

## *A Study of Book of Jonah*

### Sermon # 3

#### *"Praying When Praying Is All That Is Left!"*

Jonah 1:17-2:1-10

You may or may not remember our last lesson on Jonah in chapter 1 verse 4-16 which dealt with the "Cost and Consequences of Disobedience." In that message we noted that 1) God Loves you too much to let you remain in disobedience, 2) a believer's disobedience always involves others, 3) disobedience leaves us powerless before the storms and 4) you can not live a disobedient life without it showing. As we left the disobedient prophet God had said "Go," Jonah had said, "No" and as a result he had lost his purpose, his joy and had found himself in the midst of a storm. When we left Jonah the sailor's had finally given into to Jonah's idea that he be thrown into the sea. The storm immediately ceased (v. 15). The sailor's were convinced that they were throwing Jonah to his death, and Jonah had no reason to believe otherwise. But verse seventeen tells us, "Now the LORD had prepared a great fish to swallow Jonah. And Jonah was in the belly of the fish three days and three nights."

The fish was a miracle of God's grace!

Jonah expected death. He knew that the wages of sin, of disobedience meant death – and when he is cast into the raging sea – that is what he expects. He deserves it, the justice of God, demands it. And then, the great fish gulped him down and he finds himself alive inside the fish.

A word about the fish!

It just says it was a "great fish." I am not sure what kind of fish it was; it might be a dogfish, one of the shark family; it might be Jaws--I don't know.

The critics can't swallow the story of Jonah because they say it couldn't happen. But it could happen. An average sperm whale may have a mouth 20 feet long, 15 feet high and 9 feet wide. Let me tell you this is a big animal. In fact, it's about the biggest mammal on the planet. That explains how the fish or whale could swallow a person. The sperm whale feeds largely on squid. These squid are often larger than people. Whalers have sometimes found an entire squid in the stomach of a dead whale.

As to whether a man could survive in a whale's stomach, he certainly could, though in circumstances of very great discomfort. There would be air to breathe, of a sort. It is needed to keep the animal afloat. But there would be great heat, about 104-108°F. Unpleasant contact with the animal's gastric juices might also affect the skin.

There was actually a case of man who had been swallowed by a whale and lived. It happened on the ship, Star of the East. In February 1891, this whaling ship spotted a large sperm whale in the vicinity of the Falkland Islands. Two boats were launched, and shortly a harpooner speared the whale. The second boat attempted to get in another harpoon, but the boat was overturned in the process and one man drowned. Another man, James Bartley, disappeared and was assumed drowned. In time the whale was killed and drawn to the side of the ship where it was tied fast and the blubber removed. The

following day the stomach was hoisted onto the deck. That's where James Bartley was. He was in the whale's stomach, unconscious, but alive. He recovered and did his job again.

[James Montgomery Boice. The Minor Prophets. Chap 32. Prayer From the Depths. Jonah 1:17-2:10 Vol I. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1983) p. 229 ]

But regardless of what kind of "great fish" God chose to use to rescue Jonah is was a miracle. And if you can't accept the miracle of Jonah and the great fish then there are a lot of other miracle in the Bible that are going to give you trouble. If you have trouble with Jonah then you probably will have trouble accepting the fact that the Red Sea was opened for Moses and the Israelites; the manna given to the Hebrews in the wilderness; the fire by night and the cloud by day; the water from the rock; the Jordan River parting for Joshua or the walls of Jericho coming down. However, as I have stated previously the greatest reason to believe the story of Jonah is because Jesus accepted it as true. (Matthew 12:38-41)

Tonight as we examine Jonah's Crisis Situation I want us to see three principles.

First, *Sometimes A Crisis Experience Is Exactly What We Need To Get Us To Pray.* (2:1)

- Notice when He Prayed "Then Jonah prayed to the LORD his God from the fish's belly."

Abraham Lincoln once said, "I have been driven many times to my knees by the overwhelming conviction that I had nowhere else to go." In his book "Growing Strong In The Seasons of Life" Charles Swindoll recounts the story of an airliner in 1968 bound for New York that began its descent when the pilot realized the landing gear had refused to engage. He worked the controls back and forth, trying again and again to make the gear lock down into place but had no success. He then asked the control tower for instructions as he circled the landing field. Responding to the crisis, airport personnel sprayed the runway with foam as fire trucks and other emergency vehicles moved into position. Disaster was only minutes away. The passengers, meanwhile, were told of each maneuver in that calm, cheery voice pilots manage to use at times like this. Flight attendants glided about the cabin with an air of cool reserve telling the passengers to place their heads between their knees and grab their ankles just before impact. It was one of those "I-can't-believe-this-is-happening-to-me" experiences that led to many tears and even a few screams of despair in the cabin. The landing was only a few seconds away when suddenly the pilot announced over the intercom: We are beginning our final descent. At this moment, in accordance with International Aviation Codes established in Geneva, it is my obligation to inform you that if you believe in God you should COMMENCE PRAYER. [Charles Swindoll. Growing Strong In the Seasons of Life. (Portland: Multnomah, 1983) pp. 273-274]

When he was totally exhausted at the end of his rope...no where else to turn...only then did he cry out for God's help.

At first, Jonah probably thought he was going to die. But after a number of hours, he said, "Hey wait a minute! I think God may be up to sometime here. There is enough air to breathe. The heat isn't as intolerable as I thought at first. I'm going to make it! This fish isn't the sign of my destruction but he means of my deliverance! Thank You Lord!"

R. T. Kendall put it this way, he said: *the belly of the fish is not a happy place to LIVE, but it is a good place to LEARN.* And Jonah had a lot to LEARN...For three days in that smelly, dark fish belly he pondered his situation. He did a lot of soul-searching. He eventually saw the foolishness of his sin. He saw his need for God and then he prayed again the prayer that makes up most of this second chapter. When Jonah had turned his back on God, it did not bother him to be separated from God. But suddenly, when Jonah was thrown over board, as he faced death, he found that it bothered him tremendously to be separated from God. The most terrifying aspect of Jonah's plight was when he realized that God had almost given him what he wanted – to be free of his presence. Jonah wanted to run from God. Now the implications of that separation bring Jonah to repentance.

J. Vernon McGee tells the story of a young man who was like Jonah was running from the call of God. His parents had made him attend a Revival meeting at his home church which he did two nights in succession. And he knew that if he went yet another time, he not only would accept Christ as his Savior but would also give his life to enter the ministry.... So that night after everybody went to bed, he got an extra shirt and his pajamas and ran off to Mississippi. There he got a job in a sawmill....

One afternoon after he had worked there for about two weeks, ... he caught his index finger on his right hand in one of the logs. He felt himself being pulled along the carriage toward that big band saw. He began to yell at the top of his voice, but by that time, the other end of the log had hit the saw and was already going through.... nobody could hear him. He was yelling at the top of his voice, very frightened as he found himself being pulled against his will right into that saw.

It would take only about forty-five seconds for him to get to the saw.... In that forty-five seconds, he had prayed to the Lord. He accepted Christ as his Savior, promised the Lord he would go into the ministry and do His will, and told Him a lot of other things also! McGee said, My preacher friend used to say that he told the Lord more in that forty-five seconds than he has ever told Him in an hour's prayer since then." [J. Vernon McGee. *Thru the Bible Commentary*. Based on the Thru the Bible radio program.]. (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1981) (electronic ed. -1997)]

I believe that Jonah's prayer on the way down was like that.

Notice Not only When He Prayed But also ....

· Notice To Whom He Prays

"Then Jonah prayed to the LORD his God"

As disobedient as Jonah was in his rebellion, as much as he had gone in the opposite direction of God's will for his life, he still realized that God was his God. He was like David when said in Psalm 23 "The LORD HE is my shepherd" everything that he says is based on the calm assurance that the Lord was His personal shepherd. Jonah could still pray to HIS God. Can you?

*Sometimes A Crisis Experience Is Exactly What We Need To Get Us To Pray and...*

Secondly, *God can hear our Prayers from anywhere (2:2)*

"And he said: "I cried out to the LORD because of my affliction, And He answered me...."

The words “cried out” means in this case to utter a loud sound. There are other possible definitions according to the Strong’s Concordance. I would simply ask you this, “If you found yourself alive in a whale’s belly and knew beyond a shadow of doubt that God had put you there, what would you say? *Would say, psst. Lord I could use a little help here?* You would be shouting at the top of your voice, *“Help Me!! Please God Help Me!”* Jonah’s prayer recorded in chapter two has much to teach us about prayer.

Some commentators seem to think that Jonah was in the belly of the fish for three days before he began to pray. My personal thought is that before he cleared the tonsils he was already praying. Jonah is a very secluded spot and I think we can safely say, that now God has Jonah’s undivided attention.

But what do you pray when you don’t know what to pray. You may or may not realize it but Jonah prayed back the word of God. There probably is not one original thought or request in Jonah prayer. Jonah is praying through the book of Psalms. Eight times in the following verses he quoted from the book of Psalms. Jonah is standing on the promises of God and praying through the Scripture.

When you are lonely – you can pray *“Lord you have said in your word that you would never leave me nor forsake me.”*

When you are afraid – you can pray – *“Lord you have assured me that I need never be afraid”*

When you are in need – you can pray – *“Lord you said that you would meet all my needs according to your riches in Christ Jesus”*

When you need forgiveness – you can pray – *“Lord you have said that if I would confess my sins you would be faithful and just to forgive me and cleanse me.”*

So like Jonah whatever our need God has a promise can claim.

Jonah’s great prayer can be divided into three parts

1. Thanksgiving (vv. 2-6) "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 floods surrounded me; All Your billows and Your waves passed over me. (4) Then I said, "I have been cast out of Your sight; Yet I will look again toward Your holy temple.' (5) The waters surrounded me, even to my soul; The deep closed around me; Weeds were wrapped around my head. (6) I went down to the moorings of the mountains; The earth with its bars closed behind me forever; Yet You have brought up my life from the pit, O LORD, my God.

Thanksgiving, why thanksgiving what does Jonah possibility have to be thankful for? He had been swallowed by a great fish and he was some where in the great deep awaiting his ultimate death, what does he have to be thankful for?

“Jonah was not thankful that God had delivered him from the fish because God had not yet delivered him. He was not thankful that God was going to deliver him, because he had no idea that God was going to do it. What he was thankful for was that God had turned him from rebellion and had caused him to call on the name of the Lord once again. He was thankful for salvation. He was thankful for the abiding

grace of God. [James Montgomery Boice. The Minor Prophets. Chap 32. Prayer From the Depths. Jonah 1:17-2:10 p. 229 ]

## 2. Contrition (vv. 7-8)

"When my soul fainted within me, I remembered the LORD; And my prayer went up to You, Into Your holy temple. (8) "Those who regard worthless idols Forsake their own Mercy."

This is a step beyond just being honest about your sin. It is possible to honest about your sin, acknowledge even acknowledge that God is just in what has happened and still be unrepentant about it. We know that Jonah's confession was true because he although he acknowledge what he had happened to him had been caused by God it was his own fault and secondly because Jonah did not ask for anything for himself.

## 3. Rededication (v. 9)

"But I will sacrifice to You With the voice of thanksgiving; I will pay what I have vowed. Salvation is of the LORD."

*God can hear our Prayers from anywhere and...*

Third, *There Is A Cost To Disobedience In the Life Of A Believer (2:10)*

"So the LORD spoke to the fish, and it vomited Jonah onto dry land."

A side-light here is that no matter how far you get from God there is always a way back.....BUT the way back may not be not be a beautiful emotional experience. Jonah left on a ship bound for Tarshish but he did not return in the same way. He spent three days and three nights in the digestive system of a great fish only to be vomited up on the seashore. We must never delude ourselves into thinking that we can walk away from God without cost. There is hope in knowing that no matter how we mess up, no matter how far away we get from the Lord there is always a way back. But I believe that Jonah was a changed man, after his experience in the deep. His disobedience cost him.