you. Until you get that bit, you'll be like Jonah when you look at the Assyrians and go, them. They're such evil people.

Until you get that, you won't know how to love. But the moment you get that, the moment you get that God loved you so much that he held his son into the sea to save you, man, that unlocks a whole host of opportunities for you to love and serve.

Because you recognize that you were drowning. You recognize that you couldn't save yourself. You recognize that someone jumped in and gave up their life. That you could live. So anyway, my conclusion, my questions for you.

[42:47] Are you really ready to hear from God? Can we be a people who are ready to hear from God whatever he says? I'll finish with that story that Christina and I, we first heard about going into

ministry from God those years ago.

And we wrestled, and she wrestled for all those years. Eventually, we did it. And we're like, oh, what? Again, just our parents didn't understand. Why would you quit your jobs to do this? But you know, I'll tell you, we just got blessed time and time and time again. Every time we hurled ourselves into the sea because we trusted him, God just came back and just like, man, you just unlocked the next level.

You just unlocked the next level of goodness that you can experience from me. And we just got blessed no end. We had another kid. We had a bigger house somehow. We had all these things that we got to do over there.

And then God asked us again. Hey, actually, now. All those, do you remember, James, all those things that I gifted you when you trusted me? Oh, yeah, yeah. Good things. Great things. All the people, the home, the massage chair.

[43 : 52] Oh, the massage chair. Yeah. It's like, hey, those good things, I want you to remember those good things. And I want you to let them go now. I want you to move your family to Hong Kong.

Ah, when you experience God's goodness, I think he says, let it go. Because I want you to trust me. Not the gifts I give you.

Not the provisions I have for you. Just me. Trust me. Trust me. Are you ready to hear from God? Are you ready to experience his goodness? Because he can be trusted. Let us not be Jonah. Let us not have a God of our own making where we just want him to speak to us about the things that we want him to speak about.

Let him call us to the things that he wants to call us to. He's God in heaven and here we are on earth. Let our words be few. Let our dreams be few. And are you running from God? Are you choosing the easier way?

[44 : 55] Have you bought into the enemy's lies that, hey, this way is easier. I've even got you tickets. I've got you a boat ride. Go this way. If you have, then I'll just say, stop. There's a fish coming.

There's a fish coming to remind you of his goodness again. There is a storm coming. If you are choosing sin in your life, that sin will lead to a storm.

I assure you. I guarantee you. Repent now. Turn around now. Trust in him now. And finally, if you're doing all of those things in your own faith, then my last question for you is, is your private faith doing any public good?

Are others looking at you, those who are inherently religious, who are crying out for a savior? And you have your savior. Is it doing any good to those around you?

Because I'd like to think my prayer is that my faith, my personal private faith, which actually isn't very personal and private at all, because I have you guys. That there is a good that leads you to the people outside.

[46 : 04] And you might not realize this. Because we're so, maybe if you've been in the church all the time and you're doing two, three, four nights with Christians, you don't realize how you're changing. But to the rest of the world outside who are watching, who are crying out, they'll see a different, oh, you volunteer.

Oh, why do you volunteer? Oh, why do you care for teen moms? Wait, what's this alpha thing? Why are you willing to spend time with other people to talk through them? Because I trust in the goodness of God.

Because I was running from him. I was dead. I was drowning. But he saved me. So everything from here is house money. Everything here is gain for me.

And I want you to have the same thing. Invite Kelly and the team up now. We're going to finish with a song to reflect on. I don't know. I don't know how good we are at this.

The song is, Lord, I need you. I don't know how good we are at saying, Lord, I need you. Because I think sometimes we say it and we're going to sing it because we're used to singing in church because it's kind of like karaoke.

[47 : 14] And we're Chinese, so we like karaoke. But to actually say, Lord, I need you. And take it from the one-legged man. Don't take even steps walking for granted.

You think, oh, no, I'm actually okay. Got the job. Got this. Got that. I'm like, no, no, no, no. Those things could disappear in a second. You could not walk in a second. You could be going up for a

dunk and your Achilles will pop, just like me.

You okay, Jay? Don't take anything for granted. God is good. The very fact that we're breathing, that we're sat here, that we have a bone structure that supports us to sip, that we have ears to hear, that we have mouths that we get to feed later for lunch.

That is all the goodness of God. So if you need help remembering that, remember those things.

That whilst you were running and whilst you were drowning, you were saved.

And would you join me? Would you join us as this family in declaring together, Lord, we need you.

Every hour, every moment. My sin runs deep, but your grace is more.

[48:32] My sin runs deep, but your grace is more. Lord Jesus, we sit here and ask for your forgiveness.

So often it's like we're sat by the poolside having just been saved. And yet we're showing no gratitude to the lifeguard who saved us. Immediately we're consumed by the other things.

But Lord, would you remind us once again of our depravity and of your generosity? Would you remind us again of our sin and your grace? For those of us who are going through storms, would you use them to wake us up from our deep slumber?

Would you use them to grow us for your glory? Prepare us, Lord, for eternity with you.

Make us holy. Mould us to be more like you. Thank you.