

# JONAH, THE ESCAPIST WHO BECAME THE EVANGELIST

Scripture Lessons:

[Jonah 1: 1-17](#)

[Jonah 2:1-10](#)

[Jonah 3:1-3](#)

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Jonah is a classic example of escapism. Escapism, I suppose, is a comparatively modern term; yet, it is only a new name of an old thing. It is in fact as old as the garden of Eden. The truth is that the first man is an escapist.

But let us begin from the beginning of Jonah's life story.

1. In the first place, Jonah was a man who traveled in the wrong boat. We find him, as we read the Scriptures, that he was sailing for Tarshish. God had told him to go to Nineveh. He has booked a single fare and is now fast asleep in the hold. But the trouble is, he is in the wrong boat. It does not matter how good a ship may be, if you are in the wrong boat, your traveling is useless. That is how it was with Jonah. He was speeding along the path of disobedience. And no wonder he soon found himself running into a raging storm.

A prominent bishop once said, "Every duty, even the least of duty, involves the whole principle of obedience." Bitter raging storms inevitably beset the man who flees from God. The way of disobedience is a stormy way to all who tread upon it".

2. Now , we come to the second stage in the prophet's strange career. Jonah came to that point of life when it was no longer

even possible. All the forces of God's universe fought against him. The whole nature seemed to concentrate her forces in order to arrest him in his flight from the place of duty.

In the game of "judo", they call this "lock", that is, when a player is placed in a position where he can no longer move to fight back. He may either give it up or break his bones.

In this connection, I would like to carry you and bring you to the 20th century scene. I hope you agree with me when I say that Jonah was not the only escapist this world has ever known. I like to believe that all of us are escapists in one way or another. But in our escapism, what matters is not only what we escape from, but to what we hope to make in our escape

Some years ago, Dr. Billy Graham, in the Manila Bulletin, mentioned the names of two 20th century escapists. One was the famous poet, Hemingway, and the other one was the late millionaire Vonderbuilt who made his perfect escape by jumping through the window of his hotel. Whether he really took his life or whether it was an accident, the fact remains that Dr. Graham mentioned his name. In our country, the Philippines, the usual escape is one of the tall edifice in Escolta, Manila, or in the Pasig river. In Baguio, I was informed that some had been making Mines View Park as their escape.

But thanks to God, there are still good and wholesome escapes. For instance, some find their escape in the enchantment of the world's great music. Others find their escape in the treasures of literature. Others seek the glories of art in the angelic host of Botticelli, the matchless form of Michelangelo, or the deathless beauty of some ancient cathedral.

The truth however, is that we cannot escape from the path of duty, from the task, which God has intended for us. That was

what Jonah endeavored to do. Jonah, in the good providence of God, found his true escape. Things did not turn out as he had imagined. He was cast into the deep and he thought that would be the end of it all, but it was not. Rather, it meant another beginning. Jonah found God again in the deep, in the light of God's saving grace going after him, in spite of his being disobedient.

Time and again this happens in our world. At the age of 43, John Milton was stricken with blindness and he thought that would be the end of everything. But in less than ten years since that calamitous event, "Paradise Lost" had been born, and secured for him deathless fame. Thank God for the deeps, if in them, we come to know something of the wideness and mystery of the Lord's infinite love.

Finally, Jonah was cast up a new man. He was now a regenerated man with a new spirit, a new outlook upon life, and a new sense of duty to God. He is now fully obedient to the heavenly vision, and his face is now turned to the right direction.

Some years ago, according to information, a big moral problem was before the New York Legislature. When the opposition learned that the exponent of this Crusade was undergoing a severe operation in the hospital, they at once called up the bill for a vote. Hearing about this, the man who was the exponent for the bill demanded that he be carried into the legislature hall on a stretcher. The vote was finally taken, and the moral side won. He risked his life for the vote.

Yes, brave men have dared mobs, have looked into the eyes of death, have endured scorn- all for the challenging cause which they thought to be right. And so, Jonah went to Nineveh duty-conscious and with courage in his heart- and there, in the

repentance and salvation of that great pagan city, his eyes and heart were opened in the wonder of God's love and forgiveness.

Brethren, we are fully aware of the fact that even in our time still a great number of mankind has been cast into the deep. And right in the deep, this great number of mankind has been swallowed up by the sting and power of sin.

For instance, think of what is going on in our country today. Why should violence and killings happen in our society? Why should there be unrest among students, peasants, and laborers? The cause of these unrest, are they not evidence of the fact that still a great number of our people are being cast into the deep? And right in the deep these people are being swallowed up by the sting and power of sin and destruction.

However, I believe that this is not the end of these people. A more meaningful life is intended for them by God. But who will go to tell them that God has designed a better life, a better service, a better mansion for them? Who will respond to God who is constantly calling for men and women who will proclaim His will to a seemingly darkened generation similar to our generation? Who will say to Him in spirit and in truth, like Isaiah of old who said, "Here am I, send me"?

In 1967, I was at the Union Theological Seminary for a year of "refresher course". In that year, I noticed that in the Seminary, there came about the issue of "go home Yankee". This was evidenced by some comments from students and also from some chapel service messages. One time I was given the opportunity to give the chapel service meditation. And I said to that chapel service: "For me, I think it would be much better for us to concentrate more of our thinking and our concern to those people who are drowning in the deep sea of sin and destruction than to the issue of, "go home Yankee". For after all, as individual and as

a church it is our main and common mission to proclaim incessantly the will of God to a sinful humanity. And if we want our nation to really become great in this part of the world, let us constantly help our people, whether they be student or worker, government officials or not, to come into true relationship with God. For I believe that if a nation seeks to become great, its people must put their complete trust and confidence in God. This was the ultimate concern of Jonah when he was already in that pagan city of Nineveh.

And who will stand up and say to the Lord in this present generation, "here I am send me, O Lord." But, finally, let us be reminded that it was only when Jonah became a new man, a regenerated man, that he was able to arise and go into Nineveh, according to the word of the Lord. And the Bible says, "So the people of Nineveh believed God, and proclaimed a fast, and put on sackcloth from the greatest of them even to the least of them." Amen.

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