

*It is more profitable to know Jesus than to know about Him.*

### Weekly Edition – September 9, 2016

Jonah – Chapter 2 – part 4

<sup>1</sup> From inside the fish Jonah prayed to the Lord his God. <sup>2</sup> He said: "In my distress I called to the Lord, and He answered me. From deep in the realm of the dead I called for help, and You listened to my cry. <sup>3</sup> You hurled me into the depths, into the very heart of the seas, and the currents swirled about me; all Your waves and breakers swept over me. <sup>4</sup> I said, 'I have been banished from Your sight; yet I will look again toward Your holy temple.'

<sup>5</sup> The engulfing waters threatened me, the deep surrounded me; seaweed was wrapped around my head. <sup>6</sup> To the roots of the mountains I sank down; the earth beneath barred me in forever. But You, Lord my God, brought my life up from the pit. <sup>7</sup> "When my life was ebbing away, I remembered You, Lord, and my prayer rose to You, to Your holy temple. <sup>8</sup> "Those who cling to worthless idols turn away from God's love for them. <sup>9</sup> But I, with shouts of grateful praise, will sacrifice to You. What I have vowed I will make good. I will say, 'Salvation comes from the Lord.'"

### Three Reflections on Today's Text

#### First Consideration: I Remembered You, Lord (v 7)

- 1) In Holy Scripture, remembrance is to "call to mind." To remember something is to place it front and center before our thoughts – to call it forward from somewhere deep in the recesses of our memory and focus our attention on it. Biblically speaking, this *calling to mind* can apply to anything – past, present or in the future.
- 2) For example, the Israelites in exile call to mind Jerusalem – from which they are far removed, but was once the place where they worshipped the LORD and is the place to which they longed to return. The act of calling it to mind was an act of hope – an act of faith. From deep within the fog of exile, they remembered the Holy Mount of the LORD, where they once used to go up to worship the LORD, their God, and to which they anticipated going back home to once more at some point in the future.
- 3) But the remembrance in this verse is quite unusual in this respect: the object of the verb is present, but the subject is not! God is there; Jonah is not. Jonah is dead, as the Hebrew language makes quite clear. So it is not as though Jonah decides to remember the LORD and this saves him. The dead have no capacity to remember – dead is dead. There is no capacity in death for acts of piety or acts of memory – these are all now things that belong to Jonah's past, not his present.
- 4) So it is not Jonah who is doing the remembering – it is God! And this is very good news! When Jonah was among the living, he remembered the LORD. And now that Jonah is among the dead, those former prayers of Jonah are still before the face of the LORD! God is outside of time. Jonah looked to the LORD before he sank all the way to the bottom, and although Jonah is now gone – dead – his prayer yet lingers before the LORD here and now. Jonah is now deceased, but Jonah's prayers -prayed while he was yet alive – live on before the LORD. How good is this good news!
- 5) When pressed by the Sadducees, who did not believe in the resurrection of the dead, Jesus told them: "*The LORD, the God of Abraham and Sarah, Isaac and Rebecca, Jacob and Rachel, is not a God of the dead – but the God of the living!*" (Luke 20:38) When Martha told Jesus that had He been there, her brother Lazarus would not have died, Jesus told her, "*I am the resurrection and the life. The one who believes in Me will live, even though they die;*<sup>26</sup> *and whoever lives by believing in Me will never die.*" (John 11:25)
- 6) By the power of God, Jonah's prayer prayed while he was still alive, now lives before the presence of God even though Jonah is dead – and all is well. The good news is that even when we are dead and gone, our prayers and our faith – our remembrance of the LORD while it is yet "day" – come before the face of the LORD in the nighttime of our death. And God, in His loving-kindness, hears our prayers and answers.

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- 7) And because God is a God who answers prayers, there are those who hear God's answer – like Lazarus heard God's answer even though he was dead and in the tomb for four days. (John 11:39) When Jesus cried aloud, "Lazarus, come forth!" – Lazarus was a corpse, and a corpse cannot hear. But Lazarus hears because it is the LORD who calls to him – and all whom the LORD calls in grace and power are given ears to hear! As Jesus often said, "*Whoever has ears to hear, let them hear.*" (Luke 8:8 and others)

**Application:** Jesus said, "*As long as it is day, we must do the works of Him who sent Me. Night is coming, when no one can work.*" (John 9:4) God has given us each work to do, and the most important of these is to believe in the One whom God sent. How we spend our days here and now while it is "day" matters – because our love of God and of neighbor are the very prayers that will linger before the face of God when nighttime comes – when we are dead and no longer able to pray, or make confession, or remember. Jesus said it is "we" who must do the works of the Father who sent Jesus into the world for your sake and mine. The most important works of my life right now are.....? Have I been putting off some important work, waiting for a more convenient time?

### **Second Consideration: My Prayer Rose to You**

- 1) Our prayers come before the presence of the LORD. Jonah said, "my prayer rose to You." Our prayers rise to God. This is not on account of our prayer or our piety – or even our worthiness, but on account of God's loving-kindness.
- 2) As Paul teaches us, "*As for you, you were dead in your transgressions and sins, <sup>2</sup> in which you used to live when you followed the ways of this world.*" (Ephesians 2:1) So, in a manner of speaking, before we received Jesus Christ into our lives by faith, we too were dead in a spiritual sense.
- 3) *<sup>4</sup> But because of His great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, <sup>5</sup> made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions—it is by grace you have been saved. <sup>6</sup> And God raised us up with Christ and seated us with Him in the heavenly realms in Christ Jesus, <sup>7</sup> in order that in the coming ages He might show the incomparable riches of His grace, expressed in His kindness to us in Christ Jesus.* (Ephesians 2:4-7)
- 4) Although you and I were once dead before the face of God in our sin, in Christ Jesus God does not see our deadness in sin, but rather our aliveness in Jesus Christ. This is very good news! We have permission to live and to breathe and to be. In His mercy, God remembers us as His covenant partners! We are His chosen ones – even His beloved! God loves you and I *that* much!
- 5) And so, on account of Jesus Christ, our prayers rise before the presence of God and linger there! This is very good news. Our Lord's own prayer also came up before the presence of our Father when He hung upon the cross and lingered there for three days. Jesus called Himself "forsaken" (Mark 15:34) but that was only the first part of the Psalm Jesus prayed while He was hanging on the cross, because that Psalm ends with a vow of praise for God's deliverance. (Psalm 22:20-31)
- 6) Even while the temple of His body was literally torn-down for three days and He was a dead corpse in the borrowed tomb, the prayer of Jesus rose up before the presence of His Father (and our Father) and lingered there, and the Father brought Him up from Sheol on the third day – the Easter resurrection!
- 7) Once more we see another Sign of Jonah – and again even more depth to our Lord's instruction, "you will be given no sign but the Sign of Jonah."

**Application:** Given the unfathomable extent of God's mercy and loving kindness shown towards me – He gave me life, He sustains my every breath, He endowed me with aptitudes and spiritual gifts, He calls me His own, He loves me even more than I love myself, and He took up in His own flesh the penalty for my sin, and so much more – if I were to make a reasonable response of love to God, what could I do?

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### Third Consideration: Those Who Cling to Worthless Idols

- 1) "Attentiveness" is the human response to God's promised deliverance. By the act of remembering God in ways both small and large throughout each day, we literally *call to mind* or *become attentive* to the Divine Presence in our lives and all of God's covenant promises to us. Jonah pays heed to the Divine Presence in several ways including: looking back to the temple (2:4), remembering the LORD (2:7) who is "my God" (2:6).
- 2) To "*cling to worthless idols*" is to pay heed or to give our attention and our attentiveness to what is not. It is a deceptive emptiness or vanity. The Hebrew word for vanity means "vapor" or "mist." The writer of Ecclesiastes laments the empty pursuits of this transitory life saying "vanities of vanities" (Ecclesiastes 1:2) which can be properly translated as *the most vaporous of vapors*. Vapor is transitory; it is insubstantial; but even more so it is illusory.
- 3) What is this phrase doing here in the middle of Jonah's prayer? It doesn't fit and appears to interrupt the flow of Jonah's prayer. <sup>8</sup> *"Those who cling to worthless idols turn away from God's love for them."* Why does Jonah interrupt his remembrance of God's deliverance to tell of those who are ignorant about the LORD who delivers him?
- 4) This is the story of Jonah's own descent away from the face of the Lord, Jonah's own troubles and his calling from the depths of sin and death. Why is he now talking about someone else's sin?
- 5) Upon deeper reflection, we find this kind of interruption often in the Psalms. For example, in Psalm 23 which begins "The LORD is my shepherd, I lack nothing. He makes me lie down in green pastures..." a Psalm which is full of calm, restful and even pastoral imagery, we are jolted by "*You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies.*"
- 6) The enemies of God are those who cling to worthless idols – it is all who reject the LORD, our God, and all of His unfathomable loving-kindness shown towards them. It is those who place their confidence in vaporous vapors – and trust in deceptive emptiness rather than trusting in the majesty of our Creator God, the One in whom all things live and move and have their being.
- 7) These others have no less claim on the undeserved mercy of our God than do you or I. Yet out of our helplessness and misery we turn to the LORD – to the One who holds the power to deliver us, offering Him our lives and our very being as best we are able. But those others do not. Will not. They choose instead to cling to vaporous vapors and in doing so, *turn away from God's love for them*. It is the ultimate rejection! Hence, they do not offer their lives as living sacrifices – and their lives, like yours and mine, is the prayer that will linger before God when we are dead and awaiting our resurrection.
- 8) Paul said of this, "*in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God—this is your true and proper worship. Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is—His good, pleasing and perfect will.*" (Romans 12:1-2)
- 9) The prayers of those who cling to worthless idols are as vaporous vapor before God as are the things to which they yield their attention in this life. Hence, their prayers mount up to nothing before His face. That is why Jesus said, <sup>21</sup> *"Not everyone who says to Me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only the one who does the will of My Father who is in heaven. <sup>22</sup> Many will say to Me on that day, 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in Your name and in Your name drive out demons and in Your name perform many miracles?' <sup>23</sup> Then I will tell them plainly, 'I never knew you. Away from Me, you evildoers!'"* (Matthew 7:21-23)

**Application:** Have I yielded my life to become a living sacrifice, by asking Jesus to come into my heart and take over my life? If not, what am I waiting for? If I have, how might I cultivate more attentiveness to the Divine Presence in my life and in my neighbor as I go about my day? Have I ever asked for my heart to be filled with gratitude before all the rich blessing I enjoy because of God – even the blessing of God Himself in my life?