**“God of Mercy: The Way Back”**

**Jonah 1:17-2:9**

(notes based on the sermon by Pastor Steve Massey, Hayden Bible Church, 5/30/21)

 Jonah ran from God’s commission and found himself inside the belly of the fish. Bewildered, afraid, and desperate, he cried out to God. He said aloud what some of us SHOULD pray when we are wayward, running from God. Jonah’s psalm, like other psalms in the Bible, is a divinely inspired song. It is a prayer of reverence. Jonah’s psalm reflects his pain, and then it moves on through repentance, remembrance, rejoicing, and finally, resolve.

 Jonah’s entire experience proclaims that salvation is all a work of God. Jonah doesn’t work to earn salvation; if he could have lost it, he would have! Jonah is under God’s preserving mercy, not God’s punishment. God is preparing Jonah to serve Him in the future.

 The way back to God is much shorter than the journey you take to run away from God. (Q1) The way back to God always begins with prayer. Cry out to Him! Unfortunately, Jonah had been out of the habit of prayer. He didn’t pray until he had been gulped up. Prayer is not a natural thing… it is a supernatural thing. It is the breath of a God-commissioned life. Do you find yourself out of the habit of prayer right now? (Q2)

 The belly of the fish is discipline, not rejection by God. The first step for all who find themselves in this predicament is repentance. Not excuses, not justifying, just true repentance for straying from God. Some of our troubles and anguish come from God Himself. He loves you, so He speaks in a language you’ll be attentive to. If you don’t listen to Him through His Word, He may speak to you through affliction. And when affliction comes from God, it is a corrective love.

 Jonah’s psalm is a prayer of gratitude, thanksgiving, and rejoicing. The enemy whispers, “God doesn’t want to hear from you. You’re slime!” Of course, you don’t deserve to be heard, but the Father wants to hear from His children. He will not turn His back on you. God is actively attentive to the prayers of His people. God does not ignore or disregard the cries of the repentant (even if you have repeatedly disregarded Him).

 Do you have seasons when you don’t feel God’s attentiveness? Feelings are a horrible gauge of reality! In 2:2-4 Jonah feels he will be permanently separated from God’s mercy. But he won’t! Read Prov. 1:7. That’s the key! It is right to fear God. He is eager to answer when we cry out in repentance, asking for the help that Jesus’ work has already done for us. Despite his feelings, Jonah is grateful for the God who hears His people when they repent. What I know to be true of God is greater than how I feel in my circumstances. Jonah knew the nature of God because he knew the Word of God. Compare Ps. 120:1 to Jonah’s psalm. Jonah is praying scripture. (Q3)

 Jonah’s psalm follows the pattern of many of David’s psalms: a feeling is expressed, then a truth is recalled. The truth? God is always faithful to deliver when we cry out in repentance. Look at 2:7 again. This is a prayer of remembrance. This is an example of exercising his faith. You exercise the “muscle” of faith when you refuse to allow yourself to be controlled by your circumstances. But that doesn’t come automatically. Remember the past faithfulness of our great God. (Q4)

 Read Heb. 4:16. This is God’s promise to the messed up, the wayward. In 2:8-9, Jonah confesses the worthlessness of his idols: his own agenda, his own comfort and security. The lesson? The enjoyment of the love relationship is messed up when we cling to worthless things. God loves you too much to let you enjoy your sin and a wayward lifestyle. David says something similar in Ps. 51:11-12: the prodigal loses the joy of salvation. (Q5) Is it time right now to tell Him, “I’ve been gone too long”? Remember, you are God’s ambassador. It’s time to start living like one! Resolve to do it!

 What is the way back to God? A repentant heart, a rejoicing, reverent, remembering prayer life, and a resolve to rely on Him and His power and His Word and His church as you return to Him. Amen. (Q6)

**QUESTIONS**:

1. Why is that?
2. How do you break a habit? How do you make a habit?
3. Why should we memorize parts of God’s Word? Share the most important verses you have taken to heart.
4. When was God faithful to the people of Israel? When has He been faithful to you?
5. What does it mean to have “the joy of Thy salvation”?
6. How can we, the church, help each other return from waywardness?

“O Love, That Wilt Not Let Me Go”

 O Love, that wilt not let me go,

I rest my weary soul in Thee;

I give Thee back the life I owe,

That in Thine ocean depths its flow

May richer, fuller be.

2

 O Light, that followest all my way,

I yield my flickering torch to Thee;

My heart restores its borrowed ray,

That in Thy sunshine’s blaze its day

May brighter, fairer be.

3

 O Joy, that seekest me through pain,

I cannot close my heart to Thee;

I trace the rainbow through the rain,

And feel the promise is not vain

That morn shall tearless be.