

Jonah 1:17-2:10 ESV (Pg. 451) And the Lord appointed a great fish to swallow up Jonah. And Jonah was in the belly of the fish three days and three nights. **2:1** Then Jonah prayed to the Lord his God from the belly of the fish, **2** saying, “I called out to the Lord, out of my distress, and he answered me; out of the belly of Sheol I cried, and you heard my voice. **3** For you cast me into the deep, into the heart of the seas, and the flood surrounded me; all your waves and your billows passed over me. **4** Then I said, ‘I am driven away from your sight; yet I shall again look upon your holy temple.’ **5** The waters closed in over me to take my life; the deep surrounded me; weeds were wrapped about my head **6** 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. **7** When my life was fainting away, I remembered the Lord, and my prayer came to you, into your holy temple. **8** Those who pay regard to vain idols forsake their hope of steadfast love. **9** But I with the voice of thanksgiving will sacrifice to you; what I have vowed I will pay. Salvation belongs to the Lord!” **10** And the Lord spoke to the fish, and it vomited Jonah out upon the dry land.

- I. Last week we saw how Jonah had been commanded by God to go to Nineveh, the capital of Assyria, and “call out against it”, because of the great sinfulness there. He was to publicly declare God’s wrath to the Ninevites. Soon his holy judgement would be poured out against the city.
 - A. But Instead of obeying, Jonah ran as far in the opposite direction as he could, taking a boat towards Tarshish, to “flee from the presence of God”, not just shirking his duty, but his God. But God wouldn’t abandon his purposes, so the Bible says he hurled a “great wind” at the prophet, resulting in a “mighty tempest” at sea. God meant business, but was offering him a chance to repent.
 - B. Furthermore, Jonah’s stubbornness affected other people. The pagan sailors on the boat rowed hard against the waves to no avail, and eventually found themselves crying out to any god they could think of to calm the storm.
 1. When that didn’t work, they went looking for their passenger, who was sleeping; unconcerned that other lives were in jeopardy. The Captain woke him and demanded he call out his God as well.
 2. The sailors cast lots in order to find out who had caused all this trouble. The lot fell to Jonah, who told them who he was, and what he’d done.
 - a) They asked what they should do to him to make the storm stop; but instead of repenting of his disobedience and heading for Nineveh. He told them to throw him overboard in order to appease God’s wrath.
 - b) Jonah chose to die rather than submit. **Ezekiel 33:11b ESV turn back, turn back from your evil ways, for why will you die, O house of Israel?**
 - C. At first the sailors resisted, and they tried to row harder against the storm, but eventually, they relented, repented of what they were about to do, and tossed Jonah out of the boat. Immediately the storm ceased. The sailors, amazed by God’s power over creation and human affairs, abandoned their idols and offered sacrifices and made vows to the true God, who had spared their lives in an act of unmerited mercy.
- II. This is where we picked the story up this morning. **“And the Lord appointed a great fish to swallow up Jonah. And Jonah was in the belly of the fish three days and**

three nights.” The word “appointed” indicates that Jonah wasn’t just in the “right place at the right time”, but that God was fully in control of his circumstances.

- A. God (the King) had prepared a fish to ensure the out working of his plans. Jonah thought he could circumvent God’s decree for his life by having the sailors toss him overboard, but God cannot be so easily avoided or ignored.
 - 1. Though we don’t know of a fish big enough, or with stomach acids mild enough for a man to survive in it 3 days, God provided one. God shows absolute control over every situation and outcome, even when we act contrary to what he’s commanded.
 - 2. **Psalms 51:4 ESV** Against you, you only, have I sinned and done what is evil in your sight, **so that** you may be justified in your words and blameless in your judgment. “So that”. Even our sin works to prove the majesty of God by showing the wide margin between his holiness and our fallenness, spotlighting the consistent rightness of his judgements.
- B. But God didn’t send a fish to destroy or merely judge his prophet, but to save him. He had thumbed his nose in the face of God, and yet God rescues him from an impossible situation through a miracle.
 - a) Once again, Jonah is a mirror! We are all Jonah. Through impurity, self will, deceit, greed, impatience, hatred, and unforgiveness, we’ve thumbed our nose at God. But because of mercy, he provided a rescue for us by the most illogical means - the death of his Son on the cross.
 - b) Jonah could never have imagined his rescue would come from the briny deep. The Jews of Jesus’ time never imagined that God himself would become man, bear the sins of humanity on the cross, and reconcile God and humanity for all time.
- C. **“Then Jonah prayed to the Lord his God from the belly of the fish”**. He wasn’t praying on the boat. He was so bitter with God that he preferred self-annihilation to heavenly communication. So God put him in a place where he had little else to do than to talk to the God who had mercifully saved him.
 - 1. I’ve lost count of the times where God has placed me in circumstances too big for me, or moved me out of a place of comfortable disobedience, by placing me in the belly of a theoretical fish where I finally called out to him.
 - a) You know the times I’m talking about. When the diagnosis comes; when the job goes away; when the kids venture into self-destruction; when you are abandoned or betrayed by someone you love.
 - b) In those places you’re more ready to pray; ready to rediscover the infinite mercy of a God who loves you, yet a God you have neglected, ignored, even rebelled against. It is his love, not judgement that got you there.
 - 2. Some of you may be in the belly of a great fish right now, and instead of calling out to God, you’re angry with him, cursing him. But remember: **Psalms 86:5 ESV** For you, O Lord, are good and forgiving, abounding in steadfast love to all who call upon you. Jonah discovered this in the Great Fish.
- D. **“I called out to the Lord, out of my distress, and he answered me; out of the belly of Sheol I cried, and you heard my voice. For you cast me into the deep,**

into the heart of the seas, and the flood surrounded me; all your waves and your billows passed over me.” Notice several things about Jonah’s prayer.

1. First, he says he called to the Lord and was answered. When did he call to the Lord? Not on the ship! Not before he went to sea! It was only in the belly of the fish that he turned to God, and realized God had saved him in mercy.
 2. Next, he says he called to God “out of the belly of Sheol”. Sheol is the Hebrew name for the place of the dead. It is often confused with hell (the place of judgement), but that doesn’t really capture the meaning of the word.
 - a) Sheol was the grave, the place where life and hope come to an end, and the place from which people do not routinely come back.
 - b) Jonah realizes that without God’s intervention, the belly of that fish would have been his tomb. But mercy changed everything!
 3. Lastly, he does not credit his estate to an impersonal storm, to sailors out of options, or to his own defiance. He says to God, “*You* cast me into the deep”, and “*your* waves and billows passed over me”. Only in the belly of the great fish could Jonah see God’s overriding, sovereign hand.
- E. “Then I said, ‘I am driven away from your sight; yet I shall again look upon your holy temple.’” Jonah thought that the sea would be the end of him. As he sunk beneath the waves and into the mouth of the fish, surely he thought he was a goner! But in this forlorn place, contemplating the mercy of God, hope is reborn.
1. He describes his plight poetically. “The waters closed in over me to take my life; the deep surrounded me; weeds were wrapped about 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.”
 - a) Have you ever felt closed in on? Surrounded? Choked out by life as you came face to face with rock bottom? Jonah again emphasizes the finality of his predicament by saying “the bars closed upon me forever”. Have you ever felt this way? Can you say that you feel this way this morning?
 - b) Jonah remembers that when all seems lost, it’s not over until God rings the bell! “You brought up my life from the pit. O Lord my God.”
 2. Jonah tells us what made the difference. “When my life was fainting away, I remembered the Lord, and my prayer came to you, into your holy temple.”
 - a) If you find yourself in this kind of distress today, remember the Lord; how you found him to be altogether lovely, more precious than gold, and a God whose steadfast love endures forever. He hasn’t changed.
 - b) We remember the Lord by crying out to him in prayer. It’s not enough to believe in him religiously; we must involve him in trusting relationship.
- III. “Those who pay regard to vain idols forsake their hope of steadfast love. But I with the voice of thanksgiving will sacrifice to you; what I have vowed I will pay.” On the boat, the sailors cast away their idols in the display of God’s sovereign power. But Jonah clung to the most insidious idol of all - his own will.
- A. Now he says this is the way to lose out on the benefits of God’s steadfast love. God will not be an afterthought, and he will not play 2nd fiddle. You can have only him and all of him, or you can have your idols. You can never have both.

1. **Jonah 2:9 NIV (84)** “Those who cling to worthless idols forfeit the grace that could be theirs.” To be a true recipient of grace requires that we abandon all other hopes and schemes and throw ourselves daily and completely on God.
 2. Now Jonah (the prophet of God) shows as much contrition as the newly converted sailors on the boat. Now, he says, I will praise, I will sacrifice, I will vow. The veteran shows as much devotion as the newly minted believers.
- B. The final thought of his prayer is one that should be learned early on, not only by Jonah, but by us. **“Salvation belongs to the Lord!”** Good works can’t get you there. Big donations can’t get you there. Fame, success, health and beauty can’t get you there. Reliance on those things is a one-way ticket to the belly of a fish for a child of God! Only daily dependence on God makes any difference.
1. Salvation is ordained by God, initiated by God, sealed by God, and completed by God. Jonathan Edwards famously said, **“You contribute nothing to your salvation except the sin that made it necessary.”**
 2. Salvation belongs to the Lord - and the Lord alone. No one is saved until they have abandoned themselves and trusted him alone to do the work.
- IV. Why is this story so important to us as Christians. Jonah is by no means a role model (stay tuned!), so what can we possibly gain from this book? Is it just a “cautionary tale” about obedience to God? Would it surprise you to know that it constitutes one of the most important signs of the Messiah’s work and victory?
- A. I said earlier that the 1st Century Jews totally missed what Jesus had come to do. Those against him thought he was a blasphemer and an impostor. Those for him thought he would use his incredible power to overthrow Rome.
1. Both were wrong. Once he was accosted by the Pharisees. They wanted proof of his importance. So they demanded to see a sign from him.
 2. **Matthew 12:39 ESV** But he answered them, “An evil and adulterous generation seeks for a sign, but no sign will be given to it except the sign of the prophet Jonah. **40** For just as Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of the great fish, so will the Son of Man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth. **41** The men of Nineveh will rise up at the judgment with this generation and condemn it, for they repented at the preaching of Jonah, and behold, something greater than Jonah is here.
- B. The great sign of Jesus power wouldn’t be simply healing the blind and lame, turning water into wine, or calming the seas (impressive as those were!). The great sign would be rising from the dead, defeating death for all who believe.
1. Wicked gentiles repented when the hateful prophet Jonah spoke to them. The Jewish leaders surrounding Jesus did not. They would be condemned.
 2. Salvation would not come through their Law, or through a militaristic Messiah. Salvation belongs to the Lord. No one would stop God’s plan.
- C. Look at the parallels from our Jonah’s prayer and Jesus’ life with me:
1. Jonah was cast into the deep, and saved the unworthy. Jesus was cast onto the cross and saved all who would trust in him, unworthy as they were.
 2. Jonah was figuratively cast into Sheol. Jesus was literally cast into the grave. Jonah was heard in his tomb. **Hebrews 5:7 ESV** In the days of his flesh, Jesus offered up prayers and supplications, with loud cries and tears, to him

who was able to save him from death, **and he was heard** because of his reverence.

3. Jonah said, “I am driven away from your sight” in the belly of the fish. On the cross, Christ cried out, “My God, My God! Why have you forsaken me?”
 4. Jonah worshipped because God brought him out of the pit. The Psalms say God wouldn’t let his Holy One (Jesus) see corruption in the grave. **Luke 24:5b ESV** “Why do you seek the living among the dead? **6a** He is not here, but has risen.”
- D. We’ve talked about how God revealed his sovereignty throughout this tale. But I think the greatest evidence of his power is how God used the story of a stubborn, rebellious prophet who lived 100’s of years before Christ to paint a picture of his Son’s redemption for all who would be saved. May we never forget this truth: **“Salvation belongs to the Lord!”**
- V. **1 Corinthians 11:23 ESV** For I received from the Lord what I also delivered to you, that the Lord Jesus on the night when he was betrayed took bread, **24** and when he had given thanks, he broke it, and said, “This is my body, which is for you. Do this in remembrance of me.” **25** In the same way also he took the cup, after supper, saying, “This cup is the new covenant in my blood. Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me.” **26** For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes.
- VI. **Romans 11:33 ESV** Oh, the depth of the riches and wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are his judgments and how inscrutable his ways! **34** “For who has known the mind of the Lord, or who has been his counselor?” **35** “Or who has given a gift to him that he might be repaid?” **36** For from him and through him and to him are all things. To him be glory forever. Amen.