

Jonah: A Man on the Run

Running With God - Jonah 3

Introduction: In the movie, Forrest Gump, there is a part where When Forrest Gump decided to run, he had no reason. But as he ran, several people began to follow him and run with him. Some probably ran out of curiosity, but most just ran because ole Forrest was running. But then something strange happened. Forrest got tired of running, so he just stopped in the middle of the road, turned around and went home, leaving the others out in the middle of nowhere. I told that story because it's a sad commentary on life for a lot of people. It seem as though a lot of people are just running here and there. They think that their running around is important, but in the end, it's just leading to nowhere.

But I want you to know today that you don't have to run and run and run and end up nowhere. With God, you'll get somewhere. When you run with God, you have a purpose, and it will be rewarding, renewing, and reassuring.

In our study of Jonah, we've seen a man on the run. We were introduced to him as he was trying to run away from God. God had given him something to do and he didn't want to do it, so he tried to run away from his responsibilities. But just as he thought he was getting away, God got his attention by sending a storm and a big fish to swallow him up. That's when he stopped running away from God.

Then, we saw last week where Jonah tried to run back to God. From inside the fish, in grave danger and distress, Jonah called out to God in desperation. Jonah accepted his fate, and ran back to the merciful God he knew and was spared.

In our lesson for today, we find Jonah on the run again. But now, he's not running from God, he's running with God in obedience to His call. Now he's running with purpose and a goal in mind. Let's examine what it meant for Jonah to run with God, and what it means to us when we choose to run with God.

1. A Sign of Salvation

There's an old saying associated with gang membership that says if you are a part of the gang, you "*run with the pack.*" If you run with the pack, you're identified with the gang. You're a part of the gang. You're allegiance is with the gang.

By the same token, but on a more positive note, if you run with God, it's a pretty sure sign that you're being identified with God. It's a sure sign that you're a part of His family, and it should leave no doubt where your allegiance lies.

But be careful. As the people in Forrest Gump, it is possible to run with God, but not be of God. 1 John 1:6 says, *“The one who says he abides in Him ought himself to walk in the same manner as He walked.”* John said that even in his day, *“...many antichrists have arisen...They went out from us, but they were not really of us; for if they had been of us, they would have remained with us.”*

But the person who really walks with God, who is an imitator of Him, who practices righteousness, demonstrates genuine love, shows mercy, extends grace, and gives forgiveness, is the one who is saved and a true disciple of Christ.

2. A Second Chance (1-2)

In vs.. 1-2, we hear God calling Jonah a second time to go to Nineveh and preach. This might seem a little strange, given Jonah’s rebellious attitude and actions of chapter one. After he had been called, and literally ran in the other direction, we wouldn’t blame God for saying, *“burn me once, shame on you, burn me twice, shame on me?”* We are conditioned to be suspicious and skeptical when dealing with people who have messed up aren’t we? We love to hold grudges, bring up past mistakes, and discard people who have messed up as useless. But, thank God, He doesn’t.

Abraham fled to Egypt, where he lied about his wife, but God gave him another chance. Jacob lied to his father Isaac, but God restored him and used him to build the nation of Israel. Moses killed a man, and ran away in fear, but God called him to lead His people out of slavery. Peter denied the Lord three times, but Jesus forgave Him, and told him to *“feed My sheep.”* Over and over in the Scriptures, God has proven to be a God of second chances. Aren’t you glad He’s given you a second chance to run with Him?

3. A Signal to Share (2-4)

Third, we notice that running with God is also a signal to share His message. God called Jonah a second time to go and preach to Nineveh. God didn’t water down His call. He didn’t feel sorry for Jonah and give him a lesser task. He didn’t say, *“That’s OK Jonah, forget it this time. You just go and join the First Baptist Church of Ninevah, and wait until you’ve earned your stripes.”* No, God took Jonah seriously when he committed to pay the price. He still had a work for him to do. As far as God was concerned, Jonah’s slate was clean, and it was time to get on with the task at hand.

There’s a great lesson here. When we decide to run with God, He fires the starting gun immediately. I mean, the race is on. There’s work to do and no time to waste. God is a God who is on the move, and if we’re going to run with Him, we had better get started. Don’t wait for another signal to share the good news, God’s

already given it. *“You shall be my witnesses...” “Go and make disciples of all the nations...”* That’s our signal to share.

4. A Shunning of Sin (5-9)

But notice another aspect of running with God. When we decide to follow Christ, we turn our back on sin. It’s called repentance.

Jonah preached a simple message of repentance to the Ninevites, *“Yet forty days and Nineveh will be overthrown.”* No doubt, the sermon was more to than these eight words, but the message was clear, *“Turn or burn.” “Get right or get left.” “Glorify or French Fry!”* In other words, God’s judgment was coming on them. Their barbaric treatment of the Jews was not going to be tolerated much longer. God was going to save them destroy them, if they did not repent.

Repentance is simply turning one’s back on sin, and turning toward God. It’s a change of mind, a change of heart, and a change of direction. It’s shunning sin, and running in God’s direction.

Are you running with God? Have you completely turned your back on the sin that wants to hold you back? Have you truly repented?

5. A Sweet Surrender (10)

That leads us to the last point I want to make. **Read Verse 10.** Running with God means a sweet surrender. It means that you have surrendered to the fact that only God can save, that His ways are higher than our ways, that He wants to give life, not destroy it, that His grace is greater than all our sins, that His love is a boundless love, and that His way will lead to eternal and abundant life.

Conclusion: God is looking for people who will run with Him today. He’s looking to give someone here a second chance. He’s reminding someone that He’s already given you the signal to share your faith. He’s giving someone here the opportunity to shun sin and turn to Him in faith believing this morning. He’s looking for someone who will surrender their all to Him today.

The victorious Christian life is a series of new beginnings. When we fall, Satan wants us to believe that it’s all over for us. He wants to convince us that we have nothing to give, nothing to look forward to, no usefulness, and nothing to live for. But God is teaching us through the story of Jonah, that Satan is a liar. He teaching us that He will use us for His glory, no matter how checkered our past is.

Today is a day of new beginnings. It’s the day to claim the victory that is already ours. Run to Him today. Run and meet a loving, gracious, and forgiving God who wants to be your running mate.