

“The Praying Prophet”

Jonah 2:1-10

David P. Nolte

Jonah disobeyed God’s command to go to Nineveh and cry against it. He ran to Joppa to take a ship to Tarshish. God was a step ahead of him, though, and caused a great storm. Jonah was cast into the sea where immediately a giant guppy gulped him. This, though not of Jonah’s choosing, was God’s way of delivering and disciplining him. God could have sent a luxury liner. God could have sent a humongous sea gull to carry him to land. God could have caused Jonah to grow gills or to be able to walk on water. But God is sovereign. He didn’t have to check with Jonah or anyone else. He sent a fish. He knew that Jonah needed more schooling, more discipline, more correction, more humbling. Jonah needed time to reflect on his folly; more time to meditate; more time to pray. So God send a Codfish Chapel and gave Jonah 3 days and nights to use it. Jonah was in a great time of distress. **Distress will do 1 of 2 things to us.** 1. It will cause us to reject God in anger and we’ll sulk and pout, or 2. It will cause us to cry out to Him and to draw near Him. **In his distress, Jonah did the latter and became a Praying Prophet.**

“Then Jonah prayed to the LORD his God from the stomach of the fish, and he said, ‘I called out of my distress to the LORD, And He answered me. I cried for help from the depth of Sheol; You heard my voice. For You had cast me into the deep, Into the heart of the seas, And the current engulfed me. All Your breakers and billows passed over me. So I said, “I have been expelled from Your sight. Nevertheless I will look again toward Your holy temple.” Water encompassed me to the point of death. The great deep engulfed me, Weeds were wrapped around my head. ‘I descended to the roots of the mountains. The earth with its bars was around me forever, But You have brought up my life from the pit, O LORD my God. While I was fainting away, I remembered the LORD, And my prayer came to You, Into Your holy temple. Those who regard vain idols Forsake their faithfulness, But I will sacrifice to You With the voice of thanksgiving. That which I have vowed I will pay. Salvation is from the LORD.’ Then the LORD commanded the fish, and it vomited Jonah up onto the dry land.” Jonah 2:1-10 (NASB).

For our times of distress John W. Peterson’s words are appropriate:

“Have faith in God and trust in Him
Though shadows dark your path bedim,
Have faith in God who rules on high
Who tends the spinning worlds that fly,
But stoops to hear a sad heart sigh
Or listen to a little baby cry!

Have faith in God, you're not alone,
Remember He will guard His own;
Look up beyond to heaven's throne
Have faith, have faith in God!"

JONAH DID!

I. **HIS DISTRESS CAUSED HIM TO CRY OUT TO GOD FOR HELP:**

- A. The words that Jonah uses suggest more than mild irritation. The words mean deep anguish, dire straits, severe affliction. It is like the difference between an blinding migraine and a mild headache. It is the difference between a chest crushing heart attack and mild indigestion. Jonah is in a world of hurt.
- B. What contributed to this sad state of affairs? Why was Jonah so bummed out?
 - 1. **He had a fearful anticipation of dying.**
 - a. Sheol was the Hebrew word for the abode of the dead or the grave.
 - b. He had every reason to believe he'd be digested and that could be fatal.
 - 2. **He feared that God had abandoned him.**
 - a. He had been rebellious and disobedient. He had been cast into the sea. He had been gobbled up by a fish.
 - b. The theology of that day was, sin and you'll suffer. If you're suffering it's a

punishment. He reasoned, "I sinned, so I'm cut off. I'm swallowed, so God has forsaken me."

3. **He feared being absolutely helpless and powerless.**
 - a. He was encompassed, surrounded, imprisoned.
 - b. He couldn't fight his way out or eat his way out!
- C. Have you ever been in such despair? Have you ever thought things were bummed out and would never be good again?
1. **Perhaps you thought you were going to die;** maybe you sit here today feeling the sentence of death. Are you fearful? Anxious? Afraid?
 2. **Perhaps you felt, or still feel, things are over between you and God.** You're washed up. You are a hopeless, defiled, doomed sinner. There is no way He could love or forgive you.
 3. **Perhaps you felt, or feel, trapped in hopelessness.** You feel like you're running in mud up to your waist and you can't free yourself. You are wrestling with an assailant and you're arms are tied down.
- D. We can learn from Jonah. In his distress he cried out to God.

1. **The best thing to do in any extremity is to pray.** Don't just pray in good times.
 2. **Anytime, anyplace, any situation is a fitting one for prayer.**
 3. **The deepest depth of human woe cannot cut us off from God.** With David we can say, "As for me, I said in my alarm, 'I am cut off from before Your eyes'; Nevertheless You heard the voice of my supplications When I cried to You." Psalm 31:22 (NASB).
- E. A young boy, going to school for the first day, had his lunch in hand and eagerly set out on a new adventure. On the way to school, he saw a fish and followed it downstream. Then he saw a butterfly and tried to catch it. Suddenly he realized he was lost. He couldn't find his way. He decided to pray, but he only knew two prayers: "Now I lay me down to sleep" and the Lord's Prayer. He wasn't going to bed, so he opted for the latter. He began, "Our Father, Who art in heaven." At that moment, he heard a voice speaking his name. It was his dad who had followed him to be sure he got to school okay. Years later as he reflected on that event, it was comforting to know his father was near.

Jonah is in a fine kettle of fish – well, okay, just in one fine fish. But he's in distress. That had a positive

effect. In his distress, he found that his Father was near. Then,

II. HIS DISTRESS CAUSED HIM TO CONCENTRATE ON GOD:

- A. “While I was fainting away, I remembered the LORD, And my prayer came to You, Into Your holy temple.” Notice his awareness of God. Notice how he remembered God. In times of real crisis, major dilemma, and hard affliction, lesser things, material things, temporal things, slip our mind and are replaced by weightier things.
- B. In his distress Jonah remembered God, That caused
 1. **A fresh acknowledgment of the uniqueness and majesty of God.** Others might flee to vain idols, or simply vanities: empty, material, temporal useless things. Not Jonah!
 2. **A fresh expression of gratitude.** Even in the pits, even in despair, even in all that dark, dank, drab, smelly, slimy envelope of fish flesh, Jonah is thankful.
 3. **A fresh declaration that salvation comes from God.** It does not come from personal effort, or good works, or good intentions, or promises we make. Jonah knew that if he survived, God did it.
- C. Jonah had a clarified concept of God. He’s not to be disobeyed. He’s not to be run from.

He's not to be ignored. He is to be respected, revered, and obeyed.

D. We ought to learn, in our distresses, to concentrate on God,,and when we do, we will learn:

1. **God is always gracious and willing to forgive.** God said, "If I shut up the heavens so that there is no rain, or if I command the locust to devour the land, or if I send pestilence among My people, and My people who are called by My name humble themselves and pray, and seek My face and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven, will forgive their sin, and will heal their land." 2 Chronicles 7:13-14 (NASB).
2. **God is always there.** God has said, "Never will I leave you; never will I forsake you." Hebrews 13:5 (NIV).
3. **God is always accessible.** "For we do not have a high priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but One who has been tempted in all things as we are, yet without sin. Let us therefore draw near with confidence to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and may find grace to help in time of need." Hebrews 4:15-16 (NASB).
4. **God will always hear our fervent prayers.** "It will also come to pass that before they call, I will answer; and while

they are still speaking, I will hear.” Isaiah 65:24 (NASB).

- E. Speaking of focusing on God, the poet asks, “In the glare of earthly pleasure, In the fight for earthly treasure, ‘Mid your blessings without measure, Have you forgotten God? While His bounties you’re accepting, Are you His commands neglecting, And His call to you Rejecting? Have you forgotten God? See the shades of night appalling, On your pathway now are falling, Hear you not those voices calling? Have you forgotten God?” (Anonymous). If you have forgotten, refocus and concentrate once again on Him. Jonah did and

III. HIS DISTRESS CAUSED HIM TO COMMIT TO FAITHFULNESS TO GOD:

- A. “Those who regard vain idols Forsake their faithfulness, But I will sacrifice to You With the voice of thanksgiving. That which I have vowed I will pay”
1. **“I will be grateful”** But he wasn’t for long as we will see in chapter 4.
 2. **“I will keep my commitment.”** Prophets had a commitment to carry God’s word to other people.
 - a. Barnes wrote, “He would ‘pay what he had vowed,’ and chiefly himself, his life which God had given back to him,

the obedience of his remaining life, in all things.”

b. Though he did end up going to Nineveh, we will see that he grudgingly did his work there.”

B. We should be very careful about making a promise to God.

1. **Solomon wrote**, “When you make a vow to God, do not be late in paying it; for He takes no delight in fools. Pay what you vow! It is better that you should not vow than that you should vow and not pay. Do not let your speech cause you to sin and do not say in the presence of the messenger of God that it was a mistake. Why should God be angry on account of your voice and destroy the work of your hands?” Ecclesiastes 5:4-6 (NASB).

2. **David asked the question**, “Who may worship in your sanctuary, LORD? Who may enter your presence on your holy hill?” Psalm 15:1 (NLT2). And answered, “Those who despise flagrant sinners, and honor the faithful followers of the LORD, and keep their promises even when it hurts.” Psalm 15:4 (NLT2)

C. May our performance match our promise. May our walk match our talk.

1. **Words are just words** until they become actions.

2. **Promises are cheap and easy**, until it comes time to pay up.
 3. **Crossing fingers does not abrogate the vow.**
- D. Jonah made some promises. We all make promises. But
1. Sometimes we **forget the promise.**
 2. Sometimes we have **been made incapable of performing it.**
 3. Sometimes we **made a hasty promise and have changed our mind.**
 4. Sometimes we have **become alienated from the one to whom we made the promise so we don't care to fulfill it.**
 5. Sometimes we promise **undoable things or things beyond human ability.**
 6. Sometimes we **make insincere promises with no real intend to keeping them in the first place.**
- E. Jonah kept his promise and went to Nineveh. And God is faithful and will keep His promises. He has the authority, the power, the skill, the ability, the integrity and the readiness to do so. May we be as faithful in keeping our promises. Let me illustrate that. One stormy night an elderly couple entered the lobby of a small hotel and asked for a room. The clerk said they were filled, as were all the hotels in town. "But I can't send a fine couple like you out in the

rain," he said. "Would you be willing to sleep in my room?"

The couple hesitated, but the clerk insisted. The next morning when the man paid his bill, he said, "You're the kind of man who should be managing the best hotel in the United States. Someday I'll build you one." The clerk smiled politely.

Several years later the clerk received a letter from the elderly man, recalling that stormy night and asking him to come to New York. A round-trip ticket was enclosed. When the clerk arrived, his host took him to the corner of 5th Avenue and 34th Street, where stood a magnificent new building. "That," explained the man, "is the hotel I have built for you to manage." The man was William Waldorf Astor, and that hotel was the original Waldorf-Astoria. The young clerk, George C. Boldt, became its first manager.

Perhaps, like Jonah, you are sunk. You see no way up or out. You can be rescued. Perhaps you feel hopeless. God is our hope.

Look back at Jonah – he cried out to God, he concentrated on God and he made a commitment to God. When you feel like you've been swallowed by a fish, follow his example.

Whoever calls on the Name of the Lord will be saved. Call upon Him while He is near. He will hear, He will care, He will help.

You've never gone so far away that God cannot find you; you are not so lost that God cannot restore you; you are not so sinful that God cannot forgive you , you are not so broken that God cannot renew you. With Jonah you can know "My sin was deep but His grace was deeper!" Shane Pruitt.

You've spent enough time in the belly of that fish – let God deliver you and then go do what He sends you to do. "I'LL GO WHERE YOU WANT ME TO GO."