

Studies in Jonah 01 a Worshipping Prophet

by James R. Cochrane

Submission to God's will leads to life, while saying no leads to death, as seen in the story of Jonah and the principle of gratitude and praise.

Duration: 39:40

Scripture: 2 Samuel 9:8, Isaiah 43:1, Jonah 2:2-9, Mark 14:34, Luke 15:24, 1 Timothy 5:5, Hebrews 5:7

Topics: "Spiritual Death", "Gods Salvation"

Description

In this sermon, the preacher focuses on the story of Jonah and highlights the concept of being alive yet spiritually dead. He explains that the Hebrews used the words 'life' and 'death' with broader meanings than we do, emphasizing that one can be physically alive but spiritually dead. The preacher emphasizes the importance of understanding the danger we face in order to fully appreciate the salvation offered by God. He also emphasizes that when we reject the word of God, there is no alternative but to follow our own will. The sermon references specific verses from the book of Jonah to support these points.

Transcript

Our reading this morning is found again in the book of Jonah, chapter 2. Prophecy of Jonah, chapter 2. I should mention this morning that last night I had the opportunity of talking with my wife, Grace, in Santo Domingo. The medical project is now over and she's back home. And to those that know her, she sends you her love and the Lord.

And you might remember also our son who today begins grade 10 in school in Santo Domingo. Today is not a holiday in the Dominican Republic and the schools start and Jim enters grade 10. So you might remember Jim and my wife, Grace, in prayer in the Dominican Republic.

Now we will read Jonah, chapter 2, beginning with verse 1. Then Jonah prayed unto the Lord his God out of the fish's belly, and said, I cried by reason of mine affliction unto the Lord, and he heard me out of the belly of hell, cried I, and thou heardest my voice. For thou hast cast me into the deep, in the midst of the seas, and the floods compassed me about, all thy billows and thy waves passed over me. Then I said, I am cast out of thy sight, yet will I look again toward thy holy temple.

The waters compassed me about, even to the soul. The depth closed me round about. The weeds were wrapped about my head.

I went down to the bottoms of the mountains. The earth with her bars was about me forever. Yet hast thou brought up my life from corruption, O Lord my God.

When my soul fainted within me, I remembered the Lord, and my prayer came unto thee into thine holy temple. They that observe lying vanities forsake their own mercy, but I will sacrifice unto thee with the voice of thanksgiving. I will pay that I have vowed.

Salvation is of the Lord. I may the Lord add his blessing this morning to this psalm, for it really is a psalm written by Jonah, and may he speak to each of us today. Yesterday I watched on television the installation of Pope John Paul I. Maybe some of you saw the ceremony held in the square outside of St. Peter's Basilica.

It became an outdoor sanctuary in which approximately a quarter of a million people in their own way worshiped God. The word sanctuary is usually used of a building or a place where people meet together to worship God. We remember that Stephen said that God no longer dwells in houses made with hands, but even though he said that, people still speak of sanctuaries as places where people meet to worship God.

Just three weeks ago in the Dominican Republic, I met together with approximately 500 of the Lord's people on the northern coast of the Dominican Republic in what I think you would call a great shed put up for the purpose. And under that shed, really almost in the open air, we remembered the Lord in a very simple communion service, and the Lord was there. In that sense, it was a sanctuary.

I have been in other places in the city of Bogota, Colombia, some years ago. After a conference, we went out one afternoon to what is a great salt mine. They actually mine the salt from under a mountain, and we drove into the mountain into darkness, and down in the mountain in this great salt mine, in one part that now has already been mined, they have created a cathedral.

It is called the Cathedral of Salt, and regularly Roman Catholic priests officiate and serve the Mass to people in the Cathedral of Salt under the mountain, the way down in the ground. To them it has become a sanctuary. On the other hand, I have met many times in years gone by in the penitentiary in the Dominican Republic, and I remember one day when in a cell with a group of prisoners just recently converted, we put up a little table, and we put on a bread and wine, and we sat around on the cuffs of the cell, and we remembered the Lord Jesus.

And some of those men took part in praise and adoration for the first time in their lives in the public way. It was a beautiful, unforgettable service, and the cell in the penitentiary was a very real sanctuary. We met with the Lord, and his presence was there.

Now this morning, we move into what must be one of the strangest sanctuaries ever found in all of the Bible. The inward parts of a great fish, and a man conscious of the love and the grace of God, he pours out his heart in praise and worship to God. And that strange place, no doubt a unique sanctuary, really becomes the house of God at that moment, for Jonah has come back to God.

And every time you experience grace, it must result in praise and adoration. We suggested yesterday that when Jonah was swallowed by the fish, he was really caught up by the grace of God. And now in that place of grace, his heart begins to respond in praise and adoration to God.

It always happens. You may remember the kindness of David. When David thought of all the tragedy that had befallen the house of Saul, because of Saul's disobedience, he raised the question one day, Is

anybody left of the house of Saul? And they brought to him a man who was lame on both his feet.

His name was Mephibosheth. And he gave to that man all that belonged to Saul out of love for Jonathan. And poor Mephibosheth, lame on both his feet, looked at David and in praise and adoration.

He couldn't understand what was happening. And he said to David, Why all this kindness to such a dead dog as I? He wasn't really anybody in the world. He couldn't even walk.

But David poured out on him the grace of God in kindness. And the man turned in praise and wonder to David. All this kindness and all I am is just a dead dog.

If you have heard or experienced the grace of God, then I'm sure you've turned in wonder and adoration and praise to God. That's what Jonah did. And you'll find that in chapter 2 in the Hebrew, this psalm really consists of only three verses.

In our Bible, verses 2, 3, and 4 form the first verse. Verses 5, 6, and 7, the second verse. And verses 8 and 9, the last verse of this psalm, which Jonah wrote.

Let me suggest to you in all kindness and reverence for Jonah. I don't want you to imagine he sat in the fish with a pencil and a paper and he wrote the psalm. That would not be the idea.

But these thoughts came to him in that place. And afterwards, he penned the words. The experience took place in the fish.

Afterwards, he wrote out his thoughts, and we have them today in chapter 2. Let us notice, then, the first verse, which includes in our Bibles verses 2, 3, and 4. And Jonah said, I cried by reason of mine affliction unto the Lord, and he heard me. Now, you'll notice that right away, this prayer did not take place in the fish. This is the prayer that took place when he was in the sea, absolutely lost, before he was swallowed up by the grace of God and found himself in this great fish prepared by God.

When he was still in the sea, when he was in what he calls the place of death, he cried by reason of his affliction unto the Lord. This is a desperate prayer, and it comes from the sea. And you'll notice that phrase in the King James Version, out of the belly of hell, that phrase is a technical phrase, and it means the place of the dead.

That's where Jonah was. He's still alive, probably trying to swim, although I'm sure he didn't know how to swim. He's still moving, he still has physical life, but as far as Jonah is concerned, he's in the place of the dead.

And there is a desperate cry, goes up to God. Verse 3 indicates that Jonah recognizes the intervention of God. He's there because of the discipline of God.

He's not there by choice, and he's not there by chance. He's there because God has sent him there. For thou hast cast me into the deep, in the midst of the sea, and the floods compassed me about, all thy billows and thy waves passed over me.

Now, if you know the Messianic Psalms, and you're familiar with some of the Messianic portions of the Old Testament, you'll know how often in prayer we take these words at the end of verse 3, and we apply them to the Lord Jesus. All thy billows and thy waves passed over me. That is another subject.

Please remember this morning that first of all, they apply to Jonah. All the waves and all the billows passed over Jonah. He is in this place, the place of the dead, without any hope, and he considers himself already out of the world of the living.

In the world of the living, men enjoy the blessings of God. Jonah considers himself now out of the world of the living. Take verse 4. Then I said, I am cast out of thy sight.

Now, that wasn't true. But to Jonah, that's what he felt, that he had already passed out of the sight of God. He is in the place of the dead, and there are no blessings from God, nothing wonderful, joyful to enjoy.

Now, let us pause for a moment and remember that in these three verses, the principle thought that comes through is that when you say no to the word of God, there is absolutely no other alternative than to say yes to your own will. Now, that's a very important point in the story of Jonah, and I would like to dwell on it just for a moment this morning because it has to do with our lives also. If we say no to God, what we really are saying is yes to ourselves.

This has been the problem of mankind right from the very beginning. There is no other alternative. If you say no to God and to his word, you really are saying, I want to do my own will, or as we say in our contemporary world, to do my own thing.

Now, remember that submission to the will of God, it always leads to life. When you do your own will, it always leads to death, and there is no middle course. I can think of no greater illustration this morning on the positive side than that of our own Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ.

You remember Gethsemane where the Lord Jesus prayed, Father, if thou be willing, remove this cup from me. Nevertheless, not my will, but thine be done. Now, I have a great deal of difficulty in my own mind making any difference between the will of the Father and the will of the Lord Jesus.

But he himself makes the difference. Not my will, but thine be done. And this experience in Gethsemane was a very deep experience for the Lord Jesus.

Listen to the words from Mark. He began to be sore amazed and to be very heavy. The New English Bible reads, And again in Mark, the Lord Jesus said, The New English Bible reads, The Lord Jesus is in a struggle that we really can't understand.

His blood, his sweat is like raindrops of blood that falls to the ground. And this is his prayer. If it is possible, let this cup pass from me.

Nevertheless, not my will, but thine be done. Now, we've been in Hebrews for a few days. Let me take you back to Hebrews to one of the difficult verses where you find that in Hebrews 5, verse 7, the scriptures say, Now, we remember Gethsemane.

We remember the prayer of the Lord Jesus. But we really know of no other illustration in the Gospels that comes to mind in connection with Hebrews 5, verse 7. Although I might suggest to you that there could be other experiences in the life of the Lord Jesus not recorded in the Gospels that the writer of the books of the Hebrews knew about and that we don't know about. But we do know there's one experience when he was exceedingly sorrowful and very heavy and prayed in great strength and concentration before God.

Let this cup pass from me. Now, the Bible says in Hebrews he was hurt. That's very difficult for some of us to understand because from Gethsemane, the Lord Jesus walked straight to Calvary and he died.

He really and truly died. And yet in Hebrews it is stated that he was hurt. And he was hurt because he feared, and the last phrase can be beautifully and accurately translated, he was hurt through his godly fears.

But he still went to the cross and he died. There is an echo in that phrase in Hebrews chapter 5 from Psalm 22. Because in Psalm 22, the psalm begins with the humiliation of the Lord Jesus and of his experience at the cross.

My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me? But later down in the psalm, the resurrection and exaltation come into view. And in the latter part of the psalm, you read these words, For he hath not despised nor absorbed the affliction of the afflicted, neither hath he hid his face from him, but when he cried unto him he heard. That, no doubt, is the background of the verse in Hebrews, that he was heard through his godly fears.

Now, in Psalm 22, you may have the secret for Hebrews 5. The first part of Psalm 22 is the humiliation of the Lord Jesus. The latter part is his exaltation through resurrection. He was heard, but he was not spared the experience of death, but he was brought through the experience to resurrection and exaltation.

Thus he was really heard through his godly fears, and he was brought to power and glory and exaltation at the right hand of the Majesty on high. This is confirmed again in Hebrews, where you read, 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 sent down at the right hand of the throne of God. For consider him that endured such contradiction of sinners against himself, lest ye be weary and faint in your minds.

What you have, then, in the Lord Jesus is a great yes to the will of God, and it did lead to life and everlasting glory, though he was not spared the experience of death. Now, this is referred to in Hebrews. It was for the joy that was set before him.

What was the joy? The honor of being seated at the right hand of the throne of God. And because of that joy, the Lord Jesus went through the shame and humiliation, but he sought beforehand the glory and the joy of being seated at the right hand of the Majesty on high. Now the author says, Consider them, lest you be weary and you faint in your minds in the experiences of your life.

Because the basic thought is this, when you say yes to the will of God, there may be sorrow and trial and suffering and perhaps even death. But one thing is absolutely sure, a life lived in submission to the will of God leads to eventual fullness of life and glory forever. But when you say no, as Jonah did, to the will of God, and you say then yes to your own will, it always leads to the place of death.

And this happened in the experience of this man, Jonah. There are illustrations from the Bible, many of them. I only mentioned one this morning, and that is the story of Saul, who was the king of Israel, the first king of Israel.

We won't go back and read the portions, but there was one occasion when he knew he was not to offer sacrifice in the presence of God. He was to wait until Samuel, the man of God, came. But Saul became impatient.

He thought his soldiers would leave him. He knew the enemy was near. So he took the initiative, and he offered the sacrifice.

And then Samuel arrived. And when Samuel arrived, he pointed out the disobedience of Saul and that God had now departed from the house of Saul. That was the beginning of the downward movement in the life of Saul.

It's a very tragic story. You find him finally before a medium. In some parts of the world today, the person would be called a witch doctor, seeking guidance and direction.

Finally, his life comes to an end on a battlefield. His sons have died. And he takes his own sword, and he sets it against the ground, and he throws himself on it.

And a man from a great position of glory, having said no to the will of God, goes down and down in despair, frustration, and hate, until he finally dies. There really is no alternative. Instead, we say yes to God, and we move towards glory, or we say no to God and yes to ourselves, and we move towards death.

Notice the story of Jonah. You'll find in chapter 1 that he went down to Joppa. And then you'll find he went down into the ship.

And then down in verse 6, when he's gone down into the ship, farther down in the chapter you read, in chapter 2, in verse 6, these words, "...I went down to the bottoms of the mountains," and that's about as low as Jonah could go, right down at the bottom of the seabed, "...where there was no hope, it was the place of the dead." Now, in the next verse of this Hebrew psalm, you have reference made to the same things. We've referred to verse 6, then verse 7, also verse 5. All of these verses are basically a repetition of what you have in verses 3 and 4, also verse 2. But it's not a vain repetition. Jonah seems to want to impress on us just how great the danger was.

For if we grasp the greatness of the danger, then the greatness of the salvation will be understood. I think sometimes those who have a very shallow view of the danger in which we find ourselves have a very light view of the salvation that God gives to us. The more you understand of the danger, the more you understand of the salvation, how great and marvelous it is.

That's why I think in verses 5, 6, and 7, Jonah goes back over these things. Verse 5, "...the waters compassed me about, even to the soul. The depths closed me round about.

The weeds were wrapped about my head. I went down to the bottoms of the mountains. The earth with her bars was about me forever." Maybe it would be good someday, when you have the opportunity to read those verses in a contemporary translation of the Bible.

It's a very graphic description of just how hopeless his situation was. But remember, Jonah's still alive. He's not dead.

But he uses words that gives the impression he is already dead, even though he's still alive. And one of the great lessons from the second verse of this Hebrew poem or psalm is the fact that you can be alive and at the same time be dead. The reason for that is that the Hebrews use the words life and death with wider meanings than we do.

And I have checked this out in the New Testament. There is a word that we have in our English Bible, recover. It's the only word we can use.

When you think of a man who's sick, he recovers from his illness. But in the Hebrew language, the word is not recover. The word is live again.

Let me give you three illustrations from three kings. The first one is a king of Israel by the name of Ahaziah. And he says he fell down through a lattice in his upper chamber that was in Samaria and was sick.

And he sent messengers and said unto them, Go, inquire of Balthazar, the god of Ekron, whether I shall recover. The word is whether I shall live again of this disease. The basic thought is he was a king of Israel, but he fell from an upper story, had been badly damaged or wounded, and was no longer able to function as a king.

So in that sense, he was dead. So he sends to a pagan god a very strange thing for a king of Israel to do. And he sends messengers to inquire, Will I live again? Will I begin to function again as a king? For as far as being a king, I am dead, even though he was still alive.

The same thing is found in a pagan king, a king of Syria. But in this case, he sends to the man of God a contrast with a king of Israel. And this king of Syria, his name is Benhadad.

He was the king of Syria. And he said unto Ahaziah, Take a present in thy hand, and go meet the man of God, Elisha. And inquire of the Lord by him, saying, Shall I recover of this disease? Shall I live again of this disease? For he too at that time as a king could no longer function as a king.

So as a king, he was dead, even though he was still alive physically. The last illustration is from the king Hezekiah of Judah. You may remember his experience.

He was dying. He prayed to the Lord. The Lord gave him 15 more years of life.

And then you read, The writing of Hezekiah, king of Judah, when he had been sick and was recovered when he lived again of his sickness. For there was a time when he was so sick he could no longer function as a king. Now, all of these phrases in this psalm that Jonah wrote have to do with being dead, even though he was still alive.

He was very near to the place of physical death. But from the moment he disobeyed God, he was dead as far as being a prophet. He no longer functioned as a prophet of God.

He could no longer witness as a prophet, give the message of God as a prophet, because he had disobeyed the word of God. He'd been alive for a number of days, weeks or months. But during all of that time, even before he was thrown into the sea, as a prophet, he was dead, even though he was still alive.

Because when you say no to God and yes to yourself, you are dead as far as any spiritual activity for God is concerned. You cannot serve God and live in a state of disobedience to his word. I don't want to labor the point this morning, but there are many illustrations in the Old Testament of how that word is used.

When Joshua circumcised a new generation of soldiers as they entered the Promised Land, you'll find that they rested until they lived again. That is, until they recuperated from the surgery, they could not serve as soldiers. They were no longer soldiers.

They rested until they lived again and then recuperated. They went back to battle. During that time as soldiers, they were dead.

There's a very cruel story from the book of Genesis when the sons of Jacob wanted to avenge one of their sisters. They had met with a group of men in a small village, and the son of the leading man fell in love with one of the sisters of the sons of Jacob, and they were together. And the sons of Jacob, they conspired, a very cruel conspiracy.

And they met with the men and they made an offer. Well, we will all join forces and live together as a common family now that your son is married to our sister. There's only one thing we require, and that is that you follow our habits and all the men be circumcised, and they gladly did so.

And then on the third day when the men were recovering from the surgery, in came the sons of Jacob and they destroyed them all. They destroyed them because they could no longer function as soldiers. They were dead even though they were alive.

Now this is mentioned many times in the Old Testament. You can be alive, but you can be dead as far as the things of God are concerned, and especially His service. This is a lesson for all of us who are Christian people.

And you'll find in the New Testament that it is emphasized. It's emphasized in connection with salvation. A man is dead.

He must become alive. But it is also true of those that belong to God. Let me take the two points in the New Testament.

You remember the story of the prodigal son and how when he came back home again, the father said, For this my son was dead and is alive again. He wasn't dead physically. He was dead because he was away from the father.

Now he came back and he was alive again. We often use that in the preaching of the gospel. But most of us are Christians here this morning.

Here are two verses from the New Testament that have to do with us. The first one is about widows. Now she that is a widow indeed and desolate trusteth in God and continueth in supplications and prayers night and day.

But she that liveth in pleasure is dead while she liveth. The word pleasure speaks of an immoral life. Any Christian woman in New Testament times that became a widow had a very difficult life.

And many of them reverted back to the customs of the pagan society. Paul says to do that is to be dead even though you are still alive. And then in the Revelation in connection with the church at Sardis, Thou hast the name that thou livest and art dead.

I don't take that to mean that Sardis was a false church. Sardis is one of the seven churches. The Lord Jesus visits them all.

He walks between the candlesticks. He sends a message to each one because they belong to him. But here's a church that's wandered so far away it now only has the name.

Spiritually it is dead, no longer involved in active service for God. But this story of Jonah has a very real message for us today. He said no to God.

Then he started to go down and down and down until he finds himself at the bottom of the mountain in the sea. He's still alive, but during all that time he is dead as far as God is concerned. But it's beautiful to notice down in verse 7, when my soul fainted within me, I remembered the Lord and my prayer came in unto thee, into thy holy temple.

The two first verses of this psalm are both finished with reference made to the temple of the Lord. While he's in the sea and going round and round in the waves, there's a great prayer that goes up to God. And there is assurance that comes back to Jonah.

For he says in verse 4, Yet will I look again toward thy holy temple. And then as we've seen down at the end of verse 6, Yet hast thou brought up my life from corruption, O Lord my God. Verse 7, When I fainted, I remembered the Lord and my prayer came unto thee, into thine holy temple.

How beautiful for all of us to note this morning that it doesn't matter how far we go away. When we turn back to God, He hears and He acts in grace. And if you take the story literally, Jonah is in the sea.

He remembers the Lord. He cries out in desperation. And that great fish prepared by God comes along and it swallows him up and takes him eventually to the place of safety.

Now notice the last verse of the poem as we finish this morning. Verse 8, They that observe lying vanities forsake their own mercy. That is a very difficult verse to translate.

Let me share with you another translation. Those who pay court to false gods or false idols spurn God's grace to them. It's not their own mercy that they spurn.

But when you turn to idols or any other source of help, what you're really doing is spurning the grace of God. Jonah knew that from experience, he might have known the psalm their sorrow shall be multiplied that hasten after another gone. But the very story of Jonah confirms this truth that those who pay court to false idols spurn God's grace to them.

Because when the sailors prayed each man to his God, the storm only got worse. When they heard through Jonah about the Lord, the God of heaven, and they turned and they prayed to him, and in obedience to the word of Jonah, they threw him overboard. That great calm settled down on the troubled sea, and they found out that there was mercy and grace from God.

In fact, you find that the sailors, first of all, experienced the grace of God in the telling of the story when they turned to God. But if they continued with their idols, they were spurning the only source of health and grace. Let us remember that, dear Christian friend.

Whatever problems you may have in life, if you go to any other source but God, what you really do is spurn the grace of God. Finally then, in verse 9, But I will sacrifice unto thee with the voice of thanksgiving, I will pay that that I have vowed. Again, like the sailors, with Jonah, the story is told after the story of the sailors, the priority of God.

This is a disobedient man. You find the sailors, they are new in their experience of the grace of God. But even Jonah, when he returns to God, he does the same thing.

He gives sacrifices unto God, and also he pays his vows to the Lord, promises to the Lord, sacrifices tangible offerings of thanksgiving, not just vain words, and a sincere pledge of trust and confidence in God. And then he comes to the climax of his psalm, and I know you've used it many times, perhaps in the preaching of the gospel, salvation is of the Lord. But that's only the secondary meaning.

Salvation is of the Lord, first of all, for those of us who are prophets. In the sense, those of us who belong to God, who are servants of God, who've had so many problems and trials in our lives, we, like Jonah, have wandered so many times away from God. Salvation, help, it comes from the Lord.

It doesn't come from any place else. Jonah found that out not as an ungodly man. He found that out as a servant of the Lord.

Salvation is of the Lord. You can take those words and with every right use them in the preaching of the gospel, for it's also true that the unconverted man, salvation is of the Lord. But if you belong to the family of God, as Jonah did, how many times in our lives we remember that salvation is of the Lord.

I talked with my wife on the phone last night, and she shared with me a problem, a real problem that came up. And she said to me, perhaps not to share this with you this morning, but she said, Jim, I got down on my knees beside the bed, and I poured out my heart to God. I knew of no other help in this situation.

And she said, before I got up, the phone rang, and what I needed was on the other end of the phone. A close friend, he came and spent some days with her. You see, salvation is of the Lord.

He knows and understands all the trials and the problems. Some of them come about because of our own disobedience. Some of them come up in our testing in the life of God.

One thing is sure, salvation is of the Lord. Let's not go anywhere else but pour out our hearts to God. That's what Jonah did.

And he found out that salvation is of the Lord. For the grace of God came in the shape of a great fish, and it swallowed him up, and eventually brought him to the place of salvation and of life and of new opportunities. In other words, to the beach, where once again he could go on in the service of God.

Tonight, I would like to look at that second opportunity that God gave to Jonah. And if you think about it today, please remember, as of right now, God does not always give a second opportunity. If He does, it's simply His grace.

To some of us, He's given a second, a third, a fourth, maybe a fifth, maybe more opportunities. No one has any right to any opportunities. It's nothing but another expression of the grace of God.

Now, please take your hymn book and we'll sing this morning, as we usually do, just a verse or two of a hymn. Hymn number 404. I am the Lord, O joy beyond expression! O sweet response to voice of love divine! Faith joyous, yes, to the assuring whisper, fear not, I have redeemed thee, thou art mine.

Let us stand and sing the last three verses of 404. 404, verse 2. I am the Lord, this is my song.

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