

# Learning the Hard Way

by Chuck Smith

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*The sermon teaches that trying to run from God's call on your life and hiding from God's presence will only lead to misery and discomfort, but surrendering to God's will is the wisest thing to do.*

**Duration:** 29:07

**Topics:** "Gods Sovereignty", "Repentance"

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## Description

This sermon delves into the story of Jonah, emphasizing the importance of not running from God's call and the consequences of believing lying vanities. It highlights Jonah's stubbornness, the miracles in the story, the repentance of Nineveh, and the lesson Jonah learned about forsaking his own mercies by resisting God. The message encourages surrendering to God's will, acknowledging His mercy, and not trying to hide or escape from Him.

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## Transcript

That fascinating story and tonight Pastor Skip will lead us through the book of Jonah. So we encourage you to read it this afternoon. I believe that the Lord has something to say to each one of you in the book of Jonah.

Now it's probably something different to each one. It's a wonderful thing how that we can read the word of God and it will speak to me in one issue, but it will speak to you in another issue. Whenever I open the word to read, I'm looking for what God has to say to me through this passage that I'm reading today.

And so as I read through Jonah, I say, Lord, what do you have to say to me in this story of Jonah today? Speak to me, Lord, as I read. And if you will read with an expectant heart, I know that God will speak to you. Come tonight and let the Lord speak to you through this book of Jonah as Pastor Skip will be leading us in our study through the book.

This story of Jonah is a very interesting story and many people have a very hard time swallowing it. The story is told of Ingersoll, who was a very intellectual man of the last generation. He was a about atheist and he was walking through the Central Park in Chicago one day with some of his business associates.

There was a young girl there who was sharing her witness for Jesus Christ to a small crowd who had assembled around her. He thought he would make sport of her, pitting his gigantic intellect against her simple faith. In the Bible.

So as she was sharing her testimony of Jesus Christ, he interrupted and he said, wait a minute, young lady, wait a minute. Are you trying to tell us that you believe that the Bible is the Word of God? And she said, well, yes, sir, I do believe that the Bible is the Word of God. Then do you believe that the whole Bible is true? Well, yes, if it's in the Bible, I do believe it's true.

Well, what about that story of Jonah? Do you actually believe that that story is true that he was swallowed by a whale and for three days and three nights was there in the whale until it vomited him up on the shore? She said, well, sir, that is a story in the Bible, and I do believe that it actually happened. Yes, it is true. He said, well, what do you think he ate for those three days and three nights? She said, well, the Bible doesn't tell us, but when I get to heaven, I'll ask him.

He said, oh, what if he's not in heaven? She said, well, then I suggest you ask him. But, you know, people really don't have a problem with the story of Jonah. Their problem is with their concept of God.

Their concept of God is much too small, and it is a small concept of God that will create difficulty with the story of Jonah. But if you have a true and right concept of God, you should have no problem with the book of Jonah at all. If the God of the Bible was able to create our entire universe, all of the life forms within it, surely he could create a whale or a great fish, whatever it were, to swallow Jonah and to later place him on the shore after journeying for three days and three nights.

Do you believe that men can create a ship and that many men can enter that ship and it can leave port and submerge and go underwater for several days and then surface again, and those men can disembark at another port miles away? Do you believe that actually can happen, that man could actually build such a ship? You say, well, of course, you know, we've had submarines now for many years. Oh, then you actually believe that man has a greater capacity than God. If man can create such a vessel, why should it be difficult for God to create such a vessel? A little boy came home from Sunday school and his mother said, well, what did you learn in Sunday school today? He said, oh, the teacher taught us about a prophet named Jonah.

God called him to go to Nineveh, but he didn't want to. So he went down and he got a ship to go away from God and to escape from God so that he wouldn't have to go to Nineveh. But there was a big storm and after they had thrown everything off of the ship, they found him fast asleep down in the hold of the ship, and so he said, fellas, it's my fault.

Throw me over and the storm will all subside. So they threw him over, and just at that time, a submarine surfaced, and the captain ordered the crew to bring him on board, and they submerged again, and the submarine took off for the area of Assyria and deposited Jonah on the shores near Assyria. The mother said, are you sure that that's the way the teacher told you the story? He said, well, no, that's not quite the way she told me, but if I told you the story like she told me, you wouldn't believe it.

It is interesting how people seem to have a difficult time believing that God can do all of the things that the Bible said that he can do, but it's because they have a problem with their concept of God. The story tells us that God did prepare a large fish. Surely that shouldn't be something that we would have difficulty with.

We look at the large animals and all that God has created, and surely he could create a special fish for this purpose. But it's not the only miracle in the story of Jonah. In chapter one, verse four, we read that as he was on this ship, that a great storm, God raised up a great wind, and there was a mighty tempest.

Verse five tells us that in the storm, Jonah was fast asleep down in the hold of the ship. I'd say that's sort of a miracle, to be able to be in a little ship in this huge storm and be sleeping down in the hold. Verse seven tells us that when they were reluctant to throw Jonah overboard, they cast lots to see whose fault this storm was, and the lot fell on Jonah.

In verse 15, it said that they cast Jonah into the sea, and immediately there was a great calm. The storm was over. Verse 17, of course, God prepared the great fish to swallow Jonah.

And then chapter two, verse 10, the Lord spoke to the fish. It vomited Jonah on dry land. Another miracle is the response of the people of Nineveh to the preaching of Jonah.

He was a bitter man. He wasn't a loving prophet, but he was angry. He hated the job that God had called him to do, and he had only one monotonous message.

In 40 days, you're going to be destroyed, and he said it with sort of a smack of the lips, good riddance. Forty days comes destruction. The miracle is that they repented at this preaching of Jonah.

There was no promise that if you repent, God will be merciful. There was no hope in the message that he gave. He didn't talk about a God of love, but only a God who in 40 days was going to bring judgment upon them, and yet they repented at the preaching of Jonah.

No wonder Jesus said, the men of Nineveh will rise in this generation, with this generation, and they will condemn it, because they repented at the preaching of Jonah, and behold, the greater than Jonah is here. In the story, we do read in chapter 4, verse 6, that God prepared a gourd, grew up overnight, and gave shade to Jonah from the hot sun. In verse 7, it says that God prepared a worm that ate the gourd, and his shelter was taken away.

And so, in the story, God has prepared a great fish, God has prepared a gourd, God has prepared a worm. The problem with Jonah is that he was a true patriot. Assyria, of which Nineveh was the capital of Assyria, were a very--the Assyrians were a very cruel people.

It is known from history that when they would capture a city, they would physically mutilate the inhabitants of that city. They would gouge out an eye, they would cut off their ears, they would cut out their tongues, they would cut off their noses, and they were extremely cruel. And they were a threat to Israel.

They were a threat to invade Israel. And so, God saying, go and preach to Nineveh. Jonah, being a true patriot, loving Israel and knowing the cruelty of the Assyrians, decided, no way am I going to go to Nineveh.

No way will I preach to them, because I know God. I know that He is loving. I know that He is merciful.

I know that He's gracious. And if I preach to them, I might be successful. They might believe.

They might repent, and God won't destroy them. And he wanted to see them destroyed, and so that's why he decided that he would escape the call of God. He would run from the presence of God.

Rather than going to Nineveh, he would go as far from Nineveh as was humanly possible, and that would be Tarshish. Tarshish was the other end of the world, as far as the world was concerned. Beyond that, the vast Atlantic Ocean, and no one knew where that might lead.

And so he was going to go to the furthest place possible, humanly possible at that time. He would go to Tarshish and hide from the call of God upon his heart. When Jonah was successful, and the people did repent, we read in chapter 3, verse 10, God saw their works.

They turned from their evil way, and God did not do the evil that He had said that He would do to them. And Jonah was exceedingly displeased and very angry--angry at success in the ministry. And he prayed unto the Lord and said, O Lord, isn't this exactly what I said when I was still in my country? This is the reason I tried to flee to Tarshish, because I knew that You are a gracious God and merciful.

You are slow to anger and of great kindness, and I felt You would turn from destroying them. Now therefore, O Lord, kill me, for I would rather die than live. Jonah is not a happy camper.

He was too successful in the ministry. Now Jonah, through a very miserable time and experience, learned an important lesson, a lesson that we all need to know, a lesson that you as Jonah can learn the hard way, or you can learn it an easy way. Just believe it, because God said it.

And Jonah tells us the lesson that he learned there in chapter 2, verse 8. They that observe lying vanities forsake their own mercies. That's an important truth that we all need to know. If you are believing a lie, then you're only forsaking what's best for you.

Your own mercies. What were the lies that Jonah was believing? Well, he was believing that he could run from the call of God upon his life. God said, Go to Nineveh, that great city, and he headed for Tarshish, that last outpost of the known world, trying to escape from the call of God upon his life.

It's a lie to think that you can escape the call of God on your life. The Bible tells us that the callings of God are without repentance. He doesn't change.

You can't escape it. Secondly, he felt that he could escape from the presence of God, sort of thinking that God was localized. This is the land of God.

If I can get to Tarshish, I can be far away from God. Evidently, he didn't know or didn't believe the Psalm of David in Psalm 139, where David said, Where can I go from your spirit? Or where can I flee from your presence? If I ascend into heaven, you're there. If I make my bed in hell, behold, you are there.

If I take the wings of the morning, and I dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea, which Jonah was attempting to do, even there your hand will lead me, and your right hand will hold me. Another lying vanity is that he felt he knew what was best for him. He knew better than God what was best for him.

He thought that he could fight against God's will and win. The prophet Jonah has to be a very stubborn man. He decided he was not going to obey the call of God to go to Nineveh.

He was seeking to get as far away from Nineveh as was humanly possible. He'd rather just be there in that far outpost of the world than to obey the command of God. When he was on the ship, he told the fellows, throw me over and things will be okay.

I would rather die, he is saying, here in the Mediterranean. I'd rather drown than obey the command of God. I won't go to Nineveh.

I'll drown before I go to Nineveh. And stubbornly, he allowed them to throw him overboard, thinking I'd rather be dead than to obey God. But God wasn't through with him.

God prepared this great fish, and it swallowed Jonah. Now, the conditions must have been extremely miserable. If it were indeed a whale that was a mammal, the temperature would be 98.6. The humidity would be humongous.

He was probably very seasick. The stench must have been atrocious. The whale was diving into the depths and surfacing, salt water slopping over him, the seaweed wrapped around his head.

And he sat there. He actually said he thought he was in hell. Probably felt like that with the heat and humidity and just the misery.

But the amazing thing to me is that he sat in those miserable conditions for three days saying, I'll not go. I don't care. I'm not going.

Three days to break him. It says, and after three days, Jonah prayed unto the Lord. It took him three days before he prayed, figuring, I guess I'm going to stay in this thing forever or, you know, I better go and get out.

So, God broke him. Jonah describes his own experiences there in chapter two. He said to God, you've cast me into the deep, into 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, yet I will look toward thy holy temple.

The waters come past me about, even to the soul. The depth closed me round about and the seaweed was wrapped around my head. I went down to the bottom of the mountains and the earth with her bars was about me forever.

But there he learned a valuable lesson. Learned it the hard way to be sure. But he learned that they that observe lying vanities make it tough on themselves.

They forsake their own mercies. The question, are you observing a lying vanity today? Do you think that you can run from God? Do you think that you can hide from God? Do you think that your plan for your life is better than the plan that God has for your life? Are you resisting the voice of the Holy Spirit that speaks to your heart and seeks to guide you in God's path? If you are, you're only making it hard on yourself. You're only headed for misery, discomfort.

You're inviting trouble to your life because you are the one who is going to suffer the most if you seek to run from God. You're running from your ultimate good. You're forsaking your own mercy.

What God wants for you is the best thing that could ever happen to you. God said to Jeremiah, I know my thoughts toward you. They are not evil.

They are good. I have a great future for you. And the wisest thing any of us can do is just to submit ourselves.

We may not understand what God is calling us to do, but if we will be obedient, we will discover the best that could ever happen to us doing God's will. God is merciful. Jonah knew that.

God is gracious. Jonah knew that. God will forgive those that repent.

Jonah knew that. That's why he didn't want to go. He wanted to see the Assyrians destroyed rather than be forgiven their iniquities.

God is a merciful God. One of the characteristics, don't we read it in the Bible over and over, how that the mercies of God endure forever and ever. Remember when David had committed that terrible sin and transgression? He began his prayer saying, have mercy upon me, O God.

According to the multitude of thy tender mercies, blot out my transgressions. And I can assure you today, God is merciful. And if you will call upon him, he will blot out your transgressions.

Maybe you've been trying to run from God or hide from the call of God upon your life. But if you will just surrender, you'll find that God will use you and God will bless you. And ultimately, you'll discover it's the best thing that ever happened to you is submitting to God's will and not to do is to forsake the best life you could possibly have.

Up to you. You can learn this lesson that Jonah learned by just believing it. Or you can learn it the hard way and you can have your own whale experience, if that's what it'll take to bring you around.

But I always say, make it easy on yourself. Just accept it. You can't hide from God.

You can't escape from God. Sooner or later, you're going to meet God and you'll meet him as an enemy or as a friend. It's up to you.

Father, we thank you for this story that teaches us so many important lessons, the chief of them being that if we are observing a lying vanity, we are forsaking our own mercies, the good that you have and desire for us. And so may we, Lord, surrender ourselves to your will and your plan and purpose for our lives. In Jesus' name, we pray.

Amen. Shall we stand? The pastors are down here at the front to minister to you today, who sort of say, wow, I'm a Jonah.

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