

# A Spiritual Runaway

## Lesson for Sunday, April 28, 2024

### INTRODUCTION:

- ⇒ There are 1 million to 3 million runaway and homeless kids living on the streets in the US.
  - One in seven kids between the ages of 10 and 18 will run away at some point.
  - 68% of runaway youth were older teens, ages 15-17.
  - 23% of runaways traveled a distance of 50 miles or more from home.
- ⇒ Most believe that they are running away from their problems.
  - We see the same thing in families when one spouse runs away.
  - We see the same thing in the workforce when people run from one job to another.
- ⇒ The most famous of all runaways is probably Jonah! He was a reluctant missionary who started by trying to run away from God.
- ⇒ The Bible records Jonah's excursion in four short chapters that we will study in this lesson.

### OUTLINE:

1. Running away from God's call (Jonah 1)
  - a. The Setting: vs. 1-3
    - i. Nineveh – located in modern day Mosul, Iraq.
    - ii. Tarshish – probably modern-day coast of Spain
    - iii. Joppa – near Tel Aviv, coast of Israel
  - b. Note: God's focus has always been missions and evangelism!
    - i. God had a heart for the Ninevites – even though they were far from God. That's the heart of God: God sends the people close to Him to the people who are far away so that they might be close to Him.
    - ii. In Jonah, God even called one of his prophets as a missionary to a foreign, Gentile nation!
  - c. Jonah was resting while God was at work. In verse 5, Jonah thought he had escaped his responsibilities and he fell asleep on the boat. But the God who never sleeps was awake and at work. (*This would be a good place to use your flannelgraph.*)
  - d. There are at least five ways in the heart of this story that we see God working:
    - i. First, there was the storm (1:4).
    - ii. Second, the lot fell on Jonah (1:7).
    - iii. Third, the sea stops when Jonah is thrown in (1:15).
    - iv. Fourth, God sends the great fish to swallow Jonah (1:17).
    - v. Fifth, when Jonah repents, God has the fish spit out Jonah right where he was supposed to be (2:10).
  - e. Remember an important Biblical principle: God is always working! He desires us to join Him in what He is doing. If we refuse, God may even work to get us involved.
2. Returning to God's Call (Jonah 2)
  - a. In verse 1, Jonah turned his attention back to the Lord. That's all it takes for a runaway to return!
  - b. Notice, that even at the bottom of the ocean, God heard Jonah's cry (vs. 2).
  - c. What a beautiful reminder that we can never run so far that God will not hear us. And we can never outrun God's forgiveness and restoration.
  - d. Challenge your class: Are you a runaway? Are you willing and ready to return to God?
3. The Result of God's Call (Jonah 3)
  - a. In vs. 1-2, God repeats His call to Jonah. This time, Jonah responds properly (vs. 3).
  - b. It's amazing what God will do through the life of the one who properly responds to His call.
  - c. We read in verse 5 that the people of Nineveh experienced a great revival. They fasted and prayed (vs. 6-9), and God turned away His anger and they were spared (vs. 10).
4. Application: The Attitudes of a Spiritual Runaway (Jonah 4)

- a. You don't have to get in a boat and flee to a faraway coast to plan your escape from real Christianity – you can be a runaway while faithfully attending Sunday School every week!
- b. Jonah had the wrong attitude toward God's call on his life. We have the opportunity to put on the right attitudes so that we won't be a spiritual runaway. There are two we should work to attain.
- c. First, cultivate being responsive to the spiritual needs of others (4:1-3).
  - i. Jonah was insensitive to the greatest need of the Ninevites – their salvation.
  - ii. The danger is that after someone has been a Christian for a while, our separation from the world becomes isolation which becomes opposition.
  - iii. Opposition to the world's system is good and right, but if we lose our love for a lost world, what do we gain?
    1. Jonah was angry that the people of Nineveh found forgiveness, and mercy from God.
    2. WHY? Because he knew their wicked lifestyle and he probably thought they should be punished for it.
  - iv. Instead of being angry toward the lost or surprised by their behavior, we are called to display genuine compassion to those who are lost, blind to the gospel, and living like a sheep with no shepherd! (See John 3:16; Romans 5:8.)
  - v. Discuss practical ways we can show compassion this coming week.
- d. Second, find satisfaction in the spiritual rather than the temporal (vs. 4-11).
  - i. The Lord asks Jonah two times, "Are you really so angry?"
  - ii. Jonah's answer – "Yes! I am as angry as I can be! – even to death!"
  - iii. In verse 5, Jonah throws a classic pity party!
  - iv. In verse 6, God causes a gourd to grow and Jonah finds happiness in the gourd.
  - v. But in verse 7, God sent a worm to destroy the gourd and Jonah experiences great sorrow in its loss (8).
  - vi. In verse 9, God ask Jonah, "Are you really angry over losing a gourd?" Jonah had a really warped sense of values.
  - vii. Does that ever apply to us? Some Christians just walking around angry all the time...
    1. Many are a roller coaster of emotions based solely on circumstances of life.
    2. Weather, gas prices, didn't like that song, cereal was soggy...it's amazing what we can be angry about.
  - viii. If we are going to be a light to the world we must choose to find satisfaction in the spiritual rather than the temporal. Spiritual maturity – overlooks minor inconveniences of life in exchange for an eternal view!

CONCLUSION: Read the last 2 verses of the book.

- ⇒ God makes an appeal to Jonah and to us: Whose attitude will you adopt? Jonah's or God's?
- ⇒ Jonah was focused on comfort & protection, but what about all the people?
- ⇒ God says to us, "Should I not be concerned about the people of Florence – and the world?"

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