

Where Could I Go?

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Good Morning

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King Hezekiah was one of the most faithful Kings ... Judah ever had

But his son? One of the worst.

Manasseh led Judah away from God. And because of this ... God punished Judah ... and wanted little to do with the nation

Then the Lord said to the prophet Jeremiah ... **Jer 15:1-2** ... "Even if Moses and Samuel were to stand before me, my heart would not go out to this people. Send them away from my presence! Let them go!

And if they ask you, '*Where shall we go?*' tell them, 'This is what the LORD says: "Those destined for death, to death; those for the sword, to the sword; those for starvation, to starvation; those for captivity, to captivity."'

Everything of lasting value ... comes from God. If we turn from Him ... where COULD we go? Nowhere!

Jer 14:22 Do any of the worthless idols of the nations bring rain? Do the skies themselves send down showers? No, it is you, O LORD our God. Therefore our hope is in you, for you are the one who does all this.

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Years later ... by the Sea of Galilee ... crowds pushed toward Christ ... in the early stages of His ministry.

They were eager to hear His message. But some were offended by His teachings ... and turned away from him.

Jesus asked his twelve disciples ... "do you want to leave Me too?"

Peter answered ... "Lord, to whom shall we go?"

John 6:68-69 ... "But Simon Peter answered Him, 'Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life. Also we have come to believe and know that You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.'"

Jesus' question ... and Peter's answer ... are just as important today ... they were 2000 years ago.

It's up to each of us to learn Christ's way ... and to follow it.

One person seeks Christ and draws nearer by the Word of God

Another seeks meaning in the ways of the world ... and grows apart from God.

We may think we can act independent from God ... but we can't. We simply can't.

Our happiness ... our peace ... our success ... in this life and the life to come ... is totally in the hands of God. His laws ... His will.

Many ... very many ... seek to change God into what they're looking for. Too few change their own lives to harmonize with God.

I remember an episode of "The Andy Griffith Show" ... The town of Mayberry had a choir. They were holding auditions ... and tried to keep the try-outs a secret from Barney Fife ... Andy's deputy.

Like the old saying goes... Barney couldn't carry a tune in a bucket.

Anyway ... Barney found out and began singing with the group. It was worse than awful.

Andy the diplomat suggested that Barney try to see where the discord was coming from. Barney ... singing his heart out off key ... went from person to person looking for the problem. He never found it.

Simon Peter was willing to recognize his ways ... and adjust them to harmonize with Christ. The disciples who abandoned Jesus ... couldn't see that THEY were the problem.

Many want God to be more like them. But the Father sent His Son ... so that we could learn ... to be more like God.

John 6:40 ... "For my Father's will is that everyone who looks to the Son and believes in him shall have eternal life, and I will raise him up at the last day."

What in life could be more important ... that being raised up ... and going to Heaven.

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Our lesson title today is ...

"Where COULD I go?"

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A few weeks ago ... I was walking around the house ... singing in my head ...

... "yet when I shake ... the chilling hand of death ... where could I go but to the Lord?"

I thought those were the words to the hymn.

Sadly ... those aren't the words ... they're "yet when I face" ... FACE not "when I shake"

I more or less had thought "shake" meant "escape"

"When I escape ... shake ... the chilling hand of death"

No ... probably not.

Maybe ... shake like shake someone's hand? Now THAT WAS chilling. Shaking hands with death.

Anyway ... by the time I got that all sorted in my head ... I was hooked on the lesson.

I thought of faithful outspoken Peter. Maybe with a wistful sigh ... "Where COULD I go?"

Where COULD we go? YOU and you only have the Words of life.

Like the hymn ... "Sing them o'er again to me ... wonderful Words of Life."

Or "Tell me the story of Jesus ... write on my heart every word."

Remember what Jesus said to Thomas? "I am the Way, the Truth, and the Life. No one comes to the Father except through Me"

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We have a beautiful hymn in our book we don't know well yet. 'I Am The Way'

It's pretty short. But it's powerful.

"I am the Way." "I am the Truth." "I am the Life." "I am the Light." "I am the Son." "I am the Lord."
"I am the King." "I am the Christ."

"I am the Bread." "I am the Vine." "I am the First." "I am the Last." Believe in Me. "Be not afraid."
"Come unto Me." "I am the Way."

There's also a children's song that goes ...

"I am the way the truth and the life, That's what's what Jesus said

Without the way ... there is no going. Without the truth ... there is no knowing. Without the life ... there is no living

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All over the land ... today ... Jesus' name is being mentioned from pulpit after pulpit. Jesus is being "spoken of."

But I submit to you this truth. In only a fraction of these pulpits ... is Jesus being "preached."

When Philip the evangelist climbed into the chariot with the Ethiopian Eunuch (**Act 8**) ... and picked up the conversation by reading from what we know as **Isaiah 53** ... he preached unto Him, Jesus.

He preached the crucified and risen Son of God ... exactly like God wanted it to be preached. Not as mankind might have chosen to hear.

Prov 3:5-6 ... "Trust in the LORD with all your heart ... and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways submit to him, and he will make your paths straight.

In ALL your ways ... submit to Him.

Trusting leads to confidence and peace. Trusting makes us feel safe and secure with God

We don't want the alternative ... worry and fear.

All your heart. All your ways. ALL

Every path we take must be trusting in God.

Home, work, school. Finances, jobs, relationships. On the field of play. In the classroom.

Every aspect of our life is lived trusting in God.

Preachers used to say "Unless Jesus is Lord of all, He is not Lord at all."

This all-encompassing trust is not simply a feeling. It is shown in our obedience. Trust is hardly trust if we don't act on it.

What sense would it make if we were to say, "I trust the Lord" ... but fail to follow His will?

We've all had people ask for our advice and then totally disregard it.

Well, why did they ask in the first place?

It makes no sense to call Jesus Lord and then not obey Him

Everything we say and do ... is to bring glory to God

Col 3:17 ... "Whatever you do, whether in word or deed, do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him.

Rom 12:1 ... "I urge you, brethren, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God ... this is your true and proper worship."

Eph 6:7 ... "Serve wholeheartedly, as if you were serving the Lord, not people."

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Let me take you back to the time ... when the twelve spies returned ... from reconnoitering the land of Canaan.

Only 2 spies were confident that the land would fall to them by the hand of God ... Joshua and Caleb

The ten weak-in-the-faith spies whipped the Children of Israel into a frenzy.

Num 13:30 ... "Then Caleb silenced the people before Moses and said, "We should go up and take possession of the land, for we can certainly do it.

The ten spies did not trust God.

In **Numbers 14** ... God wants to destroy the whole nation ... but Moses asks Him to relent.

One reason given by God ... for relenting ... has to do directly with Caleb

Num 14:24 ... But because my servant Caleb has a different spirit and follows me wholeheartedly, I will bring him into the land he went to, and his descendants will inherit it.

Another translation reads ... Caleb is "fully after" God!

Do you and I have a different spirit than worldly people?

Are we fully after God? Do we follow Him all the time? Do we trust him to provide even when the odds seem to be so much against us? Are we willing to stand up among people and declare our trust in Him?

This is what **Prov 3:6** is saying ... "In all your ways acknowledge Him ... with all your heart"

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"Where Could I Go, But to the Lord" was written in 1940 by James Buchanan (JB) Coats.

The idea for the song came as Mr. Coats was sitting beside a dying neighbor.

He asked Mr. Keyes ... "Do you know where you're going to be spending eternity."

The old gentleman said, "Where could I go but to the Lord?"

Mr. Coats said ... "It reminds us ... that whether we are facing problems, a beautiful day, or making our final journey home ... there is nowhere else to turn except to the Lord.

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At many times and in many ways ... we find ourselves at our wits end ... and we don't know what to do.

So, what do you do when you don't know what to do?

2 Chron 20 ... we find Jehoshaphat ... a good king over Judah ... in a bind

What did he do when he didn't know what to do?

Judah was about to be attacked by enemies. It did not look good.

In **2 Chron 20:12** ... Jehoshaphat prayed ... "O our God, will You not judge them? For we have no power against this great multitude that is coming against us; nor do we know what to do, but our eyes are upon You."

Jehoshaphat was at a place where we've all been. He was at the place of wits end ... and he didn't know what to do.

In **2 Chr 20:15** ... the Lord answered ... "Do not be afraid nor dismayed because of this great multitude, for the battle is not yours, but God's."

A godly perspective can rescue us from a bad situation!

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Psa 139:7-10 ... "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."

In **Luke 15:1-7** ... Jesus told the parable of the lost sheep ... the one out of a hundred.

We cannot escape God's presence. We may run away from God ... as Jonah did. But nowhere we can hide from the God who created us and loves us. God is always reaching out to us. God's inescapable presence is a gift God offers us.

We may anger Him and face the consequences ... but that is not what He desires as an outcome.

"Where can I go from your spirit? Or where can I flee from your presence?"

Graphic pictures.

Up to the heavens, down to the underworld, to the farthest limits of the sea. Where can I go? Where can I flee? Nowhere. "You are there, and there, and even there...."

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I saw a reference to a children's storybook in a sermon outline. I had never heard of it. It's called "The Runaway Bunny, by Margaret Wise Brown.

Once there was a little bunny who wanted to run away. So he said to his mother, "I am running away." "If you run away," said his mother, "I will run after you. For you are my little bunny." "If you run after me," said the little bunny, "I will become a fish in a trout stream and I will swim away from you." "If you become a fish in a trout stream," said his mother, "I will become a fisherman and I will fish for you." "If you become a fisherman," said the little bunny, "I will become a rock on

the mountain, high above you.” “If you become a rock on the mountain high above me,” said his mother, “I will be a mountain climber, and I will climb to where you are.

The story continues with his mother saying she would do whatever necessary to find him. At the end the mother speaks of catching him in her arms ... holding him tight and hugging him.

What hooks us? Is it the love that healthy parents have for their children? Parental love is powerful. God’s love for us is powerful.

There’s a English poem dating from the mid 1800’s ... “Hound of Heaven.”

The poem speaks of God’s fierce and relentless pursuit of us.

The one in the poem ... the one trying to run from God ... says ... “For, though I knew His love Who followed, yet was I sore adread Lest, having Him, I must have naught beside”

That’s a scary truth ... right?

Do we run from God because we’re afraid of what we need to give up to please Him?

Wow. YES!

Adam and Eve hid ... And God came and found them.

Jonah took a ship heading East off the edge of the earth ... trying to flee from God’s will.

Saul of Tarsus couldn’t run fast and hard enough to escape the truth staring him in the face. When Jesus literally stopped him in his tracks with a blinding appearance ... Jesus said “Why are you always fighting against the cattle prod?”

It’s so common for us to strike out on our own.

We want to be self-sufficient. We want to be in control of our own lives (as if that was ever possible),

What does the Bible call it when we try to live apart from God? SIN

Aren’t we so blessed to have a God who never stops tracking us down.

Where COULD I go?

The God who loves us is always there, looking for us, ready to forgive and restore us in His Son.

One person suggested that when we run from God ... even into darkness ... it is not God, per se’, we are running from ... rather it may be a distorted picture off God.

If we come to know God ... fully knowing Him as He is willing to be known ... we would never stop running TO Him.

The Hymn ... “Guide Me O Thou Great Jehovah (Hold Me with Thy Powerful Hand)” ... The Hymn “Safe in the Arms of Jesus”

The spirit of this psalm is not fear ... but trust that nothing can separate us from the loving presence of God.

Wherever we go, whatever happens to us, God is there.

God loves us enough to pay attention to us moment by moment.

But though we are known and loved, we may still run or stray away from the relationship with God.

Rom 8:35 ... “Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall trouble or hardship or persecution or famine or nakedness or danger or sword?”

Rom 8:38-39 ... “For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.”

Nothing ... but our own stubborn will

Why do we run from God? What takes us away from God?

For many people it’s an affluent, technological culture like ours, it is easy for material things and the consumption of things to take center stage. This was true even thousands of years ago.

These things can lead to the notion that we are self-made ... and God isn’t necessary.

When God is down the list of our priorities, material things become the focus.

Our intellect might be our downfall. Only that which can be worked out in our own minds can be real. This was the downfall of the “think-tank” on Mars Hill in Athens.

Sometimes people have been hurt or wounded by bad teaching or by people in the church who treated them poorly. Congregations that administer discipline untempered with love can cause many problems.

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Conclusion

God’s Gift to Us. Where can I go from your spirit, O God? Where can I flee from your presence? “Nowhere,” says the psalmist. That is the powerful good news of the gospel in Psalm 139.

God’s presence can inspire fear or holy awe ... which, is up to each of us.

In the storybook “The Runaway Bunny” ... the bunny finally says ... OK ... I might just as well stay where I am and be your little bunny.” God’s inescapable presence is a gift to us. We call it grace—the love of God made known to us in Jesus Christ. This is good news.

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Invitation

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