

GOD'S LIGHT IN LIFE'S DARK NIGHT
#4 – JONAH: RUNNING INTO DARKNESS IN THE BELLY OF THE BEAST
Jonah 1-4

Intro: What will happen if you try to run away from God and His will for your life? The life of the prophet Jonah shows us...

The word of the Lord came to Jonah son of Amittai: "Go to the great city of Nineveh and preach against it, because its wickedness has come up before me." But Jonah ran away from the Lord and headed for Tarshish. Jonah 1:1-3a

I. When We Do a "Jonah", We Try to Run Away From God

- The prophet Jonah (also mentioned in II Kings 14:25) was called by God to go to the Assyrian city of Nineveh and prophecy their destruction. Jonah _____ the Assyrians because of the atrocities to his country and incredible wickedness. Instead, Jonah tried to run away, going the opposite way.
- We do a "Jonah" when we hear God's call and direction for our lives, but _____ to do it. We may try to simply ignore God, or actively choose a different direction for our lives. Either way, we're running away.
- Why do we try to run away?
 - 1) We may hate the _____ we are called to do. We think we have a better idea for our lives.
 - 2) We may hate where we are to go and/or the people we are to touch. We are comfortable where we are.
- Seldom do we want to go to our "_____". (I believe every Christian will have at least one "Nineveh" in his or her life – the pastor)

Then the Lord sent a great wind on the sea, and such a violent storm arose that the ship threatened to break up... Then they took Jonah and threw him overboard, and the raging sea grew calm. At this the men greatly feared the Lord, and they offered a sacrifice to the Lord and made vows to Him. But the Lord provided a great fish to swallow Jonah, and Jonah was inside the fish three days and three nights.

Jonah 1:4, 15-17

II. We Can't Run Away; God Will Find, and "Run Into", Us

- Jonah went the _____ way from Nineveh, to Tarshish (probably in Spain, the edge of his world). He hoped to be so far way, he was of no use to God.
- Today, our opposite way can include leaving the _____, and living a secular, godless lifestyle; thus hoping that we can be of no use to God.
- Like Jonah, we will find that we can't _____ from God. He will "run into" us, sending storms and trapping us in our own personal belly of the beast to get our attention. This run-in with God is actually a blessing. Thank Him for it. God could let us waste our lives in oblivion in our Tarshish or cut us off from Him. Instead, He chases us down because He cares.
- Jonah experienced being swallowed by a great _____ (or whale), trapped in the darkness of the belly of the beast. Our dark trap may be the negative circumstances of our lives, or a lack of happiness and blessings.

- Some think this “whale of a tale” is too much to _____, so it’s a fable. Jesus Himself referred to it (in Matthew 12:39-41) and treated it as historical fact.

From inside the fish Jonah prayed to the Lord his God... And the Lord commanded the fish, and it vomited Jonah onto dry land. 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 2:1, 10; 3:1-2*

III. God’s Goal For Us; To Run With Him, For Him

- Jonah’s dark prison lasted three days and three nights, long enough to get his _____. Jonah probably thought he was to die as punishment. He may have wanted to die because of his torment (after all, a whale’s belly can’t be comfortable or fun). But God’s plan wasn’t for Jonah to be fish food, but Nineveh. After the world’s first submarine cruise, Jonah was vomited out, special delivery, to continue his mission.
- Today, our run-in with _____, and its dark prison, will last long enough to get our attention, prepare us for our mission, and deliver us to the right place at the right time.
- God’s goal for our belly of the beast experience is not punishment, but _____ from our “Jonah” attitude, to running with God, and for God.
- We will be delivered from the darkness of the beast when we _____. Repenting is a serious and heartfelt spiritual u-turn to God – from the wrong way to the right way; from sin and self to the Savior and salvation. Jesus calls us to repent and believe the Good News (gospel). Mark 1:15.

When God saw what (the Ninevites) did, and how they turned from their evil ways, He had compassion and did not bring upon them the destruction He had threatened. But Jonah was greatly displeased and became angry. *Jonah 3:10-4:1*

- Like Jonah, running with God will have its share of surprises, disappointments, and _____. The key is to focus, not on them, but on our God, Who never gives up on us, and on our trust in Him.

Are you struggling with being a Jonah? Then, are you ready for your belly of the beast?

Answers: I. Hated; refuse; mission; Nineveh. II. Opposite; church; hide; fish; believe. III. Attention; God; deliverance; repent; frustrations.