

Can You Hide From God?

Jonah 1:1-6

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⁴ But the Lord hurled a great wind upon the sea, and there was a mighty tempest on the sea, so that the ship threatened to break up. ⁵ Then the mariners were afraid, and each cried out to his god. And they hurled the cargo that was in the ship into the sea to lighten it for them. But Jonah had gone down into the inner part of the ship and had lain down and was fast asleep. ⁶ So the captain came and said to him, “What do you mean, you sleeper? Arise, call out to your god! Perhaps the god will give a thought to us, that we may not perish.”

Can you hide from God?

Can your thoughts, your inner most desires, your actions, your whereabouts can they be hidden from God?

The Bible tells us that nothing escapes God. No one can hide from God. No place is closed off to God that he cannot see it. God has an unfiltered view of you and I. God cannot be lied to. When Adam sinned against God, he and his wife tried to hide from God. But God said to them, “Adam, where are you?”. God wasn’t asking him his geographical location. God knew exactly where they were. Their hearts had gone far away from their Maker.

Hear what God says through the prophet Jeremiah, “*Can a man hide himself in secret places so that I cannot see him? declares the Lord. Do I not fill heaven and earth? declares the Lord*” Jeremiah 23:24

“Even before a word is on my tongue, behold, O Lord, you know it altogether.” Psalm 139: 4

For believers, God’s intimate knowledge of us is good news. Good news because Jesus said if God’s eye is on the sparrow, surely God’s eye is on you to care for you. When you go through life’s trials or when you think there is no one who cares, there is one who cares more than a mother can. God’s compassion never fails.

“For the eyes of the Lord run to and fro throughout the whole earth, to give strong support to those whose heart is blameless toward him.” 2 Chronicles 16:9.

If you want support from God, faithfulness is the key.

However, God's omniscience is terrible news for evil, wicked and rebellious people. Jesus said, "fear him who cast both body and soul into hell". (Matthew 10:28).

"For his eyes are on the ways of a man, and he sees all his steps. ²² There is no gloom or deep darkness where evildoers may hide themselves. ²³ For God has no need to consider a man further, that he should go before God in judgment. ²⁴ He shatters the mighty without investigation and sets others in their place. ²⁵ Thus, knowing their works, he overturns them in the night, and they are crushed. ²⁶ He strikes them for their wickedness in a place for all to see, ²⁷ because they turned aside from following him and had no regard for any of his ways" Job 34:21-27

"Even if they dig down to the place of the dead, I will reach down and pull them up. Even if they climb up into the heavens, I will bring them down." Amos 9:2 (NLT)

"And no creature is hidden from his sight, but all are naked and exposed to the eyes of him to whom we must give account" Hebrew 4:13

And here in our passage, as we begin this series in the book of Jonah, we see a man running away and hiding from God. Or so it appears. And this man is Jonah.

Who is Jonah? Jonah is a prophet of God. By the way, there are no prophets of God anymore. If someone uses the prophet to attach to their name, they are probably being fancy about it. All the real prophets have passed on.

The Bible tells us who a prophet is. A prophet's job description was to act as God's mouthpiece. The prophet himself had no choice to modify the message of God. Many times, the prophets of old would bring a warning, bring a message of impending disaster, forecast future events. And if indeed that prophet was a true prophet, that message would have to be fulfilled with one hundred percent accuracy. There are times kings would call on prophets to give them a favorable message but true prophets would refuse to do so. The prophets would say something like, "whatever God says I will say, no more no less". (2 Chronicles 18:13). Even if that message meant the king would die.

Here is how they would know if someone was a true prophet or not. *"when a prophet speaks in the name of the Lord, if the word does not come to pass or come true, that is a word that the Lord has not spoken; the prophet has spoken it presumptuously. You need not be afraid of him"* Deuteronomy 18:22
So, being a prophet was quite a serious task, a very high calling. Jonah was that kind of prophet. A prophet chosen by God himself. Jonah lived during the 7th century B.C during the time of king Jeroboam II (2 Kings 14:25).

God has a mission for Jonah. What was the mission? A mission for Jonah to travel outside of Israel into

Assyria. Into the city of Nineveh. We have a map to give you a sense of geography. Assyria is the modern day Syria, Iraq, Iran and Turkey together.

Let's look at verses *one* through *three*.

Now the word of the Lord came to Jonah the son of Amittai, saying, ² "Arise, go to Nineveh, that great city, and call out against it, for their evil has come up before me." ³ But Jonah rose to flee to Tarshish from the presence of the Lord. He went down to Joppa and found a ship going to Tarshish. So he paid the fare and went down into it, to go with them to Tarshish, away from the presence of the Lord.

Here you see the task God has for Jonah – to call out against Nineveh. Meaning Jonah needs to go to Nineveh and tell the Ninevites that are not in good shape. Their moral condition has gone to such low levels that God has decided to intervene and bring disaster on them. And that is exactly why God wants to Jonah to go to Nineveh. Verse *two* "because their evil has come before me". This is a situation that is very similar to Sodom and Gomorrah.

We are told that "*..the men of Sodom were wicked, great sinners against the Lord.*" *Genesis 13:13*. And God sent his angels to destroy that city (*Genesis 19:13*).

The situation in Nineveh is very similar to what we see all around us today.

Not a day passes without some new form of evil or depravity. Whether it's the drugs or the debauchery or the ideological agenda of godless people. Who is going to warn and plead with people who know nothing but darkness? Jesus said, "you are the light of the world". For you to be light you must be walking in the light. And this world is saying that darkness is their truth. And they are fighting to be in darkness. But when you look at the outcome, what do you see? Dismay, tears, sorrow and death.

So the sin of Ninevites came to God's attention. And God wants Jonah to deliver a message.

However, what does Jonah do?

Jonah does exactly the opposite. God tells him to go East and Jonah goes West. This is very unusual of a prophet of God. Jonah is not a non-Israelite. He knows God. He was chosen by God to be his prophet. Jonah is clear about his mission. And yet he deliberately tries to run away from God's mission.

What does he do? Instead of going to Nineveh, he flees to another city. He goes to the port city of Joppa. And there he buys a ticket to get on a ship and wants to go to Tarshish.

And you see in verse *three* twice the words "*away from the presence of the Lord*". Another phrase you see in verse *two* is "*..he paid the fare and went down into it*". His mission was not an easy one. His mission was to be a messenger of the Lord. He could face adversity or resistance from the people of Nineveh or even death by giving them God's message. But the Lord was going to be with him when he goes on this mission. So, in that sense, to disobey God is to run and hide from God.

It's a wonderful thing to come together on a Sunday and worship God together. I wonder how many

Christian people are out there who would rather buy all kinds of tickets to movie halls, sports events and all kinds of entertainment on Sundays. True Christians will want to be in the presence of God – singing, praising, worshipping, hearing his Word and growing in faith.

So Jonah consciously and deliberately disobeys God. And what does the Lord do?

Verses *four* through *six*.

⁴ But the Lord hurled a great wind upon the sea, and there was a mighty tempest on the sea, so that the ship threatened to break up. ⁵ Then the mariners were afraid, and each cried out to his god. And they hurled the cargo that was in the ship into the sea to lighten it for them. But Jonah had gone down into the inner part of the ship and had lain down and was fast asleep.

This is quite an interesting turn of events. Jonah had already gone down into the inner part of the ship. We saw that in verse *two*. But now we know why he wanted to go below deck. He wanted to take a nap. And while he was sleeping, a big storm was causing confusion and fear among the people in this ship. And this is not just a random storm. God caused this storm. And you may be asking. Why does God do this? First of all, God is sovereign over nature. And many times, God uses nature to send a message or a warning. And God is not done with Jonah yet. The storm is there to let Jonah know that God is serious about his mission. After all, the God of Jonah is the God who made the seas, the wind and controls all the weather.

But Jonah wants to have none of God's way. This sounds very strange. Jonah appears *apathetic* and *indifferent* by the events on the deck. The mariners are afraid. They are trying to lighten the load in the ship. Each one prays to his own god. This is not unusual of people who are afraid of losing their lives. Have you ever been in a sticky situation where you try everything to make things better but obey God? Disobedience can take so forms. God tells us to honor father and mother, to not hate or kill, to not cheat, lie or steal or covet. And what tops all those commands is the command to love God first. When disobedience takes root, chaos can be the outcome very quickly.

Jonah knows all this. He is an Israelite prophet. And yet, we see in a very strange way, that he is unaffected by the events on the deck. He knows he cannot run and hide from God. Jonah is like someone who likes to throw a temper tantrum at God.

Finally, someone notices that Jonah is missing from the frantic calls everyone makes to their own god. And this is like an 'all hands on deck' situation. Do whatever you can to make this storm go away. Apparently, none of their prayers had worked.

So, finally the captain goes to Jonah. And the captain is rather shocked at Jonah's behavior. And he tells him to call out to his god.

Look at verse *six*.

⁶So the captain came and said to him, “What do you mean, you sleeper? Arise, call out to your god! Perhaps the god will give a thought to us, that we may not perish.”

This is a desperate effort. Call out to your god. Perhaps the god will give a thought to us that we may not die.

Jonah knows God had called him. But he disobeys, runs and hides from God. And now his own life is in peril. Not just his life but the whole ship is in danger of sinking. This is what sin does. It doesn't just affect you. It affects those around you.

Will Jonah call out to God though?

In the rest of the passage, we will see that Jonah would rather die than call on the Lord.

But that message is for next Sunday Lord willing.

I want to close today's message with a question.

Is God obligated to hear your prayer, particularly when we live in disobedience? No.

When the people of Israel lived in disobedience in Jeremiah's day, hear what God said to Jeremiah about his covenant people. *“Therefore do not pray for this people, or lift up a cry or prayer on their behalf, for I will not listen when they call to me in the time of their trouble. ¹⁵ What right has my beloved in my house, when she has done many vile deeds?”* Jeremiah 11:14.

Israel had gone after other gods and idolatry and God's ear is closed when sin prevails.

But kind of prayer does God hear and respond to?

A penitent prayer. A broken-hearted prayer. A prayer from a contrite heart.

That's the prayer that God hears. (Psalm 51:17).

And God does not hear your prayer because of your own merit or righteousness. He hears your prayer because His Son Jesus Christ perfectly obeyed His Father.

Unlike Jonah, we see example of our Lord Jesus Christ.

This is Jesus speaking from the Gospel of John – *“And he who sent me is with me. He has not left me alone, for I always do the things that are pleasing to him”*. John 8:29

God promised to be with Jonah and yet he disobeyed. God the Father was always with Jesus. And Jesus never disobeyed his Father's will.

Your prayer is heard not because of you but because of the obedience of Jesus. Because he was willing to trade the penalty of your sin with his death, you have access to God. When you call on God in Jesus name with a contrite heart, God hears you.

May the Lord give us strength to obey - *“..take every thought captive to obey Christ”* 2 Corinthians 10:5

----- Discipleship Questions-----

MESSAGE SUMMARY: **Can you hide from God?** Jonah 1:1-6

HEAD: These questions help you examine the truth of God's Word.

1. What do Jonah's actions inform us about deliberately living against God's commandments and his Word? Romans 6:20-23

HEART: These questions help you wrestle with what you believe.

2. Is God obligated to hear any of our requests or prayers when we live contrary to God's Word? Psalm 66:18, Isaiah 59:2, Proverbs 28-29. On what basis would God hear our prayer then? Psalm 51: 17, 1 John 1:9, Revelation 3:19
3. What is God convicting you of and to believe in light of this message?

HANDS/HABITS: These questions help you bring the truth into your everyday life and develop behaviors that change your habits.

4. For personal reflection: What can we learn from Jonah's disobedience and his unwillingness to call on God? 1 Peter 3:17