

Intro: Leland was a young man who sat behind me in class many years ago. We were students in TVA's steam plant student operators program.

One day during lunch the subject of God came up. It was then that I discovered Lillian was a professing atheist. When I began a discussion with him about God, his comment was, "God has never revealed Himself to me, He's never called me up on the phone." My reply was, "have you ever tried calling Him." I think he knew what I meant. Prayer is how we connect with God.

We find many places in the Bible where God encourages us to pray. Jesus said in **Mark 14:38**, "*Watch and pray that you may not enter into temptation. The spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak.*" **Luke** tells us that Jesus said, "*And he told them a parable to the effect that they ought always to pray and not lose heart*" (**Luke 18:1**). The apostle Paul writes, "*Pray without ceasing. In every thing give thanks: for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus concerning you*" (**1 Thess. 5:17-18**)

A prophet of God is someone who knows the importance of prayer. But in chapter one of Jonah, we saw last week that instead praying, Jonah was running. He was running from the presence of God. This week, however, we see in Jonah chapter 2, after being thrown overboard, Jonah prays.

READ TEXT: Jonah 2:1-10 (Page 983 in the pew Bibles)

As a prophet, Jonah had blown it. As a follower of Yahweh, Jonah had blown it. Because of his disobedience, Jonah is thrown overboard into a ragging sea and quickly swallowed by a large fish, most likely a whale.

We live in a fallen world. We are a fallen people. The prophets of God and apostles of Christ were not perfect. Priests, pastors, preachers, teachers, and church leaders are not perfect. Christians and church members are not perfect.

We mess up. We often blow it. We make bad decisions. We let friends and relatives, who are messed up, influence us into messing up. Our biggest problem is not our mess ups, but our failure to recognize them when we mess up.

In Jonah's case, God refused to let Jonah's sin lie silent. Jonah had to face his sin. He had to deal with his disobedience. While in the belly of a great fish, he prayed to God.

I. Jonah Prays

Most of us pray when our world is falling apart. But what about in the good times? Do you pray regularly? The quality and quantity of our prayers act like a barometer that reflects the kind of relationship we have with God.

Jonah's relationship with God wasn't so good, so he finds himself in the belly of a great fish, praying out of desperation. He had ran from God, but now He needs help from God. The good news is that God loves helping the helpless.

1. Jonah Finds Himself Helpless

In the belly of the fish Jonah does what he should have done before boarding the ship to go to Tarsus, he prays.

People often find themselves in impossible situations, facing problems and obstacles too big for them to deal with, and in some cases all unnecessarily. A little knowledge, a little wisdom, and a little discipline is all that's needed to keep most of us out of a bad situation and heartbreak hotel. The One person who can give us all three is God. Jesus provided an example of how to live in this world. Jesus prayed to His Father often and always before major decisions. When we let God guide us and help us along the way we are able to avoid many of the hardships in life. But even when we fail God, God is faithful. **2 Timothy 2:13** "*If we are faithless, he remains faithful—for he cannot deny himself.*"

Jonah was helpless, but God is not. Jonah cried out to God from the belly of the fish and God heard him. Regardless of your situation. Regardless of how hopeless things may be, or how helpless you may feel, the same God who delivered Jonah from the stormy seas and from the belly of this great fish is the same God that can deliver you from your impossible situation.

He did it for the three Hebrew young men who were thrown into a fiery furnace. He did it for Daniel in the lions' den. He did it for the Hebrew people when faced with the Red Sea in front of them and Pharaoh's Army behind them. He did it for the apostle Peter when King Herod threw him into prison and for Paul when he and Silas were thrown into jail at Philippi. And He has done it for me and many others who are in this congregation.

He did it when a mistake was made on my car insurance just two weeks before I totaled it. He did it when I discovered I had claustrophobia, a fear that I was helpless to control. He did it when our daughter was born and the doctors gave us no hope for her survival.

In all these things we find ourselves helpless, but we serve a great God who is never helpless nor deaf to our prayers.

Men and women of old and of today who cry out to the One true and all-powerful God have found Him to be faithful and sufficient to meet all their needs.

But many fail to cry out to God. The problem is they fail to remember God when they find themselves helpless and hopeless.

2. Jonah Remembers The Lord

Verse 7 is the key verse of this chapter. It reads, "*When my life was fainting away, I remembered the Lord, and my prayer came to you, into your holy temple.*"

When we fail to remember the Lord, we fail to pray. Jonah may have been a prodigal prophet, but he had not forgotten that the God who created him, called him, and commanded him to go to Nineveh, is the only One who can now help him.

How quick we go to God in time of need is determined by how aware we are of God's presence. We live in an ever-increasing God vacant society. The law forbids reminders of God or the practice of religion in our schools, on public properties, and in government buildings. Some homeowner associations forbid home owners from displaying religious symbols or artifacts in their yards.

With social media occupying almost every minute of our non-work time, there is little or no time to reflect on God and His beautiful creation, consequently, God is largely put out of sight and thus out of mind.

The purpose of daily devotions--time spent daily in Bible reading and prayer--is to maintain a God awareness. When we live in the felt or sensed presence of God, we quickly go to Him in prayer when obstacles confront us and troubles attack us.

Church attendance, Bible reading, regular times of prayer, all contribute to creating an atmosphere saturated with the presence of God. Believers are to be like children in respect to God as they are in respect to their parents. Children live in a parent saturated world. Their security provider, needs provider, and comfort giver are all found in Mom and Dad. When a need arises they automatically turn to Mom or Dad.

This is the way every believer needs to be with God. We need to turn to our heavenly Father. We need to run to Him in times of need. This we will

do if we believe that God is who He says He is and can do what He says He will.

This was true of Jonah. He believed in God.

II. Jonah Believes

God had already made Himself real to Jonah. He's already done so for all of us. We may deny His handiwork, but the truth is that the heaven's declare His glory. We may deny being His creation, but there is no better explanation for how such a complex human body came into existence. As the Scriptures say, we are fearfully and wonderfully made."

In Jonah's case, he believed in the God who called him to be a prophet. He believed in the God who refused to let him get to Tarsus and get away with his rebellion toward God. We need to see that Jonah didn't just believe in a higher power, much as the world does today. He believed in a specific God.

1. He Believes In a Specific God

Believing in God will not necessarily get your prayers answered. There are many so-called-Gods in the world, but they are nothing but make-believe Gods. They offer no help and only false hope.

We saw last week that the sailors on the ship with Jonah prayed to their various gods, but to no avail. But after Jonah had enlightened them to the true God, the God that controls all things, including the sea, they prayed and made vows to Yahweh.

Jonah says in **verse 8** of his prayer, "*Those who pay regard to vain idols forsake their hope of steadfast love.*" When we look to any god other than the One true God, we forsake our hope of steadfast love; we forsake the One God, who loves us and can help us. The world views Christians as being narrow minded and arrogant for claiming that Jesus is the only way to God and the only means of salvation.

Regardless of how difficult it may be for others to accept the truth, we must speak it. We cannot change the truth in order to accommodate those who dislike it. True love is telling others what they need to hear, not what they want to hear.

This is why Jonah was sent to Nineveh. God wants the Ninevites to be saved from destruction. Their sins cannot be ignored by a holy God. They must be punished or forgiven. If they will repent, God in His mercy will forgive. But if not, then judgment will be delivered. **A holy God must punish sin, regardless of how much He loves the sinner.**

Is this the God you believe in? Do you believe in the God of the Bible? Do you believe in this God, who is holy, all--powerful, all-knowing, and omnipresent.

If so then go to Him in prayer in the good times and the bad. Cry out to Him in faith, believing He can and will answer your prayers. In **James 1:6-8** God's Word says, *"But let him ask in faith, with no doubting, for the one who doubts is like a wave of the sea that is driven and tossed by the wind. 7 For that person must not suppose that he will receive anything from the Lord; 8 he is a double-minded man, unstable in all his ways."*

2. He has Experienced This God

We don't know much about Jonah other than what He tells us in his book. But any prophet of God will experience God's involvement in His life. We know God played an unforgettable role in Jonah's attempt to flee from God's presence.

Jonah writes in **verses 2-4**, *"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."*

Jonah acknowledges that it was God working through the sailors that was responsible for him being thrown overboard, *"for You cast me into the deep."* And he recognizes that it was God's waves and His billows that passed over Him.

More than once I've seen the hand of God in my life. Have you? Have you seen the hand of God in your circumstances? Do you see that God is in control? Do you see that you cannot run from God, hide from God, or do anything outside the knowledge of God. He sees all. He hears all. He judges all.

There are consequences to our sins. God makes sure there are consequences. But the same God that we cannot escape from is the same God that loves us and desires to forgive us.

Jonah knew this, and He knew that the key to God's forgiveness is repentance. Jonah repented. Jonah acknowledged that God has the right to send him to Nineveh or any other place He chooses.

We see this in Jonah's willingness to fulfill his vows to God.

III. Jonah's Vows

Jonah says in **verse 9**, *"But I with the voice of thanksgiving will sacrifice to you; what I have vowed I will pay. Salvation belongs to the LORD!"*

1. He Remembers His Vows

Jonah remembered the Lord and his vows to the Lord. We don't know exactly what vows he is referring to. It could have been a vow to obey God when God called him to be a prophet. Maybe Jonah had originally agreed to go to Nineveh, but changed his mind and tried to flee to Tarsus. But this much we know, Jonah understood that repentance requires being obedient to God. It means fulfilling our vows and promises to God.

This is true today. Every follower of Jesus has promised to obey and follow Him. When we start taking back our lives and running them however we choose, we are breaking our vow to God. Accepting Christ means giving up control of our lives. It means letting God and His Word have the final say about how we run our lives, how we spend our money, and how we treat our neighbors, and our enemies.

What promise have you made to God in the past that you've yet to fulfill? What habit did you promise to give up? What attitude did you promise to do something about? What emotion did you promise to get under control? What person did you promise to share the gospel with?

God says in **Ecclesiastes 5:5-6**, *"It is better that you should not vow than that you should vow and not pay. 6 Let not your mouth lead you into sin, and do not say before the messenger that it was a mistake. Why should God be angry at your voice and destroy the work of your hands?"*

Jonah experienced the wrath of God in the stormy seas because he failed to keep his vows to God, but not anymore. He now promises to keep his vows and offer up sacrifices to God.

When we are right with God, we gladly give to God. When we are right with God, we keep the promises we've made to God. Is this true of you today on this Mother's Day? Have you made a promise to God regarding your loved one, but have not kept it?

In the last part of our text Jonah remembers who saves.

2. He Remembers Who Saves

The last part of **verse 9** is *"Salvation belongs to the LORD."* We must remember that this prayer is from the belly of the fish. Jonah doesn't know how this will turn out, but this much he did know, if it had not been for the fish swallowing him, he would already be dead. I think he could see that God was using this fish to rescue him. From the viewpoint of those on the outside, it looked like the end of Jonah. But instead, it was simply God's idea of a taxicab that

was sent to take Jonah back to the shores of Palestine.

May we never forget that it is God who saves? There is only one name by which we might be saved--the name Jesus Christ.

Christ came into the world to save us. Jonah was in the belly of the fish for three days. Jesus was in the belly of the earth for three days. Jonah was thrown overboard by men. Jesus was crucified by men. Jonah was told to preach repentance. Jesus came preaching repentance. Jonah was delivered from death by God. Jesus was delivered from death by God, the Father. Jonah preached repentance to the Ninevites and they were saved. Jesus provided forgiveness through His death and resurrection and whosoever believes is saved.

But that is where the similarity ends. Jonah was a reluctant servant. Jesus was an obedient Son. Jonah almost died. Jesus did die. Jonah was called by God to preach repentance. Jesus was God in the flesh who died for our sins.

Conclusion: Where are you this morning? Are you running from God? Do you need forgiveness like Jonah? Do you need to fulfill your vows to God? Do you need to renew your vows to God? Do you need God's help this morning? Do you need to cry out to God? Do you need to be delivered?

If so, then cry out to God. Don't put it off. Don't delay.

Remember The Lord

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Mobile Messages Sharing God's Word

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