

The Adventures of Jonah
“Running Away From God”
November 8, 2009 by Kevin Haah



I. Introduction

- You know, there's a lot in common between the story of Jonah and us. Like Jonah, we all have run or are running from God one way or another.
 - We run from God by turning back on God and saying:
 - “See ya later. I want to live my life on my own. I don't care what you say. This is my life; leave me alone. Don't bother me anymore! “
 - Maybe you used to go to church when you were young, but for one reason or another, you just started to back slide further and further and your relationship with God is nothing but a faint memory.
 - Or maybe as you got more and more friendly with drugs, you got further and further away from God. You just didn't want to hear what God has to say about your lifestyle.
 - Or maybe you haven't been running away from God in the general sense, but you've been turning away from God in a particular area of your life. You say: I'll follow you in all the areas of my life except: this area is off limits!
 - Maybe it's your relationships
 - Maybe it's about alcohol and drugs
 - Maybe it's about lying to get around the system, or whatever,
 - Maybe it's in the area of sexuality.
 - Maybe it's in the area of anger.

- We have all run away from God. You think your story is unique but your story is not unique. We all run for the same reason: We think there is something better out there than following God. We don't trust God. We think we know better than God. Maybe you're confusing God with your past church. You had some bad experience with your church and as you started to run away from that church, you ran away from God.
- Today, we'll discover that we can run away from God, but we can't outrun God.

II. Let's open up to Jonah 1

Read Jonah 1:1-17

As we look at Jonah 1, we are going to look at three things: (1) how we run away from God, (2) what happens when we run; and (3) what God does when we run.

III. How do we run away from God?

We can run away from God by doing what the Ninevites did. We can run away from God by being bad and saying see ya! The culture of Ninevah was really horrible. Rape. Abuse. Rampant prostitution. Sorceries. Genocide. Violent. Now, how did they get this bad? I've wondered about how it got so bad in Nazi Germany. How can they do that? You just go along with what everyone else is doing. If everyone thinks that way, I think it is okay. You just go with the flow of the culture. That's how cultures get evil. There is no gatekeeper saying: wait! If you go against the flow of the culture, you have to pay the price of seeming weird.

But, you can run away from God by self-righteousness as well. Nineveh was the enemy of Israel and Judah. They destroyed Israel. Nahum 3 says:

"I am against you," declares the LORD Almighty.

"I will lift your skirts over your face.
I will show the nations your nakedness
and the kingdoms your shame.

⁶ I will pelt you with filth,
I will treat you with contempt
and make you a spectacle.

⁷ All who see you will flee from you and say,
'Nineveh is in ruins—who will mourn for her?'
Where can I find anyone to comfort you?"

Jonah hated Ninaveh and wanted them to face the judgment of God. He was afraid that if he did go, the people would repent and God would show mercy. We find this in Chapter 4:

“O LORD, is this not what I said when I was still at home? That is why I was so quick to flee to Tarshish. I knew that you are a gracious and compassionate God, slow to anger and abounding in love, a God who relents from sending calamity.”

God wanted to show mercy, but he didn't want to be an agent of mercy and grace. He feels that they should get what they deserve. The only way to live in God is to live in grace. When we move away from grace, we are running away from God. When we move away from getting our life from God alone, we are running away from God. When we are trying to save ourselves by saying only if I get this, accomplish this, win this, or have that person or that person, I will be okay. We are moving away from God to something else. We are moving away from God.

When we think that we are okay and we don't need God's mercy and grace in our lives, we are running away from God.

When we are not willing to forgive, we are essentially saying that I am better. When we refuse to be an agent of God's grace, we are running away from God.

IV. Let's look at what happens when we run.

A. When we run, we run to the strangest place and the most dangerous place.

- Where did Jonah run to? When the Lord commanded Jonah to go to Nineveh (which is in modern Iraq)—it's about 500 miles from where he was by land, the Bible says Jonah ran away from God and got on the boat to go to Tarshish. Do you know where Tarshish is? It's over 2000 miles away from where Jonah was. It was in Southern Spain. Spain was a backward country at this time. It was a dangerous place at this time. Do you know how safe a 2000 mile boat ride to Tarshish was? Remember, this is 2700 years ago. If you want to be safe, you stay on land; you don't get on a boat!
- You see, when you run from God, you end up running to the strangest and most dangerous place. You end up sleeping drunk on the streets of Skid Row. People will steal everything you got. You end up running to Loraine Hotel.

You end up running to the most dangerous drug dealers. You end up losing all of your self-dignity in the process of trying to get that one more high.

B. People who run from God eventually begin to self-destruct.

- What happened to Jonah? His life started to self-destruct. It wasn't happy go around after he started to run from God.
- Why? Because when your back is on God, you turn your back on the source of wisdom and truth, and when run from wisdom and truth, you make bad decisions.
- People who come back from running, they come back with a lot of bad baggages. You got unwanted kids. You got financial problems. You got a criminal record. You got a failure to appear that you haven't taken care of. There's an outstanding warrant for arrest. There's alimony. There's unpaid child support. There's disease. There're broken relationships. There're people mad at you. There're people who you swindled money from in order to get that next high.
- Why are you going through all of these things? You turned away from the source of wisdom and truth.

C. When you turn back on God, you turn back on THE source of unconditional love.

- In Jonah, we will much God love Jonah even in the run. I'll discuss this more in detail later.
- Other than your Mama and God, there ain't many people in the world that love you unconditionally. When you run from God, you run from the source of this kind of love.
- And you know what, we all crave unconditional love. We all want someone to accept us just as we are and love us unconditionally.
- Without this source of unconditional love from God, we end up spending a lot of time and effort to squeeze out love from relationships and people who are not going to give it to us.

- You try to fill your love tank from people and things that will not give it. Do you ever wonder why your relationships are NOT working? You're trying to get get get something from that relationship what only God can give.
- It's just the nature of what happens when you walk away from the source of unconditional love.
- You run and run and you just can't find what you're looking for because it's on the rear view mirror.

D. When you turn back on God, you also turn away from the purpose of your life.

- Remember Jonah? God's purpose for him was to declare a message of God's judgment to the people of Nineveh. Outside of this purpose, he was just being tossed left and right by the storm. What's he going to do in Spain when God called him to the Great City of Nineveh?
- Everything's created for a purpose and the creator is the one who determines the purpose.
- You're never going to find out what your purpose in life is without the creator.
- Without purpose, your life is a merry go around. You don't get anywhere and you're not going anywhere. You just exist to slowly decay and die. You exist to survive. You get this sense of purposeless.
- Folks, the purpose is with the father. You can run, you can even get a job, have a family, do this and that, but it is only in the creator/creature relationship that we find our purpose.

E. Runners always hurt the people around them.

- In the story of Jonah we see this—the passenger are losing the cargo and potentially their lives.
- If you are running from God, your family, your kids will be injured by the shrapnel of your life. Do you really love your children? Stop running from God. Your children are paying the price. It's the principle. People who run

injure the people who run close to them. It just happens. You don't have to mean to hurt them.

- E. When you run away from God, you turn away from the only real hope you have.
- In the middle of the storm that God sent, Jonah was sleeping in the lower deck while other people were trying to do everything they can to live. Jonah was depressed and he had no will to live.
 - Can you identify with Jonah? Do you sometimes feel so depressed that you don't even have the will to live? What's the use of trying to survive? I might as well drink myself to death.

But, I want to let you know that there is hope.

- IV. We looked at what happens when we run. Now, let's go on to the second point. When we run, God does something. He gets involved. What does God do when we are running?

The story of Jonah illustrates God's grace and mercy just like the story of the prodigal son in the New Testament illustrates God's grace and mercy to the son that wasted everything on wild living.

Let's look at the story (Read from verse 4ff):

- God SENDS the wind.
- What should we do to YOU to make the sea calm down for US?
- Here, Jonah discovers that you can run from God but you can't outrun God.
- He is going to create consequences that look like an overkill to bring him back. He said, I know it is my fault that the storm is upon you. Read.
- Then Jonah learns this one important thing at verse 17: the LORD PROVIDED a great fish.
- Do you know why God provided the great storm? Do you know why God provided the big fish to swallow him?

○ It's not to pay him back, it's to bring him back. It's the love and grace of God. It's because of His unconditional love for Jonah.

- Do you know why there is a great storm in your life?
- Do you know why you are having financial hardship?
- Do you know why your life seems like you hit the bottom?
- Do you know why you feel so lonely?
- Do you know why there is a sense of emptiness in your life that drives you to bad/abusive relationships or drugs and alcohol just to cover over the emptiness for just a little while?
- Do you know why you sometimes feel hopeless?
- Do you know why God is allowing all of these miserable and harsh CONSEQUENCES in your life?
- IT'S NOT TO PAY YOU BACK; IT'S TO BRING YOU BACK. GOD LOVES YOU AND HE WANTS YOU TO STOP RUNNING AND COME BACK HOME.

V. Conclusion

Matthew 12:40: "For as Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of a huge fish, so the Son of Man will be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth."

Jesus is the greater Jonah. Jesus went to the heart of the earth so that we don't have to. So that we can come back to a relationship with God.

Those who admit that they are running, even if you are not ready to stop running: raise hands.

Those who used to run and discovered that God is the God of mercy and grace—that he does not pay back, but he brings you back: raise hand.

Those who want to stop running and come home: stand up.

Stop running now because he can make a lot of bad decision and face more consequences of your bad decisions. Come home now.

Those around them—can you put your hands upon them and pray for them.

