

I. Introduction

Good morning! Nearly 2,800 years ago, the Lord commanded Jonah (**Jonah 1:2a**), “Go to the great city of Nineveh and preach against it.” However, Jonah did not obey. (**Jonah 1:3a**) “But Jonah ran away from the LORD and headed for Tarshish.” A great storm came up and the ship was in danger of being lost. The sailors identified Jonah as the cause of their trouble. Jonah admitted it was his fault and told them to throw him into the sea. (**Jonah 1:17**) “But the LORD provided a great fish to swallow Jonah, and Jonah was inside the fish three days and three nights.”



About 800 years later, when Jesus came, He told the scribes and the Pharisees, (**Matthew 12:40**), “For as Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of a huge fish, so the Son of Man will be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth.” By the way, after the service last week, someone asked me: “How can you count three days and three nights between a crucifixion on Friday and a resurrection on Sunday?”

Generally, there are two approaches to answering this question. The first is to say that Jesus was actually crucified earlier than Friday, either on Wednesday or Thursday. This does not conflict with the verses that say the day after the crucifixion was a Sabbath, since the word Sabbath can refer to any day of rest and the Jewish calendar includes Sabbaths that fall on other days besides Saturday. The second approach is to argue that Jewish idiom and culture allows any part of three days, e.g. Friday night, Saturday, and Sunday morning, to count as three days and three nights.

As we discussed last week, the words of Jesus encourage us to look for parallels between the life of Jonah and the ministry of Jesus. Last week we found a number of these and we concluded that the life of Jonah is indeed a prophetic foreshadowing of Jesus' ministry. In particular, the images of death and resurrection in the story of Jonah point clearly to Jesus' cross and resurrection.

Because of this, artists sometimes combine images from the Book of Jonah and the gospels. Take a look at these two examples. On the left, there is a stained glass window from the Church of the Annunziata in Saint Louis, Missouri (USA). On the right there is an illustration from a medieval German manuscript. Both works show the resurrected Jesus coming out of the tomb and Jonah coming out of the great fish.



Let's read Jonah 2:1-10.

II. Scripture Reading (Jonah 2:1-10, NIV 1984)

1 From inside the fish Jonah prayed to the LORD his God.

2 He said: "In my distress I called to the LORD, and he answered me.

From the depths of the grave I called for help, and you listened to my cry.

3 You hurled me into the deep, into the very heart of the seas,
and the currents swirled about me;
all your waves and breakers swept over me.

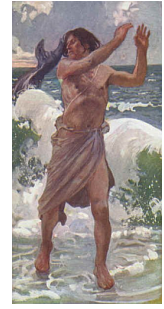
4 I said, 'I have been banished from your sight;
yet I will look again toward your holy temple.'

5 The engulfing waters threatened me, the deep surrounded me;
seaweed was wrapped around my head.

6 To the roots of the mountains I sank down;
the earth beneath barred me in forever.

But you brought my life up from the pit, O LORD my God.
7 "When my life was ebbing away, I remembered you, LORD,
and my prayer rose to you, to your holy temple.
8 "Those who cling to worthless idols forfeit the grace that could be theirs.
9 But I, with a song of thanksgiving, will sacrifice to you.
What I have vowed I will make good. Salvation comes from the LORD."

10 And the LORD commanded the fish, and it vomited Jonah onto dry land.



III. Teaching

The Lord is Lord over all. The birds of the air, the animals of the forest, the fish of the sea, and all of nature obey Him. Mankind is the stubborn and rebellious species. But the Lord is patient with us. Jonah had disobeyed God, but God did not give up on Jonah. The grace of God pursued Jonah and brought him back to obedience. God provided a great fish to swallow Jonah and to miraculously deliver the disobedient prophet safely onto the beach three days later. That fish is an amazing example of God's providence.

The dictionary defines providence as, "*The protective care of God or of nature as a spiritual power.*" God is the sovereign ruler over the whole universe. And God is love; He actively cares about all of His creation and about everything that happens. Because He cares about us, God provides for us and blesses us in many ways. The good we see and the joy we experience in life come from God's providence.

The word providence rarely appears in Scripture. In some translations it does not appear at all. Nonetheless, the providence of God is revealed on every page of the Bible. Here are a few verses as examples.

Job 10:12, "You gave me life and showed me kindness, and in your providence watched over my spirit."

Psalm 3:5, "I lie down and sleep; I wake again, because the LORD sustains me."

Psalm 104:14-15, "He makes grass grow for the cattle, and plants for man to cultivate-- bringing forth food from the earth: wine that gladdens the heart of man, oil to make his face shine, and bread that sustains his heart."

Philippians 1:6, "being confident of this, that he who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus."

God gives us life, shows us kindness, watches over us, sustains us, and brings to completion the good work He has begun in us. Sometimes God even gives us a difficult trial when that is what we need. The loving providence of God is wonderful and it is revealed all around us if we have eyes to see. Jonah's coming out of the fish alive is an unusual and amazing miracle. But for the Creator God who made the heavens and the earth, it is not a difficult thing. It is just one more example of God's providence.

When the fish swallowed him, Jonah was given a second chance. Jonah could have shaken his fist in anger and hardened his heart in rebellion. Jonah could have wept in despair and given up on life. Since Jonah was in the fish for three days, maybe he did all of these things. But whether it was on the first, the second, or the third day, Jonah finally turned to God. **Jonah 2:1, "From inside the fish Jonah prayed to the LORD his God."**



Most of Jonah chapter 2 consists of Jonah's prayer - a prayer which is in the form of a Psalm. Many of the Psalms are prayers and praying through the Book of Psalms by reciting them slowly and making them your own prayers is a spiritual discipline that has blessed many people. I have also experienced great blessing and comfort in praying the psalms. As Athanasius, a fourth century church leader said, "*the Psalms have a unique place in the Bible because most of the Scripture speaks to us, while the Psalms speak for us.*" The Psalms are full of poetic imagery and repetition that expresses the deep needs and emotions of the human heart in every time and place. I want to encourage you

to try this also. Pray through the psalms by reading slowly, or by memorizing, and make the words of the psalm your own prayer. Not every psalm will be a good fit for this, but I am sure that many will bless you.

Let's take a closer look at a few lines from Jonah's prayer psalm.

Jonah 2:2, "He said: 'In my distress I called to the LORD, and he answered me. From the depths of the grave I called for help, and you listened to my cry.'" When we cry out to the Lord from the heart, He hears us and answers. Jonah considers himself as dead, buried in a fish at the bottom of the sea, but God hears his cry.



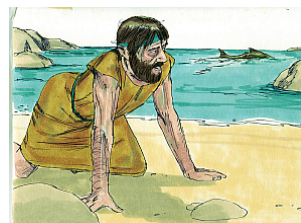
Jonah 2:3, "You hurled me into the deep, into the very heart of the seas, and the currents swirled about me; all your waves and breakers swept over me." Jonah asked the sailors on the ship to throw him into the sea and they did. But Jonah knows that his life is in the hands of the Lord. The sailors were only the instrument God used. Jonah understands that it was really the Lord who cast him into the sea. All things are ultimately in the hands of the Lord.

Jonah 2:4, "I said, 'I have been banished from your sight; yet I will look again toward your holy temple.'" Jonah knows his own sin brought this upon him, but he still has faith that his suffering is temporary. He looks forward to returning to Jerusalem and again worshipping at the Lord's temple.

Jonah 2:7, "When my life was ebbing away, I remembered you, LORD, and my prayer rose to you, to your holy temple." Near death, Jonah remembered the Lord and prayed. His prayers rose to the holy temple of the Lord and were heard. Here, Jonah is referring to the temple of the Lord in heaven. The people of Israel understood that the temple in Jerusalem was only a shadow of the true temple in heaven.

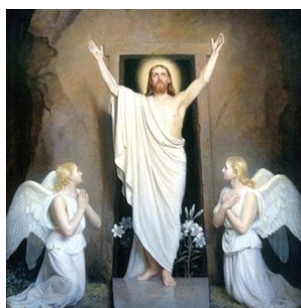
Jonah 2:8-9, "Those who cling to worthless idols forfeit the grace that could be theirs. But I, with a song of thanksgiving, will sacrifice to you. What I have vowed I will make good. Salvation comes from the LORD." Jonah may be thinking of the sailors on the ship. The sailors had cried out to false and powerless gods invented by men. But Jonah had clearly stated his allegiance to the Lord God Almighty. The sailors turned to the Lord in prayer only after they cast Jonah into the sea, so Jonah does not know about this. Notice that Jonah says that the idol-worshipper forfeits the grace that could be theirs. The Lord offers salvation to all, but many turn their backs and discard gift of grace. But whenever some repents, as the sailors did in the end, God hears them and grants mercy and grace once again.

As we look at the last lines of Jonah's prayer, we should remember that he is still trapped in darkness in the belly of the fish. Even so, Jonah speaks of offering sacrifices and a song of thanksgiving. And Jonah declares, "**Salvation comes from the LORD.**" Jonah understood that God alone has the power to save. And, at the right time, at the Lord's command, the fish released the repentant prophet unto the beach. Jonah was saved from death in the sea by the mercy and grace of God. Jonah believed and was saved.



Eight hundred years later, at the right time in God's plan, Jesus died on the cross to provide salvation from sin and death for all who believe. And, on the third day, Jesus stepped out of the grave alive. When Peter and John were arrested and brought before the Jewish rulers for healing a man and speaking about Jesus, Peter boldly proclaimed this truth.

Acts 4:10-12, "then know this, you and all the people of Israel: It is by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom you crucified but whom God raised from the dead, that this man stands before you healed. He is 'the stone you builders rejected, which has become the capstone.' Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to men by which we must be saved."



Salvation comes from the Lord. Jonah knew this and he called on the Name of the Lord and was saved. Peter knew more, he had walked with Jesus for three years and he had met the risen Lord. Our experience is not as direct, but in some ways we know even more than Peter, because we have the completed

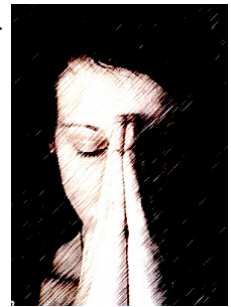
New Testament. And the New Testament makes it very clear that we need to trust in the Lord Jesus, because He is the son of God and God the Son. As Peter declared, **“Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to men by which we must be saved.”**

IV. Conclusion

When you face trouble or hardship, do you call on the Name of the Lord? When you pray, do your prayers include a confession of faith and a song of thanksgiving? We may not face the same situations that Jonah faced, and I hope that we will be obedient and not run from the Lord when He asks us to serve Him. But I also pray that we will learn to pray like Jonah prayed.

When I think of my own prayers, I am challenged by Jonah’s example of thanksgiving. It is easy to give thanks when the problem is solved, when the healing has come, and when the danger is past. But Jonah did not wait until he was safe to speak of songs of thanksgiving.

While he was still in the fish, Jonah’s prayer already revealed an attitude of gratitude. Do you sometimes pray in the dark? I don’t mean just praying with the lights out; I mean praying in dark times, when there is trouble all around. In those times, do you still give thanks? I think this is a challenge for all of us. But we really do have many things to be thankful for even in troubled times. When we remember that and begin to give thanks, our attitude changes and we can experience joy regardless of our circumstances. Developing an attitude of gratitude may be a difficult discipline, but if you practice giving thanks always, it will grow to be a habit and a great source of blessing.



And, from **1 Thessalonians 5:16-18** and many other Scriptures, we know that developing an attitude of gratitude is God’s will for us. **“Be joyful always; pray continually; give thanks in all circumstances, for this is God’s will for you in Christ Jesus.”** Jonah was told to go to Nineveh, but he ran from God’s command. In this verse, we are told that it is God’s will for us to be joyful, to pray, and to give thanks. Don’t run from this. Run to it and embrace the blessings of living in accord with God’s will.

Let’s pray.

V. Prayer