

Why Pray When Running Away?

Grace & Prayer
Jonah 1:17 – 2:10

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^{1:17} 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.

2 Then Jonah prayed to the Lord his God from the belly of the fish, ²saying, "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.

⁷ When my life was fainting away, I remembered the Lord, and my prayer came to you, into your holy temple.

⁸ Those who pay regard to vain idols forsake their hope of steadfast love.

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¹⁰ And the Lord spoke to the fish, and it vomited Jonah out upon the dry land.

Introduction:

- Herman Melville's *Moby Dick* was a great work between Ishmael and a whale and began with "They call me Ishmael"
- Jonah could have begun his book with "They call me Jonah" – and though there was a whale or large fish in the story, it was really about a proud and bitter man before a gracious and compassionate God.
- The story of Jonah isn't about a man **and** a whale, but a man **in** a whale.
- Because of this **whale of a tale**, Jonah's story has been regarded to be as **fictional** as Moby Dick
- It defies reason that person could be swallowed by a whale or fish and survive.
- Ie/ James Bartley (1870-1909) was reportedly swallowed by a sperm whale when his ship was attacked on a whaling expedition off the Falkland Islands. The whale was harpooned and the sailors didn't know Bartley was inside for 36 hours. His skin was bleached from the gastric juices and he was blind the rest of his life. It was first reported in a St. Louis newspaper in 1891 anonymously authored. There is debate as to whether this actually happened or not. (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/James_Bartley)
 - Sperm whales are known to swallow whole squid (bigger than humans)
 - Sperm whales do have 4 stomachs – the first stomach crushes the food because the whale doesn't chew. The 2nd stomach contains lethal gastric juices to further break down the food.

- Ie/ In June of this year (2021), Michael Packard, a lobster diver was swallowed by a humpback whale near Cape Cod. He thought he was in a shark, but saw no teeth. The whale spit him out after 30-40 seconds. "I was completely inside; it was completely black," Packard said. "I thought to myself, 'there's no way I'm getting out of here. I'm done, I'm dead.' All I could think of was my boys — they're 12 and 15 years old."
(<https://www.capecodtimes.com/story/news/2021/06/11/humpback-whale-catches-michael-packard-lobster-driver-mouth-provincetown-cape-cod/7653838002/>)
 - "I wasn't swallowed, Jimmy," Packard said on the Jimmy Kimmel show, "I was in his mouth. Get that straight."
 - I was at about 35 feet. And I just got hit by a freight truck. Just this 'bang!' And then everything just went instantly dark. And I'm just moving, traveling fast through the water, and I'm like, 'what the heck — did I just get eaten by a shark?' And I was like 'no, sharks mouths aren't that big, and I don't feel any teeth. Oh, great, I didn't get eaten by a shark! But, I'm in a whale's mouth. What the ----- do I do?'"
 - <https://www.capecodtimes.com/story/news/2021/06/17/lobster-diver-swallowed-humpback-whale-michael-packard-interview-jimmy-kimmel-live/7734022002/>
- Ie/ A whale capsized a kayaker in a 2020 video that went viral on Tik Tok – it looked like Liz Cottriel was swallowed but just knocked over.
<https://www.washingtonpost.com/sports/2020/11/04/kayakers-humpback-whale-california/>
<https://youtu.be/3X2C46--2IY>
- The Bartley and Packard stories have supporters and critics and so does Jonah's story.
- But if God is in this, God has the ability to act beyond what is natural and supernaturally save us.
- The Book of Jonah is about God's grace

Ch	Target Of Grace	Provision Of Grace	Response To Grace
1	Panicked Sailors	Storm Stilled	Fear God, sacrifice, vows
2	Rebellious Prophet	Whale	Prayer for salvation
3	Pagan Nation	Prophet	Repentance of people and king
4	Angry Servant	Plant, Worm, Wind	Anger
NT	Lost World	Christ	Faith

Proposition: 3 realizations of God's grace that a rebel needs to confront with God in prayer.

1. The Lord Saves Us So We Can Pray (1:17)

1:17 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.

- God saved Jonah from the depth of the sea by appointing and sending a great fish.
- God saved Jonah so He could use him later.
- God saved Jonah in the midst of his rebellion.
- The **sea** was a place of judgment for Jonah but God saved him with a fish
- When Jonah realized he was spared death by God in the belly of a fish, he responded with a prayer of repentance and dependence.

- God saved us from our sin so He could have a restored and eternal relationship with Him
- Jonah wasn't your average Israelite – he was a **prophet** that had a unique calling and intimacy with God
- Jonah threw that away in rebellion
- God wanted to save Jonah to reconcile with his **prodigal prophet**
- He wanted a relationship with Jonah again
- Part of our relationship with God is communication through prayer.
- We're saved so we can relate to Him, fellowship with our Creator, communicate with our Lord.
- God doesn't listen to the prayers of the **unsaved** – He listens to the saved.

John 9:31 We know that God does not listen to sinners, but if anyone is a worshiper of God and does his will, God listens to him.

1 Peter 3:12 For the eyes of the Lord are on the righteous, and his ears are open to their prayer. But the face of the Lord is against those who do evil.

- **Q:** Are we praying a continual thankfulness for our salvation?
- Don't just look at recent events or current illnesses. Remember the day Christ saved you, how the Holy Spirit convicted you and how the Heavenly Father receives you!
- There are many who would struggle with the idea that being swallowed by a great fish would be survivable.
- The classifications of **fish** and **mammals** were not designated 2700 years ago so to the author, a great fish could include a large whale, shark or some other sea creature that God prepared and appointed.
- But if God could create the universe in 6 days, He could form a fish or whale to accommodate Jonah for 3 days and 3 nights
- The Lord "**appointed**" a great fish
- Leslie C. Allen: "The fish stands for the amazing grace of Yahweh, which came down to where he was and lifted him to a new life. The Lord of the sea is Lord also of its creatures, and his providential control extends over both." (*The Books of Joel, Obadiah, Jonah and Micah*, NICOT, Erdmans, 1991, p. 213)
- A "**miracle**" defies what is natural
- It isn't natural for a man to survive in a whale or a fish, but it would be supernatural if God made it to be so.
- **I believe it happened because Jesus believed it happened!**

Matthew 12:40-41 ⁴⁰For 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. ⁴¹The 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.

- Bruckner notes, "Jonah and Jesus can be compared favorably in many ways." He says, Jesus did perfectly what Jonah also (if temporarily) accomplished: both were from **Galilee**; Jonah **struggled** with his call to **preach**, Jesus struggled to do the **will** of the Father (in the desert, at Gethsemane); both **preached** God's message of **judgment** and **reconciliation** to the marginalized and to sinners; both chose **death** forsaken by others; both **bore** and **removed** the **consequences** of sin from others; both caused the storm to **cease** after sleeping through it (Jonah through repentance, Jesus through his divinity); Jonah entered the **jaws** of the fish, Jesus entered the jaws of the grave; both were kept for **three days**; both were raised up again by the Father; Jonah's **obedience** in preaching led to the **conversion** of a great city, and Jesus' **obedience** led to the **conversion** of many cultures of the world.

Redmond, Eric; Curtis, William; Fentress, Ken. Exalting Jesus in Jonah, Micah, Nahum, Habakkuk (Christ-Centered Exposition Commentary) (p. 40). B&H Publishing Group. Kindle Edition.

- **Jesus is stating the reality of his 3 days in the grave as real as Jonah's 3 days in the fish**
- **If Jonah wasn't real, Jesus would be comparing his death and resurrection to a myth**
- Jonah was saved from the sea by a whale so he could reconcile with His Lord
- Christ saved us on through His death on the cross so we could be reconciled with our Lord
- **Q: Is Christ your Savior?**
- **If you're saved and running from God, it's important to stop what we're doing, how we're sinning, how we're living and remember how Christ saved us!**

2. The Lord Places Us So We Can Pray (2:1-9)

A. He Places Us In Distress So We Would Seek Help From God (1-3)

^{2:1} Then Jonah prayed to the Lord his God from the belly of the fish, ²saying, "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.

- V. 1 – in 1:17, Jonah uses a masculine for fish, but inside the fish he uses the feminine form of the word as he pictures the birth process of his spiritual renewal
- Jonah was in distress as he was drowning in the sea
 - Ie/ we have family members in distress while snorkeling
 - Ie/ I've been utterly thrown out of control when overtaken by strong currents in the river – my swimming ability couldn't lift me out of these rapids until it was calm – I still remember the panic
- Ie/ When did a **distress** in your life bring you to prayer?
 - I remember several cancer diagnoses in our family bringing us to our knees
 - I remember trials our family members went through
 - I remember times of horrific failure and difficult challenges that brought me to my knees.
 - It's better to kneel voluntarily before a distress forces us on our knees

- **This is not to say that distress and trials don't happen to praying people, but we're more used to kneeling and the joints aren't as stiff and aching if it's a regular practice**
- V. 2 – Jonah recalls in his prayer calling out to God in his distress and in a “hell-like” (Sheol) situation
- Jonah is grateful God heard him (“I cried, and you heard my voice”)
- V. 3 – Jonah realized God purposed him to be thrown off the boat, struggle in the ocean and swallowed by a whale
- Jonah was being **honest** with himself and God
 - He was rebellious
 - He was in distress
 - He had no where else to go and no one else to turn to

B. He Places Us At A Depth So We Would Look Up To God (4-6)

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.

- V. 4 – being plunged into the sea, Jonah realizes he is **distant** from God
 - He uses a figure of speech – out of sight, out of mind – God sees everything
 - The “temple” represents the presence of God
 - Jonah would be familiar with Solomon’s Temple and how it functioned as the place of worship and the Holy of Holies represented God’s presence among His people of Israel
 - Jonah is describing his separation from God and a reconciliation in His presence
 - **God sent His own depth charge to shock Jonah out of his rebellion**
- V. 5 – drowning seemed like his destiny, with the possible mummy wrap of seaweed
 - Ie/ someone should come up with a Jonah sushi roll – your choice of protein wrapped in seaweed
- V. 6 – perhaps the mountains were experienced at the steep ascent and descent of the whale
 - The bars could be the baleen that acts like a strainer (whales swallow food and expectorate the water through the baleen – the baleen keeps the food in the mouth)
 - But the bars of a prison is precisely what our sin erects in our soul
 - We’re trapped in sin – lust, greed, anger, pride
 - The depths of the sea was only a reminder of how his life has sunk in rebellion and pride

C. He Places Us At Death’s Door So We Would Seek Salvation In God Alone (7-9)

⁷ When my life was fainting away, I remembered the Lord, and my prayer came to you, into your holy temple. ⁸ Those who pay regard to vain idols forsake their hope of steadfast love. ⁹ But I with the voice of thanksgiving will sacrifice to you; what I have vowed I will pay. Salvation belongs to the Lord!”

- V. 7 – Jonah was dying and remembered to pray

- When we're running from God – we must pray
- Jonah came back into God's presence (holy temple)
- Jonah **repented** – he turned back to God and forsook anything idolatrous – including his own opinion, prejudice and path
- V. 8 vain idols don't bring hope and don't love us
 - The idols that the sailors prayed to did nothing because they are nothing
 - **An idol is anything we value, worship or depend on more than God**
 - If we value wealth and possessions more than salvation in Christ, they're idols
 - If we depend on our government more than God, it's an idol
 - If we value safety, security and health more than our spiritual life, they're idols
 - If we worship a relationship, our appearance or our hobby more than God, they're idols.
 - Salvation is in God alone
 - Every other religion has you work for your salvation
 - Only Biblical Christianity brings salvation to us as a gift bought and paid for by Christ
- Acts 4:12** And there is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved."

 - A statue doesn't love
 - An idol doesn't
- V. 9 voice of thanksgiving
- Offer a sacrifice
- Vow to commit his life
- Jonah is finally doing what the sailors did 3 days earlier

Jonah 1:16 Then the men feared the Lord exceedingly, and they offered a sacrifice to the Lord and made vows.
- **"Salvation belongs to the Lord"**
 - Finally – the admission and confession!!
 - Charles Spurgeon says of this concluding realization that Jonah "learned this good sentence of theology in a strange college."
 - Jonah had to go through a rebuke of his rebellion by God for Jonah to make this confession
- **Jonah's prayer contained an honest assessment, a repentant admission and a confession of salvation.**

Romans 10:9-10 if you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. ¹⁰For with the heart one believes and is justified, and with the mouth one confesses and is saved.

3. The Lord Gives Us Victory Because We've Prayed (2:10)

¹⁰ *And the Lord spoke to the fish, and it vomited Jonah out upon the dry land.*

- Upon Jonah's confession and profession of faith, the Lord spoke to the fish and vomited Jonah
- Because Jonah confessed and exercised faith, this trial was over.
- If we want victory, we need to keep our relationship intimate with God.

Conclusion:

- We won't realize we need to be saved until we realize sin is destroying us.
- We won't realize we need to pray until we know our other options are futile.
- We won't stop running from Him until we realize there's no better place to go.

Discussion:

- How has God spared you in the past so you could live for him in the present?
- How has a desperate situation stirred up your prayers?
- What are you grateful for about your salvation?