

Jonah 2: Could Your Life Use a Little Resurrection?

I. Introduction

Ever wish you had a second chance to do something over, something big in your life? Has your life gone the way you wanted it to? If you could do it over again, what would you change? What if God gave you a second chance, what if it was actually possible to have no regrets at the end of your life?

II. Jonah Gets a Second Chance....Does Your Life Need a Little Resurrection?

Did Jonah really spend 3 days and nights inside a giant fish? For many the story of Jonah is hard to believe. How can a man spend three days and three nights inside a fish and come out alive, that's impossible? Exactly. That's the point of the story. God did the impossible; that's the definition of a miracle. He brought Jonah back to life after being dead inside a fish three days. But what's the point of all this? What does God want us to learn from Jonah's resurrection?

A resurrected Jonah prays to God from inside the fish, Jonah 2:1-9, after spending three days and three nights in the belly of the fish, God resurrects Jonah's body and Jonah offers up a prayer in which he recounts everything that happened to him after the sailors threw him overboard. The events Jonah describes are not in chronological order.

He starts by recounting the prayer he made after he died and his soul went to Sheol, the place of the dead (Sheol had two sides: one was known as Paradise or Abraham's Bosom, Luke 16:22; 23:43, and the other as Hades or the place of torment, Luke 16:23). After Jonah died and went to Paradise, he asked God for a second chance and God heard him, 2:2. Then Jonah describes his ordeal from the moment he hit the water. Chapter one said that the sailors threw him overboard, but he knew that it was God. He caused all this to happen to Jonah including the waves that were now crashing over him, 2:3. While in the water, Jonah prayed to God and he thought that God had cast him out of His sight. Yet Jonah did not give up, he kept looking towards God's holy temple, looking for another chance from God, 2:4.

Eventually, Jonah began to sink deeper and deeper into the sea, so deep that the land masses shooting up from the ocean's floor looked like mountains to him as he looked up from the bottom of the sea. He mentions several times that he died: "the waters surrounded me, even to my soul," 2:5, "the earth with its bars closed behind me forever," 2:6, and "when my soul fainted within me," 2:7. After Jonah died and his soul reached Sheol, Jonah remembered the Lord and prayed to Him, 2:7. This is the prayer Jonah mentioned in 2:2 where he asks God for a second chance. God hears and answers Jonah's prayer by resurrecting him, "yet You have brought up my life from the pit," 2:6 (Psalm 16:10, cf. Acts 2:31).

Thus, the sequence of events is this: Jonah is tossed overboard. As the waves crash over him he acknowledges that it was God who actually did all this to him. Eventually Jonah goes to the bottom of the sea and drowns. Sometime after he drowned the great fish God had prepared swallows him and his soul goes to Sheol. While in Sheol, Jonah prays and asks God for a second chance to fulfill his mission to Nineveh. God hears him and grants his prayer by resurrecting him after having been three days in the belly of the fish. After Jonah is resurrected and while still in the fish's belly, he prays the prayer of 2:2-9, the ending of which holds the key to understanding what God wants us to learn from Jonah's resurrection.

Notice how he ends the prayer: in 2:8 Jonah likely has the Assyrians in Nineveh in mind. They were a brutal, godless people who worshipped many idols and because of that, God was about to destroy them. But Jonah may've also had in mind his own idols. What's an idol? Anything we place before God. What did Jonah place before God when he ran away from Him? His country. And because he put his country before God, Jonah was forsaking God's mercy on him (not only was his life in danger, but so were the lives of all the sailors on the ship). But when Jonah came to his senses in Sheol and let go of that idol, God showed him mercy.

What have you placed before God? Ever been afraid? When people get to the end of their life and begin to have serious medical issues, they begin to fear. And this fear is often more than a fear of death. They begin to ponder their life and are overcome with anxiety and regret. They start to think of all the things they wish they could change, "I should've treated my kids better. I shouldn't have spent so much time at work. ..." An idol is anything that takes over you and changes your actions away from God, like fear. What was Jonah's idol and how did it change his actions.....likewise fear and regret can consume us and change our actions.

But God is in the business of second chances. How does Jonah end his prayer, "Salvation is of the Lord." There is only one God in this world who will give you a second chance, even after you run away from Him, even after you put someone or something else before Him. His is the God who controls heaven and earth and the raging sea. He can sink you to the bottom of the ocean, command a fish to swallow you and hold you for three days, and then command your soul to reenter its body.

As you ponder your life, what did you get wrong and would you like to get it right with the time you have left? Did you blow it with your kids? Did you throw your life away and ignore your family by chasing money, a career, or something else? God will not only give you a second chance, He'll give you the ability, the wisdom, the wherewithal to get it right this time....and like Jonah you will say, "I will sacrifice to You with the voice of thanksgiving; I will pay what I have vowed." This time you can get it right.

God tells the fish to set Jonah free, Jonah 2:10, having given Jonah back his life, God commands the fish to spit him up on dry land and the fish does exactly what God says. And Jonah's resurrection life begins.

III. Conclusion

"Those who regard worthless idols forsake their own mercy. But I will sacrifice to You with the voice of thanksgiving; I will pay what I have vowed. Salvation is of the LORD."