

## Fish Bait

### *Prayer*

I start of today with a simple question:

Ready?

Look deep inside and ask yourself...

... Am I fish bait?

Most of you will answer: No! Of course not!

Let's find out shall we?

Now I don't worry too much about this question just yet... I will come back though and ask it again at the end of the sermon.

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Have you ever considered Jonah? I mean... have you considered what the word is trying to teach us apart from the Sunday school lessons that showed us that he was swallowed by a big fish?

Today I want to look a little deeper into what God is showing us through this amazing narrative of one mans journey through the belly of a big fish.

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How close is God to you? As you go through your daily life is he near you or far away from you?

Well... He said he will never leave us or forsake us, so if you don't feel him with you this morning... Who moved?

Many people are facing many different problems that they are struggling with. The enemy likes to have us see God as far away and unconcerned with our daily struggles, but this morning I am here to remind you that our God is all powerful and all knowing.

God knows where we are at... Consider when Adam sinned. In Genesis 3:9, 10 Our all knowing Father God asks a question of his Son Adam... He asks the question: Adam where are you at? Is it not strange that an all-knowing God would ask where Adam was? Why would our God who knows everything ask him this question?

I believe it is because God knows exactly where Adam is... But He wants Adam to come clean with him. So... God asks Adam some pointed questions about his fashion sense and what has done. So what does Adam do? In improper fashion he tries to

throw his wife under the bus and when that doesn't seem to have the effect he desires, he blames God because he gave him the woman to be his companion. Who says the bible isn't relevant today?

Just the other day on the TV, there was a prank show on that I came across as I was flipping through the channels. The guy involved pulled into a parking space and while he was away, they turned it into a special needs parking stall with a fake officer to write him a ticket... What was the first thing he said when faced with being in trouble you may ask... "My wife told me to park here..."

Isn't it interesting that one of the first lessons taught is not to throw our spouses under the bus? But I digress.

Now I can attest to the fact that God is active in my life and I am on the journey, it has not always been smooth, I have been stubborn, I have been impatient and wanted God to do things on my timings not his... but, despite my human failings, I have ultimately learned to trust God.

God has taken me on a journey of self-discovery... I have not reached my goal, but I now understand the journey and how to get there. Will I make mistakes? Probably, but I rely on the grace of God and his loving kindness to keep me as I work towards the mark. How about you? Have you considered this morning what God has for you in this life?

Let's get on to a man of God who was uh... Resistant to Gods will.

God told Jonah to go to Nineveh, but Jonah did not want to go to Nineveh. Jonah was struggling with his prejudice. In fact Jonah was upset that the Ninevites had repented. Turn with me to Jonah 4:1-2 ESV

*But it displeased Jonah exceedingly, and he was angry. And he prayed to the Lord and said, "O Lord, is not this what I said when I was yet in my country? That is why I made haste to flee to Tarshish; for I knew that you are a gracious God and merciful, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love, and relenting from disaster."*

So here we have preacher angry because the people that God wants him to speak to repented of their sin. Jonah was angry at their repentance because in his heart he wanted to see them destroyed. After all we need to realize that his experience of them was that they were a warlike people. Nineveh was the capital city of Assyria. These people were enemies of Israel. His own sense of justice and judgment comes into play. What about Jonah's pride after all he predicted the cities destruction, could he handle what he said not happening?

Not only these things bothered Jonah, but also the fact that the Ninevites were Gentiles not Jews and yet his God, the God of Israel extended his grace to them and warned them to repent... and they did. This ticked Jonah off.

As we have read in the scripture, Jonah was angry at God's decision and chose to disobey God.

You remember God, the one who never leaves us or forsakes us; the God who disciplines those whom he loves.

You see Jonah forgot one simple fact... you can't run away from God. So Jonah bought a ticket to Tarshish... for the geographically challenged among us that is in the exact opposite direction from where God told him to go...

Charles Spurgeon once wrote of Jonah: "All the while the ship sailed smoothly over the sea, Jonah forgot his God. You could not have distinguished him from the veriest heathen on board. He was just as bad as they were."

God reminded his servant Jonah who was God and who was the worm by sending him a storm and then sent a fish o' gram reminding him that he was supposed to be in Nineveh.

I wonder this morning if Jonah tried to justify his actions to himself. Can you here the inner monologue this morning? *I paid my fare; I can go to Tarshish if I want to. I can't go there because I can't let what they have done go; surely God in his grace will understand.*

How many times have people received a word from God on what to do and they simply say to themselves: "Oh, that's just me" or "Well that's one alternative" how about the ol' "I'm too busy"

Whatever his case these excuses are just that - excuses for disobedience to God. Isn't it interesting that Jonah was asleep amid all the confusion and noise going on around him?

But what are you saying pastor?

Let me be clear; today, like Jonah all around us there is confusion, chaos, storms and raging battles, yet some Christians like Jonah are still able to go to sleep in the sides of the ship...

When I was reading this I was interested in looking at the actions of the crew in this instance as well. I pulled out some interesting thoughts...

- When people are in turmoil and tossed about due to uncertainty; they will make incredibly desperate attempts to save themselves.

- They try to rely on their own strength and intellect to solve problems and some situations require more than they are able to do and so set themselves up to fail
- They will get increasingly frantic and desperate as they try what they can and fail, relying on their own efforts alone. I believe this is because they don't know how to rely on God.
- I also see an interesting parallel in that the way to be saved for these sinning individuals is to be found in the sacrifice of another for them. Also known as chucking Jonah overboard...

When I worked as a business systems analyst, I used a very basic principle that I believe applies in this circumstance. It is very difficult to get to where you want to be... without first taking a good hard look at where you are at right now.

Ever tried Google maps?

It would be pretty hard to map out a route to where you want to be without knowing from where you are starting. I mean we could randomly pick roads and hope they lead us to where we are going. But I am more than likely to experience limited success.

Sometimes when we are redirecting our lives onto the path we are meant to be on, there are times when it can seem unmanageable or confusing or even way to slow for our liking.

Trying to get Jonah to Nineveh was like herding a cat! He was motivated to go in the opposite direction. He was like a powerful and ferocious grizzly bear in hibernation... Let that sink in for a minute. All that power going nowhere and doing nothing. Asleep in the boat going the wrong direction.

So as we rejoin Jonah... we have the worm, the fish bait that was placed on the hook of his own pride... sloshing about in the smelling digesting gunk in the fishes stomach and finally coming to the realization that God wasn't joking and that he really wanted him in Nineveh. He came to the conclusion that he needed to repent for disobeying God's will for his life. He took a long hard look at where he was at and cried out to God for mercy.

How many times have we found ourselves in that place metaphorically speaking? Is there a Nineveh being avoided in your life today?

What if we are there right now?...

Well first of all let's take a realistic look at where we are at before setting out where you need to be.

Second, Come to God repent the disobedience and talk to God about the vision and plan he has for each of our lives.

Third, determine to change things around and set a course on the right path

Finally, take that step because he knows the plans he has for you, plans to prosper you and not to harm you and he will never leave you or forsake you.

This morning the message of Jonah is that if God has said to do something and we are not doing it, God has provided an example that we can learn from. This we see clearly illustrated in a disobedient prophet that God fed to a fish with the goal to bring Jonah to a place where he recognizes that God is sending him a wakeup call to get back on track, with fire, with purpose and with vision.

God will take something broken and distraught and make something beautiful out of it. My God can even mend a broken heart, but you need to give him ALL the pieces.

This morning, consider the words of the prophet Joel In Joel 2:25 wherein the word of the Lord is proclaimed: "I will make up to you for the years that the swarming locust has eaten, the creeping locust, the striping locust and the gnawing locust"

What has been destroyed God can restore. Do we take our locust bites to him? Do we look inside and bring our cares to him or do we shy away from the Nineveh of tomorrow?

I love Jonah because it is real. He is a real person. I love the word of God because God doesn't cover up the mistakes and issues of his servants. He gives them to us raw so that we can learn from them. We see Jonah in the raw like a selfie pic with a big zit on his forehead. There is no airbrushing or Photo shopping the image. He is clearly disobedient and God shows us this so that we can avoid the same pitfall. God loves him and He provides an opportunity for Jonah to reflect and get back on track.

Jonah had to overcome his prejudice against others who had wronged his people. What were his other issues?

He had to get over his pride, stop making excuses and be obedient to God's will.

Men of God have struggled with obedience to God's will. Even some of the great men of the bible. Let me give you some examples:

- Abram could not stay in Ur and still be the father of a nation in Canaan
- David could not stay a shepherd and take up the role of king
- Moses could not stay herding sheep and tell Pharaoh that God said let his people go

- How about Peter, Andrew, James and John? God had a plan for them that didn't include their day job of fishing
- Matthew is hated by his people as a sell out to the Roman oppression and is a tax collector, he had to give it up and embrace Christ
- Saul / Paul had an encounter on the road to Emmaus that required a total turn around so that God's word could be brought to the Gentiles

And the list goes on...

Real people who have had to examine where they are at in their walk. If they are honest with themselves in time they will recognize what Christ is offering and embrace it.

Today we looked at Jonah having to overcome major prejudices in order to preach to the Ninevites. Each of these biblical men had to examine where they are at and ultimately catch God's vision for each of their lives.

Now I am not minimizing these moments, these changes take a lot of faith... But we need to put faith into action because we know from Hebrews 11:6 that without faith it is impossible to please God. It might sound simplistic but to have faith isn't about just a feeling it is doing something. Faith without works is dead – remember?

In order to learn to accomplish the things God has planned for each of us, it really comes down to three things:

- Do we believe God is who he says that he is?
- Do we believe that God will do what he says that he will do?
- When he speaks to us and gives us direction, will we be obedient?

Finally, let me throw this out there...

Many people are afraid to do what God has asked them to do and so they hide themselves in religious practice doing everything that looks good but not what He asked them to do. Is it any wonder they are not happy in their faith. Is it any wonder they become discouraged or even weary in well doing?

Here is another question. Can a Godly person experience circumstances in their life that seem too hard or too much to bear; could a righteous man who loves God get depressed even potentially suicidal?

If you answered NO... boy are you in for a surprise... These next examples of well known men of God seriously struggled at times too.

- Elijah - 1 kings 19:4
  - *Then he went on alone into the wilderness, traveling all day. He sat down under a solitary broom tree and prayed that he might die. "I have*

*had enough, LORD," he said. "Take my life, for I am no better than my ancestors who have already died."*

- Moses – Numbers 11:14-15
  - *I can't carry all these people by myself! The load is far too heavy! 15 If this is how you intend to treat me, just go ahead and kill me. Do me a favor and spare me this misery!"*
  
- Jonah – Jonah 4:3
  - *Just kill me now, Lord! I'd rather be dead than alive if what I predicted will not happen*
  
- Jeremiah – Jeremiah 20:14-18
  - *Yet I curse the day I was born!  
May no one celebrate the day of my birth*
  
- Job – Job 3:1-16
  - *"Let the day of my birth be erased,  
and the night I was conceived.  
Let that day be turned to darkness.  
Let it be lost even to God on high,  
and let no light shine on it.  
Let the darkness and utter gloom claim that day for its own.  
Let a black cloud overshadow it,  
and let the darkness terrify it.  
Let that night be blotted off the calendar,  
never again to be counted among the days of the year,  
never again to appear among the months.  
Let that night be childless.  
Let it have no joy.  
Let those who are experts at cursing—  
whose cursing could rouse Leviathan —  
curse that day.  
Let its morning stars remain dark.  
Let it hope for light, but in vain;  
may it never see the morning light.  
Curse that day for failing to shut my mother's womb,  
for letting me be born to see all this trouble.*

*“Why wasn’t I born dead?  
Why didn’t I die as I came from the womb?”*

Conclusion:

*Here is what I am getting at:*

Everyone struggles!

...but God has a plan for you to prosper you and not to harm you but you need to be obedient to his will and not run from it. When we give in to our fear or try to avoid what God would do in our lives we find ourselves unhappy and weak. The joy of the Lord is our strength. But do we have the faith to trust him with the ordering of the steps of our lives or do we seek to control and only bring him in when we have hit the wall as it were?

When we find ourselves in diverse difficult situations, do we really believe Jeremiah 29:11 and Romans 8:28 which say respectively:

*“For I know the plans I have for you,” says the Lord. “They are plans for good and not for disaster, to give you a future and a hope.*

*And we know that God causes everything to work together for the good of those who love God and are called according to his purpose for them.*

When we are struggling with obedience, depression or weariness in our faith do we flail about trying to get it right using the same ideas that got us into the problem in the first place or do we take stock of where we are at or come to God and embrace his vision for our lives and press forward obediently knowing where he wants us to be?

Sure Jonah is about a guy who disobeyed God and wound up in the belly of a fish, but Jonah came to see it as a wake up call. If you are struggling this morning with your faith or you are experiencing challenges, you are not alone, as you have seen Jonah had some issues as do other prominent figures in the bible.

What gives me hope is God knew Abraham would struggle with the call on his life, but he also knew that his struggles would produce amazing faith. He failed and was a scoundrel at times, but he was called a friend of God because of his faith. He was not perfect, but God brought about a good work in him.

So like at the beginning, I ask each person once again to look deep inside and ask yourself one burning question: Do I face my “Nineveh” or am I fish bait?

*prayer*