

I. Introduction

Good morning! In **John 7:37**, Jesus invited the people to come to Him for salvation. The Scripture says, **“On the last and greatest day of the Feast, Jesus stood and said in a loud voice, “If anyone is thirsty, let him come to me and drink.”** Many of those who heard this believed in Jesus, or at least were convinced that Jesus was a prophet sent by God. But when Nicodemus urged his fellow Pharisees to listen to Jesus before judging, they scoffed. **John 7:52**, **“They replied, “Are you from Galilee, too? Look into it, and you will find that a prophet does not come out of Galilee.””**



Instead of going to Jesus to receive, they turned away from Him. The Pharisees also got their facts wrong. Even though they had a reputation for knowing the Scriptures, in their haste to reject Jesus, they argued that no prophet comes from Galilee. But they were wrong. Does anyone know which Old Testament prophet was from Galilee?

Let’s take a look at **2 Kings 14:23-25**, **“In the fifteenth year of Amaziah son of Joash king of Judah, Jeroboam son of Jehoash king of Israel became king in Samaria, and he reigned forty-one years. He did evil in the eyes of the LORD and did not turn away from any of the sins of Jeroboam son of Nebat, which he had caused Israel to commit. He was the one who restored the boundaries of Israel from Lebo Hamath to the Sea of the Arabah, in accordance with the word of the LORD, the God of Israel, spoken through his servant Jonah son of Amittai, the prophet from Gath Hopher.”**

This reading introduces the prophet Jonah, son of Amittai. Jonah was from Gath Hopher - a small town in Galilee, quite close to Jesus’s hometown of Nazareth. Somehow the Pharisees had forgotten this, perhaps because they disliked Jonah. Like Jesus, Jonah preached to both Jews and Gentiles. This passage from 2 Kings also introduces King Jeroboam, son of Jehoash. This is the second King Jeroboam to arise in Israel. He was a powerful king, but he did evil in the eyes of the Lord. Jonah prophesied roughly from 800 BC to 750 BC, a time span that includes all of the reign of Jeroboam, and a few years before and after.

For the next five weeks, we will be going through the book of Jonah. I think we will find that the Book of Jonah is, as one person put it, *“A Story of God’s Relentless Grace.”* Unlike many of the prophetic books, Jonah is mostly history, including some history that foreshadows the coming of Jesus. Only a few of Jonah’s prophetic words are recorded, most of the book simply tells the story of Jonah’s missionary trip to Nineveh. But, as we will see, Jonah was not an enthusiastic missionary. Let’s begin by reading Jonah 1:1-3.

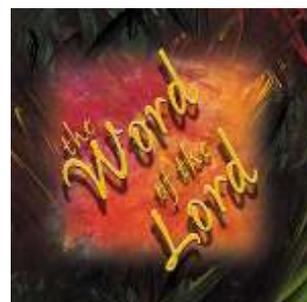


II. Scripture Reading (Jonah 1:1-3, NIV 1984)

1 The word of the LORD came to Jonah son of Amittai: 2 "Go to the great city of Nineveh and preach against it, because its wickedness has come up before me." 3 But Jonah ran away from the LORD and headed for Tarshish. He went down to Joppa, where he found a ship bound for that port. After paying the fare, he went aboard and sailed for Tarshish to flee from the LORD.

III. Teaching

Let’s take a closer look. **Jonah 1:1**, **“The word of the LORD came to Jonah son of Amittai.”** Prophetic ministry does not come from the wisdom or efforts of the prophet. Prophetic ministry comes from the Lord. Throughout the Bible, the work of the prophets is introduced by stating that the, **“The word of the Lord came.”** Some people try to become prophets through their own efforts,



but the work of man leads to false prophecy and error. We need to be careful when we hear of prophets in the church. We want to joyfully receive the word of the Lord, but there are always false prophets out there also, so we have to use discernment and caution.

The Lord spoke to Jonah and commanded him (**Jonah 1:2**), **“Go to the great city of Nineveh and preach against it, because its wickedness has come up before me.”** The Lord sees all and knows all, but sometimes He focuses on a particular person or place. Now, the wickedness of Nineveh had grown to become a stench before God. But instead of destroying the city, God chooses a prophet of Israel and commands him to go and preach to the people of Nineveh.



By the way, Nineveh is called a great city in this verse, and historians and archeologists have confirmed this. The ruins of Nineveh lay buried and forgotten for centuries, but in 1846, Austin Henry Layard began excavations at the site where Nineveh once stood and his work and the work of others after him has demonstrated that Nineveh was indeed a large and magnificent city, one of the greatest of its time. I brought a couple of maps and a photo to give us the basic idea.

This map shows the location of Nineveh, which is in northern Iraq, next to the modern city of Mosul. As you can see, Nineveh is about 1,000 kilometers northeast of Israel.



If we zoom in and use the satellite view, we can see the places where excavations have been going on around the walls of Nineveh. I have also placed a map of what Nineveh would have looked like when it was a thriving city alongside the satellite photo for comparison. Nineveh is a very ancient city, first mentioned in the Bible in Genesis 10:11 and many times after that. Scholars believe that people have lived at the site of Nineveh for 8,000 years and that it has been a significant city for 5,000 years.



There were fifteen gates leading into Nineveh; here is a photo of one of the restored gates. As you can see, the city was surrounded by a massive wall that protected it from its enemies. Nineveh had a reputation for being a very violent city and history records that the kings of the city were frequently at war. Archeology has also confirmed the warlike culture of Nineveh; the city is full of engraved scenes of violence.



The Lord commanded Jonah to go and preach against Nineveh because of the wickedness there. How did Jonah respond to God’s command? **Jonah 1:3**, **“But Jonah ran away from the LORD and headed for Tarshish. He went down to Joppa, where he found a ship bound for that port. After paying the fare, he went aboard and sailed for Tarshish to flee from the LORD.”**

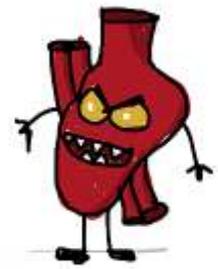
The word of the Lord came to Jonah, but Jonah ran away. The exact location of Tarshish is debated by scholars, but we do know that it was a great distance away to the west – the opposite direction from the way to Nineveh. Jonah ran away from the Lord as fast as he could go.

Jonah went to Joppa, a port now known as Jaffa, and got on a ship and sailed away. It is hard to know for sure what Jonah was thinking at this time, although there are some hints later in the book. Regardless of what his reasoning was, Jonah was running from the Lord.



The end of the year is a good time for reflection. Think about this past year. Have you been faithful in your walk with the Lord? Or have you been running away? Since you are here this morning, I am sure that you have not sailed for Tarshish. But running from the Lord and His commands does not always involve getting on a boat and sailing away.

Often we run from the Lord in our hearts and in our lives. Are there things in our lives that we do not submit to God? Most human hearts have at least a few pools of rebellion and swamps of pride hidden inside. In fact, the Bible puts it more strongly than that. **Jeremiah 17:9**, says, **“The heart is deceitful above all things and beyond cure. Who can understand it?”**



But God is watching our hearts. **Jeremiah 17:10** says, **“I the LORD search the heart and examine the mind, to reward a man according to his conduct, according to what his deeds deserve.”** God searches our hearts and examines our thoughts. We can’t really run away from God; I am sure Jonah knew this also, but, because of our emotions, sometimes we try to do things that we know will not succeed.

In **Psalm 139:7-10**, we read, **“Where can I go from your Spirit? Where can I flee from your presence? If I go up to the heavens, you are there; if I make my bed in the depths, you are there. If I rise on the wings of the dawn, if I settle on the far side of the sea, even there your hand will guide me, your right hand will hold me fast.”** Wherever we go, the Lord is already there. When we trust and obey His word, it is a great comfort to know He is with us. But, if we are in rebellion, the Lord’s presence is difficult to stand. When we are disobedient to God’s word, we want to hide or run away.

Do you try to hide from God sometimes? Or do you try to run away from His presence? It doesn’t work does it? Wherever we are, God sees us. Wherever we run, He is already waiting for us.



Jonah ran away. Most of us already know how that turned out. Jonah learned the lesson revealed in **Jeremiah 23:23-24**, **“Am I only a God nearby,’ declares the LORD, ‘and not a God far away? Can anyone hide in secret places so that I cannot see him?’ declares the LORD. ‘Do not I fill heaven and earth?’ declares the LORD.”**

Jonah ran away because God asked him to do something he was unwilling to do. Jonah was not willing to go and preach to the people of Nineveh. Jonah might have been concerned for his own safety, but in the rest of the book, Jonah is courageous, so maybe this was not the issue. The problem was that the people of Nineveh were Gentiles and they had long been enemies of Israel. Jonah likely thought they did not deserve to hear God’s message. Jonah probably longed for the destruction of these enemies of Israel.

During the past year, or even today, has God been asking you to do something that you don’t want to do? Is there an area of your life where you have been in rebellion and have long-delayed your obedience to God’s word? If we have such areas in our hearts and lives, today is a good day to repent and turn back to God. Instead of running away from God; we should run to God with our struggles, trusting in His love.

We can join the psalmist in his prayer from **Psalm 86:3-5**, **“Have mercy on me, O Lord, for I call to you all day long. Bring joy to your servant, for to you, O Lord, I lift up my soul. You are forgiving and good, O Lord, abounding in love to all who call to you.”** The Lord will forgive and restore us, even as we repent and turn to Him in obedience.

IV. Conclusion

As we continue through the book of Jonah, we will see how much God loved Jonah and the people of Nineveh as well. God was calling Jonah to a ministry he did not want, but the ultimate purpose was to reveal the love and mercy of God even more. The Lord will not abandon the runaway Jonah, and He had not yet given up on the people of Nineveh either. Many in Israel wondered why God had not destroyed their enemies, but God is eager to share His mercy and grace with all, including even the people of Nineveh, enemies of Israel. As **2 Peter 3:9** proclaims, **“The Lord is not slow in keeping his promise, as some understand slowness. He is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance.”**

V. Prayer