

20:20 Vision Ministries -- Devotions by Roger Browning Week 31 (July 28-August 3, 2013)

One of the hardest miracles for many professing Christians to believe is the story of Jonah. Our Lord, however, uses this true story to illustrate His resurrection (see Matthew 12:40). Let's look at this miracle of God with eyes of faith this week.

Sunday -- July 28 (Jonah 1:1-3)

God's word commands Jonah to go to the evil city of Nineveh to warn them of the judgment to come. The Assyrians are bitter enemies of the Jews and have treated them with unbelievable cruelty. Now Jonah is being sent to their capital city to offer salvation to them (v. 1-2). You can understand why he decides to run in the opposite direction (v. 3). Actually, he flees about as far away from God's desired destination as he can go. Nineveh is 500 miles **northeast** of Israel while Tarshish is 2,500 miles **west** of Joppa. Jonah thinks he can get away from the Lord by running to a foreign country. If he had read Psalm 139:1-12, he would have known better. Before you condemn Jonah for his disobedience, ask yourself if you've ever heard a clear call from God and run in the opposite direction? We will follow the story in tomorrow's devotions.

Monday -- July 29 (Jonah 1:4-10)

The people of Nineveh worship the fish goddess Nanshe and the fish god Dagon. That fact will help you to see why the real God is going to introduce these pagans to the One who created the fish. You will also see that our Lord provides everything along the way, even when we are running from Him. In today's text, God sends a great wind on the sea that threatens the very lives of the sailors (v. 4). They cry out to their fish gods but there is no response because they do not exist (v. 5). Jonah feels so justified in disobeying God that he is sleeping soundly below deck. The frightened sailors awaken him and ask him to pray to his god for help (v. 6). After casting lots, they determine that it is Jonah's fault that the storm has come upon them. They ask a series of questions before finding out that Jonah is a worshipper of the true God of heaven, the Creator of the sea and the land (v. 8-9). This terrifies them more because he has already told them he is running away from his God (v. 10). We will see God's grace unfold in our next study.

Tuesday -- July 30 (Jonah 1:11-17)

The situation goes from bad to worse, so Jonah confesses that **his sin** is causing the dilemma (v. 11-12). He is willing to become a human sacrifice to calm the storm, just as Christ sacrificed Himself to calm the storm of sin in His people (see John 3:16). At first, the men try their best to row back to shore, but the storm is too fierce (v. 13). This is a wonderful picture of "salvation by works" that never produces the desired results (see Ephesians 2:8-9). Finally, they cry out to the real God, asking for His mercy and grace (v. 14), they obey Jonah's formula for smooth sailing, and God answers their first prayer to Him (v. 14-15). Even while Jonah is running from the Lord, he has a boatload of converts (v. 16). Now that God has taken care of the sailors, He provides a fish to take care of His wayward prophet (v. 17). Memorize Philippians 4:19 and you will find it easier to take this fish story at face value!

Wednesday -- July 31 (Jonah 2:1-10)

I'm sure you have prayed in some unusual locations before, but no one has duplicated Jonah's prayer of faith from **inside the fish** (v. 1). I'm comforted by the fact that our Lord will hear us whenever and wherever we call to Him (v. 2). As you read Jonah's prayer today, try to visualize the faith he has. Jonah has confidence that he will see the temple in Jerusalem again, even though the odds are greatly against it (v. 3-5). (As a side point, notice that he also refers to the mountains under the sea (v. 6), long before this was proven by science) No matter where you are today or what you are doing, yield yourself to the One who can deliver you. Please do not forfeit the wonderful grace being extended to you at this moment (v. 7-8). Renew your commitment to God (v. 9) and He will deliver you to the location of His choosing (v. 10).

Thursday -- August 1 (Jonah 3:1)

I am writing this devotion on July 1st, the 44th birthday of my deceased second son, Michael Todd. I tell you this because God changed my topic for this week at the last second for a reason unknown to me until this moment. You see, in 1969 I, too, was running away from God. I had promised Him that I would go **wherever** He sent me if only He would bless me with another child. His call came to leave Virginia and go to Camden, Arkansas during the 7th month of my wife's pregnancy. I used this long awaited child as an excuse to say "no" to God. When my son died one week after his birth from the same heart disease that I had been healed from, my Lord had my attention! Miraculously, God, in His mercy and grace, extended a **second call** to Arkansas three years later during the 7th month of my wife's next pregnancy with my youngest son, Chad. This time I obeyed and moved to Camden, experiencing miracles from God too numerous to describe here. Have you disappointed God in your Christian journey? If so, allow the word of the Lord to come to you **a second time** (v. 1).

Friday -- August 2 (Jonah 3:1-10)

Following an emotional personal note in yesterday's devotions, I want you to see just how much the Lord loves all sinners, regardless of nationality, race or gender. Jonah obeys God's second calling and preaches His message of judgment to the citizens of Nineveh (v. 3-4). They hear, believe and repent! Even the wicked king of Nineveh takes this message seriously and decrees a fast (v. 5-9). The Lord sees their genuine repentance and relents from His threat (v. 10). Wouldn't it be great if our government would hear and believe the message of salvation through Jesus Christ alone and declare a time of prayer and fasting? According to 2 Chronicles 7:14, God would heal our land!

Saturday -- August 3 (Jonah 4:1-11)

Jonah wants God's **judgment**, not His mercy and grace, upon the enemy of the Jews (v. 1). He accurately describes the attributes of the Lord (v. 2), but he would prefer to die rather than see the salvation of the pagan Ninevites (v. 3). Jonah sits down to pout in a shelter he constructs (v. 4-5). This is another picture of "salvation by works." God, who has already provided a great wind (1:4) and a great fish (1:17), now provides a vine (v. 6), a worm (v. 7) and a scorching east wind (v. 8). The pouting prophet is a pitiful (but humorous) sight until God sets him straight (v. 9-11). Are there people who **you** do not consider worthy of the Lord's mercy and grace? Allow Him to show you the world from His perspective; then thank Him for that same mercy and grace that allows you to live in His Presence forever.