

Jonah's Psalm of Thanksgiving

Jonah 1:17–2:10

Intro: As we learned last week, the LORD commissioned Jonah to take His message of love and forgiveness to the wicked people of Nineveh, but Jonah rebelled. He caught a ship sailing to Tarshish 2,000 miles in the opposite direction of Nineveh. The LORD hurled a great storm upon the sea to discipline Jonah. The sailors, following Jonah's instructions, threw him into the raging sea and it became calm. The LORD appointed a great fish to swallow Jonah, and he was in the stomach of the fish three days and three nights (v. 17). Chapter 2 presents Jonah's beautiful Psalm of Thanksgiving in which he praises God for sending the great fish to rescue him from drowning.

This is where we pick up our story this morning, but before diving into the biblical text, *let's allow Mary Margaret to set the stage for us.* **STOP 5:32**

First Episode: Jonah's Commissioning and Flight (1:1-3)

Second Episode: Jonah and the Pagan Sailors (1:4-16)

Third Episode: Jonah's Psalm of Thanksgiving (1:17–2:10)

Note: Jonah's Psalm of Thanksgiving (2:2b-9) is framed by an introduction (1:17-2:2a) and a conclusion (2:10), both of which concern the "great fish."

A. Jonah's rescue by a great fish (1:17)

v. 17—And the LORD appointed a great fish to swallow Jonah, and Jonah was in the stomach of the fish three days and three nights.

As we pointed out last week, this story of Jonah being swallowed by a great fish is perhaps the most contested miracle in the Bible. No other miracle of Scripture, apart from Christ's resurrection, has caused such heated controversy among biblical critics as Jonah. Critics claim that a whale could not swallow a man, yet several types of whales have been found that could easily do so. It should be pointed out that there is a Hebrew word for whale, which is not the word used here. The Hebrew word used here is גדד , meaning "fish." The refer-ence to a "great fish" may be referring to any number of species of whales and sharks that are quite capable of swallowing a man whole. Among these are the sperm whale, the white shark, and the whale shark, all of which

have been found with whole animals as large or larger than a man in their stomachs. Have a look at a few monsters of the deep that could easily have swallowed Jonah.

SHOW SLIDES

The truth is, we do not know what kind of great fish God prepared to swallow Jonah. The God who created our universe and all that is in it would have no problem creating a great fish to swallow Jonah. The point is, God appointed or directed the great fish to rescue Jonah from death by drowning.

Modern day Jonah stories: The most popular story of a man being swallowed alive by a whale is that of **James Bartley, who in 1891, while serving on the whaling ship *Star of the East***, was swallowed alive by a giant sperm whale in the vicinity of the Falkland Islands. **This account has been a favorite of Jonah commentators for years!**

Unfortunately, this account has been shown to be false by **Edward B. Davis, Associate Professor of Science and History at Messiah College, Grantham, PA** in an article entitled: *A Whale of a Tale: Fundamentalist Fish Stories*. A copy of which I possess if you are interested.

Let me just say the story of Jonah being swallowed by a great fish and vomited up three days later is no invention, as biblical critics insist. It is not an allegory or a parable but an actual historical account. It happened exactly as recounted here by the prophet Jonah, and was validated by the Lord Jesus Christ in Matthew 12. We accept this account by faith, a faith grounded in the absolute veracity of the Scriptures.

Little Sally was transferred from Christian school to public school. On her first day in the class the teacher introduced herself as Mrs. Crump and then said, “Today we’re going to study Zoology, and the first subject in Zoology we’re going to study will be whales.

Does anyone know anything about whales?” No-one raised their hand. Then little Sally raised her hand. Mrs. Crump said, “What do you know about whales Sally?” Sally said, “Jonah was swallowed by a whale!” Mrs. Crump said, “That’s nonsense! The throat of the whale is too narrow to swallow a man! Where did you get that foolish story?” Sally said, “That’s what my Bible says!” Mrs. Crump said, “Your Bible is wrong! As I said, a whale’s throat is

too narrow to swallow a man. What do you think now?"

Sally thought for a minute and then said, "I guess I'll just have to wait until I get to heaven and ask Jonah himself what happened." Mrs. Crump thought she'd be smart and asked Sally, "What happens if Jonah isn't there to ask?" Again Sally thought for a minute and then said, "Then I guess YOU will have to ask him."

The miracle of Jonah's deliverance is not necessarily the preparation of the great fish, but in Jonah's preservation in the belly of the great fish for three days and three nights. Can you even begin to imagine what it must have been like to be in the stomach of this great fish? Its dark, its black, and it had to stink to high heaven. We read here that God appointed this great fish to swallow his rebellious prophet Jonah. **The fish stands for the amazing grace of God**, which came down to rescue Jonah and lifted him to new life.

God has a way of getting our attention when we refuse to submit to Him or His will. He gets Jonah's attention, who following his harrowing experience in the belly of the beast, records the following Psalm of praise and thanksgiving to Yahweh for his gracious deliverance.

B. Jonah's psalm of thanksgiving (2:1-9)

1. Jonah's prayer to Yahweh (2:1-2)

vv. 1-2—Then Jonah prayed to the LORD his God from the stomach of the fish, and he said, "I called out of my distress to the LORD, And He answered me. I cried for help from the depth of Sheol; Thou didst hear my voice."

What did Jonah do when he came to realize that he hadn't drowned but had been swallowed alive by a great fish? Jonah prayed to the LORD his God from the stomach of the great fish. The fact that Jonah prayed implies that the prophet was alive and conscious. A careful study of Jonah's prayer reveals that Jonah's prayer is full of passages taken from the Psalms, indicating that he had hidden God's Word in his heart.

It should also be noted that Jonah's prayer is not a request to be delivered, for there is no petition recorded. The prayer is actually a psalm of thanksgiving (v. 9) to Yahweh for dispatching the great fish to rescue Jonah from

drowning. Jonah voiced this psalm of thanks and praise during his entombment in the fishes belly, and wrote it some time later.

Jonah had cried-out in his distress and God answered him. God wants us to talk to Him, and delights to answer our prayers. Jonah cried for help from the depths of Sheol, literally from death's door, and God heard him. He praised God for delivering him from death in a watery grave.

2. Jonah's predicament recounted (2:3-6)

Jonah's psalm focuses on his physical deliverance from death by drowning. All of the poetic description found in Jonah's psalm pertains to his near-death experience in the sea. Look at vv. 3-6:

vv. 3-4—"For Thou hadst cast me into the deep, Into the heart of the seas, And the current engulfed me. All Thy breakers and billows passed over me. 4 "So I said, 'I have been expelled from Thy sight. Nevertheless I will look again toward Thy holy temple.'

Jonah acknowledges that God was responsible for hurling him into the sea. The sailors were merely His emissaries. He was buffeted by Yahweh's tempestuous breakers and billows. Even though he had been expelled from God's sight, he none-the-less confessed his confidence that he would once again worship God at His holy temple, most likely a reference to the Temple in Jerusalem.

In stunning poetic language Jonah continues to describe his frightening ordeal in verses 5-6—"Water encompassed me to the point of death. The great deep engulfed me, Weeds were wrapped around my head. 6 "I descended to the roots of the mountains. The earth with its bars was around me forever, But Thou hast brought up my life from the pit, O LORD my God."

This is an apt description of drowning at sea. Some commentators are of the opinion that Jonah is describing what he experienced in the belly of the great fish. The great deep engulfed him and seaweed wrapped itself around his head. The bars that surrounded him may have been the fishes ribcage. In any event, the LORD graciously brought Jonah's life up from the pit.

The same holds true for everyone of us. The LORD saved us by His grace, through faith in His Son Jesus Christ, who sacrificed Himself on our behalf. As Paul states in 2 Corinthians 5:21 “He made Him who knew no sin *to be* sin on our behalf, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him.”

3. Jonah’s promise to sacrifice to Yahweh (2:7-9)

7 “While I was fainting away, I remembered the LORD; And my prayer came to Thee, Into Thy holy temple. 8 “Those who regard vain idols Forsake their faithfulness, 9 But I will sacrifice to Thee With the voice of thanksgiving. That which I have vowed I will pay. **Salvation is from the LORD.**”

While Jonah was fainting away, his prayer came into Yahweh’s temple. Most likely here a reference to God’s heavenly temple. Whereas those who regard vain idols, might be prone to not keep their vows to God (v. 8), Jonah would sacrifice to God with the voice of thanksgiving. That which he vowed in the belly of the great fish, he would certainly pay.

Not only is Jonah’s prayer a Psalm of Thanksgiving, it is also a promise to keep his word to sacrifice to Yahweh in the future (v. 9). Jonah expresses his thanks to God for delivering him, and his unwavering faith that he will worship Yahweh in the future at His temple in Jerusalem. He concludes with a tremendous affirmation that salvation is a gift of God’s grace. A gift which Jonah himself had experienced firsthand.

Do we show such faith when we pray? How often do we become anxious about what will happen in the future? How often do we worry about the things of tomorrow and fail to remember the blessings of the past?

Jesus exhorted His followers four times in Matthew 6 not to be anxious about anything because our heavenly Father knows what we need and He will take care of us. Paul likewise commands believers in Philippians 4:6 “Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication **with thanksgiving** let your requests be made known to God.

C. Jonah’s release from the great fish (2:10)

Following his three day incarceration in the belly of the great fish,

v. 10—The LORD commanded the fish, and it vomited Jonah up onto the dry land.

Most of us here have probably had to clean up vomit at one time or another. Speaking from experience, permit me to say “It is awful!” I can’t begin to imagine what Jonah must have smelt like on this occasion. He must have stunk to high heaven.

I believe that God had the great fish deposit Jonah back at the dock at Joppa, where he first set sail from. God graciously gives Jonah a second chance.

Conclusion:

When was the last time you looked back over the blessings that God has brought into your life, and gave Him thanks? Thanksgiving causes us to look back on all of the many things that God has done for us in the past. That remembrance bolsters our faith to believe that God will continue to provide, deliver, protect and grant blessing in the future. By being thankful for God’s deliverance Jonah proved that he had faith that God would continue to deliver him. Even from the stinking stomach of a giant fish, Jonah believed that God would protect his life. That is praying with great faith.

Have you been anxious and worried this past week? May I encourage you to pray to God and share your problems with Him, and He will give you peace.

Closing prayer;

Closing song: Cherye