

## “GET ME OUT OF HERE! (Jonah 2)”

Then Jonah prayed to the LORD his God from the fish's belly. And he said: "I cried out to the LORD because of my affliction, And He answered me. Out of the belly of Sheol I cried, And You heard my voice." (Jonah 2:1-2 NKJV)

Have you ever been in the same situation as Jonah – trapped in the belly of a fish? Before you laugh and dismiss the idea – think a few moments. In verse 3 of this chapter Jonah quoted a verse from a Psalm by David that described his own situation:

“...All Your waves and billows have gone over me.” (Psalms 42:7b NKJV)

Think with me again if you have ever been trapped in the belly of a fish, imprisoned in the bowels of hell. Jonah was trapped someplace with no way out. If he managed to escape from his confinement it would be to a certain death in the water all around the fish.

I knew a woman who had two little girls. Her husband blamed her every time something went wrong for him and would beat her. They lived in a little town. She had no car, or money. Even if she managed to escape to someplace, she had no idea where she could stay or what kind of work she could get or who would watch her children.

A man works for a company where the boss harangues and ridicules him, other co-workers take credit for his work and ideas. He would like to look for another job but he knows he wouldn't get a good recommendation. He is so deep in debt that he has to hang on to the job he has to pay his bills.

A man in a Middle Eastern country became a Christian while studying in Europe. He cannot tell anyone that he is a Christian because he would lose his wife, his job, and his own parents would disown him.

All of these people are in the belly of a fish, in the bowels of hell.

1.) Then Jonah prayed to the LORD his God from the fish's belly. And he said: "I cried out to the LORD because of my affliction, And He answered me. "Out of the belly of Sheol I cried, And You heard my voice. For You cast me into the deep, Into the heart of the seas, And the floods surrounded me; All Your billows and Your waves passed over me. (Jonah 2:1-3 NKJV)

God and His servant were estranged. Jonah quarreled with God and fled from His presence. Their reconciliation begins on God's initiative. That is how it was with each of us who are Christian. We all like sheep had gone astray. All of us sinned and came short of the glory of God. There is none righteous, no, not one. The wages of sin is death. God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son that whosoever believes in Him should not perish but has everlasting life.

It was mercy that brought God to Jonah and saved him from drowning. It was his trouble that brought Jonah to pray to God – "I cried out to the LORD because of my affliction." Even though we have caused our troubles by our own misconduct, if we pray to God in sincere repentance and humility, we will find a welcome at the throne of grace even as the prodigal son was welcomed home by the arms of his loving father. Jonah prayed from a fish's belly. We can pray from anywhere – in a bunker on the battlefield, from a cell in jail, in a line outside the unemployment office. The Christian has the Holy Spirit within him/her. Do you not know that you are the temple of God and that the Spirit of God dwells in you? (1 Corinthians 3:16 NKJV)

By prayer Jonah now draws near to God whose presence He had so recently been fleeing. He cried out. We may whisper our prayers while we are comfortable and prosperous but we will cry out when we are in danger and our bellies are empty. God had hedged him about so that he could not get out or see any way to flee. Then he cried out to God.

2.) Then I said, 'I have been cast out of Your sight; Yet I will look again toward Your holy temple.' The waters surrounded me, even to my soul; The deep closed around me; Weeds were wrapped around my head. I went down to the moorings of the mountains; The earth with its bars closed behind me forever; Yet You have brought up my life from the pit, O LORD, my God. "When my soul fainted within me, I remembered the LORD; And my prayer went up to You, Into Your holy temple. (Jonah 2:4-7 NKJV)

I'm not an ichthyologist but I'm sure that when fish go after food in the water, such as smaller fish, they swallow a lot of water and seaweed and other flora and fauna that live in the sea. Jonah was not perched on some dry place in the fish's belly. He was surrounded by water. Probably only his head was above water. That is why the weeds floating on top of the surges of water were wrapped around his head.

He recalls that when he was thrown overboard he sank to the bottom. He went down to where the mountains are moored. He was buried at sea. Before the last spark of life was extinguished, before the body gave up his spirit, the LORD brought up his life from the grave.

In the belly of the great fish God had prepared to save him, water and weeds swirling around him, Jonah remembered the LORD. 'I have been cast out of Your sight; Yet I will look again toward Your holy temple.' He began to remember passages from the Bible. Our soldiers who were prisoners in North Vietnam were often kept isolated from each other, locked in dark, cramped cells. Many of them would try to recall the words of Scripture verses they had learned, the words of hymns. Jonah pictured the Temple and the worship there. He tried to picture the descriptions of God's temple in heaven. He turned his thoughts and hopes toward God in heaven. He believed that his prayers were received by God. "When my soul fainted within me, I remembered the LORD; And my prayer went up to You, Into Your holy temple."

3.) "Those who regard worthless idols Forsake their own Mercy. But I will sacrifice to You With the voice of thanksgiving; I will pay what I have vowed. Salvation is of the LORD." So the LORD spoke to the fish, and it vomited Jonah onto dry land.

(Jonah 2:8-10 NKJV)

Do you think that preachers just stand up and deliver a sermon *ad lib*? I served at a church once where the song leader and the pianist would use the first ten minutes of each service conferring over what hymns to sing that day. The pianist was a preacher who came to that church to play the piano after preaching in his own church. He told me that he didn't believe in planning the hymns ahead of time. Indeed, he didn't know what he was going to preach until he stood up in the pulpit! He said the Holy Spirit told him what hymns, and what to preach.

It doesn't work that way. In seminary they told us to plan on spending a half hour of preparation for every minute we would preach. Does that mean that preachers do not let the Holy Spirit lead them? Of course not! Often the hardest task is to decide what to preach the next Sunday. Prayer and the Holy Spirit lead the preacher to the sermon topic. Then He suggests relevant Scriptures. He brings memories forward that illustrate the sermon. Preparing a sermon is very intense intellectual and spiritual labor.

Still in the belly of the fish, his mind begins the process of preparing the message he will preach. "Those who regard worthless idols Forsake their own Mercy Instead of resenting the mission to Nineveh, he now thanks God for sending him there. "But I will sacrifice to You With the voice of thanksgiving; I will pay what I have vowed. Salvation is of the LORD." So the LORD spoke to the fish, and it vomited Jonah onto dry land. God was giving Jonah a second chance. If you have fled His presence, turn to Him for a second chance

