

3/15/15

Praise in Affliction #2

Jonah is one of the better-known stories of Scripture. He was told to go to Nineveh and cry out against their wickedness, but he fled from the will of God, and went the other direction. God sent a terrible storm after him, which forced the sailors to throw him overboard. A large fish had been prepared by God, and it swallowed Jonah.

1:1, Jonah prayed out of the belly of hell, or the grave. His prayer was not a prayer for deliverance, nor was it a prayer against God his maker. It was a beautiful prayer or song of Thanksgiving and praise to God, with references to several Psalms. Jonas three days and nights in the belly of hell illustrates several things:

First the death burial and resurrection of Christ.

Second, a type of Israel. Israel was to be a faithful witness to the pagan nations, which she refused to do. So God was going to cast her out of his sight. Ezekiel 22 and the book of Hosea.

Third Nebuchadnezzar swallowed up Israel and 70 years later she was placed back into her land. Jeremiah 51:34.

Fourth, the new Israel of God, the gospel church has been commanded to go into all the pagan world, and be a faithful witness. The church has failed to do that, and she is now in the "belly of hell". The day is coming when God will give her the spirit of repentance as he did with Jonah here, and she will fulfill her mission to the world.

Jonah tells what happened to him in "third person".

In the belly of this great fish, he cried out in his affliction unto the Lord, and the Lord heard him. V, 3 tells us that he went to the bottom of the sea in his prison.

V. 4. Jonah sought to flee from the sight of the Lord:

Psalms 139:7 "Whither shall I go from thy spirit? or whither shall I flee from thy presence?"

The Lord took him at his word, and now Jonah is concerned that he has been cast out of the Lord's site."

*Psalms 31:22 "For **I said in my haste**, I am cut off from before thine eyes: nevertheless thou heardest the voice of my supplications when I cried unto thee."*

Hastily spoken words can be very dangerous, for God may take us at our word. "look again". Repentance and return to the place from where he had fallen.

"thy holy Temple". It is interesting that **Temple** is capitalized in Geneva.

This declared what his prayer was, and how he laboured between hope and despair, considering the neglect of his vocation, and God's judgments for it: but yet in the end faith gained the victory. (Geneva)

Jonah knew he was cast away from the Lord because of his sin, yet he cried out to the Lord anyway.

In King Solomon's great prayer at the dedication of the Temple, he promised that if a man, even in rebellion and under the judgment of God, would turn and pray toward God's holy Temple all, God would hear and heal:

1 Kings 8:38 *"What prayer and supplication soever be made by any man, or by all thy people Israel, which shall know every man the plague of his own heart, and spread forth his hands **toward this house**: 39 Then hear thou in heaven thy dwelling place, and forgive, and do, and give to every man according to his ways, whose heart thou knowest; (for thou, even thou only, knowest the hearts of all the children of men;)"*

Being in utter darkness in the depths of the sea, Jonah did not know the direction of the Temple. But his heart and spirit followed King Solomon's instructions, as his eyes of faith were directed to the throne of God's mercy and grace.

The Tabernacle and the Temple were all pictures of Christ. Therefore, as one turns from rebellion against His command-word and prays toward our Holy Temple, Christ, then he also can expect God to hear:

Hebrews 4:14 *"Seeing then that we have a great high priest, that is passed into the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold fast our profession. 15 For we have not an high priest which cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities; but was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin. 16 Let us therefore come boldly unto the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need."*

Afflictions, adversities and various distresses come our way to cause us to look toward "thy holy Temple".

Psalms 20:1 *"The LORD hear thee in the day of trouble; the name of the God of Jacob defend thee; 2 Send thee help from the sanctuary, and strengthen thee out of Zion;"*

Psalms 121:2 *"My help cometh from the LORD, which made heaven and earth."*

Hebrews 12:2 *"Looking unto Jesus the author and finisher of our faith; who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God."*

One more point here: "I am cast out of thy sight". Jonah's cry sounds a lot like our Lord's cry from the cross: "My God! My God! Why hast Thou forsaken Me?"

But Jonah certainly was not in the realm of the dead for our sin as was Christ. He was there for his own disobedience, and to learn the lesson that was meant for him. God has a way of **custom designing** our lessons to lead us in the way that we may resist. He leads to himself, and for our own good.

Vv. 5 & 6

These verses describe Jonah's experience in the belly of the fish. Jonah not only went to the very bottom of the sea, but he went into the very jaws of death.

"The earth with her bars". He felt as though he were a prisoner in a dungeon, behind bars he could not remove. But his confidence in the Lord new these "bars" of death could not hold him, as the bars of death could not hold Christ.

You have delivered me from the belly of the fish and all these dangers, as it were raising me from death to life. (Geneva)

Thorns were wrapped around the head of Christ for our sins. Weeds were wrap around Jonah's head for his sin.

Note the words, **from corruption**. This is identical with the description of the Lord,

Psalm 16:10 *"For thou wilt not leave my soul in hell; neither wilt thou suffer thine Holy One to see corruption"*

Jonah remained conscious, but our Lord actually had to die. Without his physical death there could be no payment for the sins of his people.

V. 7 *When my soul fainted within me then I remembered the Lord...*

In the depths of "hell", Jonah remembered the Lord as He is truly identified in Scripture.

Afflictions, distresses, and various difficulties will cause our soul to faint, but we must not abandon ourselves to despair. We must remember who the Lord is, his promises to the Elect, and his great workings of the past.

Psalm 63:5 *"My soul shall be satisfied as with marrow and fatness; and my mouth shall praise thee with joyful lips: 6 When I remember thee upon my bed, and meditate on thee in the night watches. 7 Because thou hast been my help, therefore in the shadow of thy wings will I rejoice."*

Though one is a new creature in Christ, the old nature is still very much present. He will seek every opportunity to regain control of the mind and emotions. He can only be subdued by meditating on the Word of God. The battle between the old man and the new man takes place in the mind.

In the hour of his great distress, David found his encouragement in the Lord his God:

1 Samuel 30:6 *"And David was greatly distressed; for the people spake of stoning him, because the soul of all the people was grieved, every man for his sons and for his daughters: but David encouraged himself in the LORD his God."*

Things get serious, so Jonah gets serious. He is assured that the Lord heard his prayer.

Many forget the Lord when their soul faints. Then they give up with, "What's the use of continuing on?" It is very easy to watch the circumstances (fish) around us, and if we do, our soul will faint even to the place of giving up.

Jonah's soul fainted, but he remembered the Lord. Of course, God's purpose with the fish was to cause Jonah's soul to faint, to get his attention and to turn him back in obedience to the Word of the Lord.

If we take our mind off of the Lord and forget him, we will fail to see the Lord's hand in our circumstance. Not only will our soul faint, but we will stand a good chance of falling away.

We must remember the Lord if we expect the Lord to intervene in our affliction. Remembering our neighbor, our coworker, our spouse, or even the preacher will not see us through our afflictions.

Isaiah 26:3 "*Thou wilt keep him in perfect peace, whose mind is stayed on thee: because he trusteth in thee.*"

Many times, our problem is that we fail to remember the Lord's Word and past actions and mercy in our behalf, so we faint dead away, departing from the paths of righteousness.

2:1, "*and he heard me*". We can be assured that the Lord will hear our faintest cry.

2:8 "*They that wait upon lying {e} vanities, forsake their own {f} mercy.*"

{e} Those that depend upon anything except on God alone. {f} They refuse their own felicity, and that goodness which they would otherwise receive from God. Geneva

Felicity: Happiness, prosperity, blessing.

KJV, *observe* (wait upon) *lying vanities*. They who, in their affliction, depend upon anything save on God alone are willingly turning their back on God's promise of happiness and prosperity.

Afflictions come, and the soul faints, but the average person turns to a god after his own making; that is, he turns to who he thinks God is, but his god is not the God of the Bible. The Holy God of Scripture is the sovereign ruler of all things, and does as he pleases in everything, down to the very hairs of our head. He is the God who directs all of history according to his pre-determined counsel, and works in our lives. He is the Holy God who cannot be questioned with "why are you doing this?"

In their affliction, they turn to *lying vanities*, or things which offer hope. Those vain things do not produce what they promise.

2 Peter 2:17 "*These are wells without water, clouds that are carried with a tempest; to whom the mist of darkness is reserved for ever.*"

Deuteronomy 13:1 "*If there arise among you a prophet, or a dreamer of dreams, and giveth thee a sign or a wonder, 2 And the sign or the wonder come to pass, whereof he spake unto thee, saying, Let us go after other gods, which thou hast not known, and let us serve them; 3 Thou shalt not hearken unto the words of that prophet, or that dreamer of dreams: for the LORD your God proveth you, to know whether ye love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul. 4 Ye shall walk after the LORD your God, and fear him, and keep his ommandments, and obey his voice, and ye shall serve him, and cleave unto him.*"

It is the Lord who empowers false prophets to prosper. He is the one who permits lying vanities to come our way. His purpose, among other things, is to try our faith in his word. Will we remain faithful to his word, or will we be persuaded by the smooth words and empty promises that are presented in the name of the Lord.

Matthew 18:7 "*Woe unto the world because of offences! for it must needs be that offences come; but woe to that man by whom the offence cometh!*"

Our Lord tells us that "lying vanities" will come our way, and he pronounces a "woe" upon those who offer them.

2:8, Jonah says that the ones who listen to these nice lies forsake the promised blessings of God. We forsake, or ignore, the total of God's Word at our own peril.

They forsake their own mercy.

Jonah tells us that when one turns to the vain things around him in his desperation, he is responsible for turning from the mercy that is his in the Lord Jesus Christ. Jonah turned from obeying the word of the Lord as the Lord gave to him; therefore, he forsook his mercy in the Lord.

“They refuse their own felicity, and that goodness which they would otherwise receive from God.”

“*Their own mercy*”. Implied is that each person has a specific portion of God's mercy set aside for him. Thus when they turn from obedience to the Lord, they miss their portion of God's mercy.

Jonah, in fleeing from the presence of the Lord, forsook the mercy of the Lord.

God permits these offenses to come to try our faith, and our commitment to him and his word.

Lying vanities will come, but woe to the one who brings them. The ear tickling messages from the false prophets will be there, but woe to those prophets and to the people of God they win away.

False prophets will come telling us that these little sins aren't so bad. They will tell us that the little things do not really matter that much to God, for he is the loving Father, the old man upstairs who *winks* at sin. The people love the message. (Jeremiah 5:31 “*The prophets prophesy falsely, and the priests bear rule by their means; and my people love to have it so: and what will ye do in the end thereof?*”)

But God is holy, and he will judge according to his holiness and justice.

We see people who like to attend Bible-believing, Bible preaching, hell, fire and damnation churches. They want to go somewhere that preaches hard against sin, but they do not want that preaching to name their sin.

Isaiah, Jeremiah (ch. 43), Ezekiel and Amos (ch. 7) describe a common problem among the people of God:

Isaiah 30:1 “*Woe to the rebellious children, saith the Lord, that take counsel, but not of me, and cover with a covering, but not by my spirit, that they may lay sin upon sin: 2 Which walk forth to go down into Egypt (and have not asked at my mouth) to strengthen themselves with the strength of Pharaoh, and trust in the shadow of Egypt. 3 But the strength of Pharaoh shall be your shame, and the trust in the shadow of Egypt your confusion. 4 For his princes were at Zoan, and his Ambassadors came unto Hanes. 5 They shall be all ashamed of the people that cannot profit them, nor help nor do them good, but shall be a shame and also a reproach. 6 The burden of the beasts of the South, in a land of trouble and anguish, from whence shall come the young and old lion, the viper and fiery flying serpent against them that shall bear their riches upon the shoulders of the colts, and their treasures upon the bunches of the camels, to a people that cannot profit. 7 For the Egyptians are vanity, and they shall help in vain. Therefore have I cried unto her, Their strength is to sit*

still. 8 ¶ Now go, and write it before them in a tablet, and note it in a book that it may be for the last day forever and ever: 9 That it is a rebellious people, lying children, and children that would not hear the law of the Lord. 10 Which say unto the Seers, See not: and to the Prophets, Prophecy not unto us right things: but speak flattering things unto us: prophecy errors. 11 Depart out of the way: go aside out of the path: cause the holy one of Israel to cease from us. 12 Therefore thus saith the holy one of Israel, Because you have cast off this word, and trust in violence, and wickedness, and stay thereupon, 13 Therefore this iniquity shall be unto you as a breach that falleth, or a swelling in an high wall, whose breaking cometh suddenly in a moment. 14 And the breaking thereof is like the breaking of a potter's pot, which is broken without pity, and in the breaking thereof is not found a sherd to take fire out of the hearth, or to take water out of the pit. 15 For thus said the Lord God, the Holy one of Israel, In rest and quietness shall ye be saved: in quietness and in confidence shall be your strength, but ye would not. 16 For ye have said, No, but we will flee away upon horses. Therefore shall ye flee. We will ride upon the swiftest. Therefore shall your persecutors be swifter. 17 A thousand as one shall flee at the rebuke of one: at the rebuke of five shall ye flee, till ye be left as a ship mast upon the top of a mountain, and as a beacon upon an hill.

Isaiah had been speaking to those who had been redeemed by the blood of the Lamb. (1:2) Though the Lord had provided for them in miraculous ways, they turned from hearing God's word and from obeying it. They rebelled against what God wanted them to do. (30:1)

Isaiah warns them of impending judgment, telling them that God is raising up a nation with which he will judge them. Seeing the promised judgment headed their way, rather than return to the Lord, they send ambassadors down to Egypt to make a deal. They sign a treaty or an alliance which will give them Egypt's protection against the nation which is being prepared by God to move against them.

As Isaiah gives them a very blunt warning, look at what God says about them, Isaiah 30:9. He says *that they will not hear the law of the Lord*. They refuse to hear about their sin, and the judgments coming against their sins, though the judgment is rushing down upon them.

In 29:15, “*Woe unto them that seek deep to hide their counsel from the LORD, and their works are in the dark, and they say, Who seeth us? and who knoweth us?*”, they desired to go their own way after their own counsel, and they want no one to hinder them, nor speak out against them.

This sin problem is common throughout Scriptures; the Spirit speaks very clearly, plainly and pointedly to people about their sin. Isaiah names the cities, the people and the situations, as does Jeremiah and Amos.

People claim to want New Testament Christianity. They claim to desire the word of God be preached. But do they?

They that reject the faithful preaching of the Word of God and “*observe lying vanities forsake their own mercy.*”

Paul instructed the early church pastors in 1 Timothy 5:20: *Them that sin rebuke before all that others also may fear*. When was the last time we heard *Paul's* kind of an open rebuke, by name? Christians want to be identified as Pauline Christians, but they do not want to have Pauline doctrine applied to them, *rebuke before all...*

Admittedly, it is with great fear and trepidation for a pastor to *rebuke* a sinner in the church by name — *before all...*

Paul told pastors to expect people to resist sound doctrine, which included reproof, rebuke and exhortation. (2 Timothy 4:1-4.) Paul gives the same warning to Titus. Peter gives the same warning in 2 Peter 2. Of course, it is hard for a pastor to rebuke publicly a church member for doing the same things he might be doing.

In 2 Timothy 4:5 Paul warns pastors: "Watch out, don't you get caught in it. Don't you be one of the teachers who teach according to what people want to hear, according to what makes them feel good. Rather, you must endure the affliction which will come because of the truth."

Thus, Isaiah's problem was not new nor unique; it is a problem as old as human nature. Isaiah 30:10,

The people say to Isaiah, "Isaiah, don't preach about our sins. Preach about the sins of others, and we will thank God for you, but not about us. We don't want to hear the truth about us. We don't want to hear about the requirements of God for us. It makes us uncomfortable. Tell us some good things for a change. Tell us soothing, loving things. Preach the love and mercy of God, things that will encourage us. Tell us about how much God loves us or how good we are or how special we are. We want more love. We don't want to hear about sin and God's judgment. We don't want to be beating down. We don't want our lives compared with the law of God to where we must do something. We don't really think God will judge us as you say he will. Let us continue in our eating and drinking because tomorrow we die. (22:13 "*And behold joy and gladness, slaying oxen, and killing sheep, eating flesh, and drinking wine: let us eat and drink; for tomorrow we shall die.*") It doesn't really matter that we have forsaken God's law. Are we not his chosen people? (Chp. 65.) So what if we aren't serving and glorying God as God over everything. No one else does either. We want you to make us feel better about ourselves. We want soothing things so we can accept ourselves better. In fact, Isaiah, if you don't, we will find a 'preacher' who will tell us these soothing things we desire to hear. We will find someone with a message that will make us feel better about ourselves, others and God, and there are plenty such preachers."

Pastors and teachers by the hundreds teach what draws the biggest crowd and soothing words will bring them in as flies to a dead body.

Notice what Jonah said, 2:8 *They that observe lying vanities forsake their own mercy. That is, those who listen to the soothing lies, the lying vanities, do so at their own peril.*

The prophets prophesy falsely, and the priests bear rule by their means; and my people love to have it so: and what will ye do in the end thereof. (Jeremiah 5:31.)

O Israel, thou hast destroyed thyself, but in me is thine help. (Hosea 13:9.)

Seek ye me and ye shall live. (Amos 5:4.)

"They that observe lying vanities forsake their own mercy."

Ezekiel chapters 3 and 33, God gives Ezekiel his commission. Paul repeats Ezekiel's commission to the new pastors of the new church, both Timothy and Titus. As we have already pointed out, Peter also continued Ezekiel's commission, and we can find the commission throughout God's word. It is always the same.

Ezekiel was sent to God's people. The prophets were sent to the sheep, not to the wolves. These men's commission was not to convert the wolves into sheep. Reading Ezekiel 3 & 33, Timothy, Titus and Peter's

books, one will find that the charge to God's men is to go to the people of God with the law of God, and call them to repentance according to his law. (1 John 3:4)

With the commission is the warning to God's men that his people will not want to hear *repent*, and they will seek out teachers with soothing words. Jonah tells us that as they flee to more loving teachers, they forsake the mercy God had in store for them if they would only yield to the truth. Yielding to the truth by God's grace results in God's mercy and prosperity.

Those who want to know the word of God so they can do it inherit the grace, mercy and blessings of God. They want hard, sharp pointed preaching of the truth. They enjoy the truth.

On the other hand, there are far more who will seek out soothing teachers, teachers who will not bring them face to face with God's word where they must do something or be in open rebellion against God.

Paul did not lay the blame on the teachers although the soothing teachers will face God's anger, wrath and judgment. Paul did lay the blame upon the hearers as did the Lord in Isaiah and Ezekiel.

God help us to rejoice in the truth and especially when we must come face to face with Christ from his word, and then have the willingness to act upon it, grace.

The soothing teachers, the offenses, the false prophets will always be there, woe to them, and woe to them that seek after their soothing words.

V. 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."*

Hosea 14:2 *"Take with you words, and turn to the LORD: say unto him, Take away all iniquity, and receive us graciously: so will we render the calves of our lips."*

Jonah, out of the fishes belly, makes a sacrifice to God, **Ps 51:7; Rom 12:1, Heb 13:15**. The sacrifice that has always pleased God, even in the OT, is not a burnt piece of meat; rather, it is a broken and contrite heart. The heart is broken and submissive to the will of the Lord.

Ps 51:17 "The sacrifices of God *are* a **broken** spirit: a **broken** and a **contrite** heart, O God, thou wilt not despise. onah offers the sacrifice, and promises to pay his vow."

Ps 34:18 "The LORD *is* nigh unto them that are of a **broken** heart; and saveth such as be of a **contrite** spirit."

God wants us to make commitment to follow His revealed will for our lives according to the very best enabling grace He provides.

Jonah's vow was a vow to obey the Lord wherever He leads.

Salvation is of the Lord.

I am very partial to this statement, for I consider it the very heart of the gospel,

Psalms 3:8 “Salvation *belongeth* unto the LORD: thy blessing *is* upon thy people. Selah.”

God chooses, calls, quickens and keeps His own. Salvation is not of man but of the Lord.

V. 10

The fish obeys God. He swallowed Jonah alive upon command, and now he delivers Jonah safely upon command. All of creation obeys God, except man.

If the Lord God could preserve Jonah and bring him alive out of the belly of the great fish, then the Lord can deliver us from the belly of whatever great fish that may have devoured us. God can and will speak to the great fish and delivers us, for we are more than conquerors through him who loved us.

Notice that only the Lord can speak to our circumstances; only he can cause them to change; only He can move in them and put us above them. Our hope must be placed in Him and what He can do, not in anything we can do.

Where is our hope today?

Conclusion:

1. God does His pleasure upon this earth.
2. God used a rebellious preacher.
3. It is never too late to cry out to him.
4. What kind of affliction is required to get us to cry out to him?
5. It might seem that we are cast away from Him, but the Lord knows our name, SS number and our address.

This brings us to chapter 3. There a few really great things that stand out to me in this book:

- 1) God does as he pleases here on this earth.
- 2) God used a rebellious preacher.
- 3) God reveals his mercy and gr