

I. The Story

A. Jonah's Physical situation:

1. Thrown overboard – by the sailors but later he confesses that he knows it is the Lord who cast him down
2. Drowning in rough seas
3. Tangled up in seaweed
4. Swallowed by big fish
5. In the belly of the fish for 3 days!

B. Jonah's Spiritual Situation: Jonah is running away from God and is not praying. So far in our text he hasn't explained why he is running but we surmise that he may be afraid but he is definitely, in open rebellion to the Lord's command. Instead of talking with the Lord he chooses the passive aggressive route and decides to extricate himself from the situation.

1. When he received the commission from God we don't find Jonah praying seeking God's direction.
2. When he was fleeing from God we don't find Jonah praying.
3. When the storm was raging Jonah was not praying. In fact the pagan captain rebukes his lack of prayer
4. He wasn't praying when the sailors were discussing his fate
5. He wasn't praying as they cast him overboard...but then...

1:17 & 2:1 *"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. Then Jonah prayed to the LORD his God from the belly of the fish,"*

C. Jonah Prays - There are really 2 prayers

1. 1st prayer is recited inside the 2nd prayer: Jonah 2:2 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.

"When Jonah refers to the distress of the past, he means the time he spent in the water, not the time he spent in the fish. The water is the threat of death. The fish is the refuge of salvation. The cry of distress is past tense (in the water!); the voice of confidence and thanks is present (in the fish)." Piper

2. The 2nd prayer (v2 – 9) is this one that he prayed while in the belly of the fish. Two things that struck me as I read Jonah's prayer:
 - a) He knew the Holy Scriptures that he had read and memorized. Because they were hidden in his heart and mind, they were available when he turned back to God

Psalm 3:4 – "I cried aloud to the LORD, and he answered me from his holy hill."

Psalm 120:1 - "In my distress I called to the LORD, and he answered me."

Psalm 118:5 – "Out of my distress I called on the LORD; the LORD answered me and set me free."

Psalm 88:6–7 –"You have put me in the depths of the pit, in the regions dark and deep. Your wrath lies heavy upon me, and you overwhelm me with all your waves."

Psalm 42:7 – "Deep calls to deep at the roar of your waterfalls; all your breakers and your waves have gone over me. "

Psalm 31:22 –" I had said in my alarm, "I am cut off from your sight." But you heard the voice of my pleas for mercy when I cried to you for help"

Psalm 69: - "Save me, O God! For the waters have come up to my neck."

- b) What is different about this prayer than most of our prayers? No petition? Some would say that vs 2 is petition but I think this is more an acknowledgement of God, a first step towards him rather than away from him.

II. Jonah's prayer in the belly of the big fish

"The narrative is not really about the fish at all. It has only a 'walk-on part' in this gripping drama. Focus on the great fish and we may lose sight of the great God." - Ferguson

Bible is first about God and then about us and our relationship with God. So what does Jonah's prayer tell us about God and our relationship with him?



- 1. We have a covenant relationship with God. (v 1, 4, 6) ..Jonah says "O LORD, my God" and he mentions seeing the holy temple twice. For Jonah, the Temple was symbolic of the presence of God—God dwelling between the cherubim on the blood-sprinkled mercy seat. It was the place of God's mercy and faithfulness. It was the surety of God's covenant relationship with His people.

- a) We belong to God by covenant relationship

Jeremiah 31:33 "For this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, declares the LORD: I will put my law within them, and I will write it on their hearts. And I will be their God, and they shall be my people."

- b) He knows us by name. He calls us by name

John 10:14 "I am the good shepherd. I know my own and my own know me,"

John 10:27 "My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me."

- c) God will always love us and be faithful to us

Jeremiah 31:3 "I have loved you with an everlasting love; therefore I have continued my faithfulness to you."

- B. God is sovereign and He works His will through us, sometimes with “Merciful Wrath” (Ferguson). Jonah first goes through the pain of having to leave his home and he thinks his God. Then he encounters a great storm and then a deep descent into a raging and seaweed filled sea. He was sure he was dead (belly of Sheol), and then he is entombed in a giant fish.

1. God sometimes uses pain and affliction to work repentance into our lives.

Job 36:15 “He delivers the afflicted by their affliction and opens their ear by adversity.”

Romans 5:3–5 “Not only that, but we rejoice in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance, and endurance produces character, and character produces hope, and hope does not put us to shame, because God’s love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us.”

2. We need to come to a place of total dependence on God and recognition that He is Sovereign. – Jonah was in the belly of the fish 3 days!

Romans 11:36 “For from him and through him and to him are all things.”

3. God’s aim is to make us like Christ

- C. God is always near - (v2) Jonah hoped to escape from God by boarding a ship but he is reminded no one can escape the presence of God.

1. David wrote of the infinite presence of God – His omnipresence

Psalms 139:7–10 “Where shall I go from your Spirit? Or where shall I flee from your presence? If I ascend to heaven, you are there! If I make my bed in Sheol, you are there! If I take the wings of the morning and dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea, even there your hand shall lead me, and your right hand shall hold me.”

2. When Paul was in prison he felt all alone, deserted by all of his brothers – but Paul knew that he was not alone.

2 Timothy 4:16–17 “At my first defense no one came to stand by me, but all deserted me. May it not be charged against them! But the Lord stood by me and strengthened me, so that through me the message might be fully proclaimed and all the Gentiles might hear it. So I was rescued from the lion’s mouth.”

3. The greatest expression of this came to us from Christ

Matthew 28:20 “... And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age.”

- D. God always hears – (v2) Jonah cried out to God and God heard. God never slumbers. He is always present and He always hears.

Psalms 77:1–2 “I cry aloud to God, aloud to God, and he will hear me. In the day of my trouble I seek the Lord; in the night my hand is stretched out without wearying; my soul refuses to be comforted.”

- E. God is the only source of salvation (v9)

1. Jesus is the source of our salvation.

Matthew 12:38–41 “Then some of the scribes and Pharisees answered him, saying, “Teacher, we wish to see a sign from you.” But he answered them, “An evil and adulterous generation seeks for a sign, but no sign will be given to it except the sign of the prophet Jonah. For just as Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of the great fish, so will the Son of Man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth. The men of Nineveh will rise up at the judgment with this generation and condemn it, for they repented at the preaching of Jonah, and behold, something greater than Jonah is here.”

2. Jonah was in the belly of the fish for 3 days and nights for **his own** sin, but Jesus was in the heart of the earth for 3 days and 3 nights for **our** sin. And Jesus' death and resurrection brings the salvation that Jonah (and we!) needed, received and celebrated.
- F. As God's chosen and redeemed people our hearts should be continually turned to God in thanksgiving –(v9)

Psalms 69:30 “I will praise the name of God with a song; I will magnify him with thanksgiving.”

Psalms 95:1–3 “Oh come, let us sing to the LORD; let us make a joyful noise to the rock of our salvation! Let us come into his presence with thanksgiving; let us make a joyful noise to him with songs of praise! For the LORD is a great God, and a great Thanksgiving marks us

Study Questions:

1. Knowing that Jonah prayed this “from the belly of the fish,” what surprises you about this prayer?
2. How is it that Jonah, though he has been banished from God's sight for his disobedience, dares in hope to call out to God? Can you think of anyone else who called out, having realized that God had “banished” him (or her) from his sight?
3. Why does Jonah add “to your holy temple” to his prayers?
4. How do you explain that God was always in command (he commanded the fish to vomit Jonah out), yet Jonah feels his prayer has been answered by God?
5. Is Jonah truly repentant? From this text, why would you say “yes” or “no”? 6. What short phrase in this text might be a summary of the whole message of the Bible?

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