

SERMON: FROM DROWNING TO DRY GROUND

Jonah 1:15-17

Jonah 2:10

Jonah 1:15-17

(15) So they took up Jonah, and cast him forth into the sea: and the sea ceased from her raging. (16) Then the men feared the Lord exceedingly, and offered a sacrifice unto the Lord, and made vows.

(17) Now the Lord had prepared a great fish to swallow up Jonah. And Jonah was in the belly of the fish three days and three nights.

Jonah 2:10

And the Lord spake unto the fish, and it vomited out Jonah upon dry land.

Introduction

Most people know the story of Jonah. They know how he was swallowed by a whale-or should we say a big fish. Many people, including theologians, question the facts of this narrative. They claim a whale's throat is too small to allow a human to pass through. Others counter this argument and present documented evidence of several instances where a man was swallowed by a whale and survived several days in the whale's belly. Others discredit the miracle because the book of Jonah uses the term "fish" and Jesus, in Matthew 12:40, used the term "whale." Well, this is simple to reconcile. At that time, they called any organism, in the water, that was not a plant, a fish. So to them, a whale was a giant fish, not an aquatic mammal. Please allow me to insert a hermeneutical point: The words of Jesus take precedence over all other words in the Bible. So, when there seems to be a conflict in language or doctrine, we go with what Jesus said. So I am going to use the word whale in this sermon.

There are believers who seek to make the teachings of the Bible more acceptable to those who see the world strictly from a scientific vantage point. They try to give all of the miracles scientific explanations. They call this demythologizing the Scriptures. Their goal is meritorious, but their method is flawed. In my humble opinion, if you can explain it, it ceases to be a miracle. Faith is believing the realities that you cannot explain.

My God can do anything. He is too big for me to explain or quantify all of His ways. Not only do I believe the whale swallowed Jonah, but I also believe that Jonah could have swallowed the whale, if God had wanted him to.

When I come to passages like the story of Jonah and other miraculous passages, I take the narrative exactly as written in God's Holy Word. Then, through sound interpretive

methods, I extract principles which we can apply to help us in our daily living. I preach and teach the Word as written and let the seminary scholars wrestle with the theological and linguistic kinks. Okay, there are too many “I statements,” but I’m letting you know where I stand! Now let’s briefly review the story.

God told the prophet Jonah to go to Nineveh and preach against their wickedness. The message was simple and straight forward. “If you don’t repent immediately of your sins, the city will be destroyed in forty days.” This message would not have sounded farfetched to the citizens of Nineveh because the area was prone to earthquakes.

Jonah was disobedient and refused to go to Nineveh. He was rebellious and did the exact opposite of what God had commanded. In fact, he went in the opposite geographical direction. Nineveh was toward the east and he went toward the west. He went to Joppa and boarded a ship going to Tarshish. Tarshish was a seaport city in what is now southern Spain. Tarshish is beyond the Rock of Gibraltar. He was trying to flee from the presence of God. Nineveh, on the other hand, was a large inland city near the banks of the Tigris River; there was no need to board a ship to get there.

The question is constantly asked, “Why did Jonah refuse to go to Nineveh?” There are three answers to this question. The first and most important is, he was a bigoted Jew and did not want to be associated with the Gentiles. Secondly, he was personally afraid of the brutality and ruthlessness of the Ninevites. They would literally skin you alive. Thirdly, his love for Israel was misguided. Nineveh was the capital city of the Assyrian empire and they were perpetual enemies of Israel. Perhaps Jonah thought, “If God destroys them in forty days, that would be the demise of one of Israel’s greatest enemies-goodbye and good riddance.”

While Jonah was on board the ship, a fierce storm arose. All of the efforts of the sailors were futile. After much discussion and prayers to pagan gods, the sailors cast lots to see if the storm was caused by the actions of one of the passengers. The lot fell to Jonah. When pressed he finally admitted he was the culprit. Jonah insisted that he be thrown overboard. The sailors tried one last ditch effort to row the vessel to shore to save themselves and Jonah, but in the end capitulated to Jonah’s request. Jonah was thrown overboard, and the sea immediately became still, and a whale came by and swooped him up. Let’s extract some practical applications from this part of the story.

Exposition

1. The Whale Saved Jonah.

(Jonah Would Have Drowned Had The Whale Not Intervened.)
(This Simple Fact Can Be Easily Overlooked.)

2. God’s Timing Was Perfect.

(As Soon As He Hit The Water, The Whale Swooped Him Up.)

“He May Not Come When You Want Him, But He’s Always On Time.”)
(The Whale Was More Obedient Than Jonah.)

3. The Whale Was Prepared In Advance by God.

(God Was Already Ahead Of The Curve.)
(Nothing Is A Surprise To God.)
(Are You Prepared For What God Has Prepared For You?)

4. Sometimes God’s Providential Care Is Perplexing.

(Jonah Called The Whale’s Belly Hell.)
(The Whale’s Belly Was God’s Way Of Helping And Healing Him.)
(Initially, Sometimes A Good Thing Looks Bad.)
(This Is Why We Got To “See What The End’s Gonna Be.”)

5. Jonah Landed Safe And Sound On Dry Ground.

(Jonah Was Given A Second Chance.)
(He Wasn’t Kicked To The Curb And Abandoned.)
(Now He Was Eager To Do God’s Will.)

Closing Thoughts

The whale was simply a provision of the Lord. Look how merciful God is. Jonah was saved from almost certain death. Even when the storm subsided, Jonah could have still drowned in the sea. Jonah did not deserve mercy, but God gave it to him. Nineveh did not deserve mercy, but God gave it to them also. We serve a God who is both sovereign and merciful. Give God Glory! Give God All The Glory!

Related Scriptures

Jonah 1:17;

Jonah 2:1-10

2nd Kings 14:25

End Notes

1. “You can run, but you can’t hide!” The futile attempt of Jonah to flee from the presence of God initiated this saying. It is part of our Black oral tradition and was made popular in main stream culture by the championship prize fighter, Joe Lewis. It had many applications, but was used a lot when a disobedient child attempted to run from a parent to avoid a spanking. As saved people, isn’t it good to know that we cannot hide from God’s grace, mercy, forgiveness, or his correction?

2. The doubting of the miracles of the Bible is expressed in many ways, including the song, *It Ain’t Necessarily So*. It is part of George Gershwin’s opera, *Porgy and Bess*. I wonder if anyone will be singing it in hell.

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