

Better the Easy Way Than the Hard Way

by Chuck Smith

The sermon explores Jonah's struggle with God's call, emphasizing the futility of running from God and the joy of confession and forgiveness.

Duration: 32:54

Scripture: Jonah 1:17

Topics: "Obedience To God", "Gods Forgiveness"

Description

This sermon delves into the story of Jonah, highlighting the lessons learned about obedience, God's all-encompassing presence, and the consequences of trying to run from God's call. It emphasizes the importance of confessing sins, receiving God's forgiveness, and the joy of being freed from guilt and condemnation through Jesus Christ.

Transcript

Let's turn now in our Bibles for our scripture reading today to Psalm 139. I'll read the first and the unnumbered verses. We ask you to join together as you read the even numbered verses and we'll read through verse 12.

139, 1 through 12. Shall we stand as we read the word of God? O Lord, thou hast searched me and known me. Thou knowest my down-sitting and mine up-rising.

Thou understandest my thought afar off. Thou compassest my path, my lying down, and art acquainted with all my ways. For there is not a word in my tongue, but lo, O Lord, thou knowest it altogether.

Thou hast beset me behind and before, and laid thine hand upon me. Such knowledge is too wonderful for me. It is high, I cannot attain unto it.

Whether shall I go from thy spirit, or whether shall I flee from thy presence? If I ascend up into heaven, thou art there. If I make my bed in hell, behold, thou art there. If I take the wings of the morning and dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea, even there shall thy hand lead me, and thy right hand shall hold me.

If I say, surely the darkness shall cover me, even the night shall be light about me. Yea, the darkness hideth not from thee, but the night shineth as the day. The darkness and the light are both alike to thee.

Let's pray. Father, we pray that you'll help us to understand how all-encompassing you are. We can't escape you.

If we ascend into heaven, Lord, you're there. If we descend into hell, you're there. If we take the wings of the morning and we flee to the uttermost part of the sea, even there, Lord, you would surround us.

And so, Lord, conscious of your presence, may we live, Lord, with that consciousness. May we realize, Lord, that you are always there. And we thank you for that.

You're there to help us. You're there to strengthen us. You're there to guide us.

And, Lord, we just pray that we will walk according to your will and according to your purpose. Lead us, Lord, in your path. In Jesus' name we pray.

Amen. You may be seated. Well, as we are continuing our journey through the Bible from Genesis to Revelation, we've come now to the book of Jonah, a very interesting book.

A lot of people have a hard time swallowing it, but the story is told concerning a fellow by the name of Ingersoll. He was a well-known atheist of the last century. He was a very brilliant man, but did not believe in God and was very vociferous about his not believing in the existence of God.

And one day as he was walking with some friends through the Central Park in Chicago on lunch hour, there was this little Salvation Army lassie who was witnessing to a group of people, and so he thought that he would have some sport and just really get her all twisted and mixed up and so forth. And so he stopped to listen for a moment, and then he interrupted her and he said, wait a minute, young lady, wait a minute. Tell me this.

Do you really believe that the Bible is the Word of God? And she said, oh, yes, sir. Well, do you believe the whole Bible? She said, well, yes, I do. Well, what about the story of Jonah, he said, and existing there in that great fish for three days and three nights? Do you actually believe that happened? She said, well, it's in the Bible.

I believe it. She said, well, what do you suppose he ate those three days and three nights? She said, well, sir, I really don't know, but when I get to heaven, I'll ask him. She said, but what if he's not in heaven? She said, well, then you can ask him.

The story of Jonah, of course, is conserved. It is confirmed by none other than Jesus. Jesus made a couple of mentions of Jonah.

He said, as Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of the whale, so shall the Son of Man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth. And again, he said, the men of Nineveh shall rise with this generation in the great resurrection, for they repented at the preaching of Jonah, and a greater than Jonah is here. So Jesus confirmed the story of Jonah.

But people who say they have a problem with the story of Jonah really don't have a problem with the story of Jonah. Their problem is their concept of God. Their concept of God is just too small.

Their God could not create a fish that could swallow and hold a man for three days and then deposit him upon the beach. But that's their problem. It's their concept of God.

And yet, if you ask them, well, do you believe that man could build a large fish type of looking vessel that could hold men, several men, and submerge underwater, travel for many miles, and then surface and deposit them on a far distant shore? And you say, oh yes, of course, we know that's happened all the time with submarines. Well, do you believe then that man is capable of doing what God is not capable of doing? That if man can make such a machine, don't you think that God could create such a animal or fish that could do the same swallow a man and hold him for three days and then deposit him? The story of Jonah is a fascinating story. And, of course, I think of the little boy who came home from Sunday school.

And the mother said, well, what did you learn in Sunday school today? She said, well, the teacher told us the story about this man, a prophet of God, who was trying to run away from God. And God actually he was trying to take a boat and go to the far parts of the earth. And the storm came up.

And so he told the captain, throw me over and everything will be okay. And so the captain reluctantly threw him overboard. And he was swallowed.

Actually, he was thrown overboard. And this submarine emerged and the captain of the submarine sent a little boat out to get him, put him in the sub and took him onto the next port. And the mother said, well, honey, are you sure that's the way the story went? And he said, well, mom, not quite.

But he said, if I told you the way my teacher told me, you'd never believe it. And so as I say, the problem is your concept of God. Is the God that you believe and serve capable of doing something like that? And the God that I believe and serve, no problem.

He could create, if he wanted, a trident submarine or whatever, and create a great fish to swallow Jonah and to deposit him on a distant shore. So the Bible tells us that God prepared this great fish. And I believe that God is capable of doing that.

But actually, that isn't the only miracle in this story of Jonah. In verse four of chapter one, the Lord sent out a great wind into the sea, and there was a mighty storm. And verse five, it tells us that in the storm, Jonah was down in the hold of the ship, fast asleep.

For him to sleep in that kind of a storm would be some kind of a miracle. In verse seven, when they decided to cast lots to find out who was the one who created this problem for them, the lot fell on Jonah. And this, too, was a miracle.

In verse 15, when they cast Jonah into the sea, it quit its raging, and it was calm. And in verse 17, the Lord prepared this great fish to swallow Jonah. In chapter two, verse 10, the Lord spoke to the fish, and it vomited Jonah up on dry land.

And verse seven, or rather, we read that when Jonah preached to the people, the response of the people, the whole city, a large city, they all repented and sought God in fasting and prayer. And so then we read that the Lord prepared a gourd, and it gave shade to Jonah. And then the Lord prepared a worm that ate the roots, and the gourd died.

And so there are many miracles in this story. God is behind the scenes in all of these activities. And God prepared in the story a great fish.

He prepared a gourd. He prepared a worm. And so the story is filled with miracles of God all the way through.

But Jonah's problem was that he was a true patriot. You see, Assyria was, actually, Nineveh was the capital of Assyria. And Nineveh was a huge city.

It was 16 miles square. It had walls that were 100 feet high, some 30 feet thick, towers that went up to 250 feet. And it was a huge city.

It had over 100,000 inhabitants. And thus, it was a very large city of the ancient times. And the Assyrians were extremely cruel people.

When they would capture a city, they would mutilate the bodies of the people. They would cut off their noses, cut off ears. They would gouge out an eye.

They would cut off the big toes to keep them from running. And they would put hooks through their lips or through their nostrils and lead them as captives. And extremely cruel.

Jonah was a patriot. And the Assyrians were a threat to invade the land of Israel and Judah. And as far as Jonah was concerned, he'd like to see them destroyed.

And so when God said, go to Nineveh and cry out to the city, tell them 40 days, they're going to be destroyed. And preach this message to them. Jonah was afraid that if he went, that the people might repent.

And he knew that God was a merciful, loving, compassionate God. And he figured that if they repented, God might change his mind and not destroy them. So he was afraid of success in the ministry, which kept him from wanting to go to Nineveh.

In fact, he headed off in the opposite direction and got a ship down in Jaffa there to take him to Tarshish, which was the jumping off place, the end of the world. You can't get any further away than Tarshish. Beyond Tarshish was the Atlantic and the great unknown.

And thus Jonah was trying to get just as far away from the call of God as he possibly could. And when God gave him success in his ministry, afterwards Jonah was angry with God. And God said, do you do well to be angry? And Jonah said, yes, you bet I do.

And it says in 310, God saw their works, that is in Nineveh, in their repentance, that they turned from their evil way. And God did not do the evil that he said he would do unto them. And Jonah was exceedingly displeased and very angry.

And he prayed unto the Lord and said, oh Lord, isn't this exactly what I said when I was yet in my country? And this is the reason I tried to flee to Tarshish, for I knew that you are a gracious God, you're merciful, you're slow to anger, and of great kindness, and you would turn from destroying them. And therefore now, oh Lord, kill me. You don't want to kill them, kill me, Lord.

I don't want to live, you know. And he was just really upset that he had such success in his ministry that the whole city actually turned to the Lord. So Jonah, through this whole experience, learned a very valuable lesson, and God was teaching him a lesson.

And this is the lesson that Jonah learned. There in verse 8 of chapter 2, they that observe lying vanities forsake their own mercy. And it's an important lesson to paraphrase it, those who believe a lie are making it hard on themselves.

What were the lying vanities that Jonah was observing? And these are some of them. Jonah believed that he could actually escape the call of God by fleeing to Tarshish. If God has put a call upon your heart, there's no escaping it, there's no running from it, you can't escape it.

If God has called you, the call's gonna be there. But he felt that he could escape the call of God by catching this ship to take him to Tarshish. That he would be able, in verse 3 of chapter 1, to escape from the presence of God.

Thinking of God more or less as localized. God dwells here in this land, but you know, if I can just get to Tarshish, that's a God-forsaken place, you know, and surely God isn't there. And so he could escape the presence of God if he could just get to Tarshish.

Evidently, he didn't really study this Psalm of David that we read this morning, where David talks about how God is everywhere. If I ascend into heaven, thou art there. If I descend into hell, lo, you are there.

If I take the wings of the morning, flee to the uttermost parts of the sea, even there, I'll be surrounded by you. And had he read the Psalm 139, he would have realized that he couldn't escape, even if he got to Tarshish, he couldn't escape from God, that God is everywhere. He felt, in one of the lying vanities, that he had a better plan for his life than God has.

And then he knew better than God what was best for him and for the nation, and that he could resist the work of God and the call of God and still win. So these were the lying vanities that Jonah had embraced. And it is interesting, they are the same lying vanities that many people today are believing.

They believe that they can actually hide from God. They believe that they can actually run from God. They can escape from God.

You can't. God is going to pursue you, and God surrounds you wherever you might be, and you cannot escape from the presence of God, no matter where you might try to flee. But Jonah, you have to admit, was an extremely stubborn man.

He had decided that he was not going to obey God, he wasn't going to go to Nineveh, that he would catch this ship and go the opposite direction, just as far as possible from the call of God. And Tarshish was the end of the world, and beyond Tarshish, just that vast ocean. And so he would rather go there than to go to Nineveh.

So as he was cast over and in this great fish, he was just sitting there for three days saying, I'm not going to go. I'm not going to go. And for three days, until the misery was just so great, he couldn't take it anymore.

But it took three days to break him down. I'll tell you what, it wouldn't have taken me that long. I may be stubborn, but not that.

And Jonah was so stubborn, just sitting there saying, no, no way, I'm not going. But he describes his conditions there in the belly of this great fish. For he said, you have cast me into the deep, in the midst of the seas.

The floods come past me about. All of your billows and your waves passed over me. Then I said, I'm cast out of thy sight.

And yet I will look again toward thy holy temple. The waters come past me about, even to the soul. The depth closed about me, and around about my head seaweed was wrapped around my head.

And I went down to the bottoms of the mountains, and the earth with her bars was about me forever. So can you imagine the conditions? Dark, the water rushing in and out, and just overwhelmed, seaweed wrapped around his head. If it were a whale, a mammal, it was 98.6 degrees, and the humidity was probably at least 100%.

And absolutely, you could not think, and it probably smelled like everything in that fish. And to be there in this miserable condition, three days saying, no, I'm not going. I won't go.

And finally broke him down. And so he decided finally, it says, then, after three days, then he prayed unto the Lord. And so it took three days to break him down.

But yet the Lord did it. And know this, the Lord's not going to give up. If he's after you, you might as well give in, because he's not going to give up until, and he'll make life miserable for you.

He doesn't mind doing that, too. And some of you are going through some miserable situations right now. And maybe you, like Jonah, are just sort of saying, no, I'm not going to give up, you know, I'm not going to change.

But the valuable lesson, they that observe lying vanities forsake their own mercy. You're making it hard on yourself. You're making it difficult on yourself, if you are observing some kind of a lying vanity.

Do you really think that you can run from God? Do you really think that you can hide from God? Do you really think that you have a better plan for your life than God has for you? You know, if you are believing these lying vanities, you're just making it hard on yourself. You're forsaking your own mercy. What God has for you is so much better than anything you could ever devise for yourself.

And so you are the one who is going to be suffering the most if you seek to run from God. And you're running from your ultimate good that God has for you. You're forsaking your own merciful mercy.

God is a merciful God. And he seeks to, and he delights in, pardoning your sin. With David, when he had sinned against the Lord, he tried to hide his sin.

He tried to cover his sin. And one day the prophet came to David and he gave him this story about this man who had a lot of wealth and a lot of sheep, but his neighbor had company, or his actually neighbor was very poor, had only one little lamb. But this rich man with all of his flocks had company come and he sent his servants who by force took the one little lamb of his neighbor, butchered it so he could feed his guests.

And David, hearing this story, became incensed. He said, that man shall surely be put to death. And Nathan said, David, you are the man.

And David confessed, I have sinned. And the prophet said immediately, and God has pardoned your sin. All it took was the confession.

I have sinned. And the moment the confession was made, the forgiveness was there waiting for him the whole while. And God is waiting for many of you just to confess, I have sinned.

And the moment you confess, forgiveness is right there for you, no matter what the sin is. And with this David, it was a very horrible sin. It was that of adultery and of murder to cover his guilt.

And yet God's forgiveness was right there the moment he said and confessed, I have sinned. But David did describe the misery that he was going through before he confessed his sin. When he was doing his best to hide his guilt from others, he tells us in Psalm 32, when I kept silence, my bones waxed old through my roaring all the day long.

For day and night, your hand was heavy upon me. My spirit was turned as the drought of summer. And then I confess my sin unto thee.

And I no longer tried to hide my iniquity. I said, I will confess my transgressions unto the Lord, and you forgave the iniquity of my sin. The moment the confession was there, the forgiveness was there from his iniquity.

And hearing then the words of the prophet, Nathan, he said, the Lord has put away your sin is probably what prompted David there in Psalm 32, 1 to say, oh, how happy is the man whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered. Carrying that guilt complex, carrying that guilt, that heavy load of guilt for so long, when you finally confess and say, Lord, forgive me, the forgiveness is there instantly, the load is lifted, and the misery that sin brings is suddenly transformed. And oh, how happy it is to have that load lifted off, the sense of guilt and all that I had for so long lifted off, and I'm freed from that.

And you can know that joy and that happiness today, if you will just but confess your sins. He is faithful and just, the Bible said, to forgive us of our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. So it really doesn't matter what's on that guilt list.

It really doesn't matter what you have done. The moment you confess it, the forgiveness is there for you, and the Lord will wipe the slate clean. And you can go from here today with a clean slate.

There is therefore now no condemnation to those that are in Christ Jesus, and can remove the guilt, the condemnation that you're feeling because of what you have done, that can be taken away today, if you will just but confess and ask him to forgive. It's as close as your mouth. You know, don't say that salvation is far off, who's going to go bring it back for us.

It's as near as your mouth, for if you will confess with your mouth that Jesus Christ is Lord, and just believe in your heart that God is raising from the dead, you'll be saved. So what a great offer and glorious offer God is making to us today, if we will just but receive it, it's there available for each. Father, we thank you for this glorious salvation that you've provided so freely for us today.

And Lord, all it takes is just the confession of our guilt and of our sin, and the asking of you to forgive. And Lord, before we can get the words out of our mouth, it's already done. And so Lord, you see our hearts, you see our conditions, you see our needs.

Lord, we pray that you'll just really minister this day to many who are here, who are carrying a heavy load of guilt and of sin and of the past. And Lord, may they this day find that freedom, that joy, all the blessedness of knowing that their sins are forgiven, that their sins have been covered. And Lord, that you have granted pardon and forgiveness through Jesus Christ, your Son, our Lord, our Savior.

In his name we pray. Amen. Shall we stand? The pastors are down here at the front to pray for you today.

If I have been describing maybe some of the feelings that you've had because of your sin and the guilt that you are feeling because of that, the Lord is here today to forgive, to cleanse, to pardon. And this salvation is for you just to receive. And that's all that's necessary, is just to open your heart and to receive the love of God and the forgiveness through Jesus Christ.

So the pastors are down here to assist you, to pray with you, to help you, to lead you into a real relationship with God, our Father, made possible through Jesus Christ, made possible by his death for your sin and the removing of that which is standing in the way of you really knowing the full joy and blessings and peace of God within your life today. So we would encourage you, come on forward if you're in need of God's forgiveness today. And you can go from this place today, lighter than what you came in, for that heavy load of sin can be lifted off and you can go forth free from sin, from the guilt, from the condemnation of what has been done in the past.

The Lord will wipe it out today. Just give him that opportunity to do so. The Lord bless thee.

The Lord make his face to shine upon thee, and be gracious unto thee, and be gracious unto thee. The Lord lift up his countenance upon thee, and bless you.

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