The four scenes in Jonah's story   6-20-2020

If you watch a live play in the theater, you will see different scenes to act out the story. I often like to guess what the next scene will be, and I like to critique the action of the actors. You can imagine the four scenes of the play in Jonah's story that I will describe today. The book of Jonah is a minor prophet book in the Old Testament. It was written by a third person. The time period of the event is likely around mid 700thBC. Prophet Jonah is from a town called Gath-hepher near Nazareth (a town of Galilee) as described in II King 14:25. Thus, Jonah is from the Northern Kingdom of Israel. During Jonah's years as a prophet, Israel was a fairly strong country during the reign of Jeroboam II. Most prophesies are toward God' people, but Jonah's prophesy is toward the Assyrians (a nearby country).

1) Flee from God (Chapter 1 or scene 1)

    a. **Flee from God because it is not his choice**

       God told Jonah to go to Nineveh to tell them they have sinned and the way to salvation. Jonah didn't want to obey God because 1. Nineveh is the capital of Assyria which is Israel's enemy, and 2. Nineveh is filled with sins that Jonah didn't like.

       Jonah might have internal hatred towards the Assyrians. Who is your "Nineveh" that you don't want God to save? In a wider sense, do you flee from God because it is not your choice? Jonah's experience is a good lesson for us.

    b. **Consequence of acting against God's will**

       God's plan is always good for us (Jer. 29:11). He can accomplish His will with or without your involvement. When you don't obey God, you suffer similar to Jonah was in a fish stomach. In addition, other people might suffer. People in Nineveh and those people in the same boat as Jonah would suffer. In another word, people near you, far from you as well as yourself might all suffer.

2) Run towards God (Chapter 2)

    a. **Run towards God when there is a need**

God makes us to realize what we have done is wrong or get us into a situation of in need. That is the time to run to God. Jonah recognized his problem and prayed to God.

b. God responds when one seeks Him

God listened to Jonah's prayer (Jonah 2:2). Jonah admitted his sin. God delivered Jonah. In the same way, God delivers us even when we turn away from God's guidance. Matt. 7:7 in the New Testament stated "Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you."

3) Walk with God (Chapter 3)

Scene 3 is Jonah's turning point in action. Chapter 3 is about Jonah obeyed God and went to Nineveh for delivering the message. God gave Jonah the second chance. God is gracious and often give us the second chance. Jonah walked in step with God here. That is what God wants us to do. Be consistent walking with God, not running before nor running away. In that way, God's will be done as shown in this chapter.

4) Angry with God (Chapter 4)

Jonah still didn't resolve his internal issue (his heart) in Chapter 4. He wasn't happy when God saved the people in Nineveh. Jonah has no right to be angry with God, but how often that we have the same issue. Even when we walk with God "in action", but our hearts might not be. Although Jonah was angry with God, God has mercy on him. God used a plant to provide shade and later the plant died to show Jonah His merciful will, and how Jonah shall change his attitude. How difficult is it to soften one's heart? God is patience with each one of us. Let's us purify our hearts while we walk with God.

Jonah went through those 4 scenes in the 4 chapters. We shall not run away from God nor run ahead of God. Run towards God is good but should not be in a situation where you have sinned and created a desperate situation. The best is to walk with God in step so that you are always very close to God. You have no need to "run" to God once you are already close to God. We are weak spiritually but God knows that and always love us. God can purify our hearts when we walk closely with God. God

looks at our hearts as well as actions. May Jonah's experience helps us to be aware of our sins and mistakes, and walk closely with God!