

Life Lesson 112
Jonah
Text: Jonah, Psalm 139:7-12

Introduction

Have you ever heard your mother calling you to do something—something you knew you wouldn't want to do? Maybe she wanted you to do the dishes or fold the laundry. Did you feel like hiding so that she wouldn't see you? I hope you didn't hid!

The prophet in our story today heard God calling him to a job he didn't want to do. Instead of obeying, he did something very foolish—he tried to hide from God.

The Story

“I want you to go to Nineveh and preach against it,” God told Jonah, “For it is a great city and their wickedness is come up before me.”

Now, Jonah didn't mind preaching, but he did not want to preach to the people of Nineveh. They were Israel's mortal enemies! Jonah would have been very pleased if God had just sent fire down to destroy Nineveh. He didn't want to preach to them and to tell them to repent. He was afraid they would repent and not be destroyed.

Jonah didn't want to go—so he tried to hide from God. Isn't that silly? Psalm 139:7-12 tells us how foolish it is to hid from God, because God can see us anywhere. There is no place to hide from God!

Jonah got on a ship headed for Tarshish, thinking God wouldn't see him there. God had no intention of letting Jonah run away! He caused a great storm to come up on the sea. Jonah's ship was tossed on the waves and buffeted by the wind.

The crew and other passengers were frightened. They prayed and made sacrifices to their false gods—but of course false gods can't calm a storm. They found Jonah fast asleep and woke him up.

“What are you doing sleeping at a time like this?” the captain demanded. “Call on your god. Maybe he will hear and save us.”

They cast lots—which is a little like drawing straws—to see who was the guilty person causing the big storm. The lot fell to Jonah.

“Have you been doing something that would make your god angry?” they asked.

“I'm trying to hide from Him right now,” Jonah admitted.

They were dismayed to hear that! They did their best to keep the ship afloat by throwing out the cargo. At last it was apparent that there was no hope.

“Go ahead and throw me in,” Jonah told them. “If you don't we'll all perish.”

The other men were reluctant, but at last they threw him in. How astonished they must have been when a huge fish jumped out of the water and swallowed Jonah alive! And then, the raging seas suddenly became calm. They were afraid and made promises to serve the Lord.

How astonished Jonah must have been to find himself on the inside of a big fish. Do you think it was very pleasant for him? I don't much think so! Even the outside of fish are nasty and smelly. The insides must have been dark and even stinkier.

Boys and girls, when we try to run from God, we always run into smelly situations! God loves us enough to make sure we are on the right path. If we're not,

He'll sent storms and troubles to get us back on track. He knows that we are only truly happy when we are living in obedience to Him.

Jonah spent three days and three nights in the belly of the fish. At last, he was ready to obey and go where God led him. When he repented, God heard his prayer. God spoke to the fish, and he vomited Jonah out onto dry ground.

“Now, about Nineveh,” God reminded Jonah. “Go and tell them the message I will give you.”

This time Jonah went to Nineveh. He marched right into the city and began preaching to them. The people believed God. They all put on ragged clothes (sackcloth) and went without eating (fasting). They asked God forgiveness. From the king himself down to the lowest servant, they repented.

God saw that they were truly sorry from their hearts. He decided not to send the great judgment after all.

The Ninevites were happy—but Jonah wasn't! He was angry with God.

“This is just what I said would happen,” he said in disgust. “I knew that you are such a gracious God that you would forgive them and not destroy them after all. Just take my life, Lord. I don't want to live anymore.

What a terrible attitude! Jonah should have been glad to see these people repent from their wicked ways. All he could think about was that these people were enemies and weren't going to be destroyed after all. He went out and sat down where he could see the city in the distance, hoping still that the Lord would destroy it.

It was hot in the place he was sitting, so God made a quick-growing gourd plant to come up to shade him. He was glad for the protection from the sun that the plant provided. Then God prepared a worm to eat the plant so that it would die.

Jonah was in an even worse mood after the plant died! He was mad at God because he had lost his shade.

“Are you doing right to angry over a plant?” God asked Jonah.

“Yes!” Jonah answered. “I’m right to be so angry I could die.”

“You didn’t make that gourd grow. It was just a plant that grew one day and died the next. It wasn’t important at all—yet you had pity for it.

“Don’t you think I should have had pity on the people I made? There are 120,000 people there who aren’t able to tell their right hand from their left. Don’t you think I should have pity on them?”

The Bible doesn’t tell if Jonah straightened up or not, but I hope he saw how foolish it was to be angry with God. I hope he began to feel glad for those people who didn’t know their right hand from their left.

Who do you thing those people were? Some people think that God meant that there were 120,000 people who couldn’t tell right from wrong. I think, though, He meant that there were those thousands of people who really couldn’t tell which was their right hand and which was left.

Who were they? Little children—not yet old enough to know which hand is which. God saw a wicked city that deserved judgment—but He also saw little children in the city. For their sakes, He withheld that judgment.

The Life Lesson

Aren't you glad that God loves little children? Aren't you glad God loves you?

I hope you won't be like foolish Jonah and won't ever try to hide from God.

Remember, He can see clear down to the inside of your heart—no matter where you are.

Review Questions

Why did Jonah try to hide from God?

He didn't want to preach to the Ninevites.

Where did Jonah go instead of to Nineveh?

He got on a boat to Tarshish.

What happened on the way to Tarshish?

God sent a great storm.

What happened to Jonah when the crew of the ship threw him into the ocean?

A big fish came and swallowed him whole.

How long did Jonah spend inside the fish?

Three days and three nights.

What happened when Jonah repented and told God he was sorry?

The fish spit him out on dry land.

Where was Jonah when the fish spit him out?

Near Nineveh

Did Jonah preach to the Ninevites?

Yes

How did they respond to his preaching?

They repented and turned to God.

Was Jonah happy after he preached?

No, he was mad that God wouldn't punish the Ninevites.

Was Jonah's attitude pleasing to God?

No

Does God love children?

Yes