

# Sermon Text for August 1, 2021

By Rev. Robert K. Bronkema

*Acts 12:6-11, Jonah 1:14-17, 2:1,10*

*“The story of Jonah and the whale”*

It is great to be back and I wanted to thank you and the personnel committee for allowing me to take some continuing education time and some vacation time as well during these past two weeks. It makes a difference taking two consecutive weeks off at once, I don't know when I did that last. For my continuing education conference I attended virtually the New Wilmington Missionary conference and we find ourselves now in the midst of a sermon series entitled “stories to live by”, I heard the story of how God is actively involved in the calling of a missionary from Nigeria whose name is Uchenna Anyanwu.

He was an incredibly powerful speaker, someone that some day I hope we are able to invite to speak to us as well. The power behind his message was very simple, he realized that God wanted to deliver him from what was his own dream and his own goals, which he was very driven to accomplish, and replace them with God's dreams and God's goals that God would accomplish.

Today, in both of our Bible stories, we have two very, very different protagonists, what we could even call heroes of the Bible, but both of them are delivered by God in very unorthodox, or what we could call unbelievable ways. As a result of this deliverance God is able to use them for his Kingdom purposes. But neither of them was aware of what was taking place until after it had happened. God's deliverance came as a complete surprise to them. Let's read and see if we can resonate with these Bible stories for today.

## **READ**

I remember when I was an intern in seminary and I preached on this story and I called it the story of Jonah and the whale. After my sermon someone from the congregation came up to me and was furious because, and he said, it was not a whale, it was a fish. This distinction was very important to him. Okay, whether it was a whale or a fish, the point is not the type of sea creature that God sent to deliver Jonah, but rather that God delivered Jonah. But before we get to that story of deliverance, one of our favorites, let's get to one that is a bit less known, the story of the deliverance of Peter from prison. Let's turn to Acts.

We find that Herod is laying violent hands against the church as we read in vs.1 of this chapter. He proceeds to kill some disciples and arrest the leader of the gang, who is Peter, and

holds him in a cell with the next day the intent was to execute him, we read that in vs.6, the first verse that we read. Peter is in prison and is under, very, very tight security. We read in vs.4 that there were four squads of soldiers in place to guard him. We see that in the belly of the prison he is flanked in his sleep on either side with soldiers who are sleeping with him as well as two guarding the door. Peter aint going nowhere.

We see in vs.5 that the disciples realize that the only thing they can do at this moment, the only thing that they can do to contribute to Peter's safety is to pray for him, we read: "the church prayed fervently to God for him." Things start to get weird in vs.7 when an angel of the Lord appears, suddenly. This angel taps Peter on the shoulder, not wanting to wake the guards, teaches Peter how to get dressed, and Peter, still in a stupor and not knowing what was going on, follows the directions of the angel right outside of the jail cell, outside of the city gates, into freedom. He has no idea what is going on, thinking that he was still in a dream. Peter had no hand in his deliverance, it was completely at the initiative and at the hand of God and the messenger, the angel that God sends to deliver him.

As a result of this deliverance Peter is able to continue to press forward with the kingdom goal of preaching the Gospel. God's deliverance of Peter was for the sake of Peter being able to continue to carry out the great commission. It is fascinating how often we create our own visions and think we understand what our dream and our goals ought to be. The disciples found themselves in a similar situation. Look at Acts 1:6 when they thought Jesus was going to finally deliver them for their own goals. "Lord is this the time when you will restore the kingdom to Israel." This was the goal of every Jewish person living in Jerusalem at that time, the kingdom of Israel being restored. But the kingdom goal is not that which we want and that which is temporal and which puts our political party in place or our way of living in place. Deliverance from the Lord is for the sake of the spreading of the Gospel.

We find the same results in the story of Jonah and the whale. We find the story of deliverance for the sake of the preaching of the Gospel, not to maintain a way of life, as Jonah thought it might be. We pick up the story in a bit of an odd place, we find ourselves in the belly of the whale, like Peter was in the belly of the prison when he was delivered. Jonah is asleep because he is tired out from running from God. The ship is about to capsize because of the storm that is raging outside, and Jonah is fast asleep. Jonah tells the sailors to throw him overboard because God is trying to get his attention which is why the storm is raging.

When we pick the story up we find these heathen sailors praying to God to forgive them because they are about to throw Jonah overboard. Like the disciples with Peter, they only thing

they are left with is prayer to God, even though they are heathens simply looking to do the right thing. They throw Jonah overboard, and it works, it actually works, the storm stops raging, and the quiet seas return. Vs.16 tells us that as a result they were even more afraid. It worked, it worked, holy cow, it worked, we are so sorry God for not knowing who you were.

The story shifts away from these sailors and back to Jonah and God, God who sends a fish to swallow Jonah. The story leaves no doubt that this fish, this form of deliverance, unwanted as it may have been, was a result of God's work. Both of these forms of deliverance, an angel who taps Peter on the shoulder, and a whale or a fish who swallows Jonah and then transports him to Nineveh, are impossible modes of deliverance in our eyes. But deliver God does, because that is what God does. That is a part of God's nature. We are promised in Scripture that nothing can separate us from the love of God. Nothing, God will deliver us, and God will choose ways to deliver us that we don't expect or even want.

Let's be reminded of that in Romans 8:35-39.

Every time that we wrestle with God, God will win. Jacob could tell you that, Jonah can tell you that, but after that wrestling match we will be impacted for the rest of our lives, so we might as well give up to God's deliverance early on. Every time that God calls us there will be a time of disruption and adjustments.

During this time of disruption and adjustments people are creating dreams that do not align with the kingdom of God, or at least are prioritizing dreams that do not prioritize the kingdom of God. We think that we are the birthers of movements, or even of churches, we are merely the midwives. Our role is to facilitate the deliverance of God in a way that corresponds to and aligns with the Kingdom dream and not that prioritizes any other dream that we may have.

We find ourselves this Sunday in the midst of a deliverance from God that many do not even realize is happening. We have a hard time focusing on the kingdom dream which draws us away from our emphasis on economic security, personal freedoms and choice, a kingdom dream which puts the emphasis on loving our neighbor and preaching the Gospel. May God bless us and keep us as we are being delivered into a closer walk with Christ who calls us to follow His kingdom dream.