



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. 10 And the LORD spake unto the fish, and it vomited out Jonah upon the dry land. (Jonah 2:1-10)

It is too often the case that the people of God pray too late. We suffer many needless barbs simply because of our obstinacy and pride. As the evidence of our failures to be able to deal with our circumstance pile up, our hearts are too often hardened even more against calling upon the only Name under Heaven that can remedy our problems.

Job has been sent by God to Nineveh – a proud and wicked city of great size and power. But Job rebels and tries to flee from the presence of God. He purchased passage on one sea going vessel, but experiences an unscheduled change in transit to another (for which he did not pay). That other vessel is the great whale that has swallowed Jonah. The accommodations therein were doubtless cramped and stale. Those men on the ship who previously had not known the God of Jonah now prayed for Jonah after casting him overboard; but Jonah has not once prayed for himself until this final moment of peril. Now, Jerusalem would have been an ideal place to pray, or on the way to Joppa, or in the sailing vessel, but this, Jonah did not do. He now prays from a very

strange place – the belly of a fish, but that is also the best place to pray – the place that you are at the moment!

We learn some meaningful lessons here about prayer: 1) God heard Jonah's prayer even from the belly of the whale. God hears the prayer of the penitent from any place the prayer is uttered – a furnace of fire, a lion's den, or the belly of a whale. 2) Better to pray early rather than waiting until our needs grow more desperate. 3) NOW is the accepted hour of prayer – not after days of fleeing from the will of God, being overtaken by the Hand of God at sea, and then being swallowed by a whale. But even if we have procrastinated long, the hour of greatest need is NOW! Jonah could have easily prayed on the deck of the ship, but he refused to do. Now he is brought to the great Deep. He is banging on the gates of Hell. Now, Jonah will resort to prayer. 1 *"Then Jonah prayed unto the LORD his God out of the fish's belly"*

Of course, God knows the myriad of those voices that belong to Him. He has lost nary a soul since the sin in the Garden. He will also know Jonah's voice even if uttered from the depths of the sea and from the belly of a great fish. 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."* When Jonah was warm and sleepy in the hull of the ship, he found no great inclination to pray to God. But now Jonah, having foregone the moment to pray at ease, will now pray out of his affliction. Job was, in fact, in Hell at the time. God even hear his voice from that dark place. This seems to be a surprise to Jonah that God heard him. The Presence that Jonah attempted to escape is the very Presence for which he now yearns. God is able to convince us by many hard trials to hear Him just as He hears us. In Jonah's case, it was not a question of Jonah being able to hear God – it was a case of Jonah's rebellion against the clear command of God. I believe there is a Jonah inside the heart of every believer, but we have been empowered by the Holy Ghost to drown out the selfish voice of flesh, and to follow the Voice of God.

So Jonah, being at the last rung of his ladder, finally calls out to God in his desperation, or *"reason of his affliction."* Why must we endure such chastisement before responding in the right sense to God? When I was a child, my mom would warn me to stop some childish and disobedient behavior. If I had stopped immediately, I would have foregone the spanking but, sadly, a spanking usually resulted from my persistent disobedience. God loves and knows Jonah, but He is not going to allow Jonah to get away from performing his duty as a prophet. He would have followed Job, or even waited for him at the ends of the earth, if necessary. He does the same with you and me. Do we realize that much of our trials and hardships are a result of our failure to hear the Voice of God and follow in His Commandments?

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."* Please observe here that it was not the direct hand of God that cast Jonah into the Deep, but the hands of men of lesser faith than Jonah who were obeying the will and intent of God. Jonah was in complete disobedience, but these men, when they learned of the will of the True God, they followed and obeyed without equivocation. The greatest threat while Jonah was aboard the ship bound for Tarshish was the mighty billows and waves of the sea. Now, those have passed above Jonah and he is in the depths of the sea itself. He began traveling a downward spiral when he left Jerusalem. He has continued that spiral downward into the abyss of Hell. In Jonah's prayer, he tells God what God has done to him. He does not doubt that God is aware of his own actions, but he desires to make God know that Jonah is aware of the Hand and Power that placed him in the great

Deep. There has followed some amendment of spirit after such a long trail of disobedience.

4 *"Then I said, I am cast out of thy sight; yet I will look again toward thy holy temple."* Here, Jonah makes a great mistake in presuming that he is out of God's sight. The elect of God are never out of His sight! One of the most beautiful passages in all of Scripture bears this out: *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."* (Psalms 139:7-16) But now Jonah is of a softer disposition. No longer will his legs carry him in flight from God. No longer can he make proud resolutions to flee from His Presence. His jaws are locked and his tongue stilled. Somewhere from deep within the pits of Hell, his soul cries out in the sleep of death to His God. He will now look to the Holy Temple and Presence of God instead of fleeing therefrom.

5 *"The waters compassed me about, even to the soul: the depth closed me round about, the weeds were wrapped about my head."* Not only was Jonah's physical life brought to ruin, but his soul as well was covered by the deathly waters of the Deep. It would seem that even being swallowed by a whale did not move Jonah to acknowledge God at first for he was "three days and three nights" in the belly of the whale just as our Lord was in the heart of the earth for three days and three nights. *"An evil and adulterous generation seeketh after a sign; and there shall no sign be given to it, but the sign of the prophet Jonas: 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 12:39-41) Consider carefully the words of Christ here. Jonah was in the belly of the fish precisely in the same manner as Jesus was in the tomb for three days and three nights. This suggests the possibility that Jonah had died and was revived by God. Here is Jonah in a place where there is no air and only seaweed for a blanket. Whether dead or alive, he has now fully come into the Presence of God whom he sought to escape.

Do you see how low the man who left Jerusalem and went DOWN to Joppa has descended? 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."* He went way from God's will – DOWN to Joppa; DOWN into the ship; DOWN into the hull of the ship; DOWN into the sea; DOWN into the mouth of the whale; and DOWN to the bottoms of the mountains of the sea! He had descended even to Hell. There was no possible escape forever (*the earth with her bars was about me for ever*). But there is forever an escape with God. Just as the body of our Lord was not allowed to see corruption in the Tomb, so Jonah did not see corruption in the whale's belly. ". . . *thou brought my life up from corruption."*

7 *"When my soul fainted within me I remembered the LORD: and my prayer came in unto thee, into thine holy temple."* We may faint in consciousness, but to faint in soul is to become like unto a dead person. But Jonah, even at the last moment when the die was cast, remembered the God whom he had wanted to forget in better times. The prayer Jonah uttered did go to the Presence of God and to the Holy Temple whose gates he had dared to besmirch. While a breath of life remains, let it be to God and we shall have a blessed passage.

8 *"They that observe lying vanities forsake their own mercy."* There is a meaning hidden here that has not been directly related by Scripture. Has Jonah observed lying vanities? Perhaps more than we are told. We know for sure that he observed the vanity of self-will over that of the Will of God. Jonah freely admits that to do so deprives one of the mercies of God toward them. We have no right to expect the mercies of God on a nation, or people, that has excluded Him from every venue of government, politics, and social intercourse.

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 is now ready to surrender when he could have long ago and foregone the trial. Now he is thankful. Why, for he is still in the belly of the fish? It is because he knows that the Lord has heard his Voice, and he knows God will have mercy even on an obstreperous and stubborn old prophet. That leaves plenty of room for the Mercy Gates to be open for you and me, friend.

Now this great fish has been accustomed to wholesome seafood with no additives, but Jonah is full of impurities and unnatural additives such as stubbornness, rebellion, and disobedience. This, the acetic enzymes of the fish's belly cannot digest. This prophet has made the fish quite sick. Perhaps our weak faith and haphazard obedience makes those around us sick as well. Even the unbelievers cannot abide a hypocrite. So God will speak to His Great Fish, and His Great fish has better ears than Jonah at first had. 10 *"And the LORD spake unto the fish, and it vomited out Jonah upon the dry land."* Even the fish found Jonah repulsive. If Jonah was not good seafood, perhaps he will provide better food for the landlubbers at Nineveh? Patiently await the unfolding outcome, or you might just study ahead to the end of the story.....