

## Can't Hide From God Jonah 3:1-10

There are times in life where my job, family, or other events tells my body to run and hide. For me, it's because there is a task I know I will be asked to complete and I really don't want to do it. My theory is that if I don't show up then I won't be asked. If I'm asked, I can give some lame excuse as to why I'm not the person for the job. Well, that doesn't always work. I generally end up agreeing to step up and take lead because God won't let me say no. Ever had this experience? You really don't want to, but you can't say no. I believe the reason it's difficult to say no is because God's calling is stronger than my will. Let's look at the story of Jonah to help us understand why we can't get away from God's call.

The account of Jonah begins with God calling him to go to Nineveh and proclaim that in forty days God will destroy them. Their evilness has reached God and God is not pleased. Jonah does leave; but his destination is to get on the first boat to Tarshish, the opposite direction from Nineveh. Jonah has experienced his own account of the "Fear of God" in that he was afraid to do God's bidding. I don't really blame Jonah. God was sending him to a horrible place to tell them God was going to destroy this evil city. In today's world, Jonah would be sent to a place like Iraq where killing is

rampant. I would want to run the opposite direction, too. However, Jonah's escape led him to an even worse situation.

The boat Jonah boards sets out to sea and is hit with a storm so severe that the sailors are praying to every god they could think of for help. They find Jonah in the bowels of the ship in a deep sleep. Jonah is awakened and begged to pray to his God to be spared from the storm. Jonah immediately knows the problem is him. He confesses to running away from God and pleads with the sailors to throw him overboard so the sea will once again be calm. They are reluctant, but agree, and the sea immediately quiets. But this didn't end Jonah's traumatic experience of running from God.

Jonah finds himself in the belly of a great fish where he spends the next three days and nights. I wonder which was worse for Jonah, being in the belly of a fish or the encounter he would have had with the people of Nineveh? In Jonah's era, the community believed that the world under the sea was where Satan and his angels lived. It was the world of hell which is what caused the sailors to be so frightened of the storm. They did not want to be pulled into the abyss of Satan's home. Therefore, when Jonah was thrown overboard he knew where he was headed, but, God protected him with the great fish. Jonah's three days in the great fish was a

humbling and soul search time. He prayed to God and was given a second chance.

Our passage, today, finds Jonah lying on the beach where the great fish had expelled him; listening to God say, "Jonah, go to Nineveh." This time, Jonah didn't hesitate. He went straight to Nineveh and proclaimed God's words that the city would be destroyed in forty days because their evilness had reached God. What a day this was for Jonah, as he walked up and down the streets proclaiming God's word, watching people repent and change their lives. In fact, according to scriptures, the entire city repented and became obedient to God. This was not the day that Jonah had anticipated. A great city, like Nineveh, who had turned evil could have executed Jonah and no one would have been the wiser. I have learned that when God has a plan, God doesn't stop calling no matter how hard I try and run.

God has a clear voice calling you to "go" to your own Nineveh. Your destination may not be as evil as Nineveh, but, there is something out of place that needs to be rectified. If we look at biblical history, we see that God sent people to specific destination generally for the purpose of guiding the lost back to God. Our calling today is no different, but our approach is unique to our situation. I can't see God saying I need to walk up and down the streets of Denison proclaiming that the city will be destroyed in

forty days. If I did, the reaction most likely would not be repentant hearts but rather a trip to a psych ward for me. But, none the less, God is still calling you for a special task. Only you can hear God's voice. The question is, "How will you respond?" Will you go and do or will you run and hide?

Hiding today isn't physically getting on a ship and sailing away to a far away land; but we can jump ship. We can think of other things that need to be done first, make logical explanations about why we can't participate, or we can simply say, "No, that's not for me." It's quite common to want to run away from God's call because God wants us to do something we aren't comfortable doing. What the brain doesn't understand is that when we answer God's calling with a "YES, I will follow" God will shower blessing after blessing upon us. We then will have one of those experiences that words can't describe, like Jonah and Nineveh. I can't imagine what Jonah must have felt in his heart as he watched citizen by citizen turn their heart back to God. Have you ever seen anyone's heart change? It's an amazing experience to witness God at work in another person's life. Jonah almost missed the opportunity to witness an entire community return their hearts, minds, and souls back to God. God needed Jonah and gave him a second chance. Jonah is not the only one God needs, God is calling you as well.

The days of running from my Christian calling is over. I want to serve God to the best of my ability. When I get stuck as to where I am to serve next, I go to the one place I know God will speak to me; the scriptures. It is in my study, listening to other voices of my study group, or in the prayer time where I find God's voice the loudest. When I pull away and think I can do this by myself, I discover I'm in the belly of my selfish fish. I realize that God's purpose for my mission and my purpose are two very different concepts. God working through my actions can take a very different path than where I am headed. But the end result is still the same, God's relationship with others is restored and strengthened.

My prayer for you this week is that you will awakened to the voice of God. Once you hear God's voice, I pray that you will run to God rather than away from God. God has a special plan that only you can fulfill. If you're not ready now, don't worry, God will wait but be assured God will find you. Evil still exists and God has seen it at it's worst. God is ready to destroy evil and calls you to lead and follow so others can return to the love and peace of God. God will protect you when you answer your call to be a faithful servant. Come and see the wonders of a society that can be transformed by the love of God. It's an event you won't want to miss, especially if the transformation is yours. Come and see. Amen.