

Yielding to God's will.

A few years ago, I came across this parody and I think it is fitting for today's message.

It is a parody on the famous footprints in the sand poem which I am sure that you guys have all seen.

One night I had a wondrous dream,
One set of footprints there was seen,
The footprints of my precious Lord,
But mine were not along the shore.

But then some stranger prints appeared,
And I asked the Lord, "What have we here?"
Those prints are large and round and neat,
"But Lord they are too big for feet."

"My child," He said in somber tones,
"For miles I carried you alone.
I challenged you to walk in faith,
But you refused and made me wait."

"You disobeyed, you would not grow,
The walk of faith, you would not know.
Your neck was stiff, your ears were shut,
So there I dropped you on your butt."

"Because in life, there comes a time,
when one must fight, and one must climb.
When one must rise and take a stand,
or leave their butt prints in the sand."

Now, in looking back at my own Christian walk, I can tell you there were a few times that I had left my butt prints in the sand.

These were times in which I was not growing. Times in which I did not have regular fellowship with God through prayer and through reading His word. Times of disobedience.

I believe we have all had periods like this in our walks.

We want to do things our way instead of doing it God's way.

We compromise in our walk and want a little bit of God and a little bit of the world as well.

However, this is a problem - God doesn't want only a little bit of us, He wants all of us.

In the gospel of Matthew - Jesus says, "you shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind"

And because God loves us and wants us to continue to have a relationship with Him, as we rebel - He will correct us.

Many of us will continue to ignore His corrections because we are stubborn.

The good news church is that when we fall, and we will, all we have to do is to call to Him and He will be there waiting for us with open arms.

This morning, we are going to continue our study through the book of Jonah. The prophet Jonah is going through a rebellious period in his life. The question for Jonah and maybe even some of us here will be, "How long are we going to continue to run from God?"

Let's pray...

So, last week, as we began our study through the book of Jonah. We were told that God had given his prophet a message for the people of Nineveh.

Jonah was supposed to go to Nineveh and cry out/preach against it.

However, Jonah wanted nothing to do with it. The Assyrians were Israel's enemy and Jonah did not want God to demonstrate His mercy and grace toward them. After all, they were gentiles.

So Jonah flees God.

Not only does he flee God, he is headed as far away as possible to escape God's commission.

However, there is no way to escape the presence of God. He is everywhere. He is all knowing.

Jonah jumps on a boat headed to Tarshish and God creates a mighty wind and a mighty tempest.

The pagan sailors cast lot to see who is to blame and the lot falls on Jonah.

This is when Jonah reveals to the sailors that the storm is indeed his fault. So they reluctantly throw Jonah overboard and the seas calm down as Jonah hits the water.

The amazing part of chapter one is that despite Jonah's rebellion, God is not done using Jonah. God still needs His appointed ambassador to go to Nineveh.

Let's look at the last verse in chapter one again.

[Jon 1:17 CSB] 17 The LORD appointed a great fish to swallow Jonah, and Jonah was in the belly of the fish three days and three nights.

Now once again, I want to make the point that the focus of the book of Jonah has nothing to do with the fish.

I know, many of us when people bring up the story of Jonah, immediately we think of the dude that got swallowed up by the great fish.

I am not going to spend 40 minutes this morning telling you how I believe Jonah survived in the belly of the fish.

If we somehow believe that Jonah was able to survive using his own might and through other circumstances – then guess what? It is not a miracle.

I don't plan on having a discussion on what type of fish it could have been. It doesn't matter.

You see, the fish in the story of Jonah is simply a prop. Just like the great wind and the tempest that God created to get Jonah's attention.

God appointed the great fish to swallow Jonah for one purpose and one purpose only. And that was to keep Jonah alive. To save him from the sea and to give him a ride back to Nineveh.

Jonah was never going to be the fish's lunch -

This is where we fail to see the big picture. So let's go ahead and read chapter 2. It's a short chapter, only 10 verses long.

[Jon 2:1-10 CSB] 1 Jonah prayed to the LORD his God from the belly of the fish: 2 I called to the LORD in my distress, and he answered me. I cried out for help from deep inside Sheol; you heard my voice. 3 You threw me into the depths, into the heart of the seas, and the current overcame me. All your breakers and your billows swept over me. 4 But I said, "I have been banished from your sight, yet I will look once more toward your holy temple. 5 "The water engulfed me up to the neck; the watery depths overcame me; seaweed was wrapped around my head. 6 "I sank to the foundations of the mountains, the earth's gates shut behind me forever! Then you raised my life from the Pit, LORD my God! 7 "As my life was fading away, I remembered the LORD, and my prayer came to you, to your holy temple. 8 "Those who cherish worthless idols abandon their faithful love, 9 "but as for me, I will sacrifice to you with a voice of thanksgiving. I will fulfill what I have vowed. Salvation belongs to the LORD." 10 Then the LORD commanded the fish, and it vomited Jonah onto dry land.

The chapter begins with Jonah praying.

Actually, the entire chapter is a prayer or a psalm.

Now we really don't know when Jonah prayed this prayer.

There are some people that believe that Jonah was so stubborn and set in his ways that he waited until the third day to pray to the Lord... that could be the case.

Others believe that Jonah prays this prayer as he is swallowed by the fish and during his times in the belly of the fish he dies and God brings Jonah back to life.

We must remember that in the gospel of Matthew as Jesus is conversing with the Pharisees, He alludes to the events of the book of Jonah and says, "For as Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of the great fish, so will the Son of Man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth." Matt 12:40

I believe the latter – God is our creator and the giver of life and it would definitely be a greater miracle for God to bring Jonah back from the dead as opposed to providing Jonah with enough air to remain alive in the belly of the fish.

Now regarding prayer...

I think many times, I believe that many of us have the wrong concept of what prayer is.

We tend to view prayer as our own personal vending machine.

We stick out prayer coins/tokens into the machine whenever we are in need and then we proceed to make a selection of what we want.

You are hungry for a snickers bar, you select B11. You want a bag of chips, they are near the top of the machine in the A's.

I know, you can tell I know my way around a vending machine.

The problem for us when it comes to prayer is that many times, we pray for something and we get something totally different.

We insert our prayer coins and select Snickers and we get an apple instead. There might be other times where we insert our prayer coins and we get absolutely nothing in return.

This is when we resort to kicking the machine or we shake the machine or try to tip it over. We blame the machine because it is flawed.

There was a study done a few year ago that stated that people are twice more likely to die from a vending machine than they are of getting bit by a shark. Google it.

Isn't this what we do to God when we don't get what we prayed for?

That promotion that we didn't get after we have been praying about for the last couple of days?

Or we start questioning God as to why is my aunt still fighting cancer – isn't God listening to my prayers??

Is God broken??

I say this because I know that many of us have someone in our lives that are mad at God right now because God didn't answer their prayer. They didn't get the snickers they wanted.

I can think of at least three people I know that have this mentality.

Church, this is not what prayer is about.

We have the mentality that prayer is all about changing God's mind. I am going to keep praying the same prayer until God finally caves in and says here take it.

Or sometimes, we see prayer as a way to negotiate with God.

You know what God, I put my prayer coins in – I have shown up to church the last few weeks. You owe me one, I need a new car.

This is not what prayer is about.

Church, prayer is all about changing us.

So that our will to be aligned with the will that God has set for you and me.

I believe that this is the reason that many of us struggle with our prayer life.

We don't pray because we don't want to be changed.

We enjoy the small touchups in our lives that God brings as long as we get to dictate what is going to be changed and when.

Ok Lord, I am willing to give up my Sunday mornings to go to church as long as it is not football season and I can commit to pray for 5 minutes every other day.

However, we despise the complete makeover. Church, God wants to give us the complete makeover.

It's the same reason that we don't read God's word daily. We don't want to be transformed.

We come up with all these excuses...

- I don't have time to pray or read the word of God
- I don't know how to pray

The truth is – we don't want to be changed. We are afraid what the Word of God is going to reveal to us.

Turn with me to 1 Thessalonians

[1Thess 5:16-18 NKJV] 16 Rejoice always, 17 pray without ceasing, 18 in everything give thanks; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you.

In verse 17 it says pray without ceasing.

I don't think this means that we are to be on our knees 24-7, this means that we make it a point to have a conversation with God throughout the day.

Not so that our will can be done in heaven but so that we can make ourselves available to be used by God as His will is done here on the earth.

This is His will for us, to have fellowship with Him. To be in constant communication with Him. Not because we have to but, because we want to.

Now turn to 1 John 5

[1John 5:14-15 NKJV] 14 Now this is the confidence that we have in Him, that if we ask anything according to His will, He hears us. 15 And if we know that He hears us, whatever we ask, we know that we have the petitions that we have asked of Him.

Many people take this verse out of context and they claim that God will give you anything you want. The reason you don't have your car is that you haven't asked enough times. You haven't nagged God enough.

Asking according to His will means having the same mindset and the same heart as Jesus Christ.

I want you to write the following verse down,

[Psa 37:4 NKJV] 4 Delight yourself also in the LORD, And He shall give you the desires of your heart.

“Do not think first of the desires of your heart, but think first of delighting yourself in your God. If you have accepted him as your Lord, he is yours; so delight in him, and then he will give you the desires of your heart.”

(Spurgeon)

“They said of Martin Luther as he walked the streets, ‘There comes a man that can have anything of God he likes.’ You ask the reason of it. Because Luther delighted himself in his God.” (Spurgeon)

Getting back to our text in Jonah

Remember, Jonah was the only one that was not praying on the boat that was headed for Tarshish during the storm.

Jonah's mindset, Jonah's heart was still on self not on God's will.

They say that for a person to change their behavior, they have to hit some sort of "bottom".

For Jonah, the belly of the fish is hitting bottom. There is nowhere to run.

You see, Jonah could have prayed to God as he approached Joppa prior to getting on the ship to Tarshish.

Jonah could have prayed to God when the ship's captain questioned him why he wasn't praying during the storm.

When the lots fell on him and he disclosed to the sailors that he was running away from Yahweh, he could have prayed to God.

But he didn't, being in the belly of the fish is the point where Jonah realized that there was nowhere else to go but up.

The thing about hitting bottom is that we control when we hit bottom. If we continue to fight God, then we really haven't hit bottom.

Turn with me to the gospel of Luke.

[Luk 15:11-24 NKJV] 11 Then He said: "A certain man had two sons. 12 "And the younger of them said to [his] father, 'Father, give me the portion of goods that falls [to me].' So he divided to them [his] livelihood. 13 "And not many days after, the younger son gathered all together, journeyed to a far country, and there wasted his possessions with prodigal living. 14 "But when he had spent all, there arose a severe famine in that land, and he began to be in want. 15 "Then he

went and joined himself to a citizen of that country, and he sent him into his fields to feed swine. **16 "And he would gladly have filled his stomach with the pods that the swine ate, and no one gave him [anything].** 17 "But when he came to himself, he said, 'How many of my father's hired servants have bread enough and to spare, and I perish with hunger! 18 'I will arise and go to my father, and will say to him, "Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you, 19 "and I am no longer worthy to be called your son. Make me like one of your hired servants." ' 20 "And he arose and came to his father. But when he was still a great way off, his father saw him and had compassion, and ran and fell on his neck and kissed him. 21 "And the son said to him, 'Father, I have sinned against heaven and in your sight, and am no longer worthy to be called your son.' 22 "But the father said to his servants, 'Bring out the best robe and put [it] on him, and put a ring on his hand and sandals on [his] feet. 23 'And bring the fatted calf here and kill [it], and let us eat and be merry; 24 'for this my son was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found.' And they began to be merry.

In the parable of the prodigal son, in verse 16, it says that the prodigal son had gotten to the point that he was willing to eat from the same food that pigs were eating.

This is how far he had fallen. He was tending pigs which was an unclean animal. Yet he was contemplating eating from their food.

Imagine what would have happened if the father found him there and said to him, “hey son here’s ten grand” do you think that the prodigal son would have returned to the father when he did?

Probably not, hitting bottom would have probably been delayed. I am pretty sure that the son probably would have squandered those 10k as well.

However, because of the misery that he had to go through, as he hit rock bottom, that misery allowed him to realize his error.

Jonah is the prodigal son of the Old Testament.

Did you notice how the father was happy to see his son return in the parable? He didn’t tell his son, “you big dummy, I knew you were going to blow it”

He didn’t sit there and lecture him for hours regarding wasting his allowance.

The father of the prodigal welcomed him with open arms.

This is what God is about to do with his prodigal prophet. This is unconditional love.

[Jon 2:2 NKJV] 2 And he said: "I cried out to the LORD because of my affliction, And He answered me. "Out of the belly of Sheol I cried, [And] You heard my voice.

God answered Jonah. God responded to his cries. All Jonah had to do was to cry out to God.

God responded because God is faithful.

I love the words of Isaiah in 59

[Isa 59:1-2 CSB] 1 Indeed, the LORD's arm is not too weak to save, and his ear is not too deaf to hear. 2 But your iniquities are separating you from your God, and your sins have hidden his face from you so that he does not listen.

We must come before Him with a repentant heart.

Let's continue with Jonah prayer -

[Jon 2:3-4 CSB] 3 You threw me into the depths, into the heart of the seas, and the current overcame me. All your breakers and your billows swept over me. 4 But I said, "I have been banished from your sight, yet I will look once more toward your holy temple.

Notice how Jonah in his prayer is acknowledging that God was behind everything that had happened to him. The sailors were the ones that physically threw Jonah overboard.

But Jonah realizes God's sovereignty. God was in control the entire time. He is aware that God is in the process of chastening him because of his disobedience.

Now, there will be some that say, "Why couldn't God simply get someone else to go to Nineveh?" It's obvious Jonah didn't want to do it.

The fact that God chastened His servant is proof that Jonah was truly a child of God, for God disciplines only His own children.

[Heb 12:3-11 CSB] 3 For consider him who endured such hostility from sinners against himself, so that you won't grow weary and give up. 4 In struggling against sin, you have not yet resisted to the point of shedding your blood. 5 And you have forgotten the exhortation that addresses you as sons: My son, do not take the Lord's discipline lightly or lose heart when you are reproved by him, 6 for the Lord disciplines the one he loves and punishes every son he receives. 7 Endure suffering as discipline: God is dealing with you as sons. For what son is there that a father does not discipline? 8 But if you are without discipline ;which all receive ;then you are illegitimate children and not sons. 9 Furthermore, we had human fathers discipline us, and we respected them. Shouldn't we submit even more to the Father of spirits and live? 10 For they disciplined us for a short time based on what seemed good to them, but he does it for our benefit, so that we can share his holiness. 11 No discipline seems enjoyable at the time, but painful. Later on, however, it yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness to those who have been trained by it.

I discipline my children because I love them. If I see that they are going the wrong way, I will do everything I can to correct them. This is why Jonah is going through this chastening.

And Jonah accepts the discipline from the Lord because he knows he was wrong.

Inverses 5 and 6 Jonah is describing the conditions not only in the whale but also the condition of his spiritual life as well.

The waters are surrounding him – you get a sense that he was at a point of desperation.

The deep closed around me and the seaweed wrapping around his head continue to give us a glimpse of what he was going through.

Can you imagine the smell in there? The humidity? The darkness not knowing where you were.

Even though his life is passing before his eyes. Jonah knew that there was still hope.

Church, God's promise of grace remains even though we plunge ourselves in the folly of sin. Jonah had deserted God, but the fact that Jonah had not drowned proved that God had not deserted him.

[Jon 2:6-7 CSB] 6 "I sank to the foundations of the mountains, the earth's gates shut behind me forever! Then you raised my life from the Pit, LORD my God! 7 "As my life was fading away, **I remembered the LORD**, and my prayer came to you, to your holy temple.

As Jonah was heading deeper and deeper he remembered God's promise. And this is what saved him.

Jonah knew God's word and he remembered the favor that King Solomon asked from the Lord at the dedication of the temple.

[1Ki 8:38-40 NKJV] 38 "whatever prayer, whatever supplication is made by anyone, [or] by all Your people Israel, when each one knows the plague of his own heart, and spreads out his hands toward this

temple: 39 "then hear in heaven Your dwelling place, and forgive, and act, and give to everyone according to all his ways, whose heart You know (for You alone know the hearts of all the sons of men), 40 "that they may fear You all the days that they live in the land which You gave to our fathers.

In verse 8

[Jon 2:8 NKJV] 8 "Those who regard worthless idols Forsake their own Mercy.

In chapter 1, we read about the sailors praying to their gods. I don't think that this verse is in reference to the sailors.

Jonah is speaking of himself here. He is the one who was regarding worthless idols in his disobedience.

1. I can shut God out of my life.
2. I can run from the call of God.
3. I can forget God.
4. I don't need God.

Remember, idol worship can be anything that you place ahead of God. Jonah was placing his will above God's will.

He was placing Israel's wellbeing ahead of God's will as well.

When we get to chapter four in a few weeks, we will learn that he is also placing his own reputation as a prophet ahead of God.

Jonah closes his prayer with a promise. I will be obedient and go to Nineveh. I will abide by God's will. You win God.

We find the words Salvation is of the Lord in Psalm 3:8 and in Psalm 37:39. This is the central theme in all the scriptures. There is only one whom can save and that is the Lord Jesus Christ.

Jonah's salvation from the fish will come from the Lord

But there's more.

Nineveh's salvation from destruction in chapter three will also come from the Lord.

Our own salvation from eternal punishment will also come from the Lord.

The chapter ends with God speaking to the fish that He had appointed to swallow Jonah to vomit him out unto dry land. Once again, demonstrating His sovereignty.

In closing,

One of the things I believe that we learn from this chapter two is that if we are currently running from God, now is the best time to stop and to repent. It's only going to get worse.

I also believe that we need to know how to deal with prodigals. Many of us have children who are prodigals or grandchildren who have walked away from the Lord.

Just like God didn't give up on Jonah, I believe that we should never give up on them. And if by God's grace they come back, I believe that we should take the examples learned today and welcome them with open arms.

One of the hardest prayers to pray for is to pray for a prodigal and ask God to do whatever it takes so that they can return.

This is a prayer that I prayed for my father for many years as he was addicted to alcohol. This past December, he ended up in the hospital with all these health issues related to his addiction. The first night in ICU, I stood there next to his bed and thought to myself. Is this whatever it takes?

By the grace of God, he pulled through and for the first time in his life, he admitted that he had a drinking problem. He had hit rock bottom.

Continue to pray for the prodigals. God hasn't given up on them and neither should we.

Amen...

Let's pray...

Today I want to give an opportunity to anyone here that has not accepted Jesus Christ as their Lord and Savior –

We just read that salvation is from the Lord and through no one else.

Admit that you are a sinner,

Believe that Jesus Christ died for you

Accept Him as your Lord and Savior

Repent of your sins.

Lord Jesus, I know that I have sinned against you. I know that I am not perfect and that I cannot please you through my own efforts. I know that I deserve to be judged according to my sins. And, I know that I have nothing to offer you.

Lord Jesus, I ask you to forgive me of my sins. Please cleanse me and make me right before you. I trust in what you have done on the cross. I do not rely on myself but only on you and I receive you as Lord of my life and as savior of my soul. Lord Jesus, save me. I look to you alone.

In Jesus name.