



A Systematic Expository Study of the Word of God

PROFITABLE INSTRUCTION FROM JONAH'S PRAYER

Jonah 2:1-10

There is so much of the psalms in Jonah's prayer. Jonah must have, obviously, been very familiar with the psalms as to pray this way. Every part of Jonah's prayer can be traced back to the psalms. For examples, compare chapter 2 verse 1 with Psalm 130: 1 & 2; verse 2 with Psalm 18:4-6; verse 3 with Psalm 69:1,2,14,15; verse 4 with Psalm 31:22 and Psalm 5:7; verse 5 with Psalm 124:4,5,8; verse 6 with Psalm 30:3,7; verse 7 with Psalm 77:3,7; verse 8 with Psalm 40:11,12; verse 9 with Psalm 116:17,18; 3:8; verse 10 with Psalm 33:9 and Psalm 40:2.

Every verse in the second chapter of Jonah has a comparable verse in the psalms. After Jonah prayed in submission and consecration, the Lord spoke unto the fish and it vomited him out upon the dry land. There is a parallel between Jonah's experience and the psalmist's recorded in Psalm 107:6, 7, 10,11,14,19, 22, 27, 28, and 43. The believer who wants to learn how to pray more fervently and more effectively can learn much from the psalms. The psalms cover all practical experiences of life and give encouragement as well as inspiration to praying. The psalms instill confidence in God's faithfulness and develop faith to receive supernatural help and miraculous answers.

THE INTENSITY OF HIS SUPPLICATION

Jonah 2:1, 2, 10; Psalm 25:16-18; 1 Samuel 1:10; Joel 2:17, 18.

Jonah waited for too long before he could pray. But the intensity or fervency of his prayer remains outstanding and unmistakable. It was a fervency born not out of habit or tradition, but out of spontaneous and sincere outpouring of a troubled heart. It is a mark of God's mercy that, sometimes, He allows us to get into some distressing situations so that we can cry out unto Him for help and mercy. Whether at a personal or corporate level, distress drives us into deep communion with God. In Jonah's case, his prayer was fervent and totally devoid of hypocrisy and theatricals. He was not acting the part. Jonah's fervency in prayer was caused by:

(1) the flame of passion informed by Jonah's feeling of pain or, for the believer, the fire of persecution. The fire of persecution makes us to pray in a way we never could have prayed.

(2) the failure of all people. The mariners tried to help out Jonah but when none of their efforts worked, when, in desperation, they threw Jonah into the sea, Jonah suddenly realized that if God did not help him, he was doomed. This realization made him to pray earnestly to God. When none else but God could help, we are bound to pray fervently.

(3) the fight against principalities and powers. With Jonah shut up and abandoned in the belly of the fish, he had nobody to blame for his woes, nobody to complain to. He had no choice but to pray. When do we engage in our most fervent prayer? Definitely when we are lurked in a battle, not with flesh and blood but with principalities and powers of Satan!

(4) the force of perseverance. With nowhere to go and nobody to help him, Jonah persevered in prayer for the three days and three nights he spent in the belly of the fish. The more persevering we are in our prayers, the more fervent our prayers will be. The more we sing with that song-writer, 'Master the tempest is raging. The billows are tossing high. The sky is o'ershadowed with blackness. No shelter or help is nigh. Carest Thou not that I perish? How canst Thou lie asleep, when each moment so madly is threatening a grave in the angry deep?' the more we will find in Him the help we need.

(5) the focus of purpose. Jonah prayed with a purpose: that his life might be spared so that he could have the opportunity to preach the gospel in Nineveh. Our prayers can attract answers only to the extent they are goal or purpose-oriented. Some people just

pray but with no goal or purpose in mind. Such prayer can never be fervent nor make for a sure answer.

(6) faith in the promises. In spite of his experiences, Jonah had faith in God's promises. He said: "I will look toward your temple." Indeed, his hope was not dashed. "The Lord spake unto the fish, and it vomited out Jonah upon the dry land." The Lord answered his prayer. If you will have faith in His promises too, the Lord will answer your prayer. Your troubles and problems will give you up. And with that, you will become free again to do God's will.

THE INTERPRETATION OF HIS SUFFERING

Jonah 2:3-6; Psalms 32:4, 5; 39:8-10; 1 Kings 12:24.

Many times we misinterpret our situation and suffering. And, when we do, we fail to have the answers we ought to have. Jonah's use of such expressions as "thou," "thy billows" "thy waves" "thy sight" shows that he knew that the storm was divinely-guided to make him consecrated and submissive to the word and will of God. Of course, Satan would never have been interested in getting him back to the centre of the will of God. Here, we see

(1) the source of his suffering: He rightly located the source of his suffering. Many times when we disobey the Word of the Lord, when we disregard the will of God, the troubles, trials and pains we experience may be orchestrated by the hand of the Lord to bring us to path of rectitude and to make us do His good will. At such times, the earlier we realize the source of our problem, the better for us.

(2) the scope of his suffering; the suffering was physical, emotional and spiritual. It came from all directions and it overwhelmed him. When your problem is single-tracked, when it is coming from one direction, you may want to brace or endure it. But you will need greater power to hang on to when it is coming from all directions.

(3) the scourge used in his suffering. The Lord used natural elements - the floods, the billows, the waves, the weeds, etc to bring pressures to bear on Jonah. That way, Jonah would have nobody to accuse or suspect.

INSTRUCTION FOR HALTING SOULWINNERS

Jonah 2:7-10; Numbers 15:39, 40; Psalm 38:17; Revelation 2:4, 5.

Jonah knew what the Lord wanted him to do. He was not ignorant of His demands. Yet, he balked at God's command. He halted. But in the belly of the fish, he acknowledged his folly and disobedience. He acknowledged the problem - that he lied to himself; he deceived himself and to that extent, forsook his (own) mercy. It is good that Jonah realized his mistakes and vowed to thenceforth keep on obeying the Lord. Jonah's remembrance of and return to the old path is quite instructive for the believer. The Lord is calling us back to the responsibilities He has given us. We are therefore to:

- (1) Remember the Lord's commandments and renew our consecration unto Him.
- (2) Remember our first love and commitment and respond in the affection of Christ.
- (3) Remember the lost, be concerned about them and make up our minds to rescue the perishing, to care for the dying, to snatch them in pity from sin and the grave, to weep over the erring one, to lift up the fallen, to tell them of Jesus, the Mighty to save. Though they are slighting Him, still He is waiting, waiting the penitent child to receive. Plead with them earnestly, plead with them gently. He will forgive if they only repent and believe. Down in the human heart, crushed by the tempter, feelings lie buried that grace can restore; touched by a loving hand and wakened by kindness, chords that were broken will vibrate once more. Rescue the perishing. Duty demands it. Strength for thy labour the Lord will provide. Back to the narrow way, patiently win them. Tell the poor wanderer a Saviour has died. Will you do it? Rescue the perishing. Care for the dying. Jesus is merciful. Jesus will save.

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