

My Suffering (Jonah 2:1–10) 28 June 2026 KRCN

1. Jonah prayed. Strangely enough, he prayed from inside the belly of the fish. More remarkable than *what* he prayed is the fact that he was able to pray at all. After all, he was somehow able to breathe inside the fish. This indicates that although Jonah had been thrown into the sea, he had come back to life.
2. Does that mean he had actually died? Yes. He had been thrown into the sea. Just as a fish cannot live outside the water, Jonah could not live beneath it. In the sea, he died. The prayer of the sailors on the ship to Tarshish also points to this reality: the lives of many were exchanged for the life of Jonah. Innocent blood was not charged against the sailors but fell upon Jonah. Jonah died, and the sea became calm.
3. Jesus spoke of this event and called it *the sign given to a wicked and adulterous generation* (Luke 11:29). A wicked and adulterous generation is one that receives the sign of Jonah yet fails to understand it. Though the sign speaks of death followed by resurrection, that generation still refuses to believe.
4. The sign of Jonah points to what was symbolized by his emerging from the belly of the fish after three days. But the sign is not merely that he survived inside the fish for three days, nor simply that he came back onto dry land after three days. It begins with the fact that Jonah was thrown into the sea and died.
5. Then as now, the world is wicked and adulterous. The fact that Jesus chose the sign of Jonah above many other miracles means that He did not expect the world to believe it easily. Nor was He attempting to satisfy the world's expectations. God does not respond according to the expectations of the world.
6. Listen carefully to Jonah's prayer. As I mentioned earlier, this prayer is only possible because Jonah has already been brought back from death to life. The dead cannot pray. Neither can those who are on the verge of death. Prayer is the very breath of those who have been born again. Therefore, the fact that Jonah is praying means that he has already been saved into the belly of the fish.
7. Listen again to Jonah's prayer. Jonah 2:2 says: *"In my distress I called to the LORD, and He answered me. From the belly of Sheol I cried for help, and You heard my voice."*
8. At first glance, this prayer appears to consist of two cause-and-effect statements: "I called, and He answered," and "I cried out, and He heard." Reading these words, we naturally get the impression that a principle of cause and effect is at work.

9. We easily conclude, "So when Jonah called, God answered," or, "When he cried out, God heard him." But there is a subtle danger here. We may begin to think, "Prayer exists so that we can cry out whenever we face trouble." Another misunderstanding is to treat prayer as a universal remedy for solving life's problems.
10. That is not entirely wrong. Yet surely that is not the obvious lesson God intended by recording Jonah's prayer. Did God send Jonah merely to teach us that we should pray? Let me add one more thought. Even more certainly, Jesus did not come simply to tell us that we possess the key to heaven's gate—or that this key is prayer.
11. It was when my brother-in-law was on his deathbed. The rest of the family had gathered around his bedside, while we were watching his final moments through a video call. As he breathed his last, my grieving sister-in-law cried out to me, "Pastor, can you please pray or something!"
12. Indeed, there is nothing we can do in the face of death. At such a moment, prayer is the confession that we can do nothing, and that we entrust everything into God's hands. Who can snatch a soul back from the hand of God, the One who gives and takes away life? In that sense, prayer is not the key to solving our problems.
13. Yet the wicked and adulterous generation misuses prayer precisely for that purpose. They are convinced that if they simply cry out, God will answer. Such an understanding of prayer reveals that they belong to that wicked and adulterous generation. They cannot help but think this way because they read everything through the lens of their own desires and personal benefit.
14. Suppose the sign of Jonah had been recorded merely to teach us that prayer is the best thing to do when we are drowning. Or suppose the events of Jonah's life were intended simply to teach us to cast lots, find a scapegoat, and offer a sacrifice. That would be the world's interpretation. Scripture, however, teaches something entirely different: prayer is the activity of one who has already been saved and made alive. The belly of the fish signifies the womb, where new life is conceived and one is born again.
15. Look at v.3: *"For You cast me into the deep, into the heart of the seas, and the flood surrounded me; all Your breakers and Your waves passed over me."* At first glance, it sounds as though Jonah is merely describing the danger of being trapped in the depths of the sea. But this prayer is actually declaring that Jonah had truly died.

16. At this point, if we consider this verse by itself, we might still think that Jonah is simply referring to being thrown into the sea. In other words, we may assume that the suffering he speaks of is the hardship he experienced on the ship bound for Tarshish—being discovered by the captain, compelled to pray, chosen by lot, and finally thrown into the sea. It certainly sounds as though this is the suffering Jonah has in mind.
17. However, when we continue to vs. 5 and 6, it becomes clear that his suffering cannot be limited to those events alone. Verse 6 says, *"I went down to the roots of the mountains."* Surely this does not mean that Jonah descended in a submarine to the mountain ranges on the ocean floor. He continues, *"The earth with its bars closed behind me forever."* This language does not describe drowning, but burial. It speaks of someone being shut inside a grave.
18. These two unusual expressions make it clear that the suffering Jonah describes cannot simply be reduced to what happened aboard the ship to Tarshish. Rather, those events point beyond themselves. They serve as a sign that foreshadows the death of Christ.
19. Therefore, when Jonah speaks of **"my affliction,"** he is not referring merely to encountering a violent storm or being chosen by lot as the unfortunate scapegoat. His suffering points to the suffering of Christ—above all, His suffering on the cross, His death on behalf of many.
20. Jonah prayed: *"Though I have been banished from Your sight, yet I will look again toward Your holy temple."* (v. 4) What does this remind you of? The Psalms, of course. Nearly three hundred years before Jonah, David wrote in Psalm 31:22, *"In my alarm I said, 'I am cut off from Your sight!' Yet You heard my cry for mercy when I called to You for help."*
21. Whom does David foreshadow in writing such a psalm? Jesus Christ. As He hung on the cross, what did He cry out? *"Eli, Eli"* ("My God, My God...") And what followed? *"Lama sabachthani?"* ("Why have You forsaken Me?") These words express His separation from God. They echo Jonah's words, *"Though I have been banished from Your sight..."*
22. Therefore, the suffering Jonah speaks of is not merely the storm, the casting of lots, or being thrown into the sea. It encompasses his death itself. It is precisely because it is a death that it becomes a sign pointing to the cross of Christ. It foreshadows the way in which Jesus Himself would die.
23. What kind of death was it? It was a substitutionary death—a death that had to be endured so that many others might live. In other words, Christ's death was not a punishment for His own sins, nor was it an accident, nor merely a means of relieving our suffering. It was the death

He willingly bore because of God's love for the world and His desire to save it. This is what sacrifice was always meant to signify.

24. We will not continue with the rest of the story today. But one thing must be made clear here: when Jonah prays about **"the affliction I suffered,"** he is speaking of a suffering that is altogether different from the kind of suffering we usually have in mind. It is the suffering of one who must die in the place of others—a death that is undeserved, beyond words, and borne out of love.
25. Therefore, Jonah's prayer teaches us two fundamental lessons. First, **who is able to pray?** Second, **what ought we to pray for?**
26. **Prayer is something only those who have been born again are able to do.** Prayer is like breathing—it is the activity of one who is spiritually alive. Therefore, if we ourselves have not been born again through the love of God, or if we have no assurance or faith that we have been born again, we cannot truly dare to pray. Who is able to offer the representative prayer during a church service? It is the one who believes that he or she has been born again as a Christian.
27. The same is true in our personal prayer life. Prayer is coming into the presence of God our Father. Therefore, it is only possible when we are certain that we are His children. We cannot pray to the man next door as though he were our father. Prayer belongs within the relationship between a Father and His children.
28. Then what should we pray for? *"Lord, deliver me from this suffering."* *"Help me overcome this difficulty."* Certainly, we may pray such things. But these are not meant to be the central focus of our prayers. As Jonah says in v.9, the content of true prayer should be **thanksgiving to God** and **the resolve to fulfill the vows we have made to Him.**