

WEEKLY SERMON

"THE MAN WHO RAN AWAY"

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"But Jonah rose up to flee unto Tarshish from the presence of the Lord, and went down to Joppa and he found a ship going to Tarshish; so he paid the fare thereof and went down into it, to go with them unto Tarshish from the presence of the Lord." (Jonah 1:3).

The little book of Jonah is numbered among the books of the minor prophets. It is hidden in the heart of the Bible. It is a fascinating little book, and highly dramatic.

The God of Jonah is a God of power. At the same time, he is a God of great mercy. The story is also one of second chances. Jonah needed a second chance and got it. All of us need a second chance, and a third, and a fourth. The book of Jonah assures us that with God we have as many chances as we need to make good.

I. Let us look first at what Jonah was trying to get away from. God called him to go to a heathen city and preach repentance. He was to tell the people of Nineveh that their days were numbered unless they repent. Jonah thought it would make him unpopular to carry this message to Nineveh, and he did not want to be an unpopular preacher. So he tried to escape his duty by going somewhere else. He went in the opposite direction of Nineveh. Nineveh was East, he started West. He went down to Joppa, and took a ship going to Tarshish. He paid his fare, got on board, and went to sleep.

No preacher really wants to be unpopular. Some preachers, comparatively few of them, move from church to church, trying to escape unpopularity. But all of us find that wherever we go we are going to be unpopular with some people. To several classes of people; those who are up on the preacher and those who are down on him. And if a preacher does his duty he will be unpopular with a great many people. The business of the preacher is to answer the call of

God. If it makes him unpopular, it is still his business to do the will of God. And God will take care of the rest.

Jonah was trying to get away from what he considered an unpleasant duty. And he was not the first or the last man who has tried to get away from God and from duty. He was not the first or the last preacher who has tried to escape from God and from duty because he met with unpleasantness. People have always tried to escape from things they did not want to do.

II. Now, let us look at some escape mechanism. Let us consider first one or two drastic forms.

1. Suicide. Some people seem to think that they can take their lives and end it all. God gives man life and puts him in a world of responsibilities, and trouble and suffering. Some men, when they come face to face with their duties in meeting the problems of life, like Jonah, try to escape in the opposite direction. They take the ship of death rather than the ship of life. Maybe death does not end it all. At any rate, it is far better for the individual and the world in which he lives that he face life no matter what it may bring. It is his duty to live. One cannot escape God by destroying himself.

2. Some try to escape through strong drink. Life calls on them to shoulder burdens, sorrows, and heartaches; and they attempt to escape them by drowning them in drink. They tell me that when a man is intoxicated he lives in a world of make-believe. The keenness of his senses are dulled, his mind dazed, and he thinks he has escaped his burdens. But the fact is that he has to come back to his burdens a much weaker man.

A story is told of two men who had a rendezvous to bid each other goodbye when one was going to their old home. The man who was not going away said to the other, "When you see my brother, tell him I am down. If he can spare a bottle of liquor to celebrate the parting." When the liquor was consumed, this fellow who was so badly in need and wanted fifty dollars from

his brother had suddenly become rich. As his friend started away he said, in a drunken fashion, "Say! Look! when you see my brother tell him I got the world by the tail. If he needs anything, let me know." But when he became sober, he needed that fifty dollars.

3. And here is a more mild method of escape from life's duties, and the most often used. It is the alibi of preoccupation—being too busy doing something else than to do what God wants us to do. Some people really think they are too busy. Or, they think what they are doing is more important than things God wants them to do. But many people merely alibi because the thing that God wants them to do is unpleasant.

It is not doing the pleasant things that makes men strong. It is doing the unpleasant things, the hard duties, that gives men courage and strength.

4. Many Negroes resort to escape mechanism rather than face the problems that confront them as Negroes in a white world. The one most frequently used is isolation. Too many Negroes advocate racial segregation. "Let us have our own," they say. They don't want to mix up with them. But you don't escape the race problem by segregation. It has been proven by scientific investigation that segregation is the primary cause of race riots. In a segregated pattern people cannot know each other, they fear each other, they hate each other.

Then, too, segregation is prevailing. If you have segregated recreation, it does not stop there. It leads to segregated schools, segregated parks, segregated theaters. One of the worst influences in our American life is the segregated church.

As unpleasant as it may be sometimes, it is our duty to integrate in our race relations. There can be no solution of our race problem without integration. Segregation is merely an attempt to escape an unpleasant duty. And you cannot escape. We might as well face the problem with all of its unpleasantness and suffering.

III. Let me call attention to some other things that may be easily inferred from the story of Jonah. They are things which Jonah, in his selfish flight from duty, did not

think about. And people of all times, run away from what they ought to do do not think about these things.

1. When one attempts to escape a duty he always involves other people. Sometimes people think by escape they can make it easier for others when in reality they make it harder. Look at the men on board the boat which Jonah boarded for Tarshish. They were caught in an unnecessary storm. Their lives were in danger. When they found that Jonah was the disturbing factor, they rowed hard to land the boat without throwing him overboard. They pitied Jonah, they suffered for his wrong, they did their duty, but could not right Jonah's wrong. They had to, against their best desires, toss him into the sea.

It would be far better for any group if it tossed into the sea those of its members who attempt to escape duty. For no group can escape the consequences of those in it who are always inventing ways to escape the things they ought to do because those duties are unpleasant.

2. The people of Nineveh were involved. They were wronged. Jonah had misjudged them. He felt that if he preached to them it would do no good. And he did not want to preach to a heathen nation anyhow. He did not mind preaching to Jews, but to these heathen, no. So they were without the gospel because Jonah refused to preach to them.

Look at the importance of Jonah's message. "Arise, go to Nineveh, that great city and cry against it." Jonah's message was a warning. If it were not delivered, the city would be destroyed because of its sins. Jonah's attempt to escape said in effect, "Let them die in their sins. I'm not going to preach to them."

When I went to Georgia some people said to me, "Why would you go down there?" Well, someone has to preach in Georgia. When I decided to come to Oregon, a friend wrote me a letter and said, "Why on earth are you going to a God-forsaken place like Oregon?" Someone has to preach in Oregon. If God wants me to preach here then I will answer the call of God.

3. Remember this, too, when you take a ship away from duty, you always pay your own fare. This is a significant statement in the text: "So he paid the fare thereof and went down into it, to go with them unto Tarshish from the presence of the Lord." When one ships against God and against the laws of life a fare is exacted of him. And it is a hard fare. You don't ride on Satan's ship free of charge. You pay, and pay dearly.

4. Jonah never got to Tarshish. He started but never got there. When you work with God everything in the universe will fight with you, but when you work against God, you are at war with the universe. The sea, and the wind became Jonah's enemies. A storm arose, and no matter how hard those experienced seamen rowed

they could not manage the ship. They would have been destroyed had they not thrown Jonah overboard.

However we may attempt it, we cannot get away from God. The 139th Psalm asks these questions: "Whither shall I go from thy Spirit? Or whither shall I flee from thy presence?" And then the psalmist affirms, "If I ascent into the heaven Thou art there; if I make my bed in hell, behold, Thou art there. If I take the wings of the morning and dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea, even there shalt Thy hand lead me, and Thy right hand shall hold me. If I say, surely the darkness shall cover me, even the night shall be light about me."

CONCLUSION

But a merciful God gave Jonah a second chance, and a third. He prepared a fish to swallow Jonah. Jonah prayed in the belly of the fish. He was carried to Nineveh. The repentant prophet hurried to the city and preached repentance to the people. They received his message, repented, and were saved.

When Jonah was given the second chance, he made good.

If you have run away from God and duty, all right, come on back. Jonah's God is your God. He is merciful. You have a second chance to make good.

YOUR POLITICS

THE PRECINCTS IN THEIR PROPER PLACE

By Clifford Walker

For the sake of convenience and efficiency, each county has been subdivided into political working units, known as precincts. The major political parties have in each precinct a man and woman representative, the precinct committee man and precinct committee woman, who are responsible to the citizens for proper representation in party affairs and politics.

The party relies upon the working ability of the precinct committee men and committee women to carry the party program into the homes and gatherings of each given district. It is their job also to see that every qualified resident is registered and properly informed about voting procedure. The party representative must be thoroughly acquainted with the people in his precinct and must be willing to exert energy, patience and foresight in order to bring into the party votes.

Voting polls are provided in each precinct. Not only does this furnish a voting convenience for the citizens, but it also affords a means of checking the tendencies in various localities.

The voting precincts give you, the voter, an opportunity to exercise your influence in party affairs and to shape party policies. It is there the elections are won or lost by you, your family, friends and acquaintances.

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