

BIG FAITH WITHOUT A BIG FISH

Jonah 1:17-2:9

Introduction: Story is told of a man driving a truck down a mountain. When the truck's brakes fail, the man is forced to jump out as the truck plunges off the side of the mountain. The man ends up hanging onto a bush. When he calls for help, God says, "Let go and I will catch you." The man looks around and says, "Is there anybody else up there?"

Many times we rebel when God attempts to build our faith. Let's consider some of the ways God worked in the life of Jonah.

I. ASKESIS - GOD PREPARED THE WHALE

1. "*Askesis*" is a Hebrew word that describes a confinement of some sort that allows God to work intensely in our lives. The result of this is we become more God-centered in our thinking, and our faith is increased.
2. When Jonah was in the belly of the whale he could not see much. But his eyes were inwardly turned to God. *Askesis* means that all we can see is God.

II. INVOLUNTARY ASKESIS - THE WHALE WASN'T ON JONAH'S ITINERARY

1. Confinement may come in many forms: illness, family problems, work troubles, spiritual dryness, the belly of a whale. We don't usually ask for it.
2. We are able to learn more about God and ourselves in our times of confinement.
3. In Mark 6, as the disciples start across the lake, a storm begins to form. Jesus goes to them in the fourth watch of the night. He may have watched them for seven hours before he came to them. Why did he wait? Perhaps He wanted them to know their best was not good enough. They needed Him. When they were ready to admit their need for God, Jesus came. *Askesis* makes us aware of our need for God.
4. Confinement builds our faith. It doesn't take much faith to believe when you can see, but it requires *faith to believe when you cannot see. Putting our eyes on God in the midst of difficulty does something to us.*

III. PRAYER IN ASKESIS - WHO WOULD NOT PRAY IN THE BELLY OF A WHALE?

1. It is not surprising that Jonah prayed in the belly of the whale. It is surprising how he prayed.
2. The phrases Jonah used were taken from Psalms. Psalms can be broken into two large groups: lament and praise. If you were in the belly of a whale, which type prayer would you offer? Jonah's prayer had the form of praise.
3. Too much of our praying is self-centered. Prayer is not to be self-centered. It is to be God-centered.

IV. VOLUNTARY ASKESIS - CONFINEMENT WITHOUT THE FISH

1. Why wait for an accident, an illness, or a failure? Why not take deliberate steps to get in touch with God, to deal with our sin, and become all that God wants us to be? God does not send a whale to swallow us very often. We must seek a voluntary confinement without a whale.
2. We must learn how to discipline ourselves so that God can teach us on a daily basis.

CONCLUSION

1. God may not send a fish. God may work in your circumstances. Remember, the fish saved Jonah's life. He would have drowned without the whale.
2. Are you about to drown in your problems? Is life overwhelming you? God is already at work in your life. Look to God. Learn to pray.
3. *The key to survival is to spend more time with your eyes on God than on your problems.*