

3 Things to Do When You're Drowning Spiritually

Let's start by focusing on someone who actually did drown—literally—but God rescued him. His name was Jonah, a biblical character known to most people. Few, however, understand the profound depth of what really happened to him.

You might want to grab your Bible and read “The Prayer of Jonah” carefully (Jon. 2:2-9). Most of that pivotal prayer—seven out of eight verses—is actually a psalm of thanksgiving to God for having answered a previous prayer. Even more surprising—that previous prayer was apparently uttered in hell. You are probably squinting your eyes in skepticism at this point, but check it out in the Bible:

Then Jonah prayed to the LORD his God from the fish's belly. 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” (Jon. 2:1-2).

Though it can mean just the grave, the Hebrew word Sheol also refers to the underworld: the spiritual realm of departed souls, both the righteous and the wicked. According to Jesus' teaching, in that Old Testament era, Sheol contained two chambers: one of fiery torment for the wicked and then, across an impassable gulf, a pleasant but temporary abode for the righteous called “Abraham's bosom” (see Luke 16:19-31).

So apparently Jonah drowned when he was thrown overboard, and his soul descended into that horrid place reserved for the unrighteous who die in a state of sin. The erring prophet graphically described his plight:

“I went down to the foundations of the mountains; the earth with its bars was around me forever” (Jon. 2:6).

So Jonah was in a spiritual prison in Sheol. Yet amazingly, he made a decision to seek God anyway, saying:

“When my life was ebbing away, I remembered the Lord; and my prayer came to You, into Your holy temple” (Jon. 2:7).

What unshakable trust! What stubborn faith! His name may have been Jonah (which means dove—a very timid and docile bird). But his parents should have named him Chamor (which means donkey—a very stubborn animal). Because regardless of how terribly he had failed, or how severely he was chastised, Jonah refused to stop looking toward his Maker. It worked. Because at some point (we’re not told when) his body was swallowed by a great fish, then his soul re-entered his body and he came back to life.

It was at that point that his heart erupted with gratitude, and he authored a prayer of thanksgiving with three short, concluding statements that captured the heart of the God:

“But I will sacrifice to You with the voice of thanksgiving; I will pay what I have vowed. Salvation is of the LORD!” (Jon. 2:9).

Three complementary attitudes filled the heart of Jonah that did not go unnoticed in heaven:

1. THANKSGIVING—even though Jonah was not yet completely delivered (freed from hell, but not from the fish’s belly) he maintained thankfulness to God for less than what he needed, and God responded by giving him more than what he asked for (physical restoration and a city-wide revival).
2. COMMITMENT—we don’t know what Jonah had previously vowed to God; all we know is he recommitted to certain sacred pledges he had made in the past.
3. FAITH—When Jonah made the declaration, “Salvation is of the LORD,” he was admitting that he couldn’t save himself. He was utterly powerless in the face of his

impossibility. But he was also affirming that such a dilemma is well within the sphere of God's authority and power and that God has the nature and passion to save those who put their trust in Him.

In response to those three declarations, God intervened marvelously and miraculously. The Most High spoke into Jonah's circumstance, commanding the fish to vomit him up on dry ground. Furthermore, He opened the windows of heaven and sent forth a spirit of repentance on all the inhabitants of Nineveh. An entire Gentile city was converted in one day—Wow! What proof of the power of a thankful heart!

And that is the primary, practical application of this story. Maybe you feel like you're drowning, child of God. Maybe you feel like you are "going through hell": emotionally, mentally or spiritually. I heard one preacher recently say, "If you're going through hell ... Keep going!" Be just as belligerent as Jonah. Be stubborn in your faith, no matter what. React the same three ways that the repentant prophet did.

- First, instead of complaining and grumbling over what you don't have, thank God for what you do have. If you praise Him for less than enough, He may just give you more than you ask for and more than you need.
- Second, renew your commitments to God and to others, your former vows and covenant promises.
- Third, declare your confidence that *Jesus* is now and ever will be your "Savior": You have total trust that He is the "author of eternal salvation" to those who believe (Heb. 5:9).

Then maybe, just maybe, in a similar fashion, God Himself will speak into your circumstance and command the things that are binding you to let you go—and use you as His catalyst for revival!

Let it be so ... in Jesus' name!

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