

Jonah: Chapter 2

Summertime Monday Night Bible Study (RAW)

Introduction:

Welcome back to our Monday Night Bible Study – many thanks, as always, for your faithfulness to learning and studying the Word of God, and for applying it to your lives! Let’s take a quick look back at our final verse from last week: “The LORD appointed a great fish to swallow Jonah, and Jonah was in the belly of the fish three days and three nights.”

So, I love survivor stories, books, and movies. I don’t know how many times I have seen the fictional volcano movie, *Dante’s Peak*, but it’s a bunch!

My all-time favorite survivor story is the book, *Alive*, by Piers Paul Read, which tells the story of a rugby team whose airplane crashed into the Andes Mountains in 1972. The survivors subsisted on the flesh of those who died in the crash and in a subsequent avalanche. Their Catholic faith ultimately helped them make the decision to survive in this manner because of their beliefs regarding transubstantiation during Mass. In any case, only sixteen of the men survived.

Many times in survivor stories, the survivors must accomplish extraordinary endeavors and this was no exception: two of the team hiked forty miles across incredibly high mountains over a ten-day period to find help, an amazing accomplishment which has caused even experienced, modern climbers to be in awe.

In Jonah's case, his extraordinary accomplishment was significantly different than the average survivor: he had to completely *surrender* to His God and then *wait* on an answer.

Last week we talked about four major themes in the short but powerful Book of Jonah: 1) God's love for the Gentiles; 2) God's grace; 3) God's sovereignty over His Creation; 4) God's calls on our lives. And believe it or not, we covered all four themes in the very first chapter.

God loved the Gentiles of Ninevah enough to call Jonah to go to them and preach repentance because of their great evil and their need for Him; Jonah ran from the call of God while trying to run from God's very presence by hopping on a boat eventually bound for Tarshish; the LORD used His creation – a stormy sea – to cause the Gentiles on the boat with Jonah to repent and to call on *His* Name instead of their baseless idols; and Jonah was later tossed by the sailors into the waters only to be saved by a large fish that the LORD sent Jonah's way.

We also talked about the parallel of Jonah's account to that of Jesus, who was in the grave for three days (in both cases, a *part* of a day counted as a whole day in these times).

Tonight, we will study Jonah's prayer to God while he was inside the fish and the LORD's initial response to that prayer. The amazing truths of Chapter Two will help us all!

Let's pray and dive right in!

Jonah 2:1

Jonah prayed to the LORD his God – *finally*.

- Isn't it amazing how many times in our lives that we wait to the last possible moment of our distress, our depravity, or our very

lives before we call out the only One who can help us? Instead of turning to God, we turn to our family, our friends, and even the Church before we finally – finally – turn to God who awaits our prayers and our hearts.

- How about you, tonight. What is your “belly” of distrust? What are you trying to hide from God? How far have you run from God in a particular situation or call that He has placed on your life?
- When we realize just how much like Jonah we are, it is a reminder to us about the constant need for prayer in our own lives – and for utter and complete surrender to our God.
- When Jonah finally prayed, he prayed to “the LORD his God.” He did not turn to an idol, he did not give up and continue his previous desire to simply die, and he did not forget the God he served. Instead, he simply prayed to the LORD who knew him.

Jonah 2:2

Jonah cried out to the LORD in his distress. There was no posturing – no pretense. He was in distress, and this was how he called out to The Father. Many other biblical characters have cried out to God in their own distress too, and they remain an example to us:

- Jesus, in the Garden, said, “Father, if you are willing, take this cup away from me – nevertheless, not my will, but yours, be done” (Luke 22:42).
- David, after realizing his great sin with Bathsheba, repented and said, “Be gracious to me, God, according to your faithful love; according to your abundant compassion, blot out my rebellion. Completely wash away my guilt and cleanse me from my sin. For I

am conscious of my rebellion, and my sin is always before me” (Psalm 51:1-3).

- And Elijah, the great prophet, prayed, “...I have had enough! LORD, take my life, for I am no better than my ancestors” (1 Kings 19:4b).
- These were desperate people, including our Lord Jesus Christ, who cried out to God in desperate times.
- We *should* cry out to God in our distress. Now, we shouldn’t cry out to God *only* when we are in distress, but we should absolutely call out even if it has been a while since we have sincerely prayed to our Lord.

And notice what Jonah said, “I cried out for help from deep inside Sheol.”

- Sheol “refers to the grave, the netherworld, or the place of the departed dead in general.” It is mentioned sixty-five times in the Old Testament. This is a theologically difficult topic, and W.A. Van Gemeren notes six understandings of Sheol:
 - 1) It is a place from which no one can save himself.
 - 2) It is a place all people go to at death.
 - 3) It is a place the wicked go at death.
 - 4) It is a place from which the righteous are saved.
 - 5) It is a place over which God has absolute sovereignty.
 - 6) It is a metaphor for various sins.
- Contrary to what some skeptical scholars believe, the Old Testament believers or righteous held a strong belief that there was life following the physical realm. Sheol was used interchangeably to describe that belief.
- Here in the Book of Jonah, the primary character seems to be referring to the first meaning, in which Jonah was noting that he

was in a position in which only God could save him. This is the *exact* position any person must also be in to come to Christ – complete realization that only God, through His Son Jesus Christ, can save us (Ephesians 2:8-10).

- Some theologians posit that Jonah was actually dead at some point. Although it certainly would augment the already apparent imagery of Christ in the grave for three days, I cannot find evidence that Jonah actually died and was resurrected. In any case, his survival was an obvious miracle of God and yet another example of God’s preeminence over His own created beings.

At the end of Verse Two, we hear such reassuring words from Jonah: “...you heard my voice.”

- Saints, we too have the assurance that as we pray, God *hears* us.
- We see this even in Revelation: “Another angel, with a golden incense burner, came and stood at the altar. He was given a large amount of incense to offer with the prayers of all the saints on the golden altar in front of the throne. The smoke of the incense, with the prayers of the saints, went up in the presence of God from the angel’s hand” (Revelation 8:3-4). Our prayers, with “certainty,” are received personally by God – even a small prayer is received in power and in worship by the God we serve, and even when we do not know what to pray, the Spirit prays – He “*intercedes*” – in our behalf, my friends (see Romans 8:26). The great Charles Finney once said about prayer that one must pray *in faith* if one expects to receive an answer.
- Tonight, you should have received a handout regarding prayerful spiritual practices which was shared with us by my friend and mentor, Dr. Christine Corbett, when she came to Rocky Mount

Church a while back to help our staff and councils. I pray that you will enjoy it as well.

So, Jonah prayed from the belly of the fish. He may or may not have prayed with a great attitude, but he still prayed. As Warren Wiersbe said, "...better that he should pray compelled by any motive than not to pray at all." And God answered Jonah's desperate prayer.

Jonah 2:3-5

Notice here who Jonah said had hurled him into the sea. It was not the men whose actual hands had done so; instead, it was the LORD. Jonah *knew* that God's hand was in his being thrown into the depths of the sea. And within the fish – *the means by which God saved Jonah* – Jonah began his acknowledgement of his circumstances.

- Let me ask you this question: What if Jonah had made it to Tarshish, his preferred destination? Do you think he would have ever left there to go to the Ninevites? I tend to doubt it: the Jews viewed Tarshish, or modern-day southwestern Spain, as a place of luxury due to its exorbitant mineral deposits and subsequent rich culture. God told Jonah to go tell the Ninevite people about Him, and Jonah, instead, attempted to go on vacation. I get it – Becky and I joke all the time that we wish that God would call us to the Florida Keys...Snorkeling for Jesus. 😊
- The truth is, like Jonah, most of us learn the hard way. We often learn the most when the circumstances are not what we personally desire.

Here in verses three through five, we find Jonah realizing that the sea he was in was the result of his own works of disobedience. The "seas" of this time period also represented chaos, e.g., even the antichrist is described in Revelation (13:1) as coming out of the sea. Jonah *knows*

that he is being disciplined, and he looks “once more toward [God’s] holy temple.”

- Jonah was lost in despair and felt much of the same fear that the men of the boat had felt prior to them tossing him overboard with one obvious exception – Jonah had long been serving the one and only true God.
- Wiersbe rightly notes that this preacher of God is being reminded of what hopelessness feels like, much as we should remember when we consider the hopeless state of the lost. Perhaps, too, God was also reminding Jonah of the helpless and hopeless state of the Ninevites; that, without God, they truly had no hope.
- Although I am not sure that Jonah ever truly felt love for the Ninevites, he did seem to accept the LORD’s discipline. And that is a key component for our own lives. Hebrews 12:5-11 indicates that there are many ways we can respond when we receive discipline from our LORD:
 - 1) We can be angry.
 - 2) We can get discouraged and give up.
 - 3) We can actively resist and incur even more discipline.
 - 4) We can surrender, submit, and learn.

Fortunately for Jonah, and for *us*, we can remember that the LORD disciplines those He loves. 1 Peter 4:17-19 is written for us, Christians! “For time has come for judgment to begin with God’s household, and if it begins with us, what will be the outcome for those who disobey the gospel of God? And if a righteous person is saved with difficulty, what will become of the ungodly and the sinner? So then, let those who suffer according to God’s will entrust themselves to a faithful Creator while doing what is good.”

We may not love being disciplined, saints, but we should remember – as Jonah did – that our eyes should look towards the very One who sometimes disciplines us for our own good and for His call.

Jonah 2:6-7

Jonah notes here, in his despair, that he initially thought it was over for him – but – *then* he remembered the God that he served. He seemed to remember God’s covenantal promises and He looked towards God’s Holy Temple. He learned, again, that one *cannot* run from God’s presence.

We see in Verse Seven that Jonah has finally had a change of heart, at least from the perspective that he remembered God and desired to look towards him. Like us, Jonah responded to hardship rather than affluence.

- We see this in churches too. Sometimes affluent churches struggle the most to see mighty moves of God because some of the people depend more on riches, or on busy schedules filled with all sorts of things, rather than depending on God. Jesus said to such churches (Revelation 3:17): “For you say, ‘I’m rich; I have become wealthy and need nothing,’ and you don’t realize that you are wretched, pitiful, poor, blind, and naked.” Francis Chan similarly notes, “We live in a time when people go to a building on Sunday morning, attend an hour-long service, and call themselves members of the Church.” Jesus’s statement to the Church of Laodicea, which wealthy churches often emulate, was crystal clear: we must return to Him, and I believe this means that we return to Him in covenant, in worship, in service, and in heart.
- Here in Verse Seven, Jonah’s words also seem reminiscent of the thanksgiving Psalms of David. For example, “I called to the LORD in my distress; I called to my God. From his temple he heard my

voice, and my cry for help reached his ears” (1 Samuel 22:7; see also Psalm 18).

- Jonah cried to the LORD as David cried to the LORD. And the LORD also personally quoted the Psalms from the Cross in his distress: “My God, my God, why have you abandoned me?” (22:1) and “Into your hand I entrust my spirit, you have redeemed me, LORD God of truth” (Psalm 31:5). If Jonah and David and even Jesus entrusted their very beings to God during times of anguish and desperation, perhaps so should we, my friends.

Jonah 2:8-9

Here in Verse Eight, Jonah mocks those who follow “worthless idols.” One pastor said in his podcast that Jonah is “throwing shade” at people who follow idols rather than God. Think about this for a moment – the wayward, disobedient prophet *inside a big fish* is *smack-talking* someone else! That being said, and while Jonah’s thoughts about *himself* may have been a bit haughty, his words are *absolute truth*: those who love worthless idols are abandoning their hope for mercy; they are abandoning their hope for *salvation*. Perhaps in Jonah’s mind he was pondering the idol-worshiping Ninevites. In any case – the words ring true – only God can save us. And yet Jonah did not want this salvation for the Ninevites (we can talk about that in a few weeks).

However, here in Verse Nine, we finally get to see a thankful Jonah, one who is not quite so reticent to proclaim and acknowledge the God he served. Jonah certainly still did not think much of the idol-worshippers, which is ironic since he had made the Kingdom of Israel his own idol, whether he would admit it or not.

He did finally turn to his God, and he offered a sacrifice of praise. He is *vowing* to the LORD, too, a commitment to thanksgiving.

- Sometimes, this is how it is with us. We may be hurt because we do not understand the injustice we see or the pain that others cause or even the idolatry of those around us, and in those times, we must offer *sacrificial* praise and thanksgiving to God. We might say, “Lord, I don’t understand this, but I trust You, and You are deserving of my thanksgiving and of my praise.” Such vows are a vote of confidence in the One we can trust, as Israel vowed when taking on combat with the Canaanite king (Numbers 21:2), or like Hannah when she vowed to offer her firstborn son in service to God and His Temple if God would allow her to conceive (1 Samuel 1:11). These were desperate vows for desperate times! Jonah’s was no different: he was vowing thanksgiving and praise to the God – the only *true* God – who could save him.

Jonah 2:10

What an amazing command of the LORD – he caused a fish to throw up.

- Some scholars read into this act a sort of revulsion from God because of Jonah’s lousy attitude. Perhaps this is similar to Jesus’s thoughts of bearing *our* sin as He sweated blood through His own skin – he became sin for us – and He alone bore our disgusting thoughts, behaviors, sins, and evil (see 2 Corinthians 5:21; Isaiah 53:4-6).
- As we think about Jonah’s plight, we should remember that Jesus said the “sign of Jonah” was that He would be in the earth for three days and nights...but what a difference between the two! Jonah was the *reluctant* prophet who was tossed into the sea and then vomited out upon his return. Jesus was (is) the willing Servant-King who was victoriously and gloriously raised by God and was commemorated by angels, in addition to the women at the tomb,

the two on the road to Emmaus, the apostles, and then the five hundred. What a contrast – one covered with vomit, the Other covered in glory.

- Ah, but what similarities too – they both preached repentance, they both preached salvation, and they both went to people who were not deserving of the Lord’s grace. You know – like us.
- Finally, we also see that God also used His designated and sovereign instruments of salvation in both cases: the fish for Jonah and the Cross of Christ.

Application

There are many times I have heard quips like, “Que Sera, Sera,” or “It is what it is,” or other such similar statements. None of these are based on a Christian worldview: they are too akin to “fate.”

God is *sovereign* and what He required of Jonah was for him to “Get up!” and “Go.” Did Jonah have a choice? There is some theological debate surrounding this question, but I would say, “Yes, he did.” I fully believe Jonah could have chosen to simply give up and die in that big fish which was designated for his salvation.

You know, there is an extraordinary difference in “giving up” and “giving it up;” the former phrase meaning that ultimately, someone does not trust God and just gives up on everything, and the other phrase meaning that someone is “giving it up” *to* God and trusting Him and His Word. Jonah chose to give it up to God.

- When you think of your current or past difficult circumstances in life, which phrase would you say described or describes you? For

Jonah, he finally gave it up *to* God and trusted Him for salvation. And God answered his prayer.

- For us, our means of salvation is not a big fish. It is a Cross. And once we trust the salvation God offers, just like Jonah, He sends us straight to the call He has for us: “...Listen to what I’m telling you: Open your eyes and look at the fields, for they are ready for the harvest” (John 4:35b).

Jonah Chapter 2 Sources

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