

JONAH'S PRAYER

TEXT: JONAH 2

Introduction:

1. The second chapter of the book of Jonah deals with Jonah's prayer "out of the fish's belly" (2:1).
2. In chapter 1, we do not see Jonah praying.
 - When the LORD told him to go to Nineveh, Jonah apparently did not pray (1:1, 2).
 - When Jonah disobeyed God and tried "to flee unto Tarshish from the presence of the LORD," he did not pray (1:3).
 - When Jonah "went down to Joppa; and he found a ship going to Tarshish," he did not think to pray.
 - When "the LORD sent out a great wind into the sea, and there was a mighty tempest in the sea, so that the ship was like to be broken," Jonah did not pray. In fact, he was sleeping through the storm while the mariners prayed to their pagan gods (1:5).
 - When the shipmaster came to Jonah, and said unto him, "What meanest thou, O sleeper? Arise, call upon thy God," there is no indication that Jonah prayed (1:6).
3. Interestingly, Jonah 1:14 tells us that the heathen mariners "cried unto the LORD," but there is no record of Jonah praying.
4. Jonah 1:17 says, "Now the LORD had prepared a great fish to swallow up Jonah. And Jonah was in the belly of the fish three days and three nights."
5. Then we are told, "Then Jonah prayed unto the LORD his God out of the fish's belly" (2:1).
6. Finally Jonah prayed. Some Christians only pray when they are in trouble.

I. SOMETIMES GOD HAS TO GET OUR ATTENTION TO GET US TO PRAY

1. "I cried by reason of mine affliction unto the LORD, and He heard me..." (2:2).
2. When I was a boy wrestling and fighting was quite common in my schoolyard and in my neighborhood.
3. Often when one boy was pinned down, he would eventually have to "cry uncle" (give up) before he was let go.

4. The prodigal son had to wind up in the pigpen before he repented. In chapter 1, Jonah was “the prodigal prophet.” But now in chapter 2 he is the praying prophet.
5. Hebrews 12:6 says, “For whom the Lord loveth he chasteneth.” God had to chasten backslidden Jonah, and He prepared a great fish to swallow him up (Jonah 1:17).
6. And God loved the people of Nineveh (John 3:16). That is why He made sure that Jonah got to Nineveh.
7. This is a picture of God’s mercy and grace. God could have allowed Jonah to drown or be eaten alive by the big fish. God could have sent another prophet to preach in Nineveh.
8. Some have wondered why Jonah referred to the belly of the whale as “the belly of hell” (2:2). Certainly Jonah did not literally go to hell. But the dark and smelly belly of the whale must have felt like hell to the frightened prophet.
9. In his commentary on Jonah, J Vernon McGee tells the story of a friend who ran away from home. Like the prodigal son he got far from home, far from church, and far from God. He wound up working in a sawmill.
10. One day the young man had an accident at work and his finger got caught in a log as it was heading for the big band saw. The backslidden young man started praying fervently.
11. Dr. McGee said, “It would take only about forty-five seconds for him to get to the saw...His finger hit the saw and was cut off. But that released him, and he rolled to the side and was safe. In those forty-five seconds, he had prayed to the Lord. He accepted Christ as his Saviour, promised the Lord he would go into the ministry, and do His will, and told Him a lot of other things also!”
12. Sometimes God has to allow a crisis into our life before we get on our knees. Jonah did not pray back on the dry land. He did not pray on the ship. But he prayed “out of the fish’s belly.”
13. Some good Bible teachers (MR DeHaan, J Vernon McGee, John Phillips) believe that Jonah actually died and was resurrected. But the Bible does not say Jonah died.
14. They mistakenly believe that for the type to be perfect, Jonah would have to have died and been brought back to life (Matt. 12:40). But many Bible types are not “perfect.”

II. GOD HEARS OUR PRAYERS

1. Jonah may have been disobedient and backslidden but he was a saved man (1:9). The LORD was “his God” (2:1).
2. He prayed, “O LORD my God” (2:6).

3. Now that Jonah was repentant, God was ready to hear his prayer.
4. Psalm 66:18-20 says, "If I regard iniquity in my heart, the Lord will not hear me: But verily God hath heard me; He hath attended to the voice of my prayer. Blessed be God, which hath not turned away my prayer, nor his mercy from me."
5. Jeremiah 33:3 says, "Call unto me, and I will answer thee, and shew thee great and mighty things, which thou knowest not."
6. Jonah called out to the LORD. He had faith in the LORD. He knew the LORD heard his prayer (Jonah 2:2).
7. How did Jonah have this assurance? Jonah understood that God had cast him into the deep, not the mariners (2:3; cf. 1:15). Notice also: "thy billows and thy waves" (2:3).
8. Jonah is quoting Psalm 42:7, "all Thy waves and thy billows are gone over me." This gave Jonah confidence as he prayed.
9. Jonah understood that God had preserved him from drowning, and had providentially sent the whale just for him. And Jonah knew that God was going to see to it that he arrived in Nineveh (cf. 1:2).
10. It is a wonderful thing when the believer recognizes the hand of God in his life. Sometimes it takes a crisis before we recognize it.
11. Jonah knew that God had answered his prayer for deliverance. Jonah knew God was working. Now Jonah could work with God, instead of fleeing from God.
12. In chapter 1 Jonah wanted to get away from God (1:3, 10). But now that Jonah was repentant, he cried out, "I am cast out of Thy sight; yet I will look again toward Thy holy temple" (2:4).
13. This means Jonah knew he would live to look again toward the temple in Jerusalem. Jonah knew God would deliver him. Jonah was praying in faith.
14. The best way to work with God through prayer is by knowing the Word of God. Jonah may have been a backslidden prophet, but he knew Scripture. There are many references from the book of Psalms in Jonah's prayer.
15. Our Lord said in John 15:7, "If ye abide in me, and my words abide in you, ye shall ask what ye will, and it shall be done unto you."
16. Studying Jonah chapter 2, it is obvious that he knew the Word of God. (Unfortunately he did not always obey the Word of God.)
17. Psalm 116:1 says, "I love the Lord, because He hath heard my voice and my supplications." Jonah could claim that promise.
18. Then Psalm 116:2 says, "Because He hath inclined His ear unto me, therefore will I call upon Him as long as I live."
19. Psalm 116:3 says, "The sorrows of death compassed me, and the pains of hell gat hold upon me: I found trouble and sorrow." Jonah could certainly relate to that verse.

20. “Then called I upon the name of the Lord; O Lord, I beseech thee, deliver my soul... For Thou hast delivered my soul from death, mine eyes from tears, and my feet from falling. I will walk before the Lord in the land of the living.” (Psalm 116:4, 8, 9).
21. When we know the Word of God, we can have faith in the Word of God. “So then faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God” (Romans 10:17).
22. We can have the calm assurance that our prayers will be answered. “And all things, whatsoever ye shall ask in prayer, believing, ye shall receive” (Matthew 21:22).
23. Jonah refers to many other Psalms in his prayer. When we face a crisis, it is good to be full of the Word of God.
 - “But as for me, I will come into thy house in the multitude of thy mercy: and in thy fear will I worship toward thy holy temple” (Psalm 5:7; cf. Jonah 2:4).
 - “The sorrows of hell compassed me about: the snares of death prevented me. In my distress I called upon the LORD, and cried unto my God: he heard my voice out of his temple, and my cry came before him, even into his ears” (Psalm 18:5, 6).
 - “For He hath not despised nor abhorred the affliction of the afflicted; neither hath He hid His face from him; but when he cried unto him, He heard” (Psalm 22:24).
 - “In my distress I cried unto the LORD, and He heard me” (Psalm 120:1).
24. Jonah must have sunk to the bottom of the sea before the whale swallowed him (2:5, 6).

III. GOD ANSWERS OUR PRAYERS

1. Jonah was in bad shape. In verse 5 he says, “The waters compassed me about, even to the soul: the depth closed me round about, the weeds were wrapped about my head.”
2. But then notice in verse 6, “I went down to the bottoms of the mountains; the earth with her bars was about me for ever: yet hast thou brought up my life from corruption, O LORD my God.”
3. The LORD was merciful to Jonah. Micah 7:18 says, “Who is a God like unto Thee, that pardoneth iniquity, and passeth by the transgression of the remnant of His heritage? He retaineth not His anger for ever, because He delighteth in mercy.”
4. Jonah concluded his prayer by making some solemn vows to the LORD (2:7-9).

5. "Salvation is of the LORD" (2:9b). Jonah recognized only God could save him. Again, Jonah is quoting from the book of Psalms.
6. Psalm 3:8 says, "Salvation belongeth unto the LORD."
7. Psalm 37:39 and 40 says, "But the salvation of the righteous is of the LORD: He is their strength in the time of trouble. And the LORD shall help them, and deliver them: He shall deliver them from the wicked, and save them, because they trust in Him."
25. "So then faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God" (Romans 10:17).
26. Jonah could pray in faith, because he knew the Word of God. We can know the will of God when we know the Word of God.
27. God answered Jonah's prayer (Jonah 2:10).

CONCLUSION:

1. Last week (after my message), I mentioned a man who was swallowed by a whale and lived to talk about it. They say his name was James Bartley, and he disappeared in 1891 in the course of a whale hunt near the Falkland Islands. Two days after his disappearance, sailors caught a whale and when they cut it up they found Mr. Bartley unconscious, but alive.
2. They doused him with seawater, put him in the captain's cabin and after a couple of weeks of recovery, he went back to work.
3. This interesting story is mentioned in many Bible commentaries and other books. However, in 1906, the captain's wife wrote a letter stating, "There is not one word of truth in the whole story."
4. There may or may not be a word of truth in the story OF James Bartley, but we know the story of Jonah is true. Jesus Himself verified it.
5. And Jesus said in John 17:17, "Sanctify them through Thy truth: Thy word is truth."