

BOB HALLMAN - THE EPIC LIFE

Jonah's Prayer

Jonah 2:1-10

2000

Introduction

In chapter 1 of Jonah we discovered that God appointed the prophet Jonah to go to the city of Nineveh and preach against its sin. But instead he ran in the opposite direction and headed to Tarshish [2,500 miles away]. But Jonah discovered, as many of have, that you can run but you can't hide from God. God sent a storm that eventually led to Jonah being thrown into the raging sea. One can only imagine the thoughts that must have passed through Jonah's mind as he sank below the surface of the water – his wife, his children, his failure to obey God, his eternal destiny. In his last conscious moments, he cried to the Lord for deliverance. Suddenly, everything went black.

I God' Miraculous Provision

A. God provided a great fish: Probably a “dog fish” [A 40 foot shark]

Other animals God has used:

1. The animals of Noah's ark
Gen 7:7-9 “Pairs of animals came to Noah and entered the ark.”
2. Animals and insects in Egypt: Frogs, locusts, flies, and gnats
Ps 105:31, 34 “He spoke, and there came swarms of flies, and gnats throughout their country.” ... “He spoke, and the locusts came, grasshoppers without number.”
3. Quail in the wilderness - Exod 16:12-13
4. Balaam's donkey – Numbers 22:28
5. Hornets to drive out Canaanites - Josh 24:12
6. Venomous snakes to bite the Israelites
Jer 8:17 "I will send venomous snakes among you, vipers that cannot be charmed, and they will bite you.”
7. Lions with Daniel – Dan 6:22
8. The fish with the coin to pay Jesus' taxes – Matt 17:27

Observation:

Think of what needed to happen for this fish to swallow Jonah:

1. God had to create a fish large enough to swallow and preserve a man for 3 days
2. This particular fish was a part of God's plan from the beginning
Eph 2:10 “For we are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.”

3. The fish had to be born in a very specific time and place
Acts 17:26 “From one man he made every nation of men, that they should inhabit the whole earth; and he determined the times set for them and the exact places where they should live.”
4. The fish had to be cruising near the boat Jonah was in
5. The fish had to swallow Jonah within a minute from the time Jonah was thrown overboard. God is right on time every time!!
6. The fish had to avoid chewing on Jonah

Application:

This fish was destined from the day of its birth to fulfill this singular critical role in God’s work in Jonah’s life and in the eternal destiny of the inhabitants of Nineveh.

2 reasonable conclusions:

1. God is sovereign and can be trusted with our lives!
2. God has strategically placed you in this time and place for His eternal purposes.

B. *The fish is obedient to God’s call [vs. Jonah who was disobedient]

John 14:21 “Whoever has my commands and obeys them, he is the one who loves me. He who loves me will be loved by my Father, and I too will love him and show myself to him.”

I find it ironic and tragic that with the exception of angels and man [supposedly the most intelligent of God’s creation] all of creation obeys the Word of the Lord.

**Note: The next sermon message corrects the above statement.
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As Jonah regained consciousness, imagine the horror of his first sensations: the feel of the stomach lining of the fish pressing about him; irritation of the acidic stomach juices of the fish beginning to bleach his skin; the foul smell of the place – rotting fish everywhere; the darkness of this place. In time, Jonah must have realized that this fish was not the means of his destruction, but the means of his deliverance. God had heard his prayer for deliverance. He was to live. His psalm, recorded in verses 2-9, was composed in the stomach of the fish and later recorded for our instruction.

C. Jonah remains in the fish for three days and nights

Ps 88:6-7 “You have put me in the lowest pit, in the darkest depths. Your wrath lies heavily upon me; you have overwhelmed me with all your waves. Selah”

2 Cor 1:9 "... in our hearts we felt the sentence of death. But this happened that we might not rely on ourselves but on God, who raises the dead."

Why this specific period of time?

1. As a result of the hardness of Jonah's heart
"Someone has observed that there are times when we must be made to go into the lowest depths that we may regain a living faith" (Hailey)
https://www.ccel.org/contrib/exec_outlines/mp/mp_05.htm
2. As a foreshadowing of the work of Christ
Matt 12:38-41 "Then some of the Pharisees and teachers of the law said to him, "Teacher, we want to see a miraculous sign from you." He answered, "A wicked and adulterous generation asks for a miraculous sign! But none will be given it except the sign of the prophet Jonah. For as Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of a huge fish, so the Son of Man will be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth. The men of Nineveh will stand up at the judgment with this generation and condemn it; for they repented at the preaching of Jonah, and now one greater than Jonah is here."

The following psalm is a description of his deliverance from drowning. The great fish is not only the divinely appointed means of deliverance (1:17), but also the place from which the psalm was composed (2:1).

II Jonah's Response to God's Favor

A. He prayed to the Lord – FINALLY!

Ps 116:3-9 "The cords of death entangled me, the anguish of the grave came upon me; I was overcome by trouble and sorrow. Then I called on the name of the LORD: "O LORD, save me!" The LORD is gracious and righteous; our God is full of compassion. The LORD protects the simplehearted; when I was in great need, he saved me. Be at rest once more, O my soul, for the LORD has been good to you. For you, O LORD, have delivered my soul from death, my eyes from tears, my feet from stumbling, that I may walk before the LORD in the land of the living."

Application:

Consider what it took for Jonah to finally pray to God:

A storm

The rebuke of unbelievers

Facing death in the raging storm

Being swallowed alive by a giant fish

Hanging out in the fish for 3 days and nights

What does it take for you finally get on your knees and seek God?

B. He acknowledged:

1. His desperation
2 Sam 22:7a “In my distress I called to the LORD...”
2. God’s attentiveness
 - a. Jonah called and God answered
 - b. Jonah called and God listened
2 Sam 22:7b “I called out to my God. From his temple he heard my voice; my cry came to his ears.”
3. God’s discipline
 - a. God was the source of Jonah’s plight
 1. He hurled him into the sea
 2. His waves swept over him

Heb 12:5-11 “And you have forgotten that word of encouragement that addresses you as sons: “My son, do not make light of the Lord's discipline, and do not lose heart when he rebukes you, because the Lord disciplines those he loves, and he punishes everyone he accepts as a son.” Endure hardship as discipline; God is treating you as sons. For what son is not disciplined by his father? If you are not disciplined (and everyone undergoes discipline), then you are illegitimate children and not true sons. Moreover, we have all had human fathers who disciplined us and we respected them for it. How much more should we submit to the Father of our spirits and live! Our fathers disciplined us for a little while as they thought best; but God disciplines us for our good, that we may share in his holiness. No discipline seems pleasant at the time, but painful. Later on, however, it produces a harvest of righteousness and peace for those who have been trained by it.”

Application:

God’s eternal plan and our ultimate good is so important to God that He is willing to allow us to suffer in order to bring us into line with His perfect will. He is like a good Father.
If you are wise -- correction will only take a light rebuke.
If you are foolish -- it may take the wild storms of life and even near-death experiences! ***The choice is yours!***

A very basic biblical principle:

Obedience leads to ⇒ Blessing

Disobedience leads to ⇒ Discipline

3. His own helplessness

- a. He was banished from God's sight
- b. He was threatened by the engulfing waters
- c. He had seaweed wrapped around his head

Mediterranean Musubi!

- d. He sank helplessly to the bottom of the sea
- e. He anticipated a watery imprisonment
- f. His life was ebbing away

4. His need for deliverance

- a. He remembered God
- b. He prayed to God

Jer 33:3 "Call to me and I will answer you and tell you great and unsearchable things you do not know."

III Jonah's Confession of Faith

A. He announces the futility of trusting in idols

1 Sam 12:21 "Do not turn away after useless idols. They can do you no good, nor can they rescue you, because they are useless."

All idols are dumb, mute and powerless – they can't answer prayers

Buddha can't answer prayers

Vishnu can't answer prayers

Krishna can't answer prayers

The Pope can't answer prayers

Hab 2:18-20 "Of what value is an idol, since a man has carved it? Or an image that teaches lies? For he who makes it trusts in his own creation; he makes idols that cannot speak. Woe to him who says to wood, 'Come to life!' Or to lifeless stone, 'Wake up!' Can it give guidance? It is covered with gold and silver; there is no breath in it. But the LORD is in his holy temple; let all the earth be silent before him."

1. Requires the forfeiture of grace

Judg 10:13-14 "But you have forsaken me and served other gods, so I will no longer save you. Go and cry out to the gods you have chosen. Let them save you when you are in trouble!"

B. He personally responds to God

1. He worshipped God through:

- a. Songs of thanksgiving
- b. Sacrifice

Ps 50:23 "He who sacrifices thank offerings honors me, and he prepares the way so that I may show him the salvation of God."

2. He made vows to the Lord

What vows did Jonah make? To obey God and go to Nineveh!

Ps 50:14-15 "Sacrifice thank offerings to God, fulfill your vows to the Most High, and call upon me in the day of trouble; I will deliver you, and you will honor me."

C. He acknowledged the source of salvation – the Lord

Ps 37:39-40 "The salvation of the righteous comes from the LORD; he is their stronghold in time of trouble. The LORD helps them and delivers them; he delivers them from the wicked and saves them, because they take refuge in him."

Note:

Jonah's psalm contains no repentance and no confession of sin.

Jonah had a lot of sin to confess, but his prayer is strangely void of any confession or genuine repentance. Even when identifying the cause of his danger in verse 3, he does not attribute his being an outcast in the sea to his own sin, but to the sovereignty of God!

We'll talk about this more next time.

IV God's Response to Jonah's Prayer

A. God commanded the fish to expel Jonah

B. The fish immediately obeyed:

a. By vomiting Jonah onto dry land

Not exactly the most dignified way to make an entrance!

Observations:

This passage highlights the critical importance immediate and thorough obedience to God:

1. Had the fish delayed a few days, Jonah would have died.
2. Had the fish obeyed God's command to vomit, but done it in the open ocean, Jonah would have died
3. Had the fish vomited Jonah deep underwater, Jonah would have died.

What can we learn from this?

1. If we want our lives to honor and please God we must:

a. Do what God says to do – when he says to do it – in the manner He stipulates. Anything less is disobedience!

Conclusion

1. God has a purpose for your life and mission for you to fulfill! He has specifically and strategically placed you in this time in history and in this geographical location – in this era, in this country, in this church, in your family, in your job, in your neighborhood for a reason.
2. He's prepared works in advance for you to do that you should walk in them.

- a. One of the most important works He has given us to do is to communicate to the world His desire that He wants everyone – including the wicked and rebellious – to have the opportunity to hear the gospel and find new life in Christ.

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