



1 Then Jonah prayed unto the LORD his God out of the fish's belly, 2 And said, I cried by reason of mine affliction unto the LORD, and he heard me; out of the belly of hell cried I, and thou heardest my voice. 3 For thou hadst cast me into the deep, in the midst of the seas; and the floods compassed me about: all thy billows and thy waves passed over me. 4 Then I said, I am cast out of thy sight; yet I will look again toward thy holy temple. 5 The waters compassed me about, even to the soul: the depth closed me round about, the weeds were wrapped about my head. 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. 7 When my soul fainted within me I remembered the LORD: and my prayer came in unto thee, into thine holy temple. 8 They that observe lying vanities forsake their own mercy. 9 But I will sacrifice unto thee with the voice of thanksgiving; I will pay that that I have vowed. Salvation is of the LORD. (Jonah 2:1-9)

A few years back, in a study of the Book of Jonah, I pointed out how separation from God is diverging path and a growing distance from the Lord as pointed out in Psalms 1:1-3, and the first chapter of Jonah in which Jonah sought to escape the Presence of God by going DOWN from the Holy City; DOWN to Joppa; DOWN into the ship; DOWN into the hold of the ship; DOWN into the sea; DOWN into the belly of the whale; and DOWN to the very depths of the sea – all in vain, for none can escape the *Hound of Heaven* (a poem by Francis Thompson concerning God's pursuit of His Elect).

But in today's devotion, we are not addressing the full Book of Jonah, but Jonah's prayer only as he offered it up from the depths of hell itself, for Jonah's soul fainted within him. It is not clearly stated if Jonah actually suffered death in the belly of the whale, but there are many convincing proofs that this may have been the case. Let us examine the text of the prayer, and then compare with another passage from the Gospels.

First of all, we must know and understand that the predestined and foreordained will of God shall always prevail over the weak and frail wills of mere men. Jonah was a prophet of God, anointed to a great and grand purpose. His life would mirror, in many respects, the life, death, and resurrection of our Lord. The sinners of Nineveh were not of the seed of Abraham, just as we Gentiles were not of that physical seed; however, God had made provision for those of Nineveh just as He has made provision for His Elect of the Promised Seed of Abraham among the Gentile nations. Jonah really had no choice but to comply with the express will of God; but he rebelled and believed he could escape that will. Jonah's plans did not turn out well at all. The Laws of Nature, and of Nature's God, were invoked to intercede against the plans of Jonah. We all have

experienced that demeaning storm on the seas of life when we have attempted to execute our plans contrary to that which is right and just.

When Jonah had been cast into the sea, he had come to the lowest point in his life, and the greatest distance from his Lord. But the distance was not measured in feet or meters, but in a spiritual separation that is worse than death itself. Hell is a separation from God and His Presence – that is the point to which Jonah had fled. But being the greatest distance from God, as he had planned, was not a pleasant experience at all. He felt the effects of his overweening pride and rebellion. He felt the acidic digestive juices of the whale’s stomach eating at his flesh; he felt the egregious pressure of the depths of the sea crushing in on him; and he felt the smothering seaweed wrapping around his head so that he gasped for every breath ere his soul fainted within him. Perhaps his last conscious thoughts were an unutterable prayer. Perhaps his prayer was very much like the desperate prayer of St. Peter as he sank into the turbid waters of Galilee – Lord, Save Me! The prayers even of the dying, offered up in faith, are heard by the Lord. The Lord heard Jonah’s desperate and inaudible utterance and responded. Yet the Lord’s intervention on Jonah’s part was not an exception to His will, but in consonance thereof. The whole purpose of the storm and the whale was to bring Jonah to a state of obedience to the will of God. These things Jonah had brought upon himself by his own rebellion.

Jonah was the very first deep-sea diver: *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. When my soul fainted within me I remembered the LORD: and my prayer came in unto thee, into thine holy temple.* Medical science tells us that the last sense we lose at death is that of hearing, but the Lord our God hears even our dying prayers. He spared Jonah, unlike Lazarus, from corruption for Jonah was in the sea precisely as long as our Lord, who saw no corruption, was in the depths of the tomb. Of Christ, we read in the Book of Acts: *23 Him, being delivered by the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God, ye have taken, and by wicked hands have crucified and slain: 24 Whom God hath raised up, having loosed the pains of death: because it was not possible that he should be holden of it. 25 For David speaketh concerning him, I foresaw the Lord always before my face, for he is on my right hand, that I should not be moved: 26 Therefore did my heart rejoice, and my tongue was glad; moreover also my flesh shall rest in hope: 27 Because thou wilt not leave my soul in hell, neither wilt thou suffer thine Holy One to see corruption.* (Acts 2:23-27)

God has given us the account of Jonah as a type and simile of our Lord Jesus Christ who came, unlike Jonah, into a strange and distant place to bring the Gospel and to redeem His Elect. Jonah’s episode was a surely foreordained by God in His Providence as was the parting of the Red Sea. Our Lord was only three days and three nights in the heart of the earth; His body, therefore, did not experience the corrupting decay of death. So was Jonah just that short time in the whale’s belly. In this desultory prayer, Jonah claims that same promise made to our Lord ages before His crucifixion. . . . *yet hast thou brought up my life from corruption, O LORD my God.* Even the stomach of a great whale could not stomach the likes of a rebellious prophet.

To bring the narrative of Jonah into full prophetic purview, read the very words of our Lord concerning the comparative nature of the whale and the tomb: *For as Jonas was three days and three nights in the whale’s belly; so shall the Son of man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth. The men of Nineveh shall rise in judgment with this generation, and shall condemn it: because they repented at the preaching of Jonas; and, behold, a greater than Jonas is here.* (Matt 12:40-41) Just as Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of the whale, so was our Lord, precisely in the same way, in the heart of the earth. What was our Lord’s state in the tomb? Was he not dead? Is it not likely that Jonah as well suffered death in the whale’s belly? But the whale vomited him up on dry land according to the purpose of God his Maker.

In a certain sense, it matters not if Jonah suffered physical death for he certainly had experienced spiritual death in his rebellion against his Lord for all are dead in trespasses and sin until they are quickened by the Holy Ghost to the calling and election of god our Father in Christ. (Ephesians 2)

Jonah had made a vow at the moment of his calling as a prophet, but he had not kept his vow. *21 When thou shalt vow a vow unto the LORD thy God, thou shalt not slack to pay it: for the LORD thy God will surely require it of thee; and it would be sin in thee. 22 But if thou shalt forbear to vow, it shall be no sin in thee.* (Deut 23:21-22)

There are churches in our modern day that actually contribute to the sin of their members by requiring a vow of support for a building, or some other, project. If the member makes a vow to support a fund with a stated amount of money, and then fails to be able to comply due to bankruptcy or whatever, he has broken his vow unto the Lord and is responsible for his failed vow. Churches have no business exacting vows and promises from her members to provide some future benefit that they are unable to guarantee; else we are as guilty as Jonah.

What do we learn from this account of Jonah?

The first thing we learn is that we can never flee from the presence of God. Jonah believed God was restricted to the Holy City (Church) alone. But God followed Jonah to Joppa, into the ship, into the hold of the ship, and into the sea and the whale's belly. Perhaps, in his dire straits, the words of the 139th Psalm may have come to Jonah's remembrance through the memory-prompting agency of the Holy Spirit: *Whither shall I go from thy spirit? or whither shall I flee from thy presence. If I ascend up into heaven, thou art there: if I make my bed in hell, behold, thou art there. If I take the wings of the morning, and dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea; Even there shall thy hand lead me, and thy right hand shall hold me. If I say, Surely the darkness shall cover me; even the night shall be light about me. Yea, the darkness hideth not from thee; but the night shineth as the day: the darkness and the light are both alike to thee. For thou hast possessed my reins: thou hast covered me in my mother's womb. I will praise thee; for I am fearfully and wonderfully made: marvellous are thy works; and that my soul knoweth right well. My substance was not hid from thee, when I was made in secret, and curiously wrought in the lowest parts of the earth. Thine eyes did see my substance, yet being unperfect; and in thy book all my members were written, which in continuance were fashioned, when as yet there was none of them.* (Psalm 139:7-16)

Secondly, we learn from Jonah the overwhelming power of prayer and Godly repentance. Have you ever fled from the will of the Lord? – It is OK; don't lie, for I know you have done! But even in the depths of despair, the Lord will hear our plea and restore our fainting souls within us.