

Jonah 2. A Prayer for Salvation

“A Prayer for Salvation” Jonah 1:17-2:10

Introduction: Pg. _____

This Friday, I had the privilege of being a volunteer for Mrs. Stewart’s Second Grade Class at the Brooks Elementary. It just so happens that one of her star students is also my daughter, which gave me the opportunity to volunteer for Field Day.

Tug of War... {PIC}

That’s what’s going on here in the book of Jonah. God is on one side. Jonah on the other.

FCF: It is amazing to me how quickly and freely we enter into a contest with God. We saw the genesis of the tug of war match last week in chapter 1...

Context: Jonah went from God’s prophet to God’s fugitive. Rather than accepting the assignment to go to Ninevah to call them to turn from their evil, Jonah went in the complete opposite direction and set sail for a city called Tarshish. **(Map)** Jonah ran from God. BUT... God ran after him! And God pursued him by sending a storm, which culminated in Jonah being thrown overboard to what he thought would be his death, but God had a different plan. He rescued Jonah from drowning at sea by sending a great fish to swallow him alive and preserve his life.

It was in these moments of despair and imminent death, that Jonah cried out for God to save him. This is what is captured for us in the form of a Prayer to God, that is in poetic form taking the shape of a song.

This particular psalm is known as a Song (Psalm) of thanksgiving

1. Introductory summary (2b-c)
2. Crisis Situation (3-6b)
3. Cry for Help (2b-c, 8b-d)
4. Deliverance Described (6c, 9)
5. Vows of Worship (9a-b)
6. Praise to God (9c)

Read 1:17-2:10

*If I were to write a song, it would be a rap. Most raps rhyme, so here’s where we’re going in rap format.

I. Let your despair drive you to prayer. (1:17-2:6b)

Think about this: Jonah was quickly sinking to the lowest of lows, both literally (in the water), and metaphorically (in terms of his emotional and spiritual well-being).

In the whale... (17)

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- Three days and three nights... This account is reported in a very ordinary way. The focus of the story of Jonah is not his time spent in the belly of a great fish. (Though we can understand why it can quickly become the focus.)
- Bottom line: as this chapter will show in vivid detail, "Jonah was at death's door." Which led him to call out to God for deliverance/salvation.

What he describes in these verses gives us a picture of his desperate situation.

- We cannot begin to imagine the torment Jonah experienced, but this song relates the depth of his emotions.
- We need to let these words soak in, to try and feel the gravity of the situation. This was not just a near-death experience, he was right next to death, in the grip of death as he sank in the sea.
- Verse 2 provides a potent summary of the whole episode. It seems Jonah's prayer is captured for us in retrospect (in other words, the past tense indicates a perspective that looks back on what he prayed in these moments).
 - He was a man in distress. He describes his experience as being in the belly of Sheol (some translations say the "depths of the grave.")
 - Sheol was synonymous with the grave. It can refer to the place where the dead went. Here Jonah is saying he is "at the brink of death." (Walton)
- Verses 3-6 further explain his traumatic experience.
 - The end of verse 3 describes Jonah drowning at sea. His poetic prayer is filled with overwhelming imagery.
 - He is in "the deep. The heart of the seas, the flood surrounded, waves and billows passed over him."
 - He fought against the waves until he could fight no more.
 - Verse 5-6 sum up the desperate nature of the situation
 - He is a watery prison - 6x8 solitary confinement... It feels as though he is trapped in the grave.
 - "Waters closed in over me to take my life." In verse 7, he says his "life was fainting away."
 - Weeds were wrapped about my head. I went down... the bars closed upon me forever...
 - "Taken together these [words] give the impression that Jonah is being wrapped in grave clothes and buried in a tomb." (Youngblood, 108)
- At this point he knows he is far from God and he wants back! (V. 4)
 - I'll look to the temple. To the place of worship, associated with the glory and presence of GOD.
 - Perhaps God will be merciful to me. What I have refused to give others, perhaps he will give to me. (You know that's how it works, right, which is what puts the "amazing" into "grace.")

Do you see how God uses our despair to drive us to prayer?

- We live in a real and changing world, sometimes enjoyable, sometimes painful; sometimes broken (as we think of the events in England over the past two weeks, including last night), sometimes beautiful. It only makes sense that we would pray in all of these situations but like Jonah, we often wait to pray until moments of crisis to call out or cry out, like Jonah here in verse 2: Jonah is literally screaming out to God, pleading for deliverance.
- Listen, God wants us to come to him in moments of crisis, but he also wants us to come to him at any time.

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- If you only come to him when you need something, the relationship is really about you, but if you allow your needs to remind you of your greatest need, which is HIM, then you're moving to a different level in your relationship with God.
- All of this is the kindness of God.
 - Jonah needed AWAKENING! God had to teach him that to move away from him is to move toward a potentially nasty spiral downward.
 - God wanted "revive his appreciation for mercy."
 - God is not afraid to use tough love.
 - He wants to simply tap us on the shoulder to get our attention, but he will send a storm if need be.
 - Did you see the beginning of verse 3? "You cast me into the sea."
 - God's saying: "Remember me? Remember who I am? Remember how I called you to live? To reflect MY heart?"
 - He'll do whatever to make you, like him.
 - He won't relent, won't stop.

App:

- Some of you have come to the end of your rope. You're so distressed by the circumstances of life.
- You may be here and like Jonah, you've run from God but you are hitting rock bottom.

T: Are you spiritually in tune with God? He loves you too much not to grab your attention.

Clearly, God had gotten his attention. God jolted Jonah out of his spiritual complacency and in his prayer we learn two other things about prayer (in crisis or at anytime).

1) Why we should pray to God.

- God is in control. Because God was and always will be in "complete control of the chaos." (Ellison, 374).
- God cares. In his grace...
 - When we cry to God, he hears us.
 - Do you see the irony? "Jonah finds himself counting on the attentiveness of the god he has been ignoring." (Youngblood, 106)
 - It works the same way with us - we are no better than Jonah - it's just that we are arrogant enough to assume we are different.
 - You've been giving God the cold shoulder...
 - And then you want to talk!
 - Through Jesus. He is our access...

2) How should we pray to God.

- Pray the Bible... Oftentimes, the greater our stress, the unsure we are of what or how to pray.
- Jonah using the language of the Bible in his prayer. He quotes Psalm 42:7 and then alludes to Psalm 18, 69, & 120.
- "Here is a man inside a fish with a Book inside of him; and it was the Book inside of him that brought him out from the fish again." - Spurgeon
- Our prayers should always be informed by our knowledge of God. This is not a guessing game. God IS gracious. God IS sovereign. God IS holy. God IS closer than our fingertips.
- The better you know God, the more you will be driven to pray.

T: Let your despair drive you to prayer. Secondly...

II. Praise God for salvation out of your distressing situation (6c-10).

We hit a major shift in Jonah's prayer at the end of verse 6. Do you see that little word, "yet"? *Read 6c-7.*

- Jonah had been on a nasty descent from the beginning of the book. Now he describes himself as someone who is in "the pit." This word has connotations of death. It comes from a verb that means "to ruin, destroy, or annihilate."
- But now — God lifts him up!

T: Let me show you how this works.

We can worship our way out of a vibrant relationship with God.

- For Jonah, God said, "Go!" He said, "No!" God said, "Reflect my heart to the city of Ninevah." Jonah essentially said, "I want you to reflect my heart."
- Maybe that's you today. You know you've moved away from God's plans and desires for you. Your pride has put your relationships, perhaps even your marriage, into a bit of a tailspin. Your greed has you always wanting more rather than looking for ways to be generous to others. Your eyes are never satisfied either, so you turn back to pornography. We move away from God in a multitude of ways....
- And when we choose to prize/value anything above God, we are worshiping our way out of a vibrant relationship (not a relationship - if you are a Christian, but a vibrant relationship).
- Look at verse 8 (I believe one of the strongest on the cost of idolatry in the Bible): "Those who pay regard to vain idols forsake their hope of steadfast love." It could also be translated: "Those who cling to worthless idols forfeit the grace that could have been theirs."
 - Looking to anything other than God is self-robbery. We miss out on a deeper experience of God love that he wants to give us.
 - **"Has a nation changed its gods, even though they are no gods? But my people have changed their glory for that which does not profit. Be appalled, O heavens, at this; be shocked, be utterly desolate, declares the Lord, for my people have committed two evils: they have forsaken me, the fountain of living waters, and hewed out cisterns for themselves, broken cisterns that can hold no water." (Jeremiah 2:11-13)**
- Clearly, Jonah had an incredibly hard heart towards God.
 - Let's not assume our hearts are not hard to God... even new hearts can become hardened through the deceitfulness of sin... I was meeting w a friend this week. (Hebrews 3:13)
 - Jonah had been running from God, now he is running to God. Prayer is his step back.

We can worship our way into a vibrant relationship with God.

- Prayer is a vehicle by which we draw near to God.
- In verses 4 & 7, we hear the language of worship.
 - In the time before Jesus, the worship of God's people was primarily associated with the temple.
 - So when Jonah says: "yet again shall I look upon your holy temple" & "my prayer came to you, into your holy temple," he's thinking worship.
 - "I just want to worship God. I want to be near to God. I want him to know that I treasure him above all other things."

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- There is a remembrance that takes place in Jonah's heart. Verse 7, "I remembered." Some have described our propensity to sin against God as spiritual amnesia. We temporarily forget (or at least are not keeping before our minds) the goodness and glory of God.
- Again, we see how personal (and yes, we can say, intimate) prayer should be. He uses covenant language to describe God's work in saving him.
 - When my soul had turned from you and my life was fainting away, literally about to lose consciousness from drowning, I prayed and "You brought up my life from the pit, O Lord, my God." (Covenant language ("I will be your God, and you will be my people." (Gen 17:7-8; Exodus 6:7)
- When we experience God's salvation, it will move us to action.
 - Jonah committed to offer sacrifices of thanksgiving, and then...
 - He offers what is the climactic statement of the entire prayer: Salvation belongs to the Lord!
 - God alone brings the victory. God offers his salvation to us when we have absolutely no power to save ourselves. (Expound?)
 - God's salvation is not affected by human manipulation, nor is it induced by human effort or activity.
 - And, it also teaches us: No matter how far you go, you're never beyond God's reach. No matter how far you fall, God can lift you up again.
 - And one last thing, if salvation belongs to God, then God can give his salvation to whoever he pleases. He's going to give it to people from every nation and language on the planet (North Korea, China, France/Germany, Afghanistan, Russia). We get to be a part of that joy, by loving our city and sharing the story of Jesus from here, to NYC, to Montreal, to South Asia and around the world.
 - And God gives us this gift through the gift of Jesus. And that is the point of Jonah 2.

The Point: Call on Jesus, the true and greater Jonah, to experience God's salvation.

Conclusion:

Some of you are saying... I don't see Jesus in here. Once you meet Jesus and come to understand that he said - all of the Scripture points to him, you see him everywhere. But this one is obvious! :)

Matthew 12:38-40

38 Then some of the scribes and Pharisees said to Him, "Teacher, we want to see a sign from You." **39** But He answered and said to them, "An evil and adulterous generation craves for a sign; and yet no sign will be given to it but the sign of Jonah the prophet; **40 for just as Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of the sea monster, so will the Son of Man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth**

Salvation..

- Comes through Jesus.
- He is the true and greater Jonah.
 - Not only did Jesus announced God's salvation, he accomplished God's salvation through his crucifixion and resurrection.
 - Unlike Jonah, he did not accomplish it through a near-death experience, but actually took on our death on the cross.

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Jonah's near-death experience provides the bleak background against which God's salvation will shine. The same is true for us. In verse 3, Jonah gets into his salvation experience, and every story of salvation has bad news before the good news.

- {P} Gospel:
 - Not near-death, we were dead. Whew! Preach.
 - Some of you are dead in the inside. And you need the life Jesus died to bring you!
- If you are not yet a Christian, do you see the desperate situation your sin has placed you?
- If you are a Christian, do you feel the weight of your sin as that which had robbed you of life? Can't take our salvation, but can steal our joy or intimacy with God.

Once we experience God's love and grace, we can't keep that to ourselves. Let's be about that mission. God loves the city of Boston. He has placed us here to hold out his message of life. Let's be about that mission this summer!

And call for response. Lead into song

Falling on my knees in worship,
Giving all I am to seek Your face,
Lord all I am is Yours.

My whole life,
I place in Your hands,
God of mercy,
Humbled I bow down,
In your presence at Your throne.

I called You answered,
And You came to my rescue and I,
I wanna be where You are.

In my life be lifted high.
In our world be lifted high.
In our love be lifted high.