



*God takes His children to the woodshed to save them from serious sins. Wincingly, I recall a major “whoopin” from my earthly father’s belt after being caught after school stealing from a Grand Island candy store as a grade school boy. Years later, I recall witnessing two 20-year old men whose small but mighty mother (as wide as she was tall) warned them with a raised wagging index finger, “I brought you into this world! Do you not know that I sure enough can take you out of it?” They soberly parroted, “Yes ma’am.” Serious chastisement is painful for both parents and children. Wise parents discipline their children not because it is pleasant but because it is best. Chastisement and repentance save the soul from sin’s power.*

*Jonah 1 showed us a “Prodigal Prophet” chased by a thundering God hurling a hurricanic lightning storm at him until he was heave-hoe’d into the deep blue sea. Masterfully, his heavenly Father caused Jonah’s punishment for sin to be his salvation from sin. Like Easter Jesus (who died for our sins), Jonah was entombed in the belly of a giant fish long enough to be proven dead (idiomatically-speaking: three days and three nights). Jonah’s submarine savior could have been a fish (like a whale shark) or a whale (like a blue whale). It could have been a Mediterranean Miracle Monster (an ancient first cousin to Loch Nessie) created just for this specific purpose—God’s purpose of chastisement. Like all good fathers do, He sought to bring his erring child to repentance—to change his mind and actions. Since everything our*

*omnipotent God willfully decrees comes to pass, Jonah 2:1-10 shows us a chastised child, a repentant “Praying Prophet.”*

## **2:1-2 JONAH FINALLY DID SOMETHING RIGHT—HE PRAYED!**

The only Jonah we have seen in the book’s first 17 verses has been a disobedient prodigal with an iron will. In Chapter 2, we see him pray, but he does not pray until he is swallowed whole. He is not swallowed whole until he is almost dead. He is not almost dead until he had sunken to the bottom of the Great Sea. Then, and only then, does the great fish engorge our Hebrew preacher. Verses 3-7 detail his sinking story and what it took to make him finally pray. Verses 1-2 are a summary introduction of what the son of Amittai finally did—prayed a sober prayer of repentance.

*Jonah 2:1-2 “Then Jonah prayed to the LORD his God from the stomach of the fish, and he said, ‘I called out of my distress to the LORD, and He answered me. I cried for help from the depth of Sheol; You heard my voice.’”*

➤ Usually, when the Lord tells prophets to do something, they do it right away against all odds. It is formulaic. The small but mighty 48-verse-long prophetic book of Jonah is different. Usually prophetic books are filled with God’s words, directives and predictions about straying people. Jonah contains a mere eight words of predictive prophesy (five words in Hebrew). This tiny book is a snapshot of a bad chapter in the life of a good man. We learn less from what Jonah *said right* than we do from what he *did wrong*. In verse 7, Jonah did something very right.

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He repented. He prayed. In the past many weeks, we have learned from Jonah's mistakes. Today, let us learn from a repentant prophet who prayed to the Lord of the winds and the whales. The Lord can change our circumstances with the greatest of ease and save us from our deep and self-imposed troubles. We do well to remember:

**PRAYER IS THE SLENDER  
NERVE THAT MOVES THE  
MUSCLES OF OMNIPOTENCE.**

### **2:3 A DOG-PADDLER IS BARELY AFLOAT**

I admire all 49 of our State Senators who work hard and long in legislative efforts to move Nebraska forward. You have crammed schedules, constant meetings, an information overload, and are on the gerbil wheel of expectation to be an expert in every area for \$12,000 per year! Ministers face similar pressures. However, at times we are all like Jonah—in deep waters due to our own mistakes, stupidity, and sin. Panicked dog-paddling Jonah is really “in deep.” Note: the prophet told Jehovah that He threw Jonah into the sea. The sailors were His human hands, but Jehovah was the instigator.

**Jonah 2:3** *“For You had cast me into the deep, into the heart of the seas. The current engulfed me; Your breakers and billows passed over me.”*

➤ Jonah treaded cold salt water. Strong ocean currents were pulling, rolling and swelling about him. He was two nostrils above the water line as he knew he deserved God's chastisement in the billowing waves. Powerfully surging waters broke into seafoam slaps onto his soaked face. He was going down and knew it, all because of his sin.

### **2:4 DYING AND HEAVEN-BOUND**

In the worst of situations, true believers have the assurance of salvation, knowing that if they died tonight they would be with the Lord. Sea salt

stung his reddened eyes as Jonah soberly believed God was allowing his death. Yet he had hope.

**Jonah 2:4** *“So [Jonah] said, ‘I have been expelled from Your sight. Nevertheless, I will look again toward Your holy temple.’”*

➤ Jonah spoke here, by faith, of God's *heavenly* temple as he expected to see Him soon after sinking into the sea. He was *not* referring to the immense, multi-million-dollar, gold-clad Temple atop Mount Zion built in 970 BC. That world-famous, king-attracting Temple of Solomon was built on Jerusalem's rocky hilltop (where the Islamic Dome of the Rock stands). Jonah did not pray towards Jerusalem's Solomonic Temple.

Faith and I prayed last month at the Western Wall of the Temple complex and were impressed how it was not really that special spiritually. We loved *much* about the Holy Land, but we knew our prayers were going into the heavenly temple of our loving, listening Lord or nowhere at all.

### **2:5 BAD TO WORSE: WRAPPED UP TIGHT AND SINKING FAST**

A tiny man overboard, thrashed by a fierce sea, Jonah sank to an imminent death by drowning.

**Jonah 2:5** *“Water encompassed me to the point of death. The great deep engulfed me. Weeds were wrapped around my head.”*

Gyrating Jonah dog-paddled and struggled for his life, twisting in panic to fight leg cramps and rudely slapping surges of seawater. That twirling fight spun him, like a spaghetti fork, into a mass of brown Sargasso (which can be 200-foot long) which wrapped like organic sea cable around his Hebrew head. Blinded, if not smothered, by that massive kelp hoodwink, he went from bad to worse. Our now penitent prophet surely would wince in later years recalling God's severity. Jehovah's strong chastisement was not pleasant, but it was best to save His son from his sins.

**2:6 SUBMERGED: SUNKEN AND TRAPPED**

Suffocated and sunk, his Hebrew “hiney” hits the oceanic mountain roots—the continental shelf.

*Jonah 2:6 “I descended to the roots of the mountains. The earth with its bars was around me forever, but You have brought up my life from the pit, O LORD my God.”*

Jonah’s life flashed before his mind’s eye at terabyte speed as he held with pufferfish cheeks his last precious bubble of air. He thought, *“I’m not in Jerusalem, I’m in jail. I’m not getting out. The bars of this sad sea dungeon will not budge. I will now enter the forever life of eternity through this watery execution.”*

**2:7 HIS DYING PRAYER**

Until this verse—verse seven—Jonah’s panicked thoughts were on survival and the blow-by-blow reality of his death by drowning. Pulse slowing, skin chilling, oxygen depleting, woozy and fainting, he finally remembered the LORD. His iron will was broken. *God brought him into this life, He surely could take him out.* Chastised within an inch of his life, his synapses of faith finally fired and he remembered he had forgotten to pray!

*Jonah 2:7 “Fainting away, I remembered the LORD, and my prayer came to You, into Your holy temple.”*

➤ Verses 1-2 summarized *that* Jonah prayed. Not until verse seven *did* Jonah pray. Verse 1 told us he prayed *from the stomach* of the fish. Putting all that together logically, Jonah was only just now swallowed by the great fish, with a maw like a front-loading tractor scooping him off the bottom of the sea. His Jewish bottom had hit the bottom of the mountainous continental shelf—rock bottom. He was swallowed alive, but he was only one breath alive. He was saved at the second of his dying prayer. Oh, the stubbornness of our sinfulness. However, God was ready and listening, not in the Jerusalem Temple but in His holy heavenly temple, and He answered Jonah.

**THE THUNDERING LORD OF LIGHTNING HAD BECOME A LOVING LIFEGUARD DIVING DOWN DEEPLY, SAVING HIS PENITENT PROPHET.**

**2:8 THE MORAL OF THE STORY: CLINGING TO PRECIOUS IDOLS KILLS GRACE**

Jonah prayed for help and had been saved and swallowed whole, all, finally, in verse seven. With a three-day clock slowly ticking for his submarine ride, Jonah now had time to think in the Fish-Tail Motel on a foam-blubber mattress. First, he “moralized.” He stated a principle, a moral to the story—the story of his disobedience. What did Jonah learn? He summarized the moral this way:

*Jonah 2:8 “Those who regard vain idols forsake their faithfulness.”*

➤ Jonah summarized his sin as idolatry. He had learned a lesson that nearly killed him. Idolatry will ruin your life. What is an idol? An idol is anything you put before the Lord. In the terms of The Ten Commandments, it is having other gods (little g) before God (big G). In a world rich with blessings it is all too easy to create idols.

**IDOLATRY IS TURNING A GOOD THING INTO A GOD THING.**

➤ What good things did Jonah turn into a god-things? What were *his idols*? Hyper-patriotism and racism. Those two things loomed so large in his mind he refused to obey God’s clear command to go preach to an enemy nation. The Ninevites were cruel beyond description. Dark war clouds formed northeast of Israel. Jewish teeth chattered as Assyrian swords rattled. Fierce evil enemies.



Because Jonah asked to be thrown overboard to his certain death in order to avoid going to Nineveh, the late Presbyterian preacher, Donald Barnhouse, reported Jonah's idolatry this way:

*Jonah said, "Lord, I'd rather DIE than preach to my enemies. I HATE the Assyrians. I'd rather DIE than do Your will, because I love Israel and I'm a SUPER-PATRIOT I am, I am, I AM!"*

Barnhouse then sermonized and summarized:

**"THAT'S NOT ANTI-SEMITISM!  
THAT'S SEMITISM-ANTI!"**

➤ Love of country is good as is pride of heritage. Putting fatherland before our heavenly Father is idolatry. Many people love their race. That is good. Do you know racists who constantly and categorically belittle other races? Such bitter racism is idolatry. Such sins do not fall far from Jonah's tree. Those were his sins and his idols.

➤ Racism and hyper-patriotism are alive and well, especially in American politics. Other American idols we cling to are entertainment, music, money, sex, power, sports, food, leisure, political parties, philosophies, pride, and prestige. The problem with idolatry—and all sin, as Jonah moralized in verse eight—is that it robs us from walking in the grace, gifts and goodness of God. One version says those who cling to worthless idols *forsake the grace that could have been theirs.*

## **2:9 JONAH'S PERSONAL APPLICATION: A RETURN TO A CALLING OF SERVANTHOOD**

Having learned his lesson, Jonah applied the moral to his own life and recommitted to service.

**Jonah 2:9** *"But I will sacrifice to You with the voice of thanksgiving. That which I have vowed I will pay. Salvation is from the LORD."*

The true Christian works from a thankful heart after being saved. Like Jonah, he commits (and recommits) to serve the Lord because the Lord has saved him. We do not work to *earn* salvation, but we work thankfully *after receiving* salvation.

**Ephesians 2:8-9** *"For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God; not as a result of works..."*

Salvation is a real event that Paul could refer to in the past tense ("have been saved"). Do good works matter? *Absolutely!* Can good works result in salvation? *Absolutely not!* We are saved by faith alone not by works, but the faith that saves is never alone. Just like Jonah, true believers know that salvation is "from the Lord." They commit to thankful service *after* they "have been saved."

## **2:10 JONAH—VICTORIOUS & VOMITED**

Jonah prayed for help, was saved from drowning, learned about his idolatry, then recommitted to serving His Savior with a thankful heart.

**Jonah 2:10** *"Then the LORD commanded the fish, and it vomited Jonah up onto the dry land."*

After three days submerged inside the gurgling gut and burbling, burping belly of world history's most famous fish, Jonah was projectile vomited onto the dry land. From the boat to the belly to the burp to the beach, the penitent prophet headed to Nineveh to preach—finally!

## **THE SNAGGING FISHHOOKS OF IDOLATRY**

Dear Senator:

For three days and nights consider meditating on any idols that may have snagged your soul this session. Satan, that old fisherman, has his line out for leaders. The hooks of idolatry snag the best of leaders whether prophets *or* political leaders.

Clinging to the grace that can be ours,

Rev. Perry M. Gauthier V.D.M. (cell/text: 402-770-6270)