

Our God Hears

Jonah 2:1-10

Amos 3:7 declares a very important truth, “Surely the Sovereign LORD does nothing without revealing his plan to his servants the prophets.” God has always had prophets, who not only were informed of God’s plans, but revealed God’s plans and purposes to others. Way back in Genesis 4:26, after Adam and Eve’s grandson Enosh was born, we are told, “At that time people began to call upon [and to proclaim] the name of the LORD.”

The Bible says God has clearly revealed Himself through His creation, but He reveals Himself to mankind in even greater ways through His prophets. And the most important truths God has revealed about Himself and His plans for this world are recorded by the prophets in the Bible.

One area of God’s plans, which He carefully revealed to His prophets, concerned His coming judgements upon people for their wickedness. For example in Genesis 6, when God was going to judge extremely evil people, He revealed that intension to Noah. In Genesis 18, when God was going to judge wicked Sodom, He revealed that plan to Abraham. And in Jonah 1, when God determined that Nineveh’s wickedness was worthy of judgment, He revealed that information to His prophet Jonah.

However, as we were reminded last Sunday, even though Jonah was a prophet of God, and a servant of the LORD, he did not want to go to Nineveh and so he headed in the opposite direction toward Tarshish. To knowingly reject doing God’s will, is a manifestation of SIN. The events of Jonah 1, reveal that Jonah’s sin not only hurt him, but it also hurt

others. Friends, that is what sin does. It is one of the reasons why God hates it so much. And so if we are being tempted to plunge ourselves into sin, we need to stop thinking just about ourselves and consider the other people who will be hurt because of our disobedience.

Here is an important question that will be answered this morning: Did Jonah's sin cause God to permanently cast him aside – never to use him again? The answer is no. In order to set the stage for Jonah's reinstatement as God's prophet we need to read Jonah 1:11-12,

“Then they [the terrified sailors whose ship was breaking apart] said to Jonah, ‘What shall we do to you, that the sea may quiet down for us?’ For the sea grew more and more tempestuous.¹² He said to them, ‘Pick me up and hurl me into the sea; then the sea will quiet down for you, for I know it is **because of me** that this great tempest has come upon you.’”

Jonah confessed his sin before those sailors – because he had already confessed his sin to God. It is important to note that while Jonah was in active disobedience to God, his sin took him out of fellowship with God, which meant God stopped revealing His plans to Jonah. How do we know that? Because Jonah was not aware that God was going to send that horrendous storm which was threatening to sink the ship. If Jonah had known, he would not have gotten on the ship. But after Jonah confessed his sin to God, God once again told Jonah about His plans. I say that because Jonah knew if the sailors cast him into the sea, the storm would stop. It was God who revealed that reality to Jonah. Verse 15 verifies what Jonah said in verse 12, “So they picked up Jonah and hurled him into the sea, and the sea ceased from its raging.”

Let's pause and make some application for our lives as followers of Christ. If we stubbornly disobey God, as Jonah did, our fellowship with God is broken. And that is a very bad place to be. I have spoken with a number of Christians through the years, who have established a routine of confessing their sins to God at the end of each day. And I have told them, "Don't wait until the end of the day to confess your sins." We should confess our sin as soon as the Holy Spirit convicts us of it. And then get back into fellowship and obedience to God.

And so let me say again, because Jonah had confessed his sin to God, he was once again hearing from God, and was able to inform the sailors about what they needed to do in order calm the sea and save their lives. Jonah 1:16 records what happened after the sailors threw Jonah into the sea and the storm immediately ceased, "Then the men feared the LORD [the true and living God] exceedingly, and they offered a sacrifice to the LORD and made vows." It would seem that these men became followers of God. And so in spite of Jonah's disobedience God was able to draw people to Himself. And even as I speak, God is working through the **evil doings** of ISIS and Al Qaeda, to awaken many Muslims to the errors of Islam and in that process – God is drawing Moslems to Christ. Pastor Carr recently shared that Christianity is presently growing fastest in Iran, which is one of the centers for the Moslem faith.

In Jonah 2:1-4, we discover what Jonah did after he confessed his sin, was thrown into the sea, and then swallowed by a great fish,

"Then Jonah prayed to the LORD his God from the belly of the fish

[that is what I would have done], ² . . . ‘I called out to the LORD, out of my distress, and he answered me; out of the belly of Sheol [the grave] 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. ⁴ Then I said, ‘I am driven away from your sight; yet I shall again look upon your holy temple.’”

Like Jonah, there have been times in my rebellion against God, when even after I confessed and repented of my sin – I still had to go to the woodshed and suffer some earthly consequences for my disobedience. But I also knew, as Jonah knew, that God was disciplining me because He loved me. As verse 4 reveals, in the midst of his discipline, Jonah knew that he and God would once again enjoy fellowship together at God’s temple. **Is everyone here enjoying fellowship with God?** If not, then some sort of repentance is necessary.

If we had to use one word to describe Jonah’s condition inside the belly of this great fish, it would be the word “darkness”. Jonah had acted like an unbeliever, and he was experiencing great darkness, which is not where God has called His people to live. Let’s continue reading verses 5-6,

“The waters closed in over me to take my life; the deep surrounded me; weeds were wrapped about my head ⁶ at the roots of the mountains. I went down to the land whose bars closed upon me forever [a person who was as deep underwater as Jonah was, normally would not live to tell about it]; yet you brought up my life from the pit, O LORD my God.”

The average depth of the Mediterranean Sea is about 5,000 feet. Highly trained divers can go as deep as 400 feet before causing injury to themselves. Jonah was not a highly trained diver, and he probably went thousands of feet down. This is why read in verse 7, “When my life was

fainting away, I remembered the LORD, and my prayer came to you, into your holy temple.” In Jonah’s day, the place of God’s special presence on earth, was at the temple in Jerusalem. And so the temple is where Jonah said God heard his prayer and delivered him out of death. If Jonah had prayed to the idols of false gods, he would have died. This is why Jonah declares in verses 8-9,

“Those who pay regard to vain idols forsake their hope of steadfast love [love that reached Jonah deep under the sea and inside the stomach of a great fish].⁹ But I with the voice of thanksgiving will sacrifice to you; what I have vowed I will pay. Salvation belongs to the LORD!”

It is very clear from these two verses that Jonah did not believe that all roads lead to heaven. There is only one true and living God, and the only way to be rightly related to God is by relying completely upon God’s provision for our sin. In Old Testament times, God’s temporary provisions for sin were animal sacrifices. Listen to **Leviticus 1:1-5**,

“The LORD called Moses and spoke to him from the tent of meeting [the Tabernacle, which eventually became the Temple at Jerusalem], saying,² ‘Speak to the people of Israel and say to them, when any one of you brings an offering to the LORD, you shall bring your offering of livestock from the herd or from the flock . . .³ he shall offer a male without blemish [pointing to the sinless Son of God]. He shall bring it to the entrance of the tent of meeting, that he may be accepted before the LORD.⁴ He shall lay his hand on the head of the burnt offering [by doing that, the sin of the person was transferred to the animal], and it shall be accepted for him to make atonement for him.⁵ Then he [a priest] shall kill the bull [or ram] before the LORD”

The animal died in that person’s place. This was temporary until Christ became our perfect sacrifice for sin, as revealed in **Hebrews 10:11-14**,

“And every priest stands daily at his service [in the temple], offering repeatedly the same sacrifices, which can never take away sins. ¹² But when Christ had offered for all time a single sacrifice for sins [Himself], he sat down at the right hand of God . . . ¹⁴ For by a single offering he has perfected for all time those who are being sanctified.”

In Old Testament times, a person who trusted in God’s temporary provision for sin, was viewed by God as trusting in Christ. Even the temple itself was designed to point to Christ and was eclipsed by Christ. The new temple of God on earth today is the Church. But when Jonah was alive, the stone temple at Jerusalem was the official place where legitimate sacrifices for sin could be offered.

This truth brings us to an interesting possibility. In order to see it, we need to read verse 10, “And the LORD spoke to the fish, and it vomited Jonah out upon the dry land.” Back in verse 4, Jonah spoke of his confidence that he would once again worship God at His temple. In verse 9, Jonah promised to offer sacrifice with thanksgiving to God – obviously he would do that at the temple in Jerusalem. And so after Jonah was vomited onto dry land, I think it is reasonable to assume that he made his way to Jerusalem to keep his promise.

We should also note in chapter 1, that the sailors who had turned from their idols and put their trust in God, also offered a sacrifice to the LORD. But when those sailors learned that the only proper place of sacrifice was at God’s temple in Jerusalem, they too would be prompted to go to Jerusalem. Could it be that Jonah and these sailors bumped into each other at the temple? This would provide one explanation as to why Jonah

knew these sailors had offered sacrifice and made vows to the LORD after he had been thrown overboard and while he was inside the belly of the great fish. I believe if this did happen, and these sailors saw Jonah worshiping at the temple, in their minds Jonah would have risen from the dead. This is why Jonah became a sign, a picture of Christ's death, burial and resurrection. Listen to what Jesus says in **Matthew 12:38-41**,

“Then some of the scribes and Pharisees answered him, saying, ‘Teacher, we wish to see a sign from you.’³⁹ But he answered them, ‘An evil and adulterous generation seeks for a sign, but no sign will be given to it except the sign of the prophet Jonah.’⁴⁰ For just as Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of the great fish, so will the Son of Man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth.”

There are many people today who scoff at the book of Jonah and point to it as proof that the Bible is full of myths and fairytales. After all, what sane person could possibly believe that a giant fish swallowed a man, carried him around for three days and then vomited him alive onto dry land? Did our Lord Jesus think that the book of Jonah was a fairytale? No, and neither do I. I believe the book of Jonah records a miracle, but not as great a miracle as Jesus rising from the dead – which I also believe. Friends, there would be no Christianity if Jesus had not risen from the dead.

Let me quickly share with you why I concluded years ago that the great fish which swallowed Jonah was a sperm whale, like the whale in Moby Dick. One of the reasons for that conclusion is because sperm whales swallow their prey alive. And their favorite food are giant squids, which grow to be 30 to 40 feet in length. Because giant squid are deep water

creatures, the sperm whale has to go deep under the water to find and eat them. Where was Jonah when he was swallowed? At the bottom of the Mediterranean Sea, with seaweed wrapped around his head. If a sperm whale can swallow a giant squid whole, it can swallow a man. The fact that whales are mammals, mean they breath air. God could have easily ordered some of that air to go to Jonah.

Another reason I believe it was a sperm whale that swallowed Jonah is because giant squids have beaks like birds to help them eat their food. These beaks at times get lodged in the intestines of the sperm whale, which causes a waxy substance called ambergris to form around the beak to prevent it from burrowing into the whale's intestines and doing great harm. After the ambergris gets to a certain size, the whale vomits it out and it often floats to shore. It seems to me that Jonah was not a good swimmer, because he sank like a rock when he was thrown overboard. It was undoubtedly helpful for Jonah to be able to float ashore holding on to a large hunk of ambergris.

And finally, there is a well known story of a whaling vessel in 1891 that lost a sailor overboard. His name was James Bartley. Later in the day the ship was able to harpoon a sperm whale and haul it aboard the ship in order to cut it to pieces and harvest its blubber. It was a big job and it wasn't until the next day when they got to the insides of the whale and discovered the body of James Bartley wrapped inside the stomach tissue of the whale. Amazingly, he was still alive. He was in deep shock and parts of his skin were bleached white because of the gastric juices in the whale's

stomach. But after three weeks, he was able to return to work.

I have told you all this, not to take away from the miracle God performed to save Jonah's life, but to quiet the scoffers down just a bit.

What does God want us to take away from this passage? (1) Christians, we are always going to be totally dependant upon God. Jonah was a prophet of God, but he allowed **his will** to trump God's will and it caused him to disobey God. And just as Jonah's sin caused pain and grief to others, so too will our sin. Is having our own way, really that important?

(2) Where did Jonah's disobedience take him? To a very dark place.

Christians, we have been transferred out of Satan's domain of darkness, and into Christ's Kingdom of light. We have no business living in darkness. And even though we live in a fallen world, we are not in darkness unless we think and behave like the world. If you are running from God, then you need to repent and walk back into the light. (3) Even if you have to go to the woodshed for your disobedience, it means God loves you enough to discipline you, so that you can learn the right path to follow. The path that leads you out of self-centeredness and into fellowship with God. Remember, a person all wrapped up in himself, makes a very small package. Let's pray.