

Jonah was trying to flee from God's call to go and cry out against the wicked city of Nineveh. When the ship he hired was engulfed in a storm, the pagan captain woke Jonah to ask him to pray to his God. There is no record of him uttering any prayer. How could he pray when he was trying to flee from His presence? Prayer ushers in a sense of the presence of God. That is why when people ask you to pray for them or you are prompted to pray for a person, you should ask the person if you can pray right then and there. If they are not completely hardened, they will sense the presence of God when you pray. Pray as God leads, and it will bring a whole new perspective to the issue (James 5:16<sup>i</sup>).

Jonah knew the only way to stop the storm was to have him tossed into the sea. The mariners were reluctant, but they finally did so. When the ocean instantly calmed down, they knew the God of the Hebrews was indeed the Maker of the land and sea. They sacrificed and made vows to Him. These were Jonah's first Gentile converts, though Jonah did not know it. That gives us hope that even when God is disciplining us, we can be a witness and even see souls come to Him.

Jonah was tossed into the raging waves, and a fish appointed by God swallowed him up. I wonder if the mariners witnessed that. I imagine they did, as a person would normally be able to tread water for some time even in big waves. The exceeding fear they experienced when the storm instantly ceased would have been compounded by the sight of that fish swallowing Jonah. No wonder then that they would want to convert. Some are saved through the fear of God's righteous judgments (Proverbs 15:33<sup>ii</sup>; Jude 1:22,23<sup>iii</sup>). I can relate for I came to God out of fear of judgment and found His love.

Last week I spoke on the reasons that we should believe God could prepare such a fish in which Jonah could breathe. If you doubt this was possible, read last week's message in the box out front or online. I have swum with a whale shark with a mouth big enough to take me in. Last week we showed a video of a Humpback whale swallowing two kayakers and spitting them out unharmed. I cannot imagine the fear Jonah must have felt during that moment. One moment he is in the light of day and the next in the dark.

*<sup>1</sup> Then Jonah prayed to the LORD his God from the belly of the fish,* Jonah 2:1  
We do not know for certain when he began to pray this prayer. The last chapter ended by telling us he was in the belly of the fish for three days and three nights. That leads me to believe that this prayer was prayed toward the end of that time. The ESV begins chapter two with the word "then." Other translations start with "and" but either translation might imply that it was after those three days and nights that he finally prayed. Verse seven tells us it was when he thought he was about to die. Jonah was quite a reluctant prophet. Perhaps he thought he did not deserve to be heard. But then none of us deserves our voice to be heard by God. We all need to hear what God has to say. We were not worthy to bear His message, but His grace uses us anyway. "I am not worthy" can be a copout. Of course we are not worthy.

Finally, as Jonah thinks his life is slipping away, he prays to the Lord his God (Yahweh Elohay). Friends, do not wait until you get to that place. There are deathbed conversions, but why wait? God is gracious and good. He loves each one of us and wants to guide our lives into His goodness. Prayer should be as constant as breathing. It is the breath of our spirits (1 Thessalonians 5:17<sup>iv</sup>).

<sup>2</sup> 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 2:2 If we will not pray, God can put us in situations where we are desperate to pray. Or we could say we put ourselves into those situations because of our disobedience. It has often been said that addicts must reach the very end of themselves before they change. Sin is addictive. Satan gives us momentary pleasure from sin. The book of Hebrews tells us Moses chose to suffer with his people rather than to enjoy the fleeting pleasures that sin offered him (Hebrews 11:25<sup>v</sup>). We bring ourselves to the very bottom, or God creates situations in our lives where we have nowhere else to turn. Jonah sitting in the darkness of the fish belly finally came to the realization that his only hope was to surrender to God.

A sincere cry for help is music to God’s ears. It means we finally see our true condition. Like a child who has wandered into a batch of poison ivy in which his father has told him never to go, we cry out in the resulting pain. The Word declares, “Whoever calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved” (Romans 10:13<sup>vi</sup>). God’s heart is full of tender compassion (Lamentations 3:22<sup>vii</sup>). He spreads that calamine lotion over our welts and lets us put our head on His chest as we sob in our misery. His voice is soothing and kind, even though we brought it on ourselves through disobedience.

Jonah had hidden God’s Word in his heart so that when he needed to cry out to God, he could cry out in Scripture. The Scriptures that came to him, no doubt prompted by the Holy Spirit, were from Messianic psalms, further confirming the parallel with Jesus in the grave.

Jonah wrote that he called out of the belly of Sheol, which is the grave. He compares the belly of the fish with the grave. He probably thought it was his grave until he heard the Lord’s answer. This further connects us with us with Jesus in the tomb. It is no wonder Jesus said the only sign of His authority that He would give would be the sign of the prophet Jonah (Matthew 12:39<sup>viii</sup>).

God heard Jonah’s cry! He was waiting to hear Jonah finally surrender. I believe God rejoiced to hear his voice of prayer. The Song of Songs tells us the groom longs to hear our voice (Song of Songs 2:14<sup>ix</sup>). How much more so when it is an expression of our love and commitment rather than our desperate plea to get us out of the mess we have created. But no matter how great the mess or how low we fall, if we call out, we will be heard. He will answer us, even though we do not deserve an answer.

<sup>3</sup> *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 2:3 Quotations from Psalm 88:7<sup>x</sup> and 42:7 make up verse 3. Jonah prays from expressions he was familiar with in the Book of Psalms. *In my distress I called upon the Lord, and cried out to my God; He heard my voice from His temple* (Psalm 18:6<sup>xi</sup>) *Deep calls unto deep at the noise of Your waterfalls; all Your waves and billows have gone over me* (Psalm 42:7<sup>xii</sup>) *For I said in my haste, “I am cut off from before Your eyes”; nevertheless You heard the voice of my supplications when I cried out to You* (Psalm 31:22<sup>xiii</sup>)<sup>xiv</sup> Praying Scripture is one way of identifying with the characters in Scripture and God’s faithfulness to them. We are praying God’s Word when we do that. We could not choose better words. Jonah had obviously memorized them or was at least very familiar with those passages. If we are not students of the Scriptures, we will not have the words of Scripture to pray in our time of desperation. These verses he drew from directly related to what he was going

through. The psalmist was speaking figuratively but Jonah was physically experiencing the descriptions.

The wicked are compared to waves of the sea in God's Word (Jude 1:13<sup>xv</sup>; Isaiah 57:20<sup>xvi</sup>). We sometimes speak of the sea of humanity. We even do the wave at sporting events. These messianic psalms Jonah referred to were ultimately fulfilled in what our Savior experienced during His suffering on our behalf (Psalm 22:16-18<sup>xvii</sup>).

*<sup>4</sup> Then I said, 'I am driven away from your sight; yet I shall again look upon your holy temple.'* Jonah 2:4 The entire poem contrasts psalms that describe his situation with the hope found in the psalms that tells us that God hears our cry. In this verse he alludes to Psalm 31:22<sup>xviii</sup>. He is carried to the depths where people of that day thought the dead resided. He thought he could escape God's presence by going to Tarshish. Now he sees God sending him away from His presence to the grave (Lamentations 3:54<sup>xix</sup>). But he declares by faith that he will again visit the temple in Jerusalem and worship there because God has heard his prayer. This implies that he will first obey God and prophesy to Nineveh, survive, and return to Jerusalem to offer a sacrifice of praise. He is still in the fish and in utter darkness, but the light in his soul was now shining with hope. Faith believes God has heard before it sees the result.

*<sup>5</sup> The waters closed in over me to take my life; the deep surrounded me; weeds were wrapped about my head <sup>6</sup> 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.* Jonah 2:5,6 The first lines are similar to Psalm 18:4. *<sup>4</sup> The cords of death encompassed me; the torrents of destruction assailed me.* While in the great fish the water is still threatening to drown him. Seaweed wraps around his head. It is not as if he is just sitting down twiddling his thumbs while waiting for deliverance. He is desperately fighting to stay alive.

The fish apparently went on a deep dive. Could he tell because of the constant need to keep clearing the pressure in his head? Even if he could get out of the fish, he most likely would not make it to the surface alive. He feels as though the gates of death had closed him in. "Closed upon me forever" means that death is final. It is like saying, "I knew I was a goner!"

But then he expresses faith. "I was a goner, YET - but God..." He brought up his life from the pit. The pit is where the bones of a family would be stored together in the ground for the day of resurrection. He is expressing faith that he would be raised from the dead. It is expressing faith in God's ability to raise the dead (John 141:25<sup>xx</sup>).

Here we have another of those interesting word connections with Jesus' suffering. Psalm 88 was quoted at the beginning of verse 3. It is a messianic psalm about Jesus being held in the pit, a waterless cistern, at the home of the High Priest. It is now an archeological site that tourists visit to commemorate that night between the arrest of Jesus and the morning trial just before the crucifixion. Pilgrim groups gather at the bottom of that dry pit and read Psalm 88. It ends with the gloomy expression of darkness being His only friend, which is what Jonah had experienced. But God brought Jesus up from that pit, and from the pit of the tomb, just as He brought Jonah up from the depths of the sea. This is one of the many "But God" passages that remind us of the wonderful intervention of God in the lives of those who turn to Him (Psalm 49:15<sup>xxi</sup>; 1 Corinthians 1:27<sup>xxii</sup>).

In Jesus' case it was not weeds that wrapped about His head, but thorns. Genesis 3:18<sup>xxiii</sup> tells us both are a sign of the curse upon sin. Jonah bore them for his own actions; Jesus bore them for our sake.

*<sup>7</sup> When my life was fainting away, I remembered the LORD, and my prayer came to you, into your holy temple.* Jonah 2:7 Jonah was having a deathbed conversion, though he did not die. He knew that if he died in that state of rebellion, he did not want to face a holy God. He remembered God. I do not think he had forgotten Him, but rather that he remembered that God is merciful, so he cried out to Him. Jonah is the Old Testament story of the prodigal son found in the New Testament (Luke 15:17-19<sup>xxiv</sup>). Like the prodigal son, Jonah had come to his senses and realized the Father's presence was the best place to be.

Jews believed that the presence of God was in the Holy of Holies in the temple. In Solomon's dedication of the temple, his prayer asked God to hear the prayers prayed toward this place (2 Chronicles 6:21<sup>xxv</sup>). That is why Jews still gather at the Western Wall. Thus, Jonah says his prayer came to God in His holy temple. It was an expression of faith that God heard his prayer of repentance. That is what he may be referring to in the next verses.

*<sup>8</sup> Those who pay regard to vain idols forsake their hope of steadfast love.* Jonah 2:8 Had Jonah put his hope in some vain thing, such as living for comfort and wealth in Tarshish? That would be a vain idol. It is the subtle but powerful seduction of the world. It can never give the comfort and peace it promises. And when we settle for something in this world, we forsake our hope in the most recorded attribute of God, His steadfast love. Perhaps that is why Jonah said, "Just throw me in the sea and your troubles will be over." He had forsaken his hope in the steadfast love of God (Psalm 59:17<sup>xxvi</sup>).

When the world lures you away from the hope we have in God, all that is left are vain idols. They offer hope, but they can never deliver. What hope does an idol offer in the face of death? I have been with many people when they were dying. They no longer cared about their money or possessions. There was no longer any illusion of hope in the perfect vacation, or the perfect partner, or some possession saving them. I believe Jonah could make the declaration in verse 8 because he had experienced it. Clinging to the lying promises of idols is to abandon the steadfast love of God.

*<sup>9</sup> But I with the voice of thanksgiving will sacrifice to you; what I have vowed I will pay. Salvation belongs to the LORD!*" Jonah 2:9 This is Jonah's declaration of a repentant heart. He will vocalize his gratitude as he offers himself as a living sacrifice (Romans 12:1<sup>xxvii</sup>). He vows to fulfill his role as a prophet, and he will go to Nineveh. This is no reluctant, "Oh well, if I am going to die anyway, I might as well go do what You want even though I hate doing it!" No! This is a voice of praise declaring he has had a change of heart and will with gratitude serve God whose steadfast love is new every morning (Lamentations 3:22,23<sup>xxviii</sup>).

He ends his prayer with a declaration. "*Salvation belongs to the Lord.*" First, we must realize we have been clinging to worthless idols. Then we can receive the revelation that the Lord is the One who saves. He realized God had kept him alive in that raging sea and in the belly of the fish. Though he feels death's door has closed behind him, he knows the Savior can deliver him.

That phrase is quite interesting in Hebrew. Deliverance or salvation is the name of Jesus, which in Aramaic is Yeshua. This verse declares Yeshua belongs to YHWH. It is

also from the Psalms (3:8<sup>xxix</sup>). It can be translated **Yeshua makes peace with God!** Why can God have mercy upon Jonah? Because Jesus will make peace with God through the cross 750 years in the future (Romans 5:1<sup>xxx</sup>).

Do you think your situation is hopeless, that the doors of death are closing on you? Hope in the steadfast love of God. Know that Jesus has made peace with God on your behalf. He is the resurrection and the life (John 11:25)! Have faith and know He has heard your prayer. He promises to hear the prayer of faith. He hears for He is near each one of us. His ear is especially available to the crushed in spirit (Psalm 51:17<sup>xxxi</sup>). His mercy is new every morning. His steadfast love is greater than we can imagine.

*<sup>10</sup> And the LORD spoke to the fish, and it vomited Jonah out upon the dry land.* Jonah 2:10 Prayer answered! Only now Jonah covered in fish vomit smells like the stench of his rebellion to remind him how far he had fallen. He has hundreds of miles to go to get to Nineveh. His sin sent him on quite a detour, but that is what sin always does.

*This chapter may be the “happiest” section in the entire book. These verses contain the story of miracle and grace, praise and thanksgiving, deliverance and renewed hope. Jonah still has a long road and many lessons ahead of him. But today we end on this positive note of restoration. It is a restoration God desires for all prodigals no matter how far they have fallen. In these verses are found the education of the pouting prophet and the affirmation of God’s sovereignty. It is God who is the most important character. He is the one who affects salvation, and he is the one who enables deliverance. Neither Jonah nor the fish had control. It was God and God alone.* <sup>xxxii</sup>

Because Jesus tells us that the Scriptures are about Him (Luke 24:44<sup>xxxiii</sup>), and because He told us His sign to the unbelievers is that as Jonah was in the belly of the fish three days and three nights, so would the Son of Man be in the heart of the earth, our main lesson from this account should be how this foreshadows Jesus, who went to the grave for our sins, but also having faith in the resurrection and the power of God as seen in His declaration that after three days He would rise (Mark 10:34<sup>xxxiv</sup>).

Are you ready to get puked up from the belly of your fish? Yeshua/Jesus makes peace with YHWH. Believe it! Receive it! And you will land on dry ground. You may have to deal with some fish vomit, but you are on your way to an adventure with God.

Questions:

- 1 Review the account to this point.
- 2 When did Jonah offer up this prayer?
- 3 Why does he say he is in the belly of Sheol?
- 4 What does he use as a source for his prayer? Implications for us?
- 5 What conditions was he experiencing?
- 6 What are his expressions of faith?
- 7 Why does he associate his experience with death?
- 8 What is his reason for believing he will be delivered?
- 9 Where do we see his confession?
- 10 How do we see Jesus in this passage?

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<sup>i</sup> James 5:16 (ESV)

<sup>16</sup> Therefore, confess your sins to one another and pray for one another, that you may be healed. The prayer of a righteous person has great power as it is working.

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ii **Proverbs 15:33 (ESV)**

<sup>33</sup> The fear of the LORD is instruction in wisdom, and humility comes before honor.

iii **Jude 1:22-23 (ESV)**

<sup>22</sup> And have mercy on those who doubt; <sup>23</sup> save others by snatching them out of the fire; to others show mercy with fear, hating even the garment stained by the flesh.

iv **1 Thessalonians 5:17 (ESV)**

<sup>17</sup> pray without ceasing,

v **Hebrews 11:25 (ESV)**

<sup>25</sup> choosing rather to be mistreated with the people of God than to enjoy the fleeting pleasures of sin.

vi **Romans 10:13 (ESV)**

<sup>13</sup> For “everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.”

vii **Lamentations 3:22 (ESV)**

<sup>22</sup> The steadfast love of the LORD never ceases; his mercies never come to an end;

viii **Matthew 12:39 (ESV)**

<sup>39</sup> 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.

ix **Song of Songs 2:14 (ESV)**

<sup>14</sup> O my dove, in the clefts of the rock, in the crannies of the cliff, let me see your face, let me hear your voice, for your voice is sweet, and your face is lovely.

x **Psalms 88:7 (ESV)**

<sup>7</sup> Your wrath lies heavy upon me, and you overwhelm me with all your waves. Selah

xi **Psalms 18:6 (ESV)**

<sup>6</sup> In my distress I called upon the LORD; to my God I cried for help. From his temple he heard my voice, and my cry to him reached his ears.

xii **Psalms 42:7 (ESV)**

<sup>7</sup> Deep calls to deep at the roar of your waterfalls; all your breakers and your waves have gone over me.

xiii **Psalms 31:22 (ESV)**

<sup>22</sup> 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.

<sup>xiv</sup> David Guzik, [Jonah](#), David Guzik’s Commentaries on the Bible (Santa Barbara, CA: David Guzik, 2000), Jon 2:1–2.

xv **Jude 1:13 (ESV)**

<sup>13</sup> wild waves of the sea, casting up the foam of their own shame; wandering stars, for whom the gloom of utter darkness has been reserved forever.

xvi **Isaiah 57:20 (ESV)**

<sup>20</sup> But the wicked are like the tossing sea; for it cannot be quiet, and its waters toss up mire and dirt.

xvii **Psalms 22:16-18 (ESV)**

<sup>16</sup> For dogs encompass me; a company of evildoers encircles me; they have pierced my hands and feet— <sup>17</sup> I can count all my bones— they stare and gloat over me; <sup>18</sup> they divide my garments among them, and for my clothing they cast lots.

xviii **Psalms 31:22 (ESV)**

<sup>22</sup> 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.

xix **Lamentations 3:54 (ESV)**

<sup>54</sup> water closed over my head; I said, ‘I am lost.’

xx **John 11:25 (ESV)**

<sup>25</sup> Jesus said to her, “I am the resurrection and the life. Whoever believes in me, though he die, yet shall he live,

xxi **Psalms 49:15 (ESV)**

<sup>15</sup> But God will ransom my soul from the power of Sheol, for he will receive me. Selah

xxii **1 Corinthians 1:27 (ESV)**

<sup>27</sup> But God chose what is foolish in the world to shame the wise; God chose what is weak in the world to shame the strong;

xxiii **Genesis 3:18 (ESV)**

<sup>18</sup> thorns and thistles it shall bring forth for you; and you shall eat the plants of the field.

xxiv **Luke 15:17-19 (ESV)**

<sup>17</sup> “But when he came to himself, he said, ‘How many of my father’s hired servants have more than enough bread,

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but I perish here with hunger! <sup>18</sup>I will arise and go to my father, and I will say to him, "Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you. <sup>19</sup>I am no longer worthy to be called your son. Treat me as one of your hired servants."

<sup>xxv</sup> **2 Chronicles 6:21 (ESV)**

<sup>21</sup>And listen to the pleas of your servant and of your people Israel, when they pray toward this place. And listen from heaven your dwelling place, and when you hear, forgive.

<sup>xxvi</sup> **Psalm 59:17 (ESV)**

<sup>17</sup>O my Strength, I will sing praises to you, for you, O God, are my fortress, the God who shows me steadfast love.

<sup>xxvii</sup> **Romans 12:1 (ESV)**

<sup>1</sup>I appeal to you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship.

<sup>xxviii</sup> **Lamentations 3:22-23 (KJV)**

<sup>22</sup>*It is of the LORD'S mercies that we are not consumed, because his compassions fail not.* <sup>23</sup>*They are new every morning: great is thy faithfulness.*

<sup>xxix</sup> **Psalm 3:8 (ESV)**

<sup>8</sup>Salvation belongs to the LORD; your blessing be on your people! Selah

<sup>xxx</sup> **Romans 5:1 (ESV)**

<sup>1</sup>Therefore, since we have been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.

<sup>xxxi</sup> **Psalm 51:17 (ESV)**

<sup>17</sup>The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit; a broken and contrite heart, O God, you will not despise.

<sup>xxxii</sup> Billy K. Smith and Franklin S. Page, [\*Amos, Obadiah, Jonah\*](#), vol. 19B, The New American Commentary (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1995), 253.

<sup>xxxiii</sup> **Luke 24:44 (ESV)**

<sup>44</sup>Then he said to them, "These are my words that I spoke to you while I was still with you, that everything written about me in the Law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms must be fulfilled."

<sup>xxxiv</sup> **Mark 10:34 (ESV)**

<sup>34</sup>And they will mock him and spit on him, and flog him and kill him. And after three days he will rise."