

July 14, 2019

**(“Bigger” Series) God’s grace/mercy & purposes/plans are far bigger than we can imagine. “Bigger Fish to Fry”, Jonah 1:17-2:10**

Is the brief story of “Jonah and the whale” a work of fiction, a simple story/parable to teach a greater truth? Perhaps, but Jesus seems to take the Jonah’s life and ministry literally as he mentions it in his teachings (Mtt.12:38-41, Luke 11:29-32). At this point in our study of Jonah, the disobedient prophet has been thrown overboard on a ship, fleeing from God’s command to go to Nineveh. In **Jonah 1:17-2:10**, Jonah prayed desperately for rescue as he had been devoured by a huge fish (not necessarily a whale) which God had provided. God heard his imperfect prayer, and in His mercy and purpose, caused the fish to “vomit Jonah on dry land”.

### **I. God sometimes rescues His people by surprising means.**

Jonah did not die when he was tossed into the sea, but was swallowed miraculously by a gigantic fish (Jonah 1:17). God will use any method he chooses to intervene, get our attention and rescue us....and some of these can be very unexpected. For our part, we need to take the responsibility to call out to God, and He will take it from there. The ship’s crew first “cried out to the Lord” (Jonah 1:14), and finally Noah (distressed in the belly of the fish) “called to the Lord” (Jonah 2:2)....and God, out of mercy and purpose, saved him.

### **II. When God does this, we should give thanks for our rescue.**

Once safe on land, Jonah offered a lengthy prayer of thanksgiving to God as he repeated the story of his rescue 5 times, offering a different aspect of the story in more elaboration with each re-telling (Jonah 2:1-9). Just as the Hebrews traditionally wrote out public prayers of gratefulness for God’s blessings with Psalms of Thanksgiving, Jonah offered his own thanks for his rescue. We too should thank God and celebrate His mercy in our lives, e.g., rescuing us from danger; healing us mentally and physically; sparing us from the consequences of our wrongdoing; drawing us to Jesus for salvation, or just providing...

### **III. But we should realize that sometimes God has bigger fish to fry.**

Jonah’s prayer is far from perfect because it focuses entirely on himself. In Jonah 2:7-9, this disobedient prophet seems to claim his own faithfulness, and not that of God. The Gentile sailors had recognized God’s grace in their vows (Jonah 1:16) much earlier than Jonah did (Jonah 2:9). However, in His infinite mercy, God had bigger purposes than making this individual man comfortable. Jonah was to be used to bring the message of salvation to Nineveh, and ultimately to the entire world. Jonah had to be swallowed by a huge fish to bring him to the starting point of recognizing and being willing to say that “Salvation comes from the Lord” (Jonah 2:9). Now God could work through his servant in Nineveh to rescue a world of others.

**Prayer:** May we turn from our fixation on ourselves, and embrace our own rescue by our loving Heavenly Father. May the love and grace of God flow from us as we reach beyond our own lives and in humility, choose to become a part of His much larger plans and mercy: to share the saving life of Jesus Christ. May we listen and follow the Holy Spirit who guides us into knowing which folks around us might need Jesus.

### **Discussion Questions:**

1. Some of us come to God quietly and obediently, but others come like Jonah...only after rebellion and disobedience. What did God use to catch your attention to bring you to believe and live for Jesus Christ? Did His method surprise you?
2. Would you describe yourself as more of a thankful person or as a worried person? Do you experience more faith or fear? What does the story of Jonah teach us about this?
3. Are your conversations and your prayers centered around the pronoun “I”? Jonah gave us a perfect example of a self centered prayer which neither recognizes the needs of others nor the overarching plans and mercy of God Himself. How should we then pray?
4. Do any others around you actually need Jesus? How do you know that? What kinds of words would you say to them or actions would you perform in the specific name of Jesus?