

Reading: Jonah 1:15-2:10

Theme: Grace in the 'Submarine'!

None of us can outrun or outfight God, yet Jonah attempted it as he defied God. Much of the book of Jonah is about Jonah trying to do this and if we took out his defiance from the book, we would only be left with 1:1-2 and then chapter 3 and the book would read very differently without the defiant sections! Jonah did not land a blow upon God and in this book, we see the Lord Himself is magnificently in control - even though we seem to focus on Jonah. There are 48 verses in this book, but the name LORD, God or Lord God is used 39 times - the subtext of this book points us to the Lord and it is His sovereignty, His working that is displayed in this book - speaking, hurling a storm, providing the fish, re-commissioning Jonah, having compassion on Nineveh and even speaking to the defiant, but moody Jonah.

Jonah didn't stand a chance of outfighting God, but as we look at Jonah, we note he belonged to God as a believer, he had faith in the Lord, was in His service, knowing His word and love. Sadly, he rebelled against God's revealed will and defied Him. Can we see anything of our own likenesses as believers reflected in Jonah? We need to be shocked, as at times something of our own reflection is seen in this incident in Jonah's life. Recognise we too can be stubborn, rebellious and defiant. Even as believers we have indwelling, residual sin in us and it can creep in, beguile and deceive us and we so easily rationalise an act of defiance, of saying "No" to God and it becomes easier to defy God each time. We sang earlier *"Prone to wander, Lord, I feel it, prone to leave the God I love – Take my heart, O take and seal it, seal it from Thy courts above!"*

What if God had left Jonah to stew in the juices of his own defiance? Come to that, what if He did it with us! The Lord could have left Jonah in his arrogant, nationalistic defiance, but He did not. In fact, the Lord used vast swathes of creation to bring Jonah to repentance and back to His service again - the wind, waves, a huge fish, even bringing Jonah to the very edge, the precipice of death. We are not to fight against God as we cannot win! We will always be the loser and God will have His will carried out. Jonah wanted to die rather than obey the Lord, yet the Lord had infinitely more ways to deal with Jonah than Jonah did to defy the Lord! In chapter 2 we see our focus being clearly taken back to the Lord God of heaven and earth as He dealt with His wayward servant and we can note the Lord at work in three main ways:

1. Distress Sent.

We have heard or even said "*Out of the frying pan and into the fire*", but here Jonah was out of the boat and into the fish! The Lord provided (NIV), prepared (AV) this great fish to swallow Jonah. This is a sovereign and miraculous action on God's part. Yes, there are sea creatures able to do that, but the thing we are to marvel at is God's control and timing of such a creature to be where and when God wanted it. Was it a fish or a whale? We don't know. Jonah doesn't turn around when he's vomited on dry land and make a note of the species for us. Neither the Hebrew nor the Greek gives us absolute clarity as to what it is. Our focus is to be on God's sovereign power to bring this huge fish "submarine" to a precise location and time, to be there to ultimately preserve Jonah's life when Jonah was gulped, swallowed down.

The Lord, who controlled the wind and the waves above, at the same time also controlled things going on in the depths beneath. In all the situations of our lives, this God can be trusted - even when He may allow calamity into our own lives, even as we sink into the depths of despair. The Lord is still in control even when things happen to us we would certainly not want! God knows what He's doing in our lives just as He did with Jonah. There was a purpose in all this - God was at work in Jonah and we see the evidence of God at work and in 2:1 we see the stubborn defiant prophet has his defiance broken and for the first time we read of the man of God praying to his God.

This distress of sinking in the sea - he was probably a landlubber and could not swim - and as he sinks into the depths, into the depths of the grave (hell AV) which literally reads "Sheol" = the realm of the dead. To Jonah's mind he knew he was going to die, nothing else could happen. It is quite startling that it took something like this to smash his stubborn defiance. Yet he recognised all his distress was coming from the Lord – he mentions this in v3 "*You hurled me into the deep*" - but we know the human agents were the sailors, doing so at Jonah's instruction, but Jonah saw the Lord behind it all.

The runaway prophet recognised this even in his dying moments, as his life flashed through his mind, and he felt banished from God's presence (AV) (*which is what he wanted to flee from previously*) and a dread filled him as he faced death - which is what banished, cast off implies here. It troubled him! Our English versions translates the end of v4 differently - it can be as a hope "*yet I will look again towards your holy temple*" or as a question as in RSV "*How shall I again look upon thy holy temple?*" In what he felt were his last moments, he saw what he

felt he could not do without - God and worshipping God with others; now these were precious to him and he longed to be at worship and offer sacrifices at the Temple.

When Christians are defiant and away from God, they can be quick to leave the people of God, be away from them and the means of grace and disobedient believers can end up in isolation – for the joy and lives of other believers can be like rubbing salt into the wounds of their disobedience and trying to keep God at a distance. Here Jonah realised just a glimpse of this.

Jonah also felt he was going down for ever into death and to never be free (v5-6a). God's people can feel like this at times in their own life, literally and figuratively - we read of Heman the Ezrahite's experience in the dark and gloomy Psalm 88 (v4-7) *"I am counted among those who go down to the pit; I am like a man without strength. I am set apart with the dead, like the slain who lie in the grave, whom you remember no more, who are cut off from your care. You have put me in the lowest pit, in the darkest depths. Your wrath lies heavily upon me; you have overwhelmed me with all your waves. Selah"*. In our experiences in life, we can have such times, especially if we are disobedient Christians. We can also go through such times figuratively or even literally. Yet there is hope for us, especially as we know the Lord is the One who sends such distresses, Jonah came to know this in the fish, in the distress it brought him, for the Lord was working and he knew:

2. Deliverance Given.

Jonah remembered the Lord as he sank in the sea, not just His name, as a thought, but all the Lord was to him and how he had tried to rebel and resist Him. The Lord had called him - Jonah

defied; God had chastised him - Jonah called on, prayed to the Lord and the Lord delivered him. God always chastises to restore, deliver and rescue His children and always does it for their benefit (Hebrews 12:10-11). It would seem Jonah was secure in the fish's stomach at this point, as in v6b he spoke of being brought up from the pit and he had an assurance of deliverance as he recognised God's provision in this unique and unexpected means of deliverance.

There out of sight in the dark, in the belly of the fish 'submarine', he saw things clearly. In v8 he spoke of those who cling to worthless idols. We may think he meant pagans, but the word grace (NIV), mercy (AV), faithfulness (NASB), steadfast love (ESV) translate the Hebrew word "hesed" which speaks of the glorious characteristic of the Lord. Jonah there in the belly of the fish saw the folly of forsaking God, His covenant care, love, grace, mercy, faithfulness and steadfast love, for idols. He knew the Israelites had gone after physical idols; probably Jonah recognised his own idol of misplaced nationalism had led him to defiance. We too can have idols in our hearts and lives, secret idols no one will know about, but the Lord knows and wants us to see our folly of such as we will forsake His care, love, grace, mercy, faithfulness and steadfast love. Perhaps we, like Jonah, need to wise up!

There, in that unusual means of transport, Jonah was restored and instead of rebellion, now he praises God (v9). In the deeps, from within the fish submarine Jonah praised God. He realised he was delivered, rescued, saved and he would worship the Lord who had done it. Isn't that something of how we felt when we were first converted, as a newborn child of God and we thanked and praised Him, as we were able to, from full hearts. No-one

had to tell us to thank and praise God; it was as natural as crying to newborn baby.

Do we still have that same awe and wonder of the magnificence of God's deliverance? Does that wonder generate and drive our praise and worship? Jonah also said he would fulfil what he had vowed. What had he vowed? We don't really know, but part of it appears to involve obeying God's commission - if the Lord would use him. Defiance, disobedience is now replaced with a fresh resolve to obey and serve the Lord. Jonah did as the Lord said (chapter 3). Are we ready to do as our Lord would have us to do so, to serve Him when and where He wants? We are saved to serve our glorious Lord. We also see the Lord at work in:

3. Defiance Conquered.

Jonah owns "*Salvation comes from the Lord*" - he was speaking of his rescue in part, but the main focus and thrust of these words are on a far grander scale than that - as they refer to deliverance and salvation from the eternal consequences of the sin we all have and they point us onto to glorious truths:

a. Sovereignty - the Lord, Yahweh, is in charge of salvation and He saves who He will save and He will save them on purpose. He will do as He wants in terms of salvation. Jonah here was rebuking himself and his attitude concerning those to whom he would or would not tell God's word to. Jonah was fearful that the Lord would save the wrong sorts of people - the Ninevehites. He had to keep on learning that the Lord will save who He pleases to do so and Jonah had to obey and declares God's word to all, for all were like Jonah and not worthy of God's grace, mercy and deliverance being shown them. Charles Spurgeon said "*Jonah had learned great theology in a most unusual college!*" When Jonah was happily expelled (literally!) from this

"college" - vomited up, probably some degree of bleaching of clothes, hair and skin had happened. We don't know if this event was witnessed by anyone, but there on the seashore, Jonah knew that God was sovereign over his deliverance and would be sovereign over the deliverance and salvation of others. Have we seen of God's control and that we cannot choose who will be saved? Yet it is amazing we are able to call on this God to save many in His mercy.

b. Exclusivity - Jonah also meant that there is no other Saviour than the Lord. He is the only and exclusive Saviour. Many disagree with that and say all paths go up the same mountain to the same God. Yet the Bible says clearly there is only **one way** to be right with God and it is through His Son the Lord Jesus - who Himself said that He is the way, the truth and the life and no one goes to the Father apart from Him. He is the unique and only Saviour. This Saviour is none other than God the Son who was conceived in Mary's womb and came in the flesh, who Joseph was told to call Jesus – for He will save His people from their sins i.e. salvation belongs to Yahweh, He is the Lord and Jesus would save His people from their sins. His life, death and burial were all necessary for accomplishing this salvation. He is the fulfilment of Jonah's shadowy type, sign - Jesus was abandoned by God and on the cross He cried out "*My God, my God why have you forsaken me?*" He didn't go to the very precipice and edge of death, but He fully experienced death - body and soul separated, separated from God, separated to God's eternal anger and wrath there on the cross. He was in the belly of the earth 3 days and was raised to life and lives for ever more. He went through all that, not because of His defiance and disobedience, but because of ours, yet He willingly did all that and laid down His life to save us, to be the only Saviour of

people like us and *“Salvation is found in no-one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to men by which we must be saved.”* (Acts 4:12)

The question is, do we have this Saviour as our own Saviour? Or are we still trying to please Him or even still fighting Him? We can never please Him by our own goodness, and if we try to fight Him, we will be the losers - on both accounts it may have an eternal cost. We need to own that salvation comes from the Lord and go to Him and Him alone for all He's freely provided for us and we are not to rely on ourselves.

Sadly, someone watching or listening may have gone to the Lord Jesus for salvation and yet may be in a position of having wandered away, are in disobedience and defiance as a Christian. Do we think we can defy God and go on against Him and there be no or few consequences for us? We need to wise up, to forsake our wicked ways, to return humbly to Him and ask for His grace and mercy in our restoration. It is always best to walk with the Lord and walk in obedience with Him as we listen to what He says through His word and we keep in step with His Spirit. Even if we have wandered away, like Jonah we could be surprised what God could do with us. Jonah had a revival on his hands - yet that caused him to rebel again! I wonder if we could handle the blessings God could surprise us with, but let's pray for the blessings anyway and also for the grace to carry a full cup.