

Jonah's Prayer

Jonah 1:17 - 2:1-6

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Pastor Francis Bezzam

¹⁷ And the Lord appointed a great fish to swallow up Jonah. And Jonah was in the belly of the fish three days and three nights. ¹Then Jonah prayed to the Lord his God from the belly of the fish, ² saying, "I called out to the Lord, out of my distress, and he answered me; out of the belly of Sheol I cried, and you heard my voice. ³ For you cast me into the deep, into the heart of the seas, and the flood surrounded me; all your waves and your billows passed over me. ⁴ Then I said, 'I am driven away from your sight; yet I shall again look upon your holy temple.' ⁵ The waters closed in over me to take my life; the deep surrounded me; weeds were wrapped about my head ⁶ at the roots of the mountains. I went down to the land whose bars closed upon me forever; yet you brought up my life from the pit, O Lord my God.

In June 2021 a man in Massachusetts was going diving for lobsters and a few minutes later he found himself being swallowed by a whale. According to this man, he thought he was going to die when he was in the mouth of the whale but about forty seconds later the whale spit him out. And he survived to tell the story.

Jonah being swallowed by a whale is not a stretch by any means. But more than the swallowing itself, who made the provision for Jonah is perhaps the key thing to notice.

I have three observations as we look at this passage.

First observation: *God Sovereign's care is better than our expectations.*

Last week, we saw that the sailors hurled Jonah into the stormy seas. And as a result, the sea became calm. The sailors were in awe of God. But Jonah probably thought he was done. He knew he had been running and hiding from God. He confessed his disobedience. He himself asked that he be thrown overboard. Imagine what he must have been thinking as they hurled him off the ship. He probably said this to himself "I disobeyed God and I am getting what I deserve. I am going to drown. I am done. I am going to see a watery grave." However, you see the verse seventeen begin with the words "And the Lord appointed". God is not done with Jonah. God cares for Jonah better than he knows.

You see the word '*appointed*' in verse seventeen?

The Lord arranged, prepared, designated or numbered a whale. A literal translation of this word is

enrolled. All creatures are on enrolled in God's payroll.

²⁴ *O Lord, how manifold are your works! In wisdom have you made them all; the earth is full of your creatures.* ²⁵ *Here is the sea, great and wide, which teems with creatures innumerable, living things both small and great.* ²⁶ *There go the ships, and Leviathan, which you formed to play in it.* ²⁷ *These all look to you, to give them their food in due season.* Psalm 104: 24-27

The weather pattern is on God's payroll. When God wants to send a storm, he can send a wind according to his will. Its only sinful humanity that does not want to do God's will. But we see the sailors finally capitulate to the invisible hand of God. They surrender their wills to the Lord God.

And in verse seventeen, we see Jonah's location and duration after he was thrown off the ship. He is in the belly of the fish. And he is there for three days and three nights. Apparently, Jonah is having a "whale of a time".

Second observation: *When in distress, pray!*

When Jonah was in the inner most part of the ship, he thought he was hiding from God. When the sailors in the ship were terrified of storm, each one began crying out to his god. And the captain approached him and told to pray.

"Arise, call out to your god! Perhaps the god will give a thought to us, that we may not perish". Jonah 1:6. However, Jonah refused to pray. Perhaps he was too prideful. Perhaps he was throwing a tantrum against God. But now he is in the inner most part of the whale. But he doesn't think he can hide from God. Not anymore. What does Jonah do? Notice the contrast.

Verses one and two:

¹*Then Jonah prayed to the Lord his God from the belly of the fish,* ²*saying, "I called out to the Lord, out of my distress, and he answered me; out of the belly of Sheol I cried, and you heard my voice.*

Jonah prays. From where? From the inside of the fish. It was probably very dark and terrifying. That is why he thought it was like Sheol. Sheol is the place of dead. But from there he cries out. And Jonah believes God has answered him. *I cried and you heard my voice.*

The word distress is an interesting word. It's also translated "a tight spot". Have you ever been in a tight spot? A difficult situation. A place where you thought everything was "dark" around you. You thought no one could hear you. You thought all hope as lost. I have good news for you.

God can hear see you and hear you. God can and will hear your prayer from the most difficult situations. *“If I ascend to heaven, you are there! If I make my bed in Sheol, you are there! ⁹ If I take the wings of the morning and dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea, ¹⁰ even there your hand shall lead me, and your right hand shall hold me. Psalm 139:8-10*

Why did Jonah make such a u-turn?

Well, he probably heard the sailors pray to his own God. And he was probably convicted of his own lack of faith. But you see his real reason in verse three.

³ For you cast me into the deep, into the heart of the seas, and the flood surrounded me; all your waves and your billows passed over me.

Jonah now realizes that he is under God’s loving discipline. He asked to be thrown overboard. But his conviction came from his realization that he disobeyed God.

King David was under a similar situation when conducted a census.

“But David's heart struck him after he had numbered the people. And David said to the Lord, “I have sinned greatly in what I have done. But now, O Lord, please take away the iniquity of your servant, for I have done very foolishly.” ¹¹ And when David arose in the morning, the word of the Lord came to the prophet Gad, David's seer, saying, ¹² “Go and say to David, ‘Thus says the Lord, Three things I offer you. Choose one of them, that I may do it to you.’” ¹³ So Gad came to David and told him, and said to him, “Shall three years of famine come to you in your land? Or will you flee three months before your foes while they pursue you? Or shall there be three days' pestilence in your land? Now consider, and decide what answer I shall return to him who sent me.” ¹⁴ Then David said to Gad, “I am in great distress. Let us fall into the hand of the Lord, for his mercy is great; but let me not fall into the hand of man.” 2 Samuel 24:9-14

Third observation: *God’s discipline is for restoration not condemnation.*

Let’s see verses *four* through *six*.

⁴ Then I said, ‘I am driven away from your sight; yet I shall again look upon your holy temple.’ ⁵ The waters closed in over me to take my life; the deep surrounded me; weeds were wrapped about my head ⁶ at the roots of the mountains. I went down to the land whose bars closed upon me forever; yet you brought up my life from the pit, O Lord my God.

Verse five is describing to us what Jonah was going through when he was thrown overboard. The waters

closed in on him. Jonah was rapidly plunging into the depth of the sea. The weeds wrapped around his head. Jonah thought he was done. And yet in verses four and six, we see confession, hope and assurance. Jonah understands that God is just, righteous and compassionate at the same. God does not play favorites even with his prophets. And yet he hears the cry of those repent and turn to Him.

Jonah's prayer is similar to the Psalmist says in Psalm 119:75 and 76. *"I know, O Lord, that your rules are righteous, and that in faithfulness you have afflicted me. ⁷⁶ Let your steadfast love comfort me according to your promise to your servant."* And you see the end of verse six – this is very personal. Jonah prayer is an intimate prayer to God. O Lord my God.

If you see what we observed from Jonah so far you see pattern emerge from God's action and man's action. God commanded Jonah. Jonah disobeys. God hurled a wind. Jonah confesses and repents. God does not hurl a wind anymore but calms the storm. But God also appoints a method to save Jonah. What does Jonah's prayer help to live life as a believer?

It reminds me of God's appointment of Jesus. This word "appointed" is the same word the prophet Isaiah uses about the suffering servant. Isaiah 53:12. He was numbered among the transgressors. From a salvation standpoint, Jesus was appointed to be a substitute in your place. You and I were the transgressors but he (Jesus) was numbered among the transgressors. If God were to hurl his wrath on us, we would deserve all of it for our sinful disobedience against God.

"And you were dead in the trespasses and sins ² in which you once walked, following the course of this world, following the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work in the sons of disobedience— ³ among whom we all once lived in the passions of our flesh, carrying out the desires of the body and the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, like the rest of mankind" Ephesians 2:1-3

But did we receive what we deserved? We received grace upon grace. We received eternal life.

And living life as a believer is not without its temptations. The opportunities to stray and wander and disobey are many. But the Lord patiently bears with us. He is able to rescue when we repent and confess our sins. God is able to make arrangements so that you can be sustained in time of trouble.

Our straying from God may invite His discipline but if you are in Christ there is no condemnation.

God's discipline is only to train us to live more righteously.

"Who is to condemn? Christ Jesus is the one who died—more than that, who was raised—who is at the right hand of God, who indeed is interceding for us." (Romans 8:34). May the Lord give us strength to obey Him.

----- Discipleship Questions-----

MESSAGE SUMMARY: Jonah's prayer. Jonah 1:1-17 - 2:1-6

HEAD: These questions help you examine the truth of God's Word.

1. What might have caused Jonah to call out to God and pray from the belly of the fish? Compare and contrast Jonah 1:6 with Jonah 2:1-2.

HEART: These questions help you wrestle with what you believe.

2. Given Jonah's prayer, under what circumstances do you see God hears prayer when we have strayed? Psalm 38:17-18, 21-22, Psalm 119:71, Romans 2:4, 2 Corinthians 7:10
3. What is God convicting you of and to believe in light of this message?

HANDS/HABITS: These questions help you bring the truth into your everyday life and develop behaviors that change your habits.

4. For personal reflection: What can we learn from God's sovereignty and Jonah's life so far?