

BUMC Weekly Bible and Sermon Study

Sermon: A Whale of a Prayer

Scripture: Jonah 2:1-10

Key take-aways from the Scripture

- This section of the Book of Jonah is known as “Jonah’s prayer”. Here, Jonah is praying to God from inside the fish that had swallowed him at the end of chapter 1.
- It is worth noting that Jonah’s prayer to God is a psalm of thanksgiving rather than of deliverance. Here, Jonah does not plead with God to deliver him from the trouble he is in but gives thanks for still being alive inside the fish!
- Verses 1-7 says, “Then Jonah prayed to the Lord his God from the belly of the fish, saying, “I called to the Lord out of my distress, and he answered me; out of the belly of Sheol I cried, and you heard my voice.” Here, we can see that Jonah views his situation as if he were buried alive. “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. Then I said, ‘I am driven away from your sight; how[a] shall I look again upon your holy temple?’ The waters closed in over me; the deep surrounded me; weeds were wrapped around my head 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. As my life was ebbing away, I remembered the Lord, and my prayer came to you, into your holy temple.”
- Verses 8-10 says, “Those who worship vain idols forsake their true loyalty. But I with the voice of thanksgiving will sacrifice to you; what I have vowed I will pay (i.e. I will keep my promise to God and obey Him). Deliverance belongs to the Lord!” Then the Lord spoke to the fish, and it vomited Jonah out onto the dry land.” Notice in verse 8 that Jonah appears to be including himself as one of those that forsake God’s faithfulness for idols.

Key take-aways from the Sermon

- As a re-cap: Jonah is one of twelve “minor prophets” and during this time in the Book’s history, we see a shift in God’s concern from His chosen people to all nations and all people.
- Sometimes the most important Christian education is about both learning and *unlearning*. What we “know for sure what is not so”! We see that Jonah needed to do some *unlearning* in his time.
- Cognitive/Confirmation Bias: tendency to favor information that favors our preconceived notions. For Jonah, the notion of a call from God to go and preach to what he viewed as his enemies was too much for him to handle. He tries to run from God and headed for Tarshish
- In the story, Jonah’s defiance endangers both his life and that of the sailors of the ship he is fleeing on. They throw him overboard, at his insistence, and he ends up in the belly of a fish. Things go from bad to worse for him.
- Season of Descent: things went from bad to worse for Jonah as he was fleeing from God’s call for his life. There became a success built from the failures and setbacks. We will encounter many defeats but must never be defeated!
- Throughout Scripture we see that God continually uses people who fail! We never know or realize that Jesus is all that you need until He’s all you got! (Matt 10:39).
- When Jonah hits rock bottom, he turns to prayer (a psalm to be exact) in ch.2.
- Askesis: in the Greek, it means *exercise, practice, training*: the lifelong training in self-control that is essential to spiritual growth. It is a means to resilience!
- How you practice is how you play. If this true in sports, it is true in discipleship! Discipleship never happens by accident but by intention! (See Romans 5:3-5)
- Jonah is eventually released from the fish and finds himself with a second chance! Deliverance belongs to God (see James 4:10).
- In the New Testament, Jonah becomes a precursor to Jesus in many ways. In Matt. 12:38-41, the religious leaders demand a miracle from Jesus. Jesus replies to them by explaining his own death and descent, invoking the story of Jonah as an example.
- The job description of a disciple: to lift somebody else up...to descend so that somebody else may ascend!

Questions for Personal Reflection or Group Discussion

- What were your key take-aways from the sermon? How can you apply this to your everyday life?
- How would you characterize Jonah's prayer? What qualities do you take from it?
- What do you think is the attitude and motivations behind his prayer?
- What attributes of God do you see within Jonah's prayer?
- Do you think that Jonah's prayer in chapter 2 fit with the events of chapter 1? Why or why not?
- Rev. Dr. Chappell speaks of Jonah's "season of descent". Reflect on your own "season of descent". What happened or is happening? Where do you see God during this time in your life? What do you think God is calling you to?
- What is Askesis (see 35:45 minutes into the service)? How does this apply to your life?

