

A Strange Thanksgiving Service

Text: Jonah 2:1–10

Introduction

One of the strangest Thanksgiving services on record took place in the depths of the sea. Jonah was in the belly of a great fish when he remembered the Lord and prayed: “I will sacrifice unto thee with the voice of thanksgiving; I will pay that that I have vowed.”

When the Lord heard Jonah’s prayer of repentance and thanksgiving, He spoke to the fish. The fish then “vomited out Jonah upon the dry land.”

Message

1. Thankful in trouble.

- a. Jonah was thankful for the ordeal in the fish because it turned him around spiritually. Instead of running away from God, he obeyed and went to Nineveh.
- b. Trouble is a blessing in disguise if it draws us to the Lord. God often sends a storm to bring people to their knees (Psalm 107:23–30).
- c. God works in mysterious ways (Romans 11:33) so we can give thanks in all situations (1 Thessalonians 5:18), even those that seem unpleasant.

2. Thankful in persecution.

- a. Jesus said we should rejoice if reviled and persecuted for His sake (Matthew 5:10–12).
- b. When the apostles were persecuted, they rejoiced that they were counted worthy to suffer for Christ (Acts 5:41).
- c. Paul and Silas were beaten and thrown in prison for preaching, but they never complained. Instead they prayed and sang praises to God (Acts 16:25).

3. Thankful in affliction.

- a. David was thankful for his affliction because it changed the course of his life (Psalm 119:67).
- b. Jesus wept at the death of His friend Lazarus (John 11:34,35), but when He prayed, He gave thanks to the Father (John 11:41). We can be thankful God loves us and permits only what is good for us, even in bereavement.
- c. Paul’s prayer was not answered, but the Lord gave him a greater measure of grace (2 Corinthians 12:7–9). Paul was thankful because he became stronger spiritually through his physical weakness (verse 10).

4. Thankful in hardship.

- a. Habakkuk praised God and rejoiced in Him in spite of a great famine (Habakkuk 3:17,18).
- b. The Macedonian believers were in deep poverty, but they rejoiced and gave liberally of what they had (2 Corinthians 8:1,2).
- c. We should praise the Lord for all His wonderful works (Psalm 107:15), even though we wonder why He is testing us. God knows what He is doing in our lives, and when the trial is over we “shall come forth as gold” (Job 23:10).

Conclusion

We can never repay God for all His blessings. We can only accept the gifts and give thanks to the Giver (Psalm 116:13). Our personal thanks are for the one gift no one else can give. It is an offering more precious to God than all the sheep, cattle, silver, and gold in the world. Therefore let us “sacrifice the sacrifices of thanksgiving, and declare his works with rejoicing” (Psalm 107:22).

—R.C. Cunningham