

“Prayer from the Deep”  
Jonah 2  
(Preached at Trinity, November 15, 2015)

I'm supplying these notes for the benefit of busy pastors who may be engaged in bi-vocational work, feeling the pressure of preparing to preach twice on the Lord's Day while trying to balance full-time secular work as well as caring for their families. While the notes of another man are no substitute for personal study, I pray that these may aid in the process of preparing to preach.

**Disclaimer:** These are the actual notes I bring with me to the pulpit, which I follow loosely. They are not designed for publication. While I try to make every effort to give proper credit to my sources from the pulpit, adequate citations will sometimes be absent from my notes. If anyone feels their intellectual material has been used without adequate citation, please contact me and I'll make immediate correction giving credit.

1. In **Chapter 1** we saw Jonah as the fleeing prophet running from obedience to God's charge to go to the Ninevites. He fled to Joppa and then caught a ship to Tarshish. But while Jonah was running God was pursuing.
2. God never lets us go. As **Chapter 1** ended it would appear that Jonah's life had ended. He died in rebellion against God.  
**Jonah 1:15 NAU** - "So they picked up Jonah, threw him into the sea"  
Down, down, down Jonah sank into the abyss.
3. In the Hebrew **Verse 17** of **Chapter 1** is the first verse of **Chapter 2**. In other words, **Chapter 2** opens with God appointing a great fish to rescue Jonah.  
**Jonah 1:17 NAU** - "And the LORD appointed a great fish to swallow Jonah, and Jonah was in the stomach of the fish three days and three nights."
4. The content of **Chapter 2** is Jonah's prayer lifted up from within the belly of the fish. The prayer is a bit perplexing. It is a prayer of thanksgiving where we would expect it to be a prayer of confession and repentance.
  - a. But we can see a real change in Jonah. When he received the commission from God we don't find Jonah praying seeking God's direction. When he was fleeing from God we don't find Jonah praying. When the storm was raging Jonah was not praying. In fact the pagan captain rebukes his lack of prayer.  
**Jonah 1:6 NAU** - "So the captain approached him and said, "How is it that you are sleeping? Get up, call on your god. Perhaps *your* god will be concerned about us so that we will not perish."
  - b. Jonah was the prayerless prophet. But now Jonah prays. And it is a prayer praising God with thanksgiving.  
**Jonah 2:1 NAU** - "Then Jonah prayed to the LORD his God from the stomach of the fish"
  - c. In **Chapter 3** we find Jonah's change of heart.  
**Jonah 3:3 NAU** - "So Jonah arose and went to Nineveh according to the word of the LORD."
5. What we find in **Chapter 2** is a prayer that is rich in instruction. As we look at the prayer I want to look at it from two perspectives.  
First, I want us to look at Jonah's prayer from the theological perspective. What does it teach us about God?  
Second, I want us to look at Jonah's prayer from the perspective of God's people. What does it teach us about our relationship with God?

## I. What does Jonah's prayer teach us about God?

## A. God is always near

**Jonah 2:1 NAU** - "Jonah prayed to the LORD his God from the stomach of the fish"

1. Jonah presumed to escape from God by boarding a ship but he is reminded no one can escape the presence of God.
2. The extent of God's presence is magnified in **Verse 2**  
**Jonah 2:2 NAU** - "I cried for help from the depth of Sheol"  
Sheol is the Hebrew word that describes the underworld; the abode of the dead.
3. David wrote of the infinite presence of God – His omnipresence  
**Psalms 139:7 NAU** - "Where can I go from Your Spirit? Or where can I flee from Your presence? <sup>8</sup> If I ascend to heaven, You are there; If I make my bed in Sheol (KJV – hell), behold, You are there. <sup>9</sup> If I take the wings of the dawn, If I dwell in the remotest part of the sea, <sup>10</sup> Even there Your hand will lead me, And Your right hand will lay hold of me."
4. This is a sweet comfort for God's people  
In our greatest trial, He is there. At the time of our greatest need, He is there.
5. This finds its greatest expression in Christ  
**Matthew 28:20 NAU** - "and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age."
6. This is the sweet comfort of every child of God. When Paul was in prison he felt all alone, deserted by all the brethren – but Paul knew that he was not alone.  
**2 Timothy 4:16-17 NAS** - "At my first defense no one supported me, but all deserted me; may it not be counted against them. <sup>17</sup> But the Lord stood with me, and strengthened me"

## B. God always hears

**Jonah 2:2 NAU** - "I cried for help from the depth of Sheol; You heard my voice."

1. Jonah cried out to God and God heard. This is the sweetest of comforts for us. God never slumbers. He is always present and He always hears.
2. David stressed this sweet comfort  
**Psalms 77:1-2 NAU** - "My voice *rises* to God, and I will cry aloud; My voice *rises* to God, and He will hear me. <sup>2</sup> In the day of my trouble I sought the Lord; In the night my hand was stretched out without weariness; My soul refused to be comforted."

## C. God is always at work in His people – He knew how to humble Jonah

**Jonah 2:2 NAU** - "I called out of my distress to the LORD"

**Jonah 2:3 NAU** - "For You had cast me into the deep, Into the heart of the seas, And the current engulfed me. All Your breakers and billows passed over me."

1. Jonah understood that all of these afflictions were from the hand of God. The storm was from the hand of God.  
**Jonah 1:4 NAU** - "The LORD hurled a great wind on the sea"

2. But what was God doing? Jonah understood that the storm was God's chastisement upon his stubborn actions in order to bring him to repentance.  
**Jonah 1:12 NAU** - "for I know that on account of me this great storm *has come* upon you."
3. God arrested Jonah's fleeing by casting the storm. Even Jonah's death wish was an act of rebellion against God. – "Pick me up and throw me into the sea." God had a different plan for Jonah. God knew how to humble Jonah and bring him to repentance. Jonah was brought low so that he could be raised up.
4. God knows how to humble us and conform us to His holy character. Sometimes this will come through chastening. It can take many forms
  - a. As long as we continue fleeing from obedience to God we will find no rest for our souls.
  - b. David understood the effect of his sin  
**Psalms 38:3-7 NAU** - "There is no soundness in my flesh because of Your indignation; There is no health in my bones because of my sin. <sup>4</sup> For my iniquities are gone over my head; As a heavy burden they weigh too much for me. <sup>5</sup> My wounds grow foul *and* fester Because of my folly. <sup>6</sup> I am bent over and greatly bowed down; I go mourning all day long. <sup>7</sup> For my loins are filled with burning, And there is no soundness in my flesh."
5. From the belly of the fish Jonah now knows the folly of fleeing from God

II. What does Jonah's prayer teach us about our relationship with God? Jonah's prayer instructs us regarding our great privilege before God

- A. We have a covenant relationship with God  
**Jonah 2:1 NAU** - "Then Jonah prayed to the LORD his God"  
**Jonah 2:6 NAU** - "O LORD my God."  
**Jonah 2:4 NAU** - "I have been expelled from Your sight. Nevertheless I will look again toward Your holy temple."
  1. For Jonah, the Temple was symbolic of the presence of God—God dwelling between the cherubim on the blood-sprinkled mercy seat. It was the place of God's mercy and faithfulness. It was the surety of God's covenant relationship with His people.
  2. We belong to God by covenant relationship  
**Jeremiah 31:33 NAU** - "But this is the covenant which I will make with the house of Israel after those days," declares the LORD, "I will put My law within them and on their heart I will write it; and I will be their God, and they shall be My people."
    - a. He knows us by name. He calls us by name
    - b. We are bound to Him by covenant  
**John 10:14** – "I am the good shepherd, and know my *sheep*, and am known of mine."  
**John 10:27** – "My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me:"
    - c. Jesus Christ has redeemed US. He loves US.

3. We know the concept of God's covenant love for us  
**Jonah 2:8 NAU** - "Those who regard vain idols Forsake their faithfulness"
- a. The word for "faithfulness" is **אֱמוּנָה**  
 The idea is they turn away from God's covenant love  
 This is how other translations express it.  
**Jonah 2:8 NIV** - "Those who cling to worthless idols turn away from God's love for them."  
**Jonah 2:8 ESV** - "Those who pay regard to vain idols forsake their hope of steadfast love."
  - b. To forsake God is to forsake His love.  
 But for God's people, they know and experience God's covenant love. When they cry out God knows them and hears them. They are His beloved.  
 God says to us:  
**Jeremiah 31:3 NAU** - "I have loved you with an everlasting love; Therefore I have drawn you with lovingkindness."
- B. God is our great source of comfort during times of great adversity  
**Jonah 2:2 NAU** - "I called out of my distress to the LORD"  
**Jonah 2:5 NAU** - "Water encompassed me to the point of death. The great deep engulfed me, Weeds were wrapped around my head."  
**Jonah 2:7 NAU** - "While I was fainting away, I remembered the LORD"
1. Jonah's situation was dire. He was at the point of death. Water encompassed him. You can imagine as he sank deeper and deeper his lungs were burning crying out for a breath of air. He described the deep as engulfing him. His life was fainting away. And then inside the fish the situation was still desperate. He was in utter darkness in a suffocating space. He had no food or water for three days.  
 Yet, he remembered God.
  2. Life's adversities can be fiery. Jonah says his "distress" is what led him to cry out to God. Our sights must be continually upon our God.
  3. This is the treasure of faith. We have assurance in adversity. We need not wait until we are at the brink of death. Prayer must be our first response. Pray while you are sick, but also pray while you are healthy. And when your health fails, pray trusting God as the Great Physician.
- C. We cry out to God even when He seems far away – and he hears.  
**Jonah 2:4 NAU** - "So I said, 'I have been expelled from Your sight. Nevertheless I will look again toward Your holy temple.'"
1. Jonah has fled from God's presence. But now his estrangement from God is a terrible curse that he could not bear. So he set his sights on God.
  2. We've already seen that God is always near. But at times this is far from our experience. God can seem miles away. Even during these times we can and must cry out to God.
  3. Even though Jonah felt as one expelled from the presence of God, even then Jonah remembered God.  
**Jonah 2:7 NAU** - "While I was fainting away, I remembered the LORD, And my prayer came to You, Into Your holy temple."

4. How do we know that God heard. One way is the fact that Jonah remembered God. He was stirred to cry out in faith and repentance.
- D. As God's people our hearts are continually turned to God in thanksgiving  
**Jonah 2:9 NAU** - "But I will sacrifice to You With the voice of thanksgiving."
1. This has always been the heart of God's people  
**Psalms 69:30 NAU** - " I will praise the name of God with song And magnify Him with thanksgiving."  
**Psalms 95:1-3 NAU** - "O come, let us sing for joy to the LORD, Let us shout joyfully to the rock of our salvation. <sup>2</sup> Let us come before His presence with thanksgiving, Let us shout joyfully to Him with psalms. <sup>3</sup> For the LORD is a great God And a great King above all gods"  
**Psalms 100:4 NAU** - "Enter His gates with thanksgiving *And* His courts with praise. Give thanks to Him, bless His name."
  2. Thanksgiving marks us
    - a. You may boast that you profess religion - the devil transforms himself into an angel of light
    - b. You may boast that you believe in God - the devils believe and tremble
    - c. But are you thankful? - While the devils blaspheme we sing forth the praises of God
  3. From the belly of the fish Jonah was savoring the gracious goodness of God. Our worst day is infinitely better than we deserve. How gracious God is to us. His goodness to us never ceases.  
 God is worthy of continual expressions of thanksgiving.

#### Conclusion:

1. From the belly of the fish Jonah came to the realization of the folly of his sin. It was there that he realized the dreadful condition of being estranged from God. It was there that he cried out. And God heard:  
**Jonah 2:2 NAU** - "I called out of my distress to the LORD, And He answered me. I cried for help from the depth of Sheol; You heard my voice."
2. His sin was sheer folly, but God's grace is always rich and sufficient for His people. He had fled from God, but God did not forsake him.  
**Hebrews 13:5 NAS** - " will never desert you, nor will I ever forsake you,"
3. It was the realization of God's covenant faithfulness that Jonah was overwhelmed with praise and thanksgiving.  
**Jonah 2:9 NAU** - "But I will sacrifice to You With the voice of thanksgiving."
4. All of this is received through a simple child-like faith. Believe in Him; trust Him; rest in Him.

5. One more point in closing. God's people live by His Word. It encourages us. It instructs us. It convicts us. Jonah's prayer reveals that he was familiar with the Psalms. It reads like a Psalm. Listen to Psalm 18.  
**Psalms 18:2-6 NAU** - "The LORD is my rock and my fortress and my deliverer, My God, my rock, in whom I take refuge; My shield and the horn of my salvation, my stronghold. <sup>3</sup> I call upon the LORD, who is worthy to be praised, And I am saved from my enemies. <sup>4</sup> The cords of death encompassed me, And the torrents of ungodliness terrified me. <sup>5</sup> The cords of Sheol surrounded me; The snares of death confronted me. <sup>6</sup> In my distress I called upon the LORD, And cried to my God for help; He heard my voice out of His temple, And my cry for help before Him came into His ears."
6. Don't rob yourself of the richness of the Christian life by failing to immerse yourself in God's Word.