



Help for the Journey: Sermon Resources and References

February 2, 2014

Jonah's Prayer: Encountering God in the Belly of the Whale
Steve Hawkins, speaker

The fish is God's provision to spare Jonah's life and deal mercifully with him in spite of his foolishness. Through Jonah's prayer we get a glimpse of what God was teaching him in the belly and what we can learn as well.

Central Text:

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, 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.
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.
Then I said, 'I am driven away
from your sight;
yet I shall again look
upon your holy temple.'
The waters closed in over me to take my life;
the deep surrounded me;
weeds were wrapped about my head
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.
When my life was fainting away,
I remembered the LORD,
and my prayer came to you,
into your holy temple.
Those who pay regard to vain idols
forsake their hope of steadfast love.
But I with the voice of thanksgiving
will sacrifice to you;
what I have vowed I will pay.
Salvation belongs to the LORD!"*

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

Jonah 1:17-2:10 (ESV)

Further Reading:

[Bright Days, Dark Nights: With Charles Spurgeon in Triumph over Emotional Pain](#)

["How Could Jonah Survive Three Days in the Belly of the Whale?" - ChristianAnswers.com](#)

Questions for Reflection and Discussion:

1. What is your own story of running from God's calling? Is that something you've experienced in the past, or perhaps something you're going through right now?
2. How was the fish God's provision for Jonah, rather than a punishment? Can you see anything parallel in your own faith journey?
3. As we discussed in an earlier sermon, Jonah isn't just running from God's mission for him—he's running from the presence of God; yet God puts Jonah in a place where he cannot run, where he is forced to face God and deal personally with God's plan for his life. In what ways have you experienced God's drawing you, even forcefully, into His intimate presence?
4. The author of this book emphasizes again and again God's sovereignty and His power to save whomever He will. God saves the sailors, Jonah, and eventually the people of Nineveh. One of the important themes of Jonah is that God is able to save people in spite of unwillingness, failure and poor judgment on the part of His servants. In what ways does this come as a comfort to you? How should it impact your attitude toward evangelism?
5. Notice that Jonah's prayer is almost devoid of self-focus: Jonah doesn't petition God *for* things; rather, he emphasizes God's powerful hand at work. This is in stark contrast to Jonah's earlier conversations with God, in which he emphasizes his own desires, doubts and preferences. Do you see God saving Jonah from himself in this prayer? Do you think God forms even our prayers to help guide us and teach us? In what ways might you focus more on God and less on self when praying?
6. Here, God seems to use Jonah's thankfulness as a motivation. Having been saved from what he expected to be certain death in the sea, Jonah is at last ready to hear God's commands again. To what extent should thankfulness be a Gospel motivation in our lives?

Gospel Practice:

Consider your own prayer life. Do you spend more time petitioning God (trying to convince God to act) or praising God (agreeing with God that He already knows what to do and that it is right and good in every circumstance)? How could your own prayer life become less self-focused and more God-focused? What might God be teaching you through the example of Jonah, and how can you respond gladly, rather than struggling against God's intentions for you? How does your response affect how you portray the Gospel in your life for others to see?



21 West Court Street
p. 828.655.1399

Marion, North Carolina 28752
e. info@brcmarion.org