

Repentance as seen in Jonah

2011 Fall Bible Conference

By Anthony J. Carter

sermonaudio.com

Bible Text: Jonah 2
Preached on: Sunday, October 23, 2011

Grace Baptist Church
122 Walnut Street
Madison, AL 35758-9320

Website: gbcmadison-al.com
Online Sermons: www.sermonaudio.com/gbcmadisonal

Amen. Well, the word of God has been read in our hearing and let us pray that it would be effectual to our hearts.

Heavenly Father, we do thank you once again for your word that comes to us even as it comes to us through the life of your servant Jonah. We do pray this afternoon, Lord, that our hearts and our minds would be awakened to the truth that we find here and in hearing them, Lord, that they would indeed take root in our hearts and change our lives here and going forward. Bear much fruit, Lord, for your glory and for your praise. This we ask in Jesus' name. Amen.

Well, this morning we did look at chapter 1 of Jonah and we looked briefly in our introduction just to the life of Francis Thompson, the author of the English old "Hound of Heaven." I remember once sharing this with my son and my son asked me afterward if I thought Francis Thompson was saved. He wanted to know if I thought that Francis Thompson was a Christian and I told him quite honestly, of course I did not know and I did know, however, that according to Thompson's own words, he did know well the cost of discipleship. He understood what often is too lost on many of us today and that is that following Christ would cost him, for he says even in those words found in "The Hound of Heaven,"

"For, though I knew His love Who followed,
Yet was I sore adread
Lest, having Him, I must have naught beside."

Again, he knew something and understood that is lost on so many of us today, he knew that following Christ is not a part-time or a half-hearted venture.

How can dead men pray? Well, beloved, dead men don't pray and the reason that Jonah prayed is because Jonah was alive. Now you say, "Yeah, that's obvious. Of course he was alive," and yet it is not only obvious to us this afternoon, it should also be glorious. That dead men pray is nothing short of the supernatural work of God. That dead women cry out and pray to God for forgiveness and repentance is nothing short of the awesome and the effectual life-giving grace of God and this is the reason why anyone prays.

In Ephesians 2:1 reminds us of the natural state of every human being, this condition of death because of sin, naturally born, the Bible says, as children of disobedience and children under the wrath of God, such people cannot pray, such people do not pray and thus they have no desire to repent. Their hearts are only after themselves and after the things of this world. That's what it says in Ephesians 2:1-3 and then we get to verse 4 and verse 4, Ephesians 2, we begin to see how and why such men and women who were dead can and do now pray. Although Jonah was dead, the reason he prayed, "But God." But God. But God, the immortal words found in Ephesians 2:4, "But God." But God loves them, that's why they pray. But God is merciful to them, that's why we pray. But God when we were dead in our trespasses and sins, the Bible says made us alive. That's why we pray. There it is. That's the answer. How can dead men pray? Because God makes dead men come to life, and the reason why any of us pray the prayer of repentance from our sins is because God made us alive. The only reason that Jonah prayed from the belly of the fish is because God made him realize that he was alive.

One of the first things that people do when they are brought to life is pray. They pray. In Acts 2:6 and following, Paul reminded us that while he was on the road to Damascus cursing, Christ-killing, Christian-persecuting, the church dead in his trespasses and sin, and yet Christ arrested his heart so that he could be made alive. Christ blinded his eyes so that he could see and the first words out of his mouth were, "Who are you, Lord?" And the second words are, "What, what, what would you have me to do?" Because when dead men are brought to life, they pray. That's what they do.

So Jonah prayed. Why did he pray? Well, we see, we see what God did that caused him. We have an answer, an easy answer to this one. Why did he pray? It's plainly stated in the text, it says in verse 2 he prayed because he was afflicted. He cried out to God because God had afflicted him. Remember what we said this morning, that God has a myriad and a multitude of resources available to him to cause his people to cry out to him. One of those resources is affliction. Affliction. The God who afflicts desires those afflicted to call out to him in the midst of their affliction. In the midst of the afflictions and the pains of life, God would desire for us to know the goodness and the grace of God in that even though we are afflicted, we are yet alive. We are yet alive and we are alive unto him.

A couple of years ago, John Piper was battling prostate cancer. During that time, he really served the body of Christ well by writing some of the most encouraging and challenging words you can read anywhere on affliction when Piper wrote on the subject, "Don't Waste Your Cancer," and in it he reminded us that the pain and affliction in this life is always, they always are accompanied by the voice and the grace of God and we must be sure not to waste these opportunities. He gave us 10 principles to understand so that we don't waste our afflictions. Here are a couple of them. It says you will be wasting your cancer if we did not believe that that affliction was designed by God. You would waste your affliction if we spend more time reading about our affliction than we are doing reading about God. You'd waste your affliction if we failed to use it at the means to witness to the grace and the glory of God.

I wonder how many of us have wasted our afflictions? How many of us are currently wasting our afflictions this afternoon? How many of us are wasting our trials by focusing too much and too long upon the trial and not focusing upon God? How many of us have, how many of us find ourselves wallowing in self-pity and not crying out to God and growing closer to him in the midst of our affliction? We waste our afflictions if we don't eventually learn to say what the Psalmist says in Psalm 119:67, "Before I was afflicted I went astray, but now I keep your word." He said in verse 71, "It is good for me that I was afflicted, that I might learn your statutes." He says in verse 75, "I know, O LORD, that your rules are righteous, and that in faithfulness you have afflicted me."

If affliction causes us to cry out to the Lord in ways that prosperity does not, then we need to thank God for the affliction. For such, beloved, the Bible tells us was the case with Jonah for it was affliction that causes us to do and to say what Jonah said in verse 7, namely, "remember the LORD." Remember the Lord. Repentance, what happens when dead men pray? They remember the Lord. Repentance is also what happens, then, when dead men live.

In verse 10 we have seen one of the first signs of new life is repentance and repentance, then, is the fruit of new life. When Jonah realized that he was alive, he repented and so, too, do we. We begin to discover the purposes of God in the redemption of his people. You know, God had determined that for three days and three nights Jonah would be in the belly of this fish, but he also determined that for three days and three nights that would be the extent of the time that he would be in the fish. He determined that three days and three nights was long enough and in this we see that God's design was never that Jonah would perish in the belly of the fish, but that he would come to repentance.

Does that not illustrate for us what the Apostle Peter says in 2 Peter 3:9, "The Lord is not slow to fulfill his promise as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, not wishing that any should perish, but that all should reach repentance." And Jonah understood the moment, Jonah understood the purposes of God in saving him because he gave testimony to the grand theme of all redemptive history and that is salvation is of the Lord. That's where God was bringing him, to the realization from the very time that he resisted to this point, God showed Jonah, "No, Jonah, salvation belongs to me."

Those are not the purposes of the Father, beloved, that the Son should have stayed in the grave any longer than three days and three nights. As we read in our Bibles, we understand that three days and three nights in the grave for our Lord Jesus Christ was long enough because like Jonah, everyone thought that Christ had perished. Everyone. Ask the soldiers who nailed his hands to the cross that day. If you were to ask them, those who gambled for his clothes at the foot of the cross, if you had asked them, "Where is Christ?" they would have said, "Christ is gone. Christ is dead. Christ has perished." If you had asked Pilate or Herod who stood over the execution, they would have told you most assuredly, "We have killed Jesus. He's dead." Ask our Lord's mother who watched her son bleed from head to toe, ask her where her son Jesus was and she would have told you on that faithful Friday, "He's dead. He's gone." Ask our Lord himself. He was on the cross. Ask him what happened with him on the cross and he would tell you when he

cried, "It is finished!" and gave up the Spirit and hung his head, died, it was indeed finished. Indeed, like Jonah, our Lord went down into Sheol, down into the grave, down into the pit, but the grave nor the fish was the ultimate destination of the servant of God. The fish was not designed to hold Jonah nor was the grave designed to be able to hold Christ, and just as the fish gave up Jonah, so did the grave give up Christ. And since it did not hold Christ, is the glorious news, beloved, it won't hold you either. Just as the grave gave up Christ, so too must the grave give up you and me.

God did not design for Jonah to perish in his sins and neither has he designed for you and me to perish in ours, but rather he would desire that we would come to repentance, and what happens when dead men live? They repent. They repent and those who refuse to repent, Jonah tells us in verse 8, they forsake the mercy and grace that could be theirs, for the grave like the fish, has given up the dead and made possible and effective repentance.

Beloved, remember Jonah says, verse 9, "Salvation belongs to the LORD!" This should remind us, remind us of this truth, that while salvation is a plan and we speak of salvation being a plan, it is not just a plan, in fact, it is not first and foremost a plan, salvation is a person. Salvation is first and foremost a person. The Gospel is a person, it is the person and the work of Jesus Christ. And the Bible says salvation is of the Lord. He means the salvation is of Jesus. Now only Jesus saves, that the four spiritual laws or evangelism explosion for whatever usefulness these tools may be in witnessing and offering to people plans of steps unto salvation, they themselves do not save anyone. People must have Christ because salvation is of the Lord and it's not true repentance until they are made to see and understand, until their eyes are opened to who Jesus is, until they are made alive to behold the Lord in all his grace and his mercy and his glory.

It is Christ who has risen from the dead. It is Christ who saves. Salvation is of the Lord. For his name is Jesus, the Bible says in Matthew 1:21, and it is he who saves his people from their sins. We said it this morning and we say it again, be saved. If you would hear the voice of the Lord this afternoon, do not harden your heart. Be saved. Repent of your sins. Call upon the name of the Lord. Believe upon the Lord Jesus Christ. Cry out to him in the midst of your affliction. Cry out to him in the midst of your guilt and find yourself not only repenting but rejoicing that there is a Savior who has risen from the grave and believing in him guarantees that you arise too.

Now if you are saved this morning, you are saved this afternoon, then you should be able to rejoice; with Jonah as that whale spit up Jonah on the side of that sea, Jonah realized that he was not destined to perish in that fish. If you are saved this afternoon, rejoice and know that you are not destined to just perish in the grave for the mortal must put on immortality and the corrupt must put on incorruption. Jonah, but more than that, Jesus reminds us, "O grave, you have no victory. O death, you have no sting." How great is the victory that we have in Jesus and, therefore, my brothers and sisters, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord knowing that your work is not in vain when you labor in the risen Lord.

Let us pray.

Heavenly Father, we do thank you this afternoon once again that we have the privilege of gathering here and being reminded that we are saved in your name for your praise. So I pray, Lord, if there's anyone here this afternoon under the sound of my voice who has not repented of their sins, I pray even now that by your Spirit you would make them alive, call out their name, call them, Lord, that they might hear the voice of Jesus, repent of their sins and realize for the first time that they are alive and rejoice in their risen living Savior. Thank you for this time, Lord. Thank you for this church. Thank you for this witness. But most of all, thank you for Jesus who is the author and finisher and the hope of all our salvation. In his name we pray. Amen.