

Jonah

I am Jonah. You have probably heard my story. And if you think about it, you ought to be glad that YOUR life history is not written in the Bible!

You see, I was probably the most successful missionary the world has ever seen, but at the same time I was a personal spiritual disaster.

First of all, I did not want to go. I wasn't only like Moses who argued with God about his personal qualifications for the job. No, I questioned God's judgment in sending ANYBODY to Ninevah.

You see, Ninevah was the capital of the Assyrian empire. Does that say anything to you? Your civilization does not study the past, does it? Would you have any reaction if I mentioned the Third Reich? Adolph Hitler? Well, Hitler looks like a softy compared to Sennacherib.

The Assyrians had a very successful business plan -- their ultimate goal was to conquer the world. And to facilitate cooperation, they were very clear about what they would do to those who resisted in any way. They tortured and killed them in the most heartless manner possible. This provoked terror wherever they went, and that was the plan. If there was any chance of losing a battle with them, it was far better to surrender first.

I didn't want to go. I had no sympathy for them. I would not be able to disguise my disgust when talking to any Assyrian. God was not being reasonable, so I ran. I bought a ticket to the other side of the world. Did I really think I could get away from God? Maybe not, but I hoped at least that I would be far enough away that God would decide to use somebody closer to the target.

Can we learn from the lives of others? I hope you learn from mine. Don't do as I did. But also remember that even if you do, God will turn your rebellion into a tool for His kingdom.

I got aboard the ship and breathed a sigh of relief as it pulled away from the pier -- I had successfully escaped....NOT! (To use one of the strange but useful expressions of your clumsy language.)

You know the rest of the story -- confidence in my plan was gradually eroded as the weather turned dangerous. But still I thought, "To die is also to escape." So when the sailors wondered who I was and what I was doing, I told them that I served the God who made heaven and earth (and controlled the wind and seas, of course) and that I was running away from him.

The fleeting thought crossed my mind that even as I attempted to get them to cooperate in my "sailor assisted suicide," I was being an evangelist. Maybe God had picked the right person after all, but it didn't matter because they were going to throw me overboard.

As I sank into the turbulent sea, for the second time I felt that I had successfully escaped the will of God. Of course you can clearly see the foolishness of that idea, but you are sitting safely on dry land and not caught in the middle of the situation.

Out of the blurry wetness I noticed two things. The surface of the sea above me became like glass as I sank beneath it and I saw the sailors fall on their knees at the rail of the ship. My first - and I truly believed last -- evangelistic campaign had been a success. But at the same time, from below came a darkness that suddenly engulfed me.

I had been swallowed by a huge monster of the sea. I am not sure what you would call it for you classify the beasts differently than we. But in fact it swallowed me whole. It did not chew me, I can tell you that, although it did try to digest me. And that it had air in its belly I can surely attest -- smelly foul air -- but I lived, much to my disappointment.

Finally, my stubbornness was broken, I could only imagine what God's next step for me would have been had I not come to my senses then. I called to God in honest and humble prayer. The monster vomited me out upon the beach, then departed in relief. All who transport me seem to find comfort only when getting rid of me.

As I looked at my skin, after my eyes adjusted to the light, I was as pale as a ghost and as my nose adjusted to the air, I realized that I smelled powerfully of fish. When the Lord gave me my orders this time, I went. I guess He had explained the alternatives pretty well.

When I got to Ninevah, apparently my reputation had preceded me. The story of the storm and the ship, the sea creature and my miraculous survival, all had traveled very fast. And my strange appearance made me instantly recognizable.

I must say, I liked the message I was charged to deliver. If I had known what it was at the beginning, I probably would have jumped at the chance to say to that evil city, "In forty days Ninevah will be destroyed." I proclaimed it with no compassion and must have been frightfully convincing because from the king on down, the people repented and turned to the LORD.

I should have marveled at the Lord's ability to soften their hearts of stone, but instead I was furious. I had desperately wanted to see revenge taken on those cruel people and was waiting to see what method God would use. I had read of the destruction of Sodom and the plagues of Egypt. I had a ring-side seat for a spectacular show.

But God did the unexpected, to me at least. He had mercy. It shouldn't have been unexpected because he had shown mercy to me. But he forgave the people because they had turned humbly to him.

I sulked and fumed. God patiently taught me -- by an object lesson to start with -- a vine grew up and then withered. I was upset because I missed it, but only because of how it shaded me. Then he taught with logic -- there were 120,000 children in the city who did not know and were not responsible for the evil that I so hated. And they all, innocent and repentant, were valuable to God.

Remember, God can accomplish his will by many means. If he chooses to use you, do not refuse. And if you are successful in what the LORD does through you, do not become proud, for your heart is still prone to evil and he is using you in spite of yourself, not because of some special merit.

And finally, remember me -- the flawed evangelist with the spectacular story. When we meet again in God's eternal kingdom, I want to hear YOUR story, with all the embarrassing details. Shalom!

For an abbreviated version of Jonah, click [HERE](#)