

Prayers from the Deep (Part 1)

Jonah 1:17 – 2:10

We have come to the most familiar portion of the book of Jonah. Most people, even with limited exposure to the Bible, have heard the story of Jonah and the whale. While I will admit that was a miraculous event, it is not the focus of the book. We must keep in mind that the sovereignty of God in drawing people unto Himself is the theme of Jonah.

This theme is clearly seen in the miracle of Jonah being swallowed by the great fish. God had called Jonah to go to Nineveh and preach a message of repentance. Rather than being obedient to God's call, Jonah decided to flee from the presence of the Lord. He thought he would be able to escape God's presence, and thus be freed from any obligation to the Ninevites. God, in His sovereignty, had called Jonah to go to Nineveh; and He fully intended for that to happen. This is affirmed by the action God took regarding Jonah's disobedience. [Jonah 1:17 – Now the LORD had prepared a great fish to swallow up Jonah. And Jonah was in the belly of the fish three days and three nights.](#) The fish was prepared by God to swallow Jonah and keep him for three days and three nights. In this we see an Old Testament portrayal of Jesus' time in the grave and His triumphant resurrection. We cannot miss God's sovereignty in regard to Jonah and his call to Nineveh.

As we examine this familiar text, I hope we see the relevant application for our lives. While we will likely never be swallowed by a fish, God has a plan and purpose for our lives. He is calling each of us into closer fellowship and obedience to Him. It is futile to run from the desire God has for our lives.

This passage records the prayer of Jonah from within the belly of the whale. It is a short passage, but there is much in these verses. As we begin to discuss the particular [aspects](#) of Jonah's prayer, I want to consider: [Prayers from the Deep](#).

I. The Necessity for Prayer (1:17-2:1) – [Now the LORD had prepared a great fish to swallow up Jonah. And Jonah was in the belly of the fish three days and three nights.](#) ^[1] [Then Jonah prayed unto the LORD his God out of the fish's belly.](#) If Jonah had ever faced a crisis in life that warranted prayer, this was certainly such an occasion. Notice:

A. The Situation – While this is difficult for us to imagine, Jonah found himself swallowed by a great fish. Miraculously, he had survived this ordeal, and was well aware of his surroundings. While being in the belly of the fish for three days and nights, Jonah had time to contemplate his life and the needs he faced. During this terrifying situation, Jonah prayed unto the Lord. He was helpless and in need of God to move in his situation. Apart from God, he would perish.

- We have never experienced anything like this, but each of us has encountered situations that we were unable to handle. At times these came upon us with no advance warning, and we may have done nothing to bring about the situation. At other times our disobedience creates consequences that we must endure. Regardless, like Jonah, we all have dealt with situations that required the Lord's help and guidance. We too have been driven to our knees in desperation, calling on the Lord to provide.

B. The Duration (1:17) – Now the LORD had prepared a great fish to swallow up Jonah. And Jonah was in the belly of the fish three days and three nights. Jonah was forced to endure the horror of being within the great fish's belly for three long days and nights. Some might argue that this was no big deal – after all, it only lasted three days. It is impossible to imagine the fear and uncertainty of being within the fish for three days and nights. Had it not been for the sovereign hand of God, Jonah would have perished. Likely he wondered many times if he would survive the ordeal.

- At times our trials may be intense, but they can be short lived. At other times there seems to be no end in sight. When we are dealing with particularly difficult situations, moments can seem like days. We find ourselves wondering if the storm will ever pass. It is easy to become desperate and lose hope in these situations. Like Jonah, we must remember to whom we belong and look to Him for the provision we are unable to provide for ourselves. In times like these, we must rest in God's sovereignty rather than being consumed by the circumstances of the current situation.

II. The Sincerity in Prayer (2-4) – Here we discover the sincerity of Jonah's prayer. This should come as no surprise. Upon realizing that he was alive, even in the midst of a whale's belly, Jonah began to earnestly pray unto the Lord. His sincere prayer was prompted by:

A. The Affliction (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. It goes without saying that Jonah found himself in a horrific situation. He offers some detail regarding his encounter, but this had to be one of the most difficult situations any human has faced. He cried out in his affliction. This speaks of "*adversity, anguish, distress, and tribulation.*" If you can imagine, think of the utter darkness within the whale's belly, the water and seaweed sloshing around, the sounds he would hear in the darkness, and the great unknown. I think you would agree that Jonah was in great distress.

- He cried out from the belly of hell. This is the Hebrew word *sheol*, and speaks of "*the world of the dead, the grave, death, and the depths.*" It was also used to describe the under-world. Surely Jonah felt as if he were in the grip of death, unsure whether he would live or not. One can imagine he would have sensed the depths to which the great beast had descended in the sea,

and may have even thought he would face a watery grave, eventually being consumed by the great fish. This was great affliction, to say the least.

B. The Confirmation (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.* As desperate and uncertain as Jonah's situation was, he had not lost all hope. Knowing the Lord was his only hope and help, Jonah cried out unto the Lord. It seems apparent that Jonah knew the Lord heard his cries. Twice in this verse Jonah affirmed that God had heard his plea. Although he was in the depths of the sea, within the belly of a great fish, Jonah knew the Lord was aware of his desperate situation.

- Such affirmation is always much easier in retrospect, but it is often difficult to affirm when in the midst of a great trial. We know the Bible teaches that our Lord will never leave or forsake us, and yet at times we feel alone and abandoned. There are times when we pray and it seems as if God has not heard, or has refused to listen. Like Jonah, we need to know that God hears the cries of those who come before Him broken, and with a pure heart. When we come to the end of ourselves, realizing our need, and cry out to God, we can rest assured that He hears our prayers! *Psalm 34:18 – The LORD is nigh unto them that are of a broken heart; and saveth such as be of a contrite spirit.*

C. The Desperation (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.* Jonah quickly realized that he was in an inhospitable environment, a place man could not survive. He was in the midst of the sea, having plunged to its depths, all within the belly of a great fish. Apart from the provision of God, Jonah would not survive this desperate situation.

- Although it brought little comfort, Jonah had begun to realize that he was in this situation according to God's sovereign plan. He admitted that God had cast him into the deep; the billows and waves within God's control had washed over him. His situation was very desperate, but at least Jonah had come to grips with God's position in all of this. No doubt this brought a measure of comfort, even in the desperate darkness of the deep.
- Life always presents challenges. None are immune to despair and difficulty. Even those who walked closest to the Lord faced adversity and times of uncertainty. Our response to such desperation will often influence the outcome. Whether we like to admit it or not, God is always in control. Our lives are never left to chance. The saved by grace are kept within the mighty grip of our Lord's hand. We can rest in His abundant grace, knowing He has promised to work all things for good to them that love Him, or we can blame God and become bitter. Regardless of our position in adversity, the Lord's position never changes. He was sovereign before the trial came;

He is sovereign in the midst of our adversities; and He will remain sovereign long after the storm has passed. We must learn to trust the Lord and rest in His plan for our lives.

D. The Conviction (4) – [Then I said, I am cast out of thy sight; yet I will look again toward thy holy temple.](#) This was the turning point in Jonah's situation. He had purposed to flee the presence of God, and realized how foolish he had been. God had not forsaken Jonah, but he knew the Lord had cast him out of His sight. Jonah was not angry with God or blaming Him for the situation. He knew he was there because of his rebellion and disobedience. Jonah determined to seek the Lord in the midst of this great trial, once again looking toward His holy temple. Jonah desired to have communion with God once again.

- I fear that the Lord allows many to have the desire of their hearts; but once they get what they thought they wanted, they realize they didn't want it after all. We will never have joy or peace in our lives walking contrary to God's will. When trials come, we must seek the Lord and the strength and wisdom only He provides. It is never wise to walk away from the Lord and His will, especially during trials of life. We must do as Jonah and return unto the Lord, seeking His help and provision in our desperation. His ways are always just and righteous. He will always lead us in the right path. If your relationship with the Lord is suffering, He has not moved. Return to Him, and you will find the joy and guidance you need and desire.

Conclusion: We will continue to discuss this powerful passage in our next study. Although we haven't been swallowed by a great fish, I am sure we all can relate to Jonah. We have found ourselves in desperate situations because of disobedience and rebellion. If that is the case with you today, I would urge you to return unto the Lord. Being in the belly of the whale is not enjoyable, but for some it is necessary. You can avoid that through submissive obedience.