

## Praise in Affliction

This is a small chapter, showing that the Lord knows how to get our attention. There are so many biblical and practical applications in this chapter that we will not make it through in one message.

To me there are two messages that stand out in this chapter:

**1.) A servant of the Lord cannot flee from God without expecting God's chastening hand.** For 30 years, I have watched people, even pastors, try to flee from where the Lord had them because they were discouraged or discontent.

I must admit that if I had moved every time I felt discouraged, I would have to leave the moving truck loaded or live out of a suitcase.

**But the problem is within**, not in their environment. The discontent or discouraged man is trying to flee from himself, and impossible goal. He simply changes one environment with its problems for another environment with the same basic problems – himself. So he becomes discouraged again. Environmentalism is one of the major religions of our age as discouraged, discontent and unhappy men blame their problems on their environment.

Over the years and though my spirit cries out to "chuck" it all, I have tried to remain content with wherever the Lord has me until he decides to move me. I have tried to obey the admonition that a steward is to be found content and faithful where he is, not where he would like to be.

**2.) No matter what comes our way, we owe praise to our Creator.**

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."*

1) Jonah's stay in the fish was a sign to Nineveh, that great heathen city, as was our Lord stay in the grave for three days and three nights. Matthew 12:38-41

2) God did not give Jonah a spirit of repentance until after the three days and nights, for to do so would have destroyed the only Old Testament illustration of the death, burial and resurrection of our Lord.

3) *"God had prepared a great fish..."* The fish was a special fish prepared for Jonah. Throughout history, this is the only record of anyone being found alive after some time in a fish.

Obviously, there are those who would try to give to this verse some naturalistic explanation, an impossible task without denying the word of God.

God and his servant Jonah had parted in anger, with the quarrel beginning on Jonah's side as he fled from God will for his life. God begins reconciliation with the terrible storm, and in his mercy gives Jonah another chance. Jonah returns to being a faithful servant, over his objections.

1:17, "*a great fish*". In 1758, a sailor fell overboard in the Mediterranean. Before his shipmates could save him, a shark gulped him down right before their eyes. The captain shot the shark, and the shark vomited the sailor out and he was rescued alive. The fish was retrieved, dried and given to the man who had the narrow escape from death. He then traveled Europe with the fish and with his story, and made a great deal of money. That fish was only 20 feet long and weighed nearly 4000 pounds. But the same specimen of fish have been found to weigh as much as 10,000 pounds. (Jonah, p 138)

The miracle here was not only in the manner that the fish swallowed Jonah, but the Jonah remained safe and alive in the fish's belly for 3 days and 3 nights, as he foreshadowed our Lord.

God's love for his servants

For the benefit of teaching Jonah a lesson, God prepared a great fish, a gourd, a worm and an east wind.

- \* God prepared frogs, flies, lice and locusts to deal with the Egyptians.
- \* God prepared fiery serpents to chastise Israel for complaining.
- \* God sent a lion to slay a disobedient prophet.
- \* God sent two she-bears to destroy 42 young men who insulted the prophet Elisha.
- \* God charged an ass to rebuke Balaam, a foolish, money hungry prophet.

God created all creatures for a specific purpose, particularly man whom he called to discharge his duties to God. All creation except man willingly and quickly obey their Creator.

Now we come to Jonah's response from the belly of the fish.

This is one of the most beautiful Psalms in Scripture

When did Jonah pray unto the Lord his God?

After the three days and nights?

We really can't say, but this chapter implies that he had been in the belly the fish for some time before he cried out.

- \* Why would he wait for three days and nights?
- \* Why didn't Jonah cry out before this?
- \* Was he mad at the Lord?

Maybe he had decided he would rather die than submit to the Lord. Then after he saw that the Lord would not permit him to die, he submitted to the Lord his God, and cried out to the Lord.

I have met Christians who would rather die than humble themselves under the mighty hand of God, and make peace with him through the Lord Jesus Christ. They would rather die than make peace with others. Pride is a common problem, and has caused the destruction of many good men

Once our mind is made up, what does it take to change it?

Jonah discovered there are things worse than death.

V. 1, "*then Jonah prayed*". "Prayer" speaks of any kind of address to God, whether a petition, confession or Thanksgiving.

Throughout the ages, people have prayed from every possible location on earth. This the first and only time someone prayed from the belly of a fish. How did Jonah breathe and stay alive in the belly of the fish?

Again we see that verbal prayers are not necessary in order to come before the throne of grace and mercy.

We commonly hear people say that they do not need to go to church to pray; they can pray on the golf course as well as in church. Certainly, it is not necessary to be in church to pray, but those who sincerely pray will be glad to come to the house of God as often as possible.

"unto the Lord his God". Though he was fleeing from the Lord, he now returns to "the Lord his God."

We should "observe that the Lord does not cease to be our God when we cease to be His servants. Jonah was by no means the only one of God's ancient servants who ceased to serve Him. Moses and Aaron did so, as did David and Solomon, Asa and Josiah, Mark and Peter, and a great many others. But the Lord remained their God, although they ceased to be His servants, and by His grace they were restored to the path of duty from which they had wandered. It has been with some of us as it was with those just mentioned. You and I, my brethren, have left the right path again and again, but have we not to acknowledge that we have been as often restored to that path by the Lord our God? Or is there anyone among us who is saying sadly to himself that he has wandered so far and so long from the way of rectitude that he cannot hope to regain a place among the people of God? I say to him that he has no need to despair. He who restored Jonah will restore him. Of Jonah's God it is still as true as it was in the time of the Psalmist, that "He restores the outcasts of Israel." Be of good cheer, for as surely as you desire to be restored, you shall be so. (*The Prophet Jonah*, Samuel Cleft Burn, 1880. Pp. 143, 144.)

Psalms 23:1 "The LORD is my shepherd; I shall not want. 2 He maketh me to lie down in green pastures: he leadeth me beside the still waters. 3 He restoreth my soul: he leadeth me in the paths of righteousness for his name's sake."

"he maketh me, even when I might not want to lay down. He does whatever he might need to do to break my spirit, so he can lead me beside the still waters, restore my soul, and lead me in the paths of righteousness, all for his name's sake.

Jeremiah 3:2 "Return, ye backsliding children, and I will heal your backslidings. **Behold, we come unto thee; for thou art the LORD our God.** 23 Truly in vain is salvation hoped for from the hills, and from the multitude of mountains: truly in the LORD our God is the salvation of Israel."

Jonah's words remind us of the Psalms. In fact, this chapter is clearly a Psalm of praise as written by Jonah, a prophet of God. He was a godly man who knew the word of God. But knowing the word of God did not prevent him from trying to run from God.

Jonah did not abandon his faith in the belly of the fish; rather he confirmed his faith. These words show us that he felt safe in the fish's belly, and did not despair of God's mercy.

"out of the fish's belly"

Jonah was snatched from the very gates of "hell", that is the realm of the dead, not the place of torment.

Rather than death by drowning, he received God's gracious presence and life in the belly of the fish. Though he was in a dark dungeon, even the belly of hell, his heart was full of praise for the mercy of his God.

There are several illustrations with Jonah.

**First**, Jonah illustrates the death burial and resurrection of Christ, and the command to his people to go Christianize the pagan nations with the gospel. We will develop this in a moment.

**Second**, Jonah here represents a type of Israel. Israel was to be a witness to the pagan nations around them. Jonah had been preaching to Israel to repent and fulfill her purpose, which she refused to do. Ezekiel 22 and the book of Hosea tell us that God was going to cast her out of his sight.

After her exile, she was brought back and reestablished as a nation for the purpose of bringing forth the Savior. He would be that testimony to all the nations of the world, and bring salvation to those nations.

Here Jonah was to witness to a pagan nation, which he refused to do. So God cast him out of his sight. At God's predetermined and proper time, Jonah was cast upon the land and given the command to go preach repentance. He wasted no time obeying that command.

**Third**, another application that has been made is Babylon. Nebuchadnezzar swallowed up Israel, and 70 years later, when her judgment time was over, Israel was placed back into her land.

Jeremiah 51:34 *"Nebuchadnezzar the king of Babylon hath devoured me, he hath crushed me, he hath made me an empty vessel, he hath swallowed me up like a dragon, he hath filled his belly with my delicacies, he hath cast me out."*

**Forth**, the new Israel of God, the Gospel Church, is commissioned to go into all the world, (Nineveh) and conquer the pagan nations for Christ with the gospel. In her refusal to do so, she is now in the "belly of hell". How long will it be before she will humble herself under the mighty hand of God, cry out to God in repentance, and fulfill her mission to the world?

The result will be that she will be "vomited out", empowered by God, and will rush to preach to the heathen nations.

Isaiah 26:9 *"With my soul have I desired thee in the night; yea, with my spirit within me will I seek thee: for when thy judgments are in the earth, the inhabitants of the world will learn righteousness."*

We must remember however, that God's purpose is being fulfilled, and in his good time, he will turn the hardened hearts to himself.

V. 2-10. The "third person", which is Jonah telling what happened after it happened, explains what took place in the fish's belly.

**This prayer, or Psalm is a Psalm of praise and thanksgiving.**

It very well describes the experience of the whole nation of Israel, as well as a description of the experience of the new Israel of God of which we are part. The New Israel Of God, the Gospel Church, is clearly in great affliction and distress worldwide, including here in America. Those who proclaim the truth of the word of God are ridiculed and excluded from all public discussions.

V. 2. *"And said, I cried in mine affliction unto the Lord, and he heard me: out of the belly of hell cried I, and thou heardest my voice."*

In his affliction, his mind went immediately to the word of God. We see here in his cry many references to the Psalms as he identifies with the afflictions that the Psalmist experienced.

**First**, note the clear prophecy concerning Christ who spent three days and three nights in the "belly of hell".

Peter quoted Psalms 16:10 in Acts 2:

22 *"Ye men of Israel, hear these words; Jesus of Nazareth, a man approved of God among you by miracles and wonders and signs, which God did by him in the midst of you, as ye yourselves also know: 23 Him, being delivered by the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God, (Jonah was delivered by the determinate council 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: (as was Jonah) 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.** 28 Thou hast made known to me the ways of life; thou shalt make me full of joy with thy countenance. 29 Men and brethren, let me freely speak unto you of the patriarch David, that he is both dead and buried, and his sepulchre is with us unto this day. 30\* Therefore being a prophet, and knowing that God had sworn with an oath to him, that of the fruit of his loins, according to the flesh, he would raise up Christ to sit on his throne; 31 He seeing this before spake of the resurrection of Christ, **that his soul was not left in hell, neither his flesh did see corruption.** 32 This Jesus hath God raised up, whereof we all are witnesses. 33 Therefore being by the right hand of God exalted, and having received of the Father the promise of the Holy Ghost, he hath shed forth this, which ye now see and hear. 34 For David is not ascended into the heavens: but he saith himself, The LORD said unto my Lord, Sit thou on my right hand, 35 Until I make thy foes thy footstool. 36 Therefore let all the house of Israel know assuredly, that God hath made that same Jesus, whom ye have crucified, both Lord and Christ."*

Notice how well Jonah fits the above description, but obviously Jonah went to "hell" for his disobedience, yet he was not left there. Jonah's flash saw no corruption, for he was able to go to Nineveh immediately after having been deposited on land.

**Second**, Jonah tells us that while he was in the fish's belly, he cried by reason of his affliction unto the Lord.

Hosea 5:15 *"I will go and return to my place, till they acknowledge their offence, and seek my face: **in their affliction they will seek me early.** 6:1 **Come, and let us return unto the LORD:** for he hath torn, and he will heal us; he hath smitten, and he will bind us up."*

Many people, both saved and unsaved, do not pray at all, particularly in their prosperity. But *"by reason of mine affliction"* they are brought to tears and strong cries to the Lord God. There are many accounts of those who make no profession of "God" crying out to God in their distress, and being "rescued" in the most miraculous way where they must confess that it was God who delivered them. Though they knowingly received the mercy of God, they continue on in their godlessness.

But our confidence in prayer is found in the intercession of our Redeemer before the Father.

1 John 5:14 *"And this is the confidence that we have in him, that, if we ask any thing according to his will, he heareth us: 15 And if we know that he hear us, whatsoever we ask, we know that we have the petitions that we desired of him."*

Though like Jonah, we bring our afflictions upon ourselves with our sins, yet our earnest, humble prayers through Christ are as welcome at the throne of Grace as was Jonah's.

We should be crying out to the Lord all the time, not just in the time of afflictions, but it normally requires afflictions to get us to sincerely cry out to the Lord.

**Third**, "*out of the belly of hell*".

The fish might have well been called a **grave**. It was a prison into which Jonah had been cast, but his cry was not in vain, for the Lord heard his voice. He did not cry out until he was in the fish. Far too often, the only time we cry out is after the fish swallows us. Yet God hears. It is never too late to cry out to Him.

Jonah's hell was not the place of torment as recorded in Luke, but was the realm of the dead. Christ went to this realm as a dead man, but Jonah did not.

There is, however, a hell, a place of eternal torment. It is a place where people will cry out for mercy for all eternity, but their cry will not be heard.

Luke 16:23 *"And in hell he lift up his eyes, being in torments, and seeth Abraham afar off, and Lazarus in his bosom. 24 And he cried and said, Father Abraham, have mercy on me, and send Lazarus, that he may dip the tip of his finger in water, and cool my tongue; for I am tormented in this flame. 25 But Abraham said, Son, remember that thou in thy lifetime receivedst thy good things, and likewise Lazarus evil things: but now he is comforted, and thou art tormented. 26 And beside all this, between us and you there is a great gulf fixed: so that they which would pass from hence to you cannot; neither can they pass to us, that would come from thence. 27\* Then he said, I pray thee therefore, father, that thou wouldest send him to my father's house: 28 For I have five brethren; that he may testify unto them, lest they also come into this place of torment. 29 Abraham saith unto him, They have Moses and the prophets; let them hear them. 30 And he said, Nay, father Abraham: but if one went unto them from the dead, they will repent. 31 And he said unto him, If they hear not Moses and the prophets, neither will they be persuaded, though one rose from the dead."*

Hell is just as real as this fish that swallowed Jonah:

Isaiah 5:14 *"Therefore hell hath enlarged herself, and opened her mouth without measure: and their glory, and their multitude, and their pomp, and he that rejoiceth, shall descend into it."*

V. 2, For he was now in the fishes belly as in a grave or place of darkness. (Geneva)

**First**, note the clear prophecy concerning Christ who spent three days and three nights in the "belly of hell".

**Second**, Jonah tells us that while he was in the fish's belly, he cried by reason of his affliction unto the Lord.

**Third**, it is important to notice closely the wording here:

**Notice that he did not set his mind against nor pray against the God of heaven.** It was not a prayer of complaint against his God: "Why have you dealt thusly with me?" Nor was it a curse against the day of his birth because of the terrible thing that was upon him.

Psalms 73:9 *"They set their mouth against the heavens, and their tongue walketh through the earth."*

**Jonah's prayer was not a prayer for deliverance**; rather, it was a prayer of thanksgiving and praise for his deliverance from death in the raging sea. He understood that his present condition of being alive in the belly of the fish was assurance of his future deliverance from the belly of the fish.

Being now swallowed up by death, and seeing no remedy to escape, his faith broke out to the Lord, knowing that out of this very hell he was able to deliver him. (Geneva)

His prayer shows that rather than doubting the promises of God through unbelief, Jonah was strengthened in the faith, and gave glory to God.

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**Third**, importance of the wording

Now, **Fourth**, Jonah's preservation in the fish did not cause him to doubt God, but strengthened his faith as he gives thanks and praise God.

Speaking of Abraham, Paul said *"Neither did he doubt of the promise of God through unbelief, but was strengthened in the faith, and gave glory to God,"* (Geneva, Romans 4:20)

2 Corinthians 4:8 *"We are afflicted on every side, yet are we not in distress: we are in doubt, but yet we despair not."*

Jonah's prayer is much like Hannah's prayer of praise for the birth of Samuel:

**1 Samuel 2:1** *"And Hannah prayed, and said, Mine heart rejoiceth in the Lord, mine horn is exalted in the Lord: my mouth is enlarged over mine enemies, because I rejoice in thy salvation. 2 There is none holy as the Lord: yea, there is none besides thee, and there is no god like our God. 3 Speak no more presumptuously: let not arrogancy come out of your mouth: for the Lord is a God of knowledge, and by him enterprises are established."*

*And he heard me...* His ear is always attentive to the cry of his children. Many times, as here, He brings distress upon His children so they will cry unto him. Like Jonah, though, when things are going good we have neither time nor motivation to cry out to the Lord.

When we are strong, we don't need his strength.

When we are prosperous, we don't need his prosperity.

When we are lifted up, we don't need his lifting up.

When we are in wealth, we don't need his wealth, etc.

But we do need Him in every area. If we would only learn to follow and depend upon him when we are on the dry land or even before we get thrown in the sea, if we could only learn that we need him every hour, just think of the work that could be accomplished for Christ and the great cities like Nineveh that could be reached.

**V. 3.** *"For thou hadst cast me into the deep"*. As the sailors cast Jonah overboard, he saw the hand of God casting him into the deep.

*"all thy billows and thy waves passed over me."*

Psalms 42:6 "O my God, my soul is cast down within me: therefore will I remember thee from the land of Jordan, and of the Hermonites, from the hill Mizar. 7 **Deep calleth unto deep at the noise of thy waterspouts: all thy waves and thy billows are gone over me.** 8 Yet the LORD will command his lovingkindness in the daytime, and in the night his song shall be with me, and my prayer unto the God of my life. 9 I will say unto God my rock, Why hast thou forgotten me? why go I mourning because of the oppression of the enemy? 10 As with a sword in my bones, mine enemies reproach me; while they say daily unto me, Where is thy God? 11 Why art thou cast down, O my soul? and why art thou disquieted within me? hope thou in God: for I shall yet praise him, who is the health of my countenance, and my God."

Jonah says he literally experienced what David spoke of figuratively.

"**thy waves**". "Nature" belongs to God, and answers only to him. Through Moses, God had promised to use the forces of nature not only to chastise sin but also the judge sinful nations.

There are no un-trodden paths in the way of the Lord, for there is no temptation that has taken us but such as is common to man.

Whether David experienced everything he wrote about or not, about every temptation is recorded in his writings along with the proper words of encouragement and victory. We know that the Second David "*was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin*" so that he could be our faithful High Priest who intercedes for us with the Father.

In whatever "deep waters" we find ourselves, we must realize that it was the hand of God that cast us there. We are there for His purpose: maybe because of sin, maybe to increase our faith, maybe as a trial of our faith is for his praise and glory, or maybe even to teach us a lesson that will do us good now and in the future and for the benefit of those around us.

We see with Jonah that we must have the word of God and our fingertips, for His word alone will see us through whatever afflictions come upon us.

To here, 3/8