



Pressures & Privileges, Politics & Prayer

Jonah 2:1-2

TO: NEBRASKA STATE SENATORS

FROM: REV. PERRY M. GAUTHIER

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Sixty four years ago, President Harry S. Truman addressed Congress with a sobered soul. He was thrust into the presidency after the death of President Franklin Delano Roosevelt. It was fitting for the new leader of the free world to address the King of the universe in prayer. He knew his needs were great and the pressures were heavy. But he believed the Lord's help was available. Addressing Congress, April 16, 1945, Truman said:

*"At this moment, I have in my heart a prayer. As I have assumed my heavy duties, I humbly pray, Almighty God, in the words of King Solomon: 'Give therefore thy servant an understanding heart to judge thy people, that I may discern between good and bad, for who is able to judge this thy so great a people?' I ask only to be a good and faithful servant of my Lord and my people."*¹

2,786 years ago, the Galilean prophet Jonah had a sobered soul as well. He had found himself thrust by the Lord into a sea of chastisement. He was sinking deep in punishment because he had chosen to run from the Lord. But then Jonah realized he had been swallowed alive by a swimming savior in the sea.

I. THE PRESSURES OF PRAYER

Jonah 2:1-2 Then Jonah prayed to the LORD his God from the stomach of the fish, and he said, "I called out of my distress to the LORD, And He answered me. I cried for help from the depth of Sheol; You heard my voice."²

In verses one and two we see the pressures and privileges of prayer. Presidents pray. Prophets pray. Biblically, though, we most often see prophets praying for God's people about their waywardness and sins before the Lord. Jonah is a rare exception to this pattern since he is praying about his own waywardness from the Lord.

Jonah realizes that the pressures causing his prayers are caused by his own sins. Our prodigal prophet is praying due to the pressures of personal problems. These problems are indeed his fault.

We can take comfort from this passage to know that we never sink so low in

sin, even stubbornly willful sin, that we are beyond the listening ear of God.

At the 2010 Nebraska Leadership Prayer Breakfast last week, at the Cornhusker Hotel, Senators Hansen and Carlson led the assembly in prayer. Senator Avery did the New Testament reading from the following passage:

1 Thessalonians 5:19-22 Do not quench the Spirit; do not despise prophetic utterances. But examine everything carefully; hold fast to that which is good; abstain from every form of evil.

I find it interesting that Jonah, God's own prophet, has violated every phrase in this Scripture. He quenched the Spirit--not obeying the call to preach to Nineveh. Jonah despised the prophetic utterance that God had spoken directly to him (as a prophet of Jehovah) about His will. He didn't examine anything carefully and prayerfully and slowly--he got up and he ran! He did not hold fast to God's good word and God's good will for his life. Also, he did not abstain from the evil of prodigally and pridefully running from God.

The result was chastisement. Pressure. Pressures pushed on the prophet to produce prayers. That's a good thing. Prayer is always a good thing, even prayers produced by the pressures of punishment. If you are a child of God, you know the loving chastising hand of God. The New Testament book of Hebrews says that if you do not know the Lord's chastisement, you are not a true child of His.

BUT IF YOU ARE WITHOUT DISCIPLINE, OF WHICH ALL HAVE BECOME PARTAKERS, THEN YOU ARE ILLEGITIMATE CHILDREN AND NOT SONS. FURTHERMORE, WE HAD EARTHLY FATHERS TO DISCIPLINE US, AND WE RESPECTED THEM; SHALL WE NOT MUCH RATHER BE SUBJECT TO THE FATHER OF SPIRITS, AND LIVE? HEBREWS 12:8-9

Note Jonah's expressions of this pressure in verses 1 and 2. "Then Jonah prayed...from the **stomach** of the fish...'I called out of my **distress**...I **cried** for **help** from the **depth** of Sheol...'" He felt the emotional pressures of the mucous and the stinking slime of the insides of the sea monster. He had been in a panic, under major stress, even afraid of death in a watery grave.

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Sheol³ in the Old Testament is “the abode of the dead.” Jonah was crying out in fear, desperate for help. He was crying for his very life.

Like all earthly fathers, I’ve had the challenging privilege of disciplining my sons as mentioned in Hebrews 11. As such, I’ve also seen the resulting peace that the Bible says will follow fatherly discipline, if such discipline is properly received. Whenever one of my sons has turned back to me after such discipline, it has always brought great joy to my fatherly heart.

Be encouraged that as the sons and daughters of the Lord, we have the same privilege. Because His discipline is always motivated by love, we can always turn back to Him, asking for a restored relationship. Like the prodigal son of Luke 15, we will always be welcomed back home to the Lord’s way and the Lord’s will. But first we must “come to our senses” like he did (Lk.15¹⁷).

Remember that pressures on a prodigal (whether a prodigal son or a prodigal prophet) are designed to produce penitent prayers that will restore a right relationship with God.

II. THE PRIVILEGES OF PRAYER

Note also Jonah’s expressions of the privileges of prayer in verses 1 and 2.

Jonah 2:2 *[The LORD] answered me... [He] heard my voice.*

One of the amazing things about the Lord is His amazing grace. It’s never too late to turn back to Him. Jonah’s privileges were supreme and his stubbornness is world famous, and yet the Lord graciously answered him in his stress and distress. Remember that many of the stories of sinning saints in the Old Testament were written “for our instruction.”⁴

I was inspired this week in my Scripture reading to see that even Jesus Himself was thankful for answers to His own prayers. At Lazarus’ tomb, Christ had asked the Father for power to raise Lazarus from the dead that the Father might be glorified.

SO THEY REMOVED THE STONE. THEN JESUS RAISED HIS EYES, AND SAID, "FATHER, I THANK YOU THAT YOU HAVE HEARD ME"—JOHN 11⁴¹

If Christ Jesus was thankful for answered prayer, how much more ought we to be? Are you thankful for the privilege of answered prayers? When God “heard” Christ and “heard” Jonah it means that He actively and caringly considered the information in the requests. Then He chose to move the

muscles of His omnipotence on their behalf. Like Christ and Jonah, we should be thankful for answered prayer. But we can also be confident that God will answer our prayers. Perhaps my favorite verses in the whole New Testament regarding answered prayers are found in 1 John 5.

1 John 5:14-15 *This is the confidence which we have before Him, that, if we ask anything according to His will, He hears us. And if we know that He hears us in whatever we ask, we know that we have the requests which we have asked from Him.*

III. PRAYING PRESIDENTS, PRAYING POLITICAL LEADERS

Vice President Truman knew the pressures of political life. He had no desire to be the President of the United States. Yet Providence would prove that his calling was to serve our country in just such a role.

Perhaps you find yourself, like the old gospel song says “standing in the need of prayer.” Be encouraged that the Lord is gracious; and He is not far from any one of us. He’s not begrudging to answer our prayers, even if we have to begin them with confessions of sin and pleas for mercy.

PRAYER IS THE SLENDER NERVE THAT MOVES THE MUSCLES OF OMNIPOTENCE

God hears and answers prayer. As you’ve heard me say before, God loves leaders; and He also has a special place in His heart for political leaders. Be encouraged that the privileges of your political position put you in a good place. God will hear you in the pressures you face in your lives this week with family, work and politics. You only need to humbly cry out to Him like President Truman said, as “a good and faithful servant of my Lord and my people.” May the **pressures** of politics push you to the **privileges** of prayer!

¹ The Faith of the Presidents, Ron DiGianni, ©2004 Charisma House, page 143.

² All Scripture quotations are taken from the New American Standard Version 1995 Update unless otherwise noted.

³ Sheol is simply our English transliteration of the Hebrew word (here Hebrew, left to right, שְׁאוֹל—Sheol (grave, underworld, abode of the dead)).

⁴ 1 Corinthians 10:6 & 11—“Now these things happened as examples for us, so that we would not crave evil things as they also craved...Now these things happened to them as an example, and they were written for our instruction, upon whom the ends of the ages have come.”