



BETHEL
PRESBYTERIAN

MINISTRY OF THE WORD

Volume 9 Issue 40

November 14, 2010

The Reflection of a Recovering Sinner, Part 2

Jonah 2:2-9, Jonah 2:2-9, "saying,

"I called out to the LORD, out of my distress,
and he answered me;
out of the belly of Sheol I cried,
and you heard my voice.

³For 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.

⁴Then I said, 'I am driven away
from your sight;
yet I shall again look
upon your holy temple.'

⁵The waters closed in over me to take my life;
the deep surrounded me;

weeds were wrapped about my head
⁶at the roots of the mountains.
I went down to the land
whose bars closed upon me forever;
yet you brought up my life from the pit,
O LORD my God.
⁷When my life was fainting away,
I remembered the LORD,
and my prayer came to you,
into your holy temple.
⁸Those who pay regard to vain idols
forsake their hope of steadfast love.
⁹But I with the voice of thanksgiving
will sacrifice to you;
what I have vowed I will pay.

Salvation belongs to the LORD!” (The Holy Bible, English Standard Version, 2001)

Jonathan Edward’s Resolutions

There is very little debate that Jonathan Edwards was the greatest American theologian to have ever lived. His books are profound, his writings inspirational, and his sermons convicting and edifying.

Yet did you know that one of his most beloved works was not originally intended for a public audience? By the age of 19, Edwards had compiled a list of seventy resolutions which he read on a weekly basis to encourage him unto faithfulness in his walk with God. These resolutions remain an object of study not only because they are so edifying, but because of the man who wrote them.

Jonah 2 similarly contains four resolutions which Jonah made after he was delivered from a most difficult trial. Now because this is God’s word, we take them for more than just the good advice of a man of God (as we might Edward’s); rather we understand them to be nothing less than the covenant will of God for all struggling in a trial of faith.

We are going to consider them one by one; yet let us not forget what we saw last time. Recall we began by looking at the reflections of a recovering sinner. Jonah is introduced to us as a man who already had been called to the prophetic ministry. And though he was a man of God, nevertheless he was a sinner who struggled with the same nationalism which came to characterize God’s people in the Old Testament. By the time of Christ we read of this nationalism as it was put in writing. One teacher wrote that “...God delights over the downfall of the godless.” (t. Sanh. 14:10; SB II, 209) Another said, “There is joy before God when those who provoke Him perish from the world.” (LT2, p. 256)

This was clearly Jonah’s mindset, for when God called him to preach a message of warning to the Gentile capital city of Assyria, Jonah refused! Instead, he boarded a boat which encountered a storm that almost sank the boat on account of Jonah’s rebellion. And at Jonah’s bidding, the crew tossed him out of the boat where the prophet sank into the abyss/Sheol! Yet God in His mercy

sent a giant fish/whale to swallow the prophet and so preserve him alive. And in this horrible place, which Jonah identified as a living hell (Jonah 2:2), the prophet was brought to repentance. Consequently the large sea creature spit him back on land whereupon he fulfilled his original calling.

It should be noted that Jonah 2 records the written reflection of Jonah as he meditated upon that which brought him to Sheol. We know this because of the tense of the prayer as it is recorded here and the form in which Jonah deigned to write it: it is a chiasm! In light of this structure we saw last time that the heart and focus of this prayer is v. 4 where Jonah expressed THE main reason for why he ended up in this place of sorrow, gloom, suffering, and emptiness...

Jonah 2:4, "So I said, 'I have been expelled from Thy sight. Nevertheless I will look again toward Thy holy temple.'"

How is it that Jonah found himself in this place of suffering and turmoil? Notice His confession.

Jonah's Reflection

Jonah's confession (Jonah 2:2-7) teaches us that on account of his rebellion, Jonah removed Himself from the Covenant presence and so the blessing of God, (Jonah 2:4a). On account of his rebellion, Jonah forsook the active fellowship of the Lord, (Jonah 2:4b). And because of this, Jonah's life descended into the abyss!

As one who eventually got out of the belly of the fish, went through the struggles of chapter 4, was restored, and then called to write about it, Jonah chose to end the record of his prayer with a statement of conviction; that is, what he learned from all that he suffered which I call his conviction. Based on the tense that Jonah is using here, we conclude that this is NOT what Jonah prayed in the belly of the fish; RATHER, this is what the restored prophet upon reflection resolved as a servant of Christ,

Jonah 2:8-9, "Those who regard vain idols forsake their faithfulness, but I will sacrifice to Thee with the voice of thanksgiving. That which I have vowed I will pay. Salvation is from the Lord."

Taken by themselves these statements denote an entirely different message than if taken in reference to Jonah and his situation. (We are going to do the latter throughout our study.) Therefore let's consider each one of these "resolutions;" there are four of them.

Compromised Ministry

Ministry is compromised when we are moved by anything other than Christ, (Jonah 2:8).

Jonah 2:8 "Those who regard vain idols forsake their faithfulness."

What is a "vain idol" verses just "an idol"? There is no difference between the two. It is that Jonah here is expressing his contempt for anything that might vie for the attention and glory that alone

belongs to God. Accordingly he adds a word in the Hebrew which denotes “nothingness” or “vanity.” And so it is NOT just “an idol” which alone speaks of ultimate folly (see Isaiah 44:9). RATHER it is a “vain/empty/nothing idol”! Again, the emphasis is one of contempt. Yet what is idolatry? What is Jonah here is addressing?

Jonah is describing idolatry. First off notice that the root word for “idols” here relates to a “snare.” What are snares? They are traps adorned such that they lure their prey unto their death. So it is with idols. On the surface, they look good and so will be tempting to its servants. With that, what is idolatry? Idolatry involves at least two things: First thinking thoughts about God that are unworthy of Him. Recall the excellent treatment of Tozer on this subject:

Let us beware lest we in our pride accept the erroneous notion that idolatry consists only in kneeling before visible objects of adoration, and that civilized peoples are therefore free from it. The essence of idolatry is the entertainment of thoughts about God that are unworthy of Him. It begins in the mind and may be present where no overt act of worship has taken place. (Tozer, 1978, pp. 11-12)

Secondly, idolatry involves giving weight, honor, or glory to anything other than God. Recall the word for “glory” in the Bible is the word for “weight” or “substance.” Accordingly idols are said to have no glory because they cannot act on behalf of the one who trusts in them (again, recall Isaiah’s words in Isaiah 44!). In contrast, God alone possesses glory, honor, power:

Isaiah 64:4, “For from of old they have not heard nor perceived by ear, neither has the eye seen a God besides Thee, who acts in behalf of the one who waits for Him.”

Thus, when you and I give preference to, trust, or rely upon anything other than God, we have just fashioned an idol.

Now prior to his descent unto Sheol, it is clear that Jonah had made the annihilation of Nineveh an idol. It was this for which he was living. It was this that became more important to him than God. What was the result? Jonah compromised greatly when it came to the ministry to which he had been called! Listen to the calling God placed upon all prophets:

Jeremiah 23:28, “The prophet who has a dream may relate *his* dream [this is speaking in reference to the many false prophets who lived in Judah at the time, all of which claimed a dream, vision, or message from God], but let him who has My word speak My word in truth...”

The prophet, preacher, teacher has but one responsibility. It is NOT to

- Gather a following.
- Grow the size of an assembly.
- Leave people inspired and motivated to face the week.

The responsibility is to boldly and without compromise to speak the word of God regardless of the results! And this was Jonah’s calling; this was the work that God had given him! Yet it was this

very calling which he compromised when he fell into the idolatry of self!

Ministry is compromised when we are moved by anything other than Christ! Oh Christian, consider the ministry to which you have been called. Are you fulfilling it? Or is your life, like mine, filled with compromise and unmet obligations?

Let me assure you. God's love is not predicated upon our faithfulness. He loves us in Christ; there is therefore now no condemnation (Romans 8:1)! Yet having said this, let us not be content with compromise in our service of Christ in any form. Rather, let's diagnose the problem so that as much as possible we might present to God a service worthy of His greatness.

In light of this, why is there compromise and unmet obligations in our lives? There could be many reasons, but one that surfaces from our text is the issue of Idolatry! Perhaps in our service we are giving deference to something other than God! Maybe it is our children; we just can't stand to see them cry. Maybe it is our peers/colleagues- we're afraid of what they might think or say. Maybe it is our own sinful will and desires; we have placed pleasure and our good above God's honor and glory!

I don't know. But this I do: where there is compromise in our faithfulness to the Lord there most likely is going to be an idol. In recognizing this in his own life, Jonah obviously brought the matter before the Lord (otherwise he wouldn't have written as he did here). He confessed his sin... he did not hide it. And God forgave him!

Yet he didn't stop here for this led to an important commitment. Notice the next resolution; any service to which we have been called is a privilege.

Service is a Privilege

Any service to which we have been called is privilege. Again, let's read this in reference to Jonah's calling:

Jonah 2:9, "But I will sacrifice to Thee with the voice of thanksgiving..."

The wording denotes the service of worship to which each and every child of God has been called. For Jonah that involved his ministry as a prophet! That was his "sacrifice." Consider the big picture for a moment. According to the plan and purpose of God, we have been saved for the purpose of worship.

John 4:23, "But an hour is coming, and now is, when the true worshipers shall worship the Father in spirit and truth; for such people the Father seeks to be His worshipers."

God's aim when it comes to redemption is the gathering to Himself a people who might worship Him acceptably. We see it in Exodus 7 where God gives us the stated purpose behind the Exodus. Listen to the message God gave Moses:

Exodus 7:16, “And you will say to [the Pharaoh], ‘The Lord, the God of the Hebrews, sent me to you, saying, “Let My people go, that they may serve Me [worship me] in the wilderness.””

Do you see it? God’s people were redeemed to worship! And thus Paul, using the language of worship, exhorted the Romans.

Romans 12:1, “I urge you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies a living and holy sacrifice, acceptable to God, *which is* your spiritual service of worship.”

Truly all that we have become in Christ relates to and so revolves around worship. From our eating to our drinking, all of it is to be done unto the glory of God (1 Corinthians 10:31)! In light of this we must see that Jonah’s wording is reflective of the heart and soul of Christianity: the worship and service of God! As a prophet, worship was what his calling was all about. Accordingly when Jonah here mentions a “sacrifice,” we take this in reference to his calling to preach the word. Again, that was his sacrifice!

How it is then Jonah now would fulfill this calling? “With the voice of thanksgiving!” Do you understand the significance behind this resolution?..

1. Much of Jonah’s problem in his rebellion against God is that he lost the understanding/conviction that any and all ministry in the name of Christ is privilege.
2. For him, preaching the word of God lost the status of privilege. It had become something that he did either as a favor to God or out of obligation.

...accordingly as he looked back upon his descent into Sheol he made an important resolution. No longer would he serve out of obligation or a sense that he was doing God a favor. Rather, he would exercise his calling with a heart and so with the voice of thanksgiving!

Are you a Jonah that has lost your first love? Has the ministry to which you have been called become nothing more than a duty? How it behooves us to recognize that the gifts and callings of God are granted not out of need on the part of the Lord or His kingdom, but of grace! Do you honestly think He needs you to do this or do that? He doesn’t! But that we have received the calling enables us to be part of His Kingdom work! It is privilege to:

- Serve an ungrateful spouse!
- Minister to messy, whiny children!
- Have a job, even if it is collecting trash!

All of it and any of these “sacrifices” have been given as a blessed calling of the Lord and an opportunity to glorify Christ. If you don’t think so, walk down the path of a stroke or a debilitating disease. Those in such a condition would give anything to walk free of pain for just one day, not to mention work your job or raise your kids! It reminds me of the words of David Livingstone who served in Africa as a missionary:

People talk of the sacrifice I have made in spending so much of my life in Africa. Can that be

called a sacrifice which is simply paid back as a small part of a great debt owing to our God, which we can never repay? Is that a sacrifice which brings its own blest reward in healthful activity, the consciousness of doing good, peace of mind, and a bright hope of a glorious destiny hereafter? Away with the word... and with such a thought! It is emphatically no sacrifice... it is privilege. (Speech to Cambridge students December 4, 1857)

Jonah lost this sense of privilege and blessing when it came to the sacrifice to which he had been called. As such, he thought very little of compromise when it came to his calling! When God brought him to his senses by His grace (the big fish), Jonah made a commitment. No longer would he serve the Lord out of obligation. Rather, he would serve the Lord in gratitude; he would "...sacrifice to God [preach the word] with the voice of thanksgiving!"

This brings us to a third resolution; that the calling of the child of God is unto faithfulness.

Calling Unto Faithfulness

The calling of the child of God is unto faithfulness. Again, speaking of his calling as a prophet, Jonah wrote this:

Jonah 2:9, "...That which I have vowed I will pay...."

In the Bible vows of service and devotion were a big deal. The vow, in contrast to an oath, was a promise made to God before man (an oath is a promise to man made before God). As such, vows were highly encouraged and so became an important part of a service of worship. Typically they were offered in response to a gift or calling of the Lord. That's what the votive offering was all about! Accordingly, and this is an important point, callings and giftings of the Lord were accompanied by vows of service, either stated or implicit. That is why today when a man is set aside unto the pastoral ministry, he takes a vow. When a person endeavors to use his gifts in the context of a local church, he/she takes a vow of membership. Vows are found throughout the Bible, in all kinds of contexts and callings.

Now in this passage we read of Jonah having taken a vow. What was the vow? Based on the context it should be obvious: it was the vow which accompanied his call to preach the word. Think of it! Was it not the neglect of this calling which led him on his journey of descent? Now restored it only makes sense to take Jonah's statement here in reference to his calling to preach the word of God.

That was Jonah's third resolution. Having been restored to life, he resolved, "That which I have vowed- preaching the word- I will pay!" In other words he said:

- *I cannot dictate what the message of the Lord will be.*
- *I cannot control where He might send me.*
- *I cannot choose those to whom I will minister and those to whom I won't.*
- *There is much, in association with the ministry of the word, which is out of my control.*
- *But this I can and will control: I will be faithful when it comes to the carrying out of my*

calling. That which I have vowed I will pay!

That was the third resolution Jonah made as he reflected back upon his ordeal of suffering.

Family of God, may the Lord bring us to this point of maturation in the outworking of our calling. Where has serving the Lord brought you today? Singleness? A difficult relationship? Hard circumstances? A job you don't like? A calling you despise?

Your calling in and through all these situations is NOT success, fruit, or change. That which accompanies every calling of the Lord is the summons unto faithfulness.

How we need to hear this! When Jeremiah took responsibility for the fruit of his ministry, he was brought to discouragement, Jeremiah 20:9-10! When Elijah grieved over the spiritual condition of Israel in spite of his work, he fled, 1 Kings 19:10! When Jonah endeavored to dictate how, when, and where God would work, he woke up in Sheol!

Family of God, in the spirit of Jacob who after wrestling with God gave up the life of manipulation (Genesis 32:24-32), may we this day be done with bargaining, manipulating, or placing conditions on God's call for our life. This brings us to Jonah's final resolution, that God alone is life.

God alone is life

Jonah 2:9, "...Salvation is from the Lord."

This is quite a significant statement when we consider the context. For much of Jonah's ministry heretofore, "salvation"- which in Scripture ultimately is the restoration of all that constitutes life; clearly was housed in a variety of different things.

- Religious practices.
- A strong and growing central government (recall that Israel at this time had entered into its golden age).
- Security.
- The knowledge that he was part of an invincible people.

All of this and more represented the typical worldview of the Jew at the time. As Jonah was part of his culture, he obviously took delight in these things as well. That is why he was so nationalistic. Yet the humbling which came as he fled from Christ enabled him to see life (and these things) for what it really is. Accordingly if you asked Jonah prior to his humbling, "What is it that jazzes you? What is it that brings you greatest joy and delight?" He might have said...

- *The absolute domination and victory of God and His people.*
- *Preaching the word when it involves a good message.*
- *The worship of the Lord.*
- *The many lessons I continue to learn as a servant of Christ.*

It is these things and more from which many men and women of God have derived delight and joy throughout redemptive history. Yet would you notice. While each of these things is wonderful and glorious, nevertheless to derive satisfaction from them is to confuse the gift with the Giver (and so to build broken cisterns which can hold no water)!

That is what Jonah did here. Prior to the events of this book “salvation”— the fullness of life — was to Jonah about doing, having, enjoying. Yet his ordeal in which he was brought to the end of himself opened his eyes to the truth that “salvation” — life as God intended — revolves NOT around what one has or does, BUT God alone!

How we need to hear this for so many of us are no different from Jonah. We have God- the fount of life; but we neglect/forget/forsake Him because we have fallen in love with His gifts. As a result, we are satisfied if only we can...

- Attend worship.
- Read the Bible.
- Serve Him in His kingdom.
- And a host of other religious activities.

Hear me carefully. There obviously is nothing wrong with these things. They are glorious means to fellowshiping with Christ. But if they take the place of Christ and so become the end of our living and so the salvation granted us in Christ, they become just another religious shell keeping us from the Lord.

Family of God, may we ever and always guard our heart such that our delight and joy comes not from the gift, but from the Giver! Life indeed (1 Timothy 6:19), salvation comes from the Lord!

Such is the fourth and final lesson which Jonah derived from his descent into Sheol. Now it is tempting at this point to bring this to a close. Yet to do that would be to miss an incredible statement that Jonah is making here. Notice, the shocking aftermath.

The Aftermath

Jonah 2:10-3:3a, “Then the Lord commanded the fish, and it vomited Jonah up onto the dry land. Now the word of the Lord came to Jonah the second time, saying, ‘Arise, go to Nineveh the great city and proclaim to it the proclamation which I am going to tell you.’ So Jonah arose and went to Nineveh according to the word of the Lord.”

You know the rest of the story. Jonah fulfilled the call to preach to the Ninevites who did indeed repent. This aroused in Jonah the ugliness of his sinful flesh such that he went out of the city, sat in the dust, and pouted! IOW, he came right back to where he was prior to his descent into the belly of the fish!

Yet God in His grace wasn’t about to leave the prophet in this state. Accordingly the Lord carried Jonah once again to Sheol where Jonah actually said this:

Jonah 4:3, "Therefore now, O Lord, please take my life from me, for death is better to me than life."

In the end Jonah was shaken out of his rebellion and so restored in his relationship with God such that 7 years later we find him ministering to the people of God in 2 Kings 14:26-27. So what's the point?

As low as Jonah got when he was in the belly of the fish (Jonah 2:2-3) and as high as Jonah soared when he was brought to the end of himself and so arrived at the conviction expressed in Jonah 2:4, none of this prevented him from sinking even lower when things once again didn't go his way.

If Jonah could undergo such a reformation and yet still rebel against the Lord again we are talking about a man of God here:

- What do you suppose will be your experience?
- Will we have moments of great growth only to be followed by spiritual declension? There is no question!

Yet notice two very important truths, Jonah's failure in chapter 4 does not invalidate the resolutions recorded in chapter 2 (recall that Jonah arrived at these resolutions later; he deigned to place them here in his writing) If anything, his failure ought to sober us as we work out our salvation! God did not cast Jonah aside and say, "I've had it with this sinner?" Rather, God in His grace once again raised the prophet from the dust!

And perhaps more than anything, that was Jonah's intended message here. Again, the resolutions of Jonah 2:8-9 were not arrived at in the belly of the fish (the tense is all wrong). Accordingly we conclude that these are the convictions Jonah arrived at after the ordeal of Jonah 3-4 was over!

And that raises these very important questions:

- Why did Jonah insert these resolutions here, prior to the rebellion recorded in chapters 3-4? He could have placed them anywhere in the book.
- Why did he choose to record them at this point?- don't forget, Jonah was a master writer (again, consider the Chiasm of chapter 2). Clearly he didn't piece this prophecy together mindlessly. So again why did he place them here?

We can't be dogmatic on this, but could it be that by placing them prior to the fall recorded in chapter 4 he intended us to see that first, maturation on this side of the grave is not a destination but a process?! We never arrive. Secondly, our confidence and hope must never be how godly we may think we have become, but ever and always God, His grace, and so His mercy?

As a result, look at the commitments Jonah made in this passage. Based on what we've seen we conclude that Jonah's message here is that if you and I follow them, we will not be prevented from falling away from Christ. Only the Lord can prevent that. Accordingly we conclude that if these

resolutions are attended to outside of a relationship with Christ, they will lead the child of God to Sheol (v. 2). But if they are studied and observed on the part of one's trusting in Christ, they will produce fruit!

Works Cited

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About the Preacher

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