

WHEN LIFE SEEMS TO SWALLOW YOU WHOLE - Thoughts on God's Will from the Book of Jonah - Part 3
 Sunday , July 19th - 6:30 p.m.
 Pastor Don Horban, Cedarview Community Church, Newmarket, ON

Jonah chapter 2 - "Then Jonah prayed to the Lord his God from the belly of the fish, [2] saying, 'I called out to the Lord, out of my distress, and he answered me; out of the belly of Sheol I cried, and you heard my voice. [3] For you cast me into the deep, into the heart of the seas, and the flood surrounded me; all your waves and your billows passed over me. [4] Then I said, 'I am driven away from your sight; Yet I shall again look upon your holy temple.' [5] The waters closed in over me to take my life; the deep surrounded me; weeds were wrapped about my head [6] at the roots of the mountains. I went down to the land whose bars closed upon me forever; yet you brought up my life from the pit, O Lord my God. [7] When my life was fainting away, I remembered the Lord, and my prayer came to you, into your holy temple. [8] Those who pay regard to vain idols forsake their hope of steadfast love. [9] But I with the voice of thanksgiving will sacrifice to you; what I have vowed I will pay. Salvation belongs to the Lord!' [10] And the Lord spoke to the fish, and it vomited Jonah out upon the dry land."

There are some important thoughts being formed in this text:

1) **GOD IS TAKING THE EVENTS OF THIS WORLD IN HIS DIRECTION**

In Matthew chapter 12 Jesus talked about "*the sign of Jonah.*" He was linking God's handiwork in this world in a very long chain. And Jonah was a part of it. Hundreds of years before Christ God was forming His plan through the seemingly random events of Jonah's rebellion. God's will was not being **overturned** by Jonah. God was **working out** His will. This should build our faith. Things are never as **random** as they may appear. There is always **meaning**.

2) **NOTICE THE IMPORTANCE OF REMEMBERING GOD IN TIMES OF TROUBLE**

Sometimes guilt makes us hesitate to call on God. Sin makes us want to hide from His presence. Sometimes drastic situations like Jonah's make us panic and forget God. Jonah was wise enough not to make any of these mistakes.

Jonah has tried running from God. He has every reason to hide his face in shame. He has every reason to be spiritually evasive and distant. Yet he has the wisdom to stop himself when there is nowhere else to go and face his God. It's a good thing to know when you've been wrong and turn your face back in the proper direction. Pride is slowly losing its grip on Jonah.

3) **THERE IS GREAT FAITH IN THE PRAYER OF JONAH**

You can see it in verses 2,6 and 7 - “....I called out to the Lord, out of my distress, and he answered me; out of the belly of Sheol I cried, and you heard my voice....[6] at the roots of the mountains. I went down to the land whose bars closed upon me forever; yet you brought up my life from the pit, O Lord my God....[7] When my life was fainting away, I remembered the Lord, and my prayer came to you, into your holy temple.”

These words don't spring from a renewal conference. Jonah is praying from the slimy stomach of a fish. There is no immediate prospect for escape. Yet Jonah still has the confidence he has not slipped from God's hand. Somehow, he still looks for the goodness of his God.

This is always a good first step on the path toward home - Psalm 27:13 - “I believe that I shall look upon the goodness of the Lord in the land of the living!”

4) WHAT CAN YOU LEARN IN THE BELLY OF A FISH?

Jonah had a lot of time to think. There wasn't much else to do for those three days. Here are some lessons:

- a) ***God's commands are not to be taken lightly.*** He is ***loving*** but never ***indifferent***. God has given us solid instructions about not lying, about loving our neighbor, about not forsaking the fellowship of the church, about forgiving our enemies, and the danger of idolatry. The clear lesson of Jonah is this - ***to ignore commands is to invite chastening.***
- b) ***It's easiest follow God by obeying His Word right away.*** His Word is His clearest, most simple, and pain free path of His teaching. It may save Him having to use whales.
- c) ***Even in our sin, God does not easily give up on us.*** He is constantly drawing us to repentance and renewed faith. God doesn't hold grudges if we repent. His love is ***pure***, but not ***petty***.

5) REPENTANCE AND HUMILITY ARE THE SUREST AND FASTEST WAYS BACK TO DRY LAND WHEN DROWNING IN SIN

Notice that praying by itself isn't enough. It's after Jonah pledges himself to ***obey God's original call*** that the fish spits him out - “***But I with the voice of thanksgiving will sacrifice to you; what I have vowed I will pay. Salvation belongs to the Lord!***”(2:9).

There is usually no other way out of the mess of rebellion but ***backing out*** - returning to the same point where you first shunned God's call. There will never be a ***different*** way out of the bondage of spiritual rebellion.

Verse 8 is also an important one along these lines: **"Those who pay regard to vain idols forsake their hope of steadfast love."** Jonah found there was no experience of mercy while he continued in his sin. God's call may seem hard at times, but His revealed will is the only reliable conduit of His ***"steadfast love"*** in this fallen world.