

God's Loyal Love

Աստուծոյ Հաւատարիմ Մէրը

Jonah 1:13-17; 2:1-10

We are studying the book of Jonah, God's prophet who did not want to take God's message to Nineveh. He wanted to escape from God, as far he could go, as far as he could be...

On his way to Tarshish (Spain), a storm hits, and the sailors and the captain realize that the storm is the result of Jonah being there with them. First, they cry out to their gods, then they start throwing out their cargo. Then captain wakes Jonah and asks him to pray. Eventually the men cast lots only to discover that Jonah is the problem.

Jonah finally agrees that he needs to go. It was his sin, his disobedience that created this chaotic situation. He confesses to the sailors. He also takes a courageous action, and he asks them to throw him out of the boat everyone else could be rescued. Someone should be sacrificed.

¹² "Pick me up and throw me into the sea," he replied, "and it will become calm. I know that it is my fault that this great storm has come upon you."

¹³ Instead, the men did their best to row back to land. But they could not, for the sea grew even wilder than before. ¹⁴ Then they cried out to the LORD, "Please, LORD, do not let us die for taking this man's life. Do not hold us accountable for killing an innocent man, for you, LORD, have done as you pleased." ¹⁵ Then they took Jonah and threw him overboard, and the raging sea grew calm. ¹⁶ At this the men greatly feared the LORD, and they offered a sacrifice to the LORD and made vows to him. (Jonah 1:12-16 NIV11)

The sailors don't want to kill the prophet of God Yahweh. They want to row back to the land. The sea becomes rougher. In Hebrew it literally says: **"the sea grew and raged against them."**

They know that Jonah is in trouble, but they don't want to be responsible for killing the prophet of God.

Finally, they cry out to the Lord (*Adoni*, Yahweh).

They pray to God. They do not want to die simply because they have taken on a passenger who is disobeying God. Also, they realize that God is pursuing His prophet. They are out of options, and they throw him overboard....

Everything becomes calm again.

How interesting. Do you remember how Jesus was sleeping in the boat, and there was storm? How Jesus brought calm to his situation. Jesus would be the sacrifice, the ultimate sacrifice bringing "calmness" to our storms.... Just think about that... Now what was the reaction of the sailors?

At this the men greatly feared the LORD, and they offered a sacrifice to the LORD and made vows to him. (Jonah 1:16)

Let us talk about the word fear in this passage:

- All the sailors were **afraid** (*yare*) and each cried out to his own god. (1:5)
- I am a Hebrew and I **fear** (worship NIV) the LORD, (1:9)
- the men greatly **feared** the Lord, and they offered a sacrifice to the Lord and made vows to him. (1:16)

Fear or terror from the storm becomes the fear of God, awe, adoration and worship to Yahweh, the God of creation.

The fear of the Lord is the beginning of Wisdom. They sacrificed two things: first Jonah and then a sacrifice to the Lord as an expression of adoration and gratitude. God rescued them. How loyal were they to God later on? I don't know. But I see **God's loyal love** in rescuing these pagan sailors who experienced God Almighty in a tremendous way.

Did God give up from this disobedient prophet?

God Provides a Rescue Plan

Now the LORD provided a huge fish to swallow Jonah, and Jonah was in the belly of the fish three days and three nights. (Jonah 1:17 NIV11)

I love our God. The God of mercy, the God of *hesed*, His faithful love towards humanity. God sees His man on the run, and He does not give up. **The big fish is a rescue plan.** Some take it as an allegory. I take it as it is. If I cannot explain it scientifically (how a man can be alive in a fish for three days?), that does not mean it cannot be a reality. With God everything is possible, a man can live three days even in the belly of the fish.

I want you to read the Word of God carefully. As you see, **God provided** a big fish. **God sent a storm** over the sailing ship. **God is in control** of the situation. God can use even this fugitive prophet. Remember the pagan sailors were the first converts in the missionary trip. How interesting...

Jesus and Jonah

It is interesting that Jesus himself talked about Jonah when the people asked him for a sign.

As the crowds increased, Jesus said, "This is a wicked generation. It asks for a sign, but none will be given it except the sign of Jonah. ³⁰ For as Jonah was a sign to the Ninevites, so also will the Son of Man be to this generation.... ³² The men of Nineveh will stand up at the judgment with this generation and condemn it, for they repented at the preaching of Jonah; and now something greater than Jonah is here. (Luke 11:29-32 NIV11)

- Jonah and Jesus were both were from Galilee;
- Jonah struggled with his call to preach, Jesus struggled to do the will of the Father (in the desert, at Gethsemane);
- both preached God's message of judgment and reconciliation to the marginalized and to sinners;
- both chose death willingly when the time came, for the sake of others;
- both went to death forsaken by others;
- both bore and removed the consequences of sin from others;
- both caused the storm to cease after sleeping through it (Jonah through repentance, Jesus through his divinity);
- Jonah entered the jaws of the fish, Jesus entered the jaws of the grave;
- both were kept for three days;
- both were raised up again by the Father;
- Jonah's obedience in preaching led to the conversion of a great city, and Jesus' obedience led to the conversion of many cultures of the world.¹

The point here is not praising Jonah, but to preach repentance to all people. (*Remember the sermon of Badveli Jason, are we relevant?*) We should guide the people in humility that there is a judgment day. Lead people to God. Because Jesus himself says there is something greater than Jonah here, that is Christ and not Jonah.

As Paul says to young Timothy:

Preach the word; be prepared in season and out of season; correct, rebuke and encourage—with great patience and careful instruction. (2 Tim 4:2 NIV11)

Now, let us read the prayer/psalm of Jonah in the fish.

From inside the fish Jonah prayed to the LORD his God. ² He said:

**“In my distress I called to the LORD,
and he answered me.**

**From deep in the realm of the dead I called for help,
and you listened to my cry.**

**³ You hurled me into the depths,
into the very heart of the seas,
and the currents swirled about me;
all your waves and breakers
swept over me.**

**⁴ I said, ‘I have been banished
from your sight;
yet I will look again
toward your holy temple.’**

**⁵ The engulfing waters threatened me,
the deep surrounded me;
seaweed was wrapped around my head.**

**⁶ To the roots of the mountains I sank down;
the earth beneath barred me in forever.**

**But you, LORD my God,
brought my life up from the pit.**

**⁷ “When my life was ebbing away,
I remembered you, LORD,
and my prayer rose to you,
to your holy temple.**

**⁸ “Those who cling to worthless idols
turn away from God’s love for them.**

**⁹ But I, with shouts of grateful praise,
will sacrifice to you.**

What I have vowed I will make good.

I will say, ‘Salvation comes from the LORD.’”

The format of this prayer is like psalms, five stanzas and a refrain.² It has common Old Testament structure of chiasms (ABCB’C’)³

The major theme of “going down” and being “brought up” by Yahweh. We see how much he uses the word “going down, deeper and deeper” ...

From deep (2); into the depths (3); the deep (5); I sank down (6);

Then God is lifting him up:

brought my life up from the pit (6)

This is a prayer of thanksgiving that God rescued him, God delivered him.

How much repentance do we see here?

Is Jonah genuine in his repentance?

He is evaluating his condition of being in a pit. Well, he is right. He sees that only God can rescue him (lift him up). He is right.

How about those words:

“Those who cling to worthless idols turn away from God’s love for them.

⁹ But I, with shouts of grateful praise, will sacrifice to you. (Jonah 2:8,9 NIV11)

It surprises me that he critiques the pagan sailors in relation to him.

Ok, their gods are worthless, and Jonah believes His God, Yahweh is the true God.

Do we see Jonah’s repentance?

One can say that Jonah repented and that is why he is saying those words. I am not sure, because later in chapters 3 and 4, when he arrives to Nineveh, we see his attitude is still not changed; “Why should these pagan people be given a chance to repent?”

I wonder about this prayer, how genuine is his gratitude to God for his deliverance?

I see genuine change in the sailors’ lives.

They turn to Yahweh. They also offer a sacrifice of thanksgiving.

NIV commentary says that there is a tension between **two truths**.

There is a tension in the narrative events Chapters 1,3,4 and the prayer in chapter 2.

It is not resolved.

I think it was kept open intentionally.

We can have the right theology, but we also wrestle with it when it challenges us, and sometimes we don’t know how to live it out.

Jonah gives thanks from the belly of the fish that he has been delivered even though he is not dry land yet. Jonah did not give up from his fundamental beliefs about Yahweh. Yet, he does not want Nineveh to have the opportunity to repent.

Does God listen to this kind of prayers?

“Jonah has looked toward God (2:4, 7). It is enough for his deliverance. God will deal with his protest/running issues later. For now, they must remain in tension. **God answers those who call out in distress** whether their issues of protest are resolved or not. **He delivers those who call out in times of trouble** (2:9b).⁴

Yes, in his prayer there is right theology; only God knows Jonah’s heart. One thing I see, the big fish vomited Jonah unto dry land. Hahaha, even the fish could not stand Jonah.

Application:

We all are Jonah somehow or another.

1. “We should not run from God, but we do. **Fish was rescue plan.**

Until we admit we are on the run, we are lost. But when, with Jonah, we admit our true situation (1:10), we have real hope.

God in his mercy does more than call us back to himself.

It is all about God.

Yahweh pursues us as he pursued Jonah, with a storm, sailors’ questions, and the great fish of death. This pursuit is our only hope. Apart from it, we are still running from God and from the message of Jonah.⁵(Romans 7:22-26)

God is talking to you today; there are fish, sailors ... are you attentive? Seek the Lord

2. Jonah thanked God even thou he was not on dry land.

“In my distress I *called* to the LORD, and he *answered* me. From the depths of the grave I *called* for help, and you *listened* to my cry” (2:2)

Well, Jonah did not repent.

He kept his dialogue with God.

God in His **mercy and love** listens to our prayers and deals with our shortcomings. Be open to God even if you have questions and doubts, or you feel lost; don’t give up from having a dialogue with God. God’s loyal love (*hesed*) will always pursue you. God’s loyal love (*hesed*) never changes.

1. James Bruckner, *NIV Application Commentary (Jonah, Nahum, Habakkuk, Zephaniah)*. P63

2. *ibid* p 70

3. *ibid* p71

4. *ibid* p 82

5. *ibid* p 59