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**Series: Exposition of Jonah**  
**Message: Prophet on the Run**

**Transcribed Message**  
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John Bunyan's book *Pilgrims Progress*, as you probably already know, is a classic. In fact, it's a book that every Christian should read at some point and probably it's a book that should be on the re-read list as well. It's not really enough to read *Pilgrims Progress* once. It needs to be re-read every so often. It's the most published book next to the Bible in the English language. No other book comes close to the Bible and to *Pilgrims Progress*. If you're familiar with the story, you know that somewhere along the way when Pilgrim is making his journey to the Celestial City, he gets off of the King's Highway, which is to say he steps out of God's will and purpose for his life. He steps off of the King's Highway and he enters into Bypath Meadow. It is in Bypath Meadow that he falls into the hands of the giant Despair who of course is the owner of the Doubting Castle. As Pilgrim looked back on that experience later in his life, he wrote these insightful and perceptive words. He said "Then I thought it is easier going out of the way when we are in than going back when we are out." Then I thought it is easier going out of the way when we are in than going back in when we are out. I don't know about you but I could relate to that. It's easier to stay in the way than it is to find our way back once we stepped out.

Someone who definitely shares that sentiment with us is a man named Jonah. Let's turn again this as we continue our study that we just started last Sunday. We did an introduction then. We look at the first three verses this morning and I think what we want to see in these verses is to experience the blessing of God. Who doesn't want to experience God's blessing in their life? All that that means to experience the blessing of God requires that we submit to and that we obey the word of God. There really is no other way to do that. There are so many choices out there that are offered to us, but ultimately the only way we enjoy the blessing of walking in fellowship with God is when we submit daily and we obey His Word.

In a very quick review, the man that is at the center of all of this whose name is given to us in the book itself is of course Jonah. He's best known, as we saw last week in that little video, for the fish story. He wants us to know him for more things than that. He wants us to know that he was a prophet. He was a prophet of God, a prophet that God used previously to this experience that he encounters here. His book is in a group of books that we often call the minor prophets. There are 12 of them. They're at the end of your Old Testament. They're minor prophets not because they're minor in significance or minor in terms of their importance. They're minor prophets because they're so small. Here's Jonah with 48 verses. Isaiah has more verses in the first two chapters. That's why we call them minor prophets. He is the first prophet, as we noted, who God sent specifically to a Gentile nation. He's the first missionary to a Gentile nation. First missionary prophet. The times in which he lived. Look on the timeline. The time in which he lived was the 8<sup>th</sup> century. Israel, the two northern tribes, were ruled by a man named Jeroboam, who is not a good man. He was an evil man. He was an evil king. It's possible, we don't know, but it's possible that Jonah was a disciple of Elisha. They lived in the same time. He was a contemporary prophet with Hosea and Amos. Hosea and Amos testified and prophesied to the 10 northern tribes. Jonah heard the message of God from Hosea. He heard the message of God from Amos. He was familiar with that. It was a time in which Israel as a nation and as a people they were not walking with God. That's going to be important as we're going to see this morning again.

Then, there's the message of this book. You know, it's so hard to nail down the message of the book, even a short one like this. I think you could say there is the matter of the sovereignty of God. We're going to see that this morning. We'll see it again in our next study. There's the matter of the love of God, the mercy of God that shines through this book. There certainly, as we saw last week, is the missionary heart of God that is a part of this story. In fact, in many ways, it is the lead part of this story. So let's look, having just said that, about the theme. Let's look interestingly this morning at God's sovereign will and a man's determined effort to oppose it. His determined opposition to it.

We begin in the first couple of verses by seeing the call that comes to Jonah and it is first of all the source of that call that I direct you to. "Now the Word of the Lord came

to Jonah the son of Amittai, saying..." Now, we'll just stop right there. The source is identified to us, isn't it? "Now the Word of the Lord came..." It's a very familiar phrase in the prophets of the Old Testament. When God was giving them a message, He was basically saying here is the message that I am giving to you. The Lord is speaking this message to His prophet and this message is to be taken to whomever God has directed them. Obviously, here are instructions to follow and to obey. Sadly, even though Jonah begins that way, "Now the Word of the Lord came to Jonah", there are periods of time in the Old Testament and later in which we read something like this: "Now the Word of the Lord was rare in those days." That was true in 1 Samuel chapter 3 when God spoke to the prophet Samuel. The Word of the Lord was rare in those days. We know that from the whole time of the ending of the Old Testament to the time of the New Testament, what we call the Intertestamental Period and is sometimes called the 400 silent years. There were 400 years in which no prophet of God heard the words that Jonah heard. "Now the Word of the Lord came to Jonah." God is speaking. He is the source. He is the one who is putting out this call to Jonah.

I would say this. For us today, and in a very practical way, the Word of the Lord comes to you and me today through the Word of God and through God's Spirit. The only reason that it would be true in our lives that the Word of the Lord was rare in our life is if we were not finding ourselves in that Word and reading that Word and hearing that Word and listening to that Word on a daily basis. It doesn't need to be said of us today the Word of the Lord was rare in our life. In fact, it should be just the opposite of that. It should be that the Word of the Lord has spoken to us yet again today, because that's why God has given us His Word and He's given us His Spirit. The writer of Hebrews begins his letter and he says in times past, God spoke by means of prophets but He has in this day spoken by means of His son. We have the Living Word and we have the Living Lord. Both of those come to us and speak to our heart.

The recipient of the letter, as we already know, is our friend Jonah. He is the son of Amittai. His name means dove. We're going to find out he does not have very many dove-like thoughts towards Nineveh. His thoughts are more like a screaming war eagle. Maybe a falcon or some kind of a bird of prey would better describe Jonah and his attitude towards Nineveh. He doesn't come off very dove-like in his attitude or heart

towards the people of Nineveh. His father is Amithai. That's the only reference we have. We don't know anything more about his family. He grew up in Gathfer which is right by Nazareth. This is kind of interesting, because remember what we noted last week how Jesus referenced the fact of the connection between Him and Jonah. It's even more than three days and three nights in the belly of the whale. Three days and three nights in the tomb. It is even beyond that because he is a prophet from Nazareth, from Galilee just in the same way that would be true of the Lord Jesus. So we don't know where he was.

We don't know what he was doing when we read in verse 1: "Now the Word of the Lord came to Jonah" but what we do know is this. We do know what God said and the command that comes to Jonah is very clear as it is a threefold command. God said to Jonah. I want you to do three things. Here are three commands as My prophet that I'm calling for you to do. I want you to arise. I want you to go. I want you to cry. If you're using a New International Version, you don't have the word "arise" in there, you just have the two verbs go and cry. In the English Standard Version that we're reading from, you have three different statements: arise and go and cry. I think that it should be understood that way. It reminds me of when a race is about to get started. You have people that are there. On your mark, get set, go. So that's kind of the way I visualize the word "arise". It was something that Jonah needed to do. He needed it to take some steps before he would go. There's a note of urgency in that word "arise". You're going to notice in a couple weeks in verse 6. Look at what verse 6 says: "so the captain of the ship came." so here they are. They're in the midst of the storm. "What do you mean, you sleeper? Arise..." That's the same word and it's expressed, I think, with the same sense of immediacy and the same sense of urgency. Here's a ship that's being rocked by the storm and the captain wants a response from Jonah in the same way that God does.

The second word is the word "go". I want you to go and I want you to go to Nineveh. Nineveh is some 550 to 600 miles away from where Jonah finds himself living in Israel. It is the capital of Assyria. If you look at the map, and we talked about this just briefly last week and we're going to say more about it in just a moment, but if you look at the map, you see the city of Mosul. So we're in modern-day Iraq. I thought it was interesting that we're in now in the book of Jonah, modern-day Iraq. We just finished the

book of Colossians and Philemon, which was the modern-day Turkey, which is just to the north and west of where we are now. We're right there by the city of Mosul. The city of Mosul you can literally throw a rock and hit the ancient ruins of Nineveh. It's almost like they are right there together. Of course, we know that that is a city that is under siege and I want to comment on that in just a moment. So what is he to do? He is to arise. He's to go and he is to cry. He is to bring a message basically of impending judgment. If you look at chapter 3 and verse 4, you get a sense of what that is. Jonah began to go into the city, going a day's journey and he called out, "...yet 40 days and Nineveh shall be overthrown". We don't know all the other things that he no doubt added to that message, but that was the impending judgment that God was calling for Nineveh to experience.

It took me to Romans chapter 2 and here's what the apostle Paul says, talking about the judgment of God, and I think even of the days in which we find ourselves living. Romans chapter 2 verse 4: "Or do you presume on the riches of His kindness and forbearance and patience, not knowing that God's kindness is meant to lead you to repentance? But because of your hard and impenitent heart you are storing up wrath for yourself on the day of wrath when God's righteous judgment will be revealed." When He says, call out against it for their evil has come up before Me, it's not like God just learned about the wickedness of Nineveh. There is within the matter of the character of God this wonderful aspect of God's character of His patience and of His long-suffering and His compassion. Just look at the United States of America. Look at the things that happen within our large cities on any given day especially weekends and you see the grossness of sin and the depravity of sin. You can very easily realize the same thing that is happening to this land has happened to Nineveh. That the wickedness of people was literally being stored for the Day of Judgment because God is a God of patience and of mercy and grace. But here is this message that comes from Jonah to these people.

Assyria, as I said, was known for its wickedness. When God says Jonah, I want you to go to Nineveh and I want you to cry out against this land. It was with due cause. Assyria was a cruel group of people. Their kings were especially known for the atrocities that they committed against conquered peoples. Annals that we have and historical

documents that really are not fitting to be read in a company like this because they're not only so descriptive but they're so horrific in that description of what they would do to a conquered people. It was abundantly clear that when God calls for Jonah to go to this place, He says their wickedness cries out. It was indeed a wickedness that was deserving of God's judgment.

Again, you look at that map and the irony to me as we study this in 2017 this morning is here's Mosul, this city that is under siege in which there are Isis fighters holding out against forces that are trying to root them out of the city. Right next door is the city of Nineveh. In a tragic news story that I saw this week, it was a video released by the Isis terrorist group in which they actually captured on video the training of boy soldiers. These little boys couldn't have been more than 10, 11 and 12 years old. They're teaching them urban warfare. They literally have this video of them going building by building in these training exercises and clearing these buildings room by room. These boys are armed with handguns. As they would go into a room, these Isis terrorists had put in certain rooms already targets restrained. These boys would go into a room and if there was a target in the room they would execute the target. They captured this on video for the world to see. It caused me to think of the visceral response that you can have to that kind of evil and that kind of darkness, to think that the lives of these precious boys are just being ruined forever. Yet, Jonah is being asked to go to a city in a country that would've probably fit very accurately with that description that I have just given as well. I think it gives us some sense of perspective. But here he is. He's a prophet of God. He has been God's voice before. He is being asked to be God's voice. Again, so what do you do when God calls?

Well, we notice then secondly his refusal. He is not going. So God calls. The source of the call is from God. Jonah's response is going to be that of refusing to go. I note at the beginning of verse 3, just the opening words: "But Jonah rose to flee to Tarshish". The first thing I want you to see is that intrusive word "but". That's the way verse 3 begins. Go to a dictionary to look up the words "adversative conjunction". The word "but" is an adversative conjunction. Verse 3 begins with an adversative conjunction. But here's God's call and stepping right into that call is this adversative conjunction. Here's a definition of it: a word that expresses antithesis or opposition to.

So there you go. Jonah lifts up an adversative conjunction to God and says “but”. We've all been there. It may have been a little “but”. It may have been a big “but”. But we've all been there.

Somebody says to me, Pastor Carlon, I like you, but... Carlon, I really like Covenant Community Church, but... It was a good message this morning, but... You can almost tell when an adversative conjunction is coming your way. Don't you have that kind of a feeling when someone is making a comment and you just know the next thing is an adversative conjunction? Are you with me on that? Honey, you did a wonderful job painting that room, but that was the wrong color. So here is Jonah, of all things saying to God, I'm not going.

Instead we read secondly, he went the wrong way. He went down. He rose to flee to Tarshish from the presence of the Lord. I guess you could argue that Jonah obeyed the first. He got up. Arise. He did that one. He did half of the next one. Go. He just didn't go in the right direction. What I want you to see about this third verse is this third verse is filled with action verbs. It's filled with action verbs. But Jonah rose to flee from the presence of the Lord. He went down to Joppa. He found a ship going to Tarshish. He paid the ferry. He went down into it to go with them to Tarshish, away from the presence of the Lord. You just have all of this energy that is being expressed in this third verse. But here's the tragedy of it. All of this action and all of this energy is being utilized to step out of the King's Highway and to go to Bypass Meadow, which, according to Pilgrim, is to step out of obedience to God and to go our own way. It is to throw in the face of God an adversative conjunction. But God, I'm not going to do that.

It occurred to me how true it is in our lives and how often it is true that we expend a lot of energy at times in our disobedience to God. God tells us to do this or to not do this, and it's amazing sometimes how much energy we bring to doing what God has told us not to do. This was certainly true of Jonah. If you look at the map of where he was headed, he was supposed to go 600 miles to the north and east to Nineveh. Instead, he heads down to the port of Joppa and he finds himself on a ship going to Tarshish. It would almost be as if God said Jonah I want you to go to Nineveh and Jonah heads for Timbuktu, right? Actually he is headed more in the direction of Timbuktu than he is in the direction of Nineveh. Timbuktu is west of where he's going so he's headed in the

opposite direction is the point. We're not absolutely certain where Tarshish is. A lot of people think it was in southern Spain, but it doesn't really matter to the story per se, because it is just saying to us that Jonah is going in the opposite direction to which God had called him to go.

You notice a couple of times in that third verse that we're told that he was fleeing from the presence of the Lord. We read that twice. You read it again in chapter 1 and verse 10. What's going on here when we read that Jonah is attempting to flee from the presence of the Lord. Did Jonah skip prophecy school on the doctrine of the omnipresence of God? Did he miss that lecture? Did he cut that class? Is his theology so deficient as a prophet of God that he actually thinks he can run literally out of and from the presence of God? I can assure you that is not what he's doing. He's not thinking that he has the capability of running away from an omnipresent God. I'm almost 100% sure of that because when we get into the chapter where he is in the belly of the fish, a good part of his prayer is filled with illusions and quotes from the Psalms. So he knew the Psalms as well as other Scriptures. I know that he knew David's Psalm 139 written 200 years before he was even here. David wrote where is it can I flee, Father? Where can I flee from Your presence? If I go up into the heavens on the wings of the morning, You're there. If I go down into the depths of Sheol, You're there. Wherever I go, there I am in Your presence. Jonah knew that. He's not running literally, physically trying to get out from under the omnipresence of God. He's running away from the calling of God. He's running away from anything that would remind him of God. He is running from the people of God. He's running from the call of God. He's running from the office of a prophet that God has called him to. He doesn't want any reminders in his life of God's call on his life.

I hope you see how reflective this is of us at times. At times, we expend way too much energy in disobedience when it could rightfully be offered in obedience. In the midst of that, we disconnect ourselves in every way that we possibly can from anything that would remind us of that call of God's people, of His presence. We all know that one of the dangerous things that happens when we step off of the King's Highway and we go in to Bypath Meadow is that we do not want the fellowship of God's people. We isolate ourselves away from others who may remind us of God's call in our life and who

may remind us of the importance of walking and submission and obedience to the Word of God. We simply don't want that at that time. We want to get away from the presence of God. That's what the blindness of sin does. That's what the work of the deceiver does in our life at that time. So that's one of the things that happens to us as well.

Look briefly with me at the reasons why he may have chosen to not do what God called him to do. There are a couple of things here that I want to suggest and I think there is one that really drives the story. Why did Jonah see and understand and hear clearly the call of God and then say I ain't doing it? I'm going the other way, God. You told me to go that way. I'm going that way. Why would he do that? One of the reasons that you could suggest just knowing the story is the difficulty of the task involved, right? It's not like he was commanded to get together a team and they were all going to go together. This is a call of a prophet who is to go singularly by himself to Nineveh, to Assyria. Thankfully, many times when we send out missionaries from our church they go to very challenging places, but very often there are people who are waiting there in some measure or degree to assist them and to be about helping them and to be a part of the team together. Jonah is told to go to Nineveh where there are 120,000 children who do not know their right hand from their left, which is to say they haven't reached the age of accountability. That means there's probably about 600,000 people in the city. He's given this task to take it on by himself. He could very well have said, "How can one person even do this, God?" It reminds me of when Paul went to Corinth. and Paul the apostle said he was afraid. He was anxious in his heart for what was ahead of him. It's not unlike any of us facing a daunting task like that.

Secondly, how about the danger involved? How about the very danger involved? And not just a great city in terms of size and population, how about the wickedness of the city? How about the fact that he is to call out judgment against them? How about the fact that people in general really don't like it when you call out judgment against them and you point out sin in their life, right? That's not generally received as a gift that's being offered by those people who find themselves in that condition. So you can look at that and agree that it's a difficult thing. It is a dangerous thing. but here's I think what it really is. It simply didn't fit with Jonah's view of the world. This is what God is going to teach Jonah and what He's going to teach us hopefully is how is it that we view

this world that we find ourselves in. Because for Jonah and his world view, the Jewish people were first, second, third and, oh by the way, they're fourth and fifth. If there's anybody else, they're so far down the list I can't really even see them. Jonah's heart and his mind were wrapped around the fact that God had called them as the chosen people. They were, after all, the people of privilege. What he had forgotten was with that calling and with being chosen, they were to be a light to the world. He had conveniently forgotten that part of it. He remembered well that they were the chosen people, the people of privilege. Why go to Nineveh when your own country is in apostasy? Why take this message of impending judgment to Nineveh and to Assyria when your own land is filled with wickedness and your own king is taking the heart of the people away from God? That's a part of his worldview at this time. God, I'm not going to Nineveh. My own people are in apostasy before you. I think it was unthinkable for him to go to a place where, remember now, the contemporary prophet of his time was Hosea. Hosea chapter 11 and verse 4. Hosea's message to God's people was because they were living in rebellion against God, the king of Assyria would rule over them. That was the message that Hosea was preaching at the same time this call came to Jonah. Jonah is processing this through his very Jewish view of the world. Being the people of privilege that they are and knowing that they need the repenting work of God's Spirit in their own land and he's saying no way. I'm not going to these people.

Finally, I think Jonah knew the heart of God. and Jonah knew that God, being a merciful God, would relent of his judgment against Assyria if they heeded the call to repent. As Jonah looked at this, his conclusion was God, I simply will not go.

Now let's look at the consequences of his disobedience. We'll wrap this up and really carry this on into the rest of this chapter, but there are a couple things that I think we need to consider ourselves this morning. the first one is as you read this story, whenever you run from God you're on a downward spiral. Isn't it interesting in the Bible how often the physical is reflected in the spiritual? How often the spiritual is reflected in the physical? It's uncanny but it's the work of God's Spirit that when He describes situations like He does here with Jonah, He uses this referencing of going down three times just in these opening verses. Jonah goes down and he goes down and he goes down and you run away from God and you're going down. You're in a downward spiral.

You step off of the King's Highway and you go in to Bypass Meadow and you've taken a step down. The consequence of sin in our life is always to take us down. I have every reason to believe that as Jonah processed what he was doing: he goes down to Joppa; he finds the ship; it is heading for Tarshish; he has the money in his pocket; the ship is leaving within an hour. All of these circumstances are coming together the way that they were.

Do you know what sin does in our life? It causes us to rationalize away the commands of God for the choices of our own heart. He's sitting there and he's rationalizing all of this as if now this is becoming the will of God for his life. After all, there's a ship here and it's leaving right now. I've got the money and it must be God's will to bring all of these circumstances together so perfectly for me. That's why, my friends, we can't rely simply on the circumstances of life to determine the will of God. The circumstances of life are one part of determining the will of God. A far greater measure of determining God's will is right here in this book and the Spirit of God taking that truth and bringing it into our life in such a way that we see whatever those choices may be before us, and then those are confirmed by others who give us wise counsel. Then we consider the circumstances themselves. But Jonah was in a downward spiral, rationalizing his choices.

Then, you notice secondly, whenever we run from God, we never end up where we thought we would. Whenever we run from God, we never end up where we thought we would. Someone said when you run from God, Satan always provides the transportation. And here he is. Joppa. A boat. Going the opposite direction. It's got to be what God wants for me. I'm on the boat going the other way. Again, my friends, that's the very nature of sin in our life. It takes us places where we never thought we would go. It takes us to circumstances we never thought we would find ourselves in because the very nature of sin is to blind and to deceive and to isolate and ultimately to ruin what God would want to do in our life. So here it is again. To experience the blessing of God requires that we submit to and obey the Word of God. There really is no other way.

What do we take away? These opening verses of the book of Jonah. Often our biggest challenge is not a lack of knowledge regarding God's will. Very often we know it. We just don't want to do it. The first step away from God is the most dangerous. Don't

take it. God has made His will for our lives abundantly clear. All through the pages of this book, and the more we immerse ourselves in this book, and the more we immerse ourselves in the truth of this book, the more clear is the call of God on our life and the more clear is the will of God for our life. The more we are away from this book and away from this truth, the more we open our life and our heart to those choices that are going to take us away from God's blessing and God's purpose for us. That first step is always the most dangerous because it will take us places we never thought we would go.

Do you know what I'm so glad that I can share this morning? If there is somebody here that is in that place, do you know what? There's a way back. There is a way back. It simply is called repentance. It's called confession. It is turning to God, acknowledging His word and His will and His truth, His desires. It's as simple as laying claim to what it is that He has provided for us. If we confess our sin, He's faithful and just to forgive us our sin and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. So I extend the invitation to come back. Get on the Kings Highway. Walk with God. Experience God's blessing. If you're on the King's Highway, stay on the King's Highway. Do everything you can to stay on the King's Highway. Surround yourself with people who are walking on the King's Highway. Encourage each other in your walk in the King's Highway. The truth of God is soaked in your life in such a way that you are committed to His will and purpose and God will bring blessing.

Let's pray. Father God, thank you for this snapshot again of a man like us. A man who often reflects, Father, where we find ourselves so often struggling with doing and obeying and submitting to Your word and to Your will. But thanks be to God who gives us the victory through the Lord Jesus Christ, Who enables us and equips us to walk in obedience to Your truth. Father, I pray this morning if there is somebody here that has stepped off and stepped out of Your will that your Holy Spirit will bring conviction to their heart. Draw them back to Yourself. Lord, if we will do that, if we will repent and turn from sin and seek You, You are so quick to forgive and to welcome us back. Father, if there is somebody here this morning who's never put their trust and their faith in Jesus as their personal Savior, we want them to know Your love for them. We want them to understand and know that Jesus has done everything that needs to be done to provide

for us the gift of eternal life, simply by trusting in what Christ has accomplished for us.  
Thank You, Father, for these good and precious gifts. In Jesus's name, Amen.