

Be Prayerful

Jonah 2:1-10

As I shared with you last Sunday, Charles Wesley wrote the hymn “And Are We Yet Alive?” Whenever we have an annual conference, we sing this hymn in the opening session. Let’s sing this hymn together. Please turn to page 553 in your hymnal, and let us sing verses 1 & 2. “1. *And are we yet alive, and see each other's face? Glory and thanks to Jesus give for his almighty grace!* 2. *Preserved by power divine to full salvation here, again in Jesus' praise we join, and in his sight appear.*”

As we continue our sermon series, “And Are We Yet Alive?”, we need to reflect on and check in with our prayer life. Does our prayer life reflect the urgent and dire situations of our churches in our denomination or our challenged lives as Christians in the world? Why is prayer so indispensable during this time?

1. Prayer is to Confirm that God is in Control.

Jonah chapter 1 ends with the following words: “*But the Lord provided a large fish to swallow up Jonah, and Jonah was in the belly of the fish three days and three nights.*” (Jonah 1:17 NRSV). Also, the last verse of Jonah chapter 2 has this, “*Then the Lord spoke to the fish, and it vomited Jonah out onto the dry land.*” (Jonah 2:10 NRSV) Each of the stories on the ship and in the belly of the big fish ends with a clear message that God is in control not only of Jonah’s life but also of the grave and desperate situations he was facing. Even the big fish obeyed God’s call and opened its mouth, sheltered Jonah, and finally vomited him onto the dry land. God was in perfect control.

If God is in control of any circumstances, that means we can find God’s grace or God’s loving presence at any time and in any situation. Think about Jonah. He tried hard to run away from God’s call, God’s presence, and his relationship with God. But he wasn’t successful because God was in control. This reminds us of Psalm 139, one of King David’s psalms. “*Where can I go from your spirit? Or where can I flee from your presence? If I ascend to heaven, you are there; if I make my bed in Sheol, you are there. If I take the wings of the morning and settle at the farthest limits of the sea, even there your hand shall lead me, and your right hand shall hold me fast.*” (Psalm 139:7-10 NRSV)

This Psalm is called the crown of all the Psalms or the Psalm of God’s omniscience and omnipresence. We can find two themes here: God’s intimate knowledge of every individual and His constant presence throughout all of creation.

Even though our churches are in very adverse and complex situations, we need to continually confirm and experience in our prayers that God is in control without question.

2. Prayer is to express our love for God and our neighbor.

How can we understand our spiritual state? How can we know about our church's spiritual health? One way we can measure the spiritual state of individuals or even the church is prayer life.

When Jonah received his call to go to Nineveh, he was not willing to obey and had strong reservations in his heart. But he didn't pray. He just ran away from God. When the ship was tossing and turning, making the people on board panic, he didn't pray to God. He just wanted to give up his life. Even though he knew that God could answer his prayer, he chose not to pray.

In John Wesley's notes on 1 Thessalonians 5:17, "**Pray without ceasing,**" (1 Thess 5:17 NRSV), he said, "**Prayer may be said to be *the breath of our spiritual life*. He that lives cannot possibly cease breathing. So much *as we really enjoy of the presence of God*, so much prayer and praise do we offer up without ceasing; else our rejoicing is but delusion.**" (NT Notes, 1 Thes. 5:17).

Then how can we pray without ceasing? Let me quote John Wesley from his book, ***A Plain Account of Christian Perfection***. "**Whether we think of, or speak to, God, whether we act or suffer for him, all is prayer, when we have no other object than his love, and the desire of pleasing him ... In souls filled with love, the desire to please God is a continual prayer.**" (John Wesley, *A Plain Account of Christian Perfection*). John Wesley's answer is very simple: The loving attitude of our heart toward God and others can fulfill this command. This means if we do not lose our loving heart toward God and others, we don't have to worry about the command, "**Pray without ceasing.**" Our prayer is a clear expression of our love for God and others.

3. Prayer is to transform our thoughts and align with God's plan.

God filled Jonah's heart with underserved grace. Jonah couldn't help but pray to God with immense gratitude.

"Then I said, 'I am driven away from your sight; how shall I look again upon your holy temple?' The waters closed in over me; the deep surrounded me; weeds were wrapped around my head at the roots of the mountains. I went down to the land whose bars closed upon me forever; yet you brought up my life from the Pit, O Lord my God ... Those who worship vain idols forsake their true loyalty. "

(Jonah 2:4-6 & 8 NRSV)

Our call from God is to ultimately reveal God's saving grace. Jonah intentionally disobeyed God's call. He didn't want to reveal God's saving grace to Israel's enemy, Assyria. Jonah's disobedience meant his death. He seemed to know about his destiny as a disobedient runaway sinner. However, God saved him. God revealed to Jonah his special grace of salvation. Why?

By letting Jonah experience God's saving grace, God wanted Jonah to understand God's loving and saving heart for the people in Nineveh. God wanted Jonah to be his mouthpiece to proclaim God's saving grace to them.

We can find today's story in the Gospels of Matthew and Luke when some of the scribes and Pharisees asked Jesus to show them a sign. Jesus replied, "**An evil and adulterous generation asks for a sign, but no sign will be given to it except the sign of the prophet Jonah. For just as Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of the sea monster, so for three days and three nights the Son of Man will be in the heart of the earth.**" (Matthew 12:39-40 NRSV) Jonah's story is a sign that demonstrates God's resurrection power or God's power of salvation in and through Jesus Christ. Through Jonah's prayer, God wanted to prepare Jonah to be transformed with God's saving grace and mercy. Prayer is the very first means of grace for our transformation to love God and our neighbors more.

4. Prayer is to plant a seed for revival.

Before a revival, there are always humble hearts of prayer, both individually and collectively. Prayer is also essential to sustain a revival. This means God prepares His people with prayers before He pours down His blessings from heaven. To bring revival to Nineveh, God guided Jonah to pray. It was God's plan to prepare Jonah's heart for the revival of Nineveh. That's why Jonah's prayer concludes with this: "**Salvation comes from the Lord.**" (Jonah 2:9b NIV). We can find the same proclamation in Revelation 7:10, where people from all nations, tribes, and languages get together in God's Kingdom and praise, "**Salvation belongs to our God, who sits on the throne and to the Lamb.**" (Revelation 7:10).

[In Wales, England](#), God's special anointing of revival broke out several times - 1739, 1762, 1791, 1817, 1840, and 1849. A lot of people repented their sins and made resolutions to live a new life in Christ during those revivals. People in Wales longed for another revival. So, people prayed for revival in their family worship or church worship, using the Scripture from Psalm 85:6, "**Will you not revive us again, so that your people may rejoice in you?**" Finally, God allowed them to have another awakening time in 1859 and also in 1904 and 1905.

As you may know, there was God's special encounter at [Asbury University](#) on February 8, 2023, lasting for 16 days. Those who longed for God's special

anointing from other colleges and universities participated in the revival, repenting their sins and recommitting their lives to Jesus Christ.

Somi and I went to Asbury last year after the revival to help Abe move in. We participated in the Wednesday chapel and could see the college students' longing for God's presence. They tried to figure out why the revival came to the Asbury campus and their lives. I felt two things during my stay at Asbury. First, God is not done yet with our denomination. Second, I have to pray for revival for our churches in the United States and especially for the next generation.

I'd like to invite you to join our hearts in prayer to God for the revival of our lives, for all churches—not only in our denomination but also across our nation—and for the next generation as well.