

Sunday, 6 August 2023

## Jonah Chapter 2

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God's Salvation Story - Christ in Jonah

Where is the worst place you've ever stayed in? Well, recently my parents had to move a tenant out of a house they rent out and the state of it, when they got the keys back was horrific. So much damage, and mess everywhere, just an awful place to be.

Well, I know that some of us are a fan of seafood and others very much aren't. That is certainly the dynamic me and Bekah have. I love nothing more than a good bowlful of mussels cooked up in a nice sauce. Whereas Bekah has to leave the house, call a fumigation team in to clean the house of any trace of smell.

Jonah finds himself in probably one of the worst environments possible. Darkness all around, the horrific smell, the mess, stomach acid burning. If anyone ends up in the belly of fish, life has gone pretty badly wrong.

Last week we spent a bit of extra time looking at Jonah's history and background.

So, very briefly, Jonah is a prophet, someone who shares God's word with God's people. He is prophesying to the Northern kingdom of Israel.

Jonah is struggling emotionally with two things. One is that the Israelites, Jonah's people, are living under the threat of the Assyrian superpower nation and then he is hurt by the fact that God's own people are living in sin and not listening to God's word and not responding in repentance.

This is part of why he is disobedient in chapter one, he's led by his emotions to run away from Nineveh and try to escape God.

Let us remind ourselves of chapter one starts with God's call to 'Go' and preach to the people of Nineveh. Jonah tried to go his own way by running to Tarshish in southern Spain to escape God.

God rightfully brought judgment on him through a huge storm.

Jonah tries to escape again by sleeping whilst the sailors do all they can to save the ship and get back to land. They try to offload the cargo and then row back to shore but ultimately the only way in which salvation can come is for Jonah to be thrown overboard and for God's judgement to be satisfied.

Jonah is condemned to death in the depth of the ocean but God in mercy... *'provided a huge fish to swallow Jonah, and Jonah was in the belly of the fish three days and three nights.'*

Verse 1 in chapter 2 starts with Jonah in the belly of the Fish praying to God.

We see Jonah is finally forced to stop running away from God and call out to him in his deepest time of need in prayer. This takes the style of a Psalm and is filled with many wonderful allusions and quotations from other parts of the Old Testament. Jonah talks about his distress and the feeling of lostness whilst in the belly of the fish as he descends to the depths of the ocean. He feels banished from life but he still looks to God for help and God is faithful in *'bringing his life from the pit'*, as it says in verse 6.

Through it all we end up with God showing his mercy and sovereignty as he returns Jonah to dry land, vomited up by the fish. Both bringing salvation for Jonah and fulfilling God's command to go to Nineveh.

As we step into reading the prayer of Jonah, we almost slow down, the chaos of Jonah's time above the water has stopped and now the sound of silence means Jonah is separated from all things except the reality of death and the hope of God.

As we go through Jonah's prayer there are three points that we can pull out and learn from.

#### 1. God's mercy is for all sinners

Firstly, God's mercy is for all sinners.

It's important to know that as we look at our Bible today, we see Chapters and then verses, these are wonderfully helpful for us but when the books of

the bible were written they didn't have them. So verse 17 of chapter one is part of chapter 2.

So our section starts with the fact that Jonah has been swallowed up by a great fish. The term to be swallowed is used a few times in the Old Testament to represent God's Judgement and wrath. Psalm 21:9 says 'The Lord will swallow them up in his wrath'.

So Jonah being swallowed by the great fish actually represents two things.

Firstly, due to all of Jonah's actions, God's Judgement is being shown to him. Secondly, we see that in verse 10, Jonah is delivered safely back to dry land. So being swallowed is also a vessel of mercy that saves Jonah.

How much do you have to go through before you turn to God and pray? It can be a fault of a lot of us. I am definitely someone who likes to get a job done. If a problem arises I want to fix it.

Well, Jonah is pretty stubborn, isn't he? He goes through so much in chapter one and still doesn't talk to God. God's commands, a big storm, thrown into the sea and swallowed by a fish. Finally, only when Jonah is at his lowest, does he call out to God.

Jonah could be quoting Psalm 18:6 here which says *'In my distress, I called to the Lord; I cried to my God for help. From his temple he heard my voice; my cry came before him, into his ears.'*

There is a slight irony here in Jonah's distress. Verse 3 says 'From deep in the realm of the Dead'. What that is talking about is the place called Sheol. Sheol was the place of the dead and most importantly, in the Bible, it was the place of God's absence. Jonah is distressed because he feels that God has abandoned him.

The ironic thing is that it is exactly what Jonah was trying to achieve at the start of Chapter 1. He wanted to escape God. He ran away to be out of God's reach.

As Jonah finally calls out from his distress accepting that God is sovereign through all things.

It's just phenomenal that Jonah took this long to respond to God. How could he be so stubborn and ignorant? Well, it's a thought for us, isn't it? I bet as we look back over our Christian journeys we can see God's hand at work but in the moment we didn't respond to him.

Verses 4 and 5 show us the extent of despair that Jonah finds himself in. Banished from God's sight, without his love, care, and protection. Death is knocking on Jonah's door in verses 5 and 6. The deep surrounding him, the root of the mountains are there, he is barred or imprisoned by the earth. The seaweed wrapped around my head like burial clothes in a tomb. Jonah is in a bad situation here.

Verse 6 ends with hope though. If you ever see *But* or *Therefore* in the bible, then it's usually a good indication to listen up. Something has just changed.

*'But you, Lord my God, brought my life from the pit'*. God in his mercy changes the trajectory for Jonah here. Everything was descending down to death till this point but now hope.

We see God's wonderful mercy in action throughout Jonah chapter 1 already. The Pagan sailors, who were idol worshippers, deserved nothing but end up repenting and being blessed by God.

Jonah has been shown great mercy by being saved by God's provision of a big fish.

This mercy is so undeserved and I think this is highlighted by Jonah's prayer in some ways as well. As we read through this prayer it's interesting to observe that Jonah refers to himself 23 times. 'In my distress, listened to my cry, swept over me, I have been banished, I will look on your holy temple, deep surround me, brought my life from the pit, my prayer rose, I shout with grateful praises.'

You see Jonah has a heart issue. He is crying out for God to save him but he never repents in this prayer. He constantly talks about his own work to save himself.

This just magnifies the fact that Jonah is totally undeserving of salvation but God in his mercy is still faithful to Jonah.

## 2. God's forgiveness covers all our Sin

As we journey through Jonah's prayer we come to our second point. Which is that God's forgiveness covers all our sins.

Even though Jonah gets so much wrong in Chapter 1 and he continues with a heart problem in Chapter 2 as he calls out to God.

God still brings his salvation. From the pit of the grave at the end of verse six, we eventually see Jonah restored to life in verse 10.

In essence, he is born again. At the end of chapter one, it says 'Jonah was in the belly of the fish three days and three nights.' Both belly and fish here are masculine words in Hebrew. At the start of chapter two, it also says fish and belly. These are feminine words. So it changes from the belly of the fish to the womb of the fish.

Basically, the author changes the direction of Jonah. In verse 17 he is condemned to death in the belly of the fish. Whereas as he prays he is confined to the womb ready for new birth.

The whole trajectory of Jonah changed from echoes of Judgement and death to hope and new life.

God's forgiveness is seen at the changing point in verse 6. '*You, bought my life from the pit*'. Even though Jonah has an attitude problem and his heart is still hard and at times pharisaical. God's forgiveness covers it all.

As God turns Jonah's fortunes around in this prayer in verse 6 we see Jonah remember some wonderful truths in verse 8.

The NIV translation is wonderful, it's readability and faithfulness to Scripture but let me read you verse 8 from the ESV translation just because some of the wording is really helpful. '*Those who pay regard to vain idols forsake their hope of steadfast love.*'

I'm just going to quote David Platt here because I think he sums it up brilliantly. '*The plainest reading of this verse is that Jonah's glad he's not put his hope in vain idols. The word for vain is a combination of breath and emptiness. Jonah is saying from the depth of an ocean floor, completely out of*

*breath, that idols are empty and offer no hope for breath to him there. The word for Idol there literally means a snare. Idols are deceptive snares. They promise so much, but when you most need them when you're at your lowest point, they prove completely empty. Our only hope, in the depths of despair, is the Steadfast Love of the Lord.'*

When it says God's steadfast love it means the phrase KHESED love. But this KHESED love isn't just the English term love. It's so much bigger than that. It's a Loyal love. It encompasses faith, promises, kindness, loyalty, endurance and love, all wrapped up in one. It continues and endures because the person giving it, God, remains loving despite the recipient's failures and sins.

It is seen throughout the Old Testament but Psalm 136 maybe sums it up most beautifully when it repeats the phrase *'his steadfast love endures forever'* twenty-six times.

The closest thing we would know to Khesed love is that of a parent's love for their child. Children are a blessing from the Lord but it is tough being a parent. And every so often, jokingly, Bekah will say to Eliza 'I love you but I don't like you'. That is by no means the full scope of Khesed love but it is an enduring love that says no matter what you do or say I will still love you. That is what God's love is for his children but a thousand times greater.

This is the only thing that can save Jonah from his despair at the bottom of the ocean. God's Steadfast Love.

God's love doesn't change despite the fact that Jonah is the most undeserving sinner. God's forgiveness covers all sins.

Jonah recognises this Steadfast Love and declares that if he is finally to be delivered that it will only come from God.

The phrase at the end of verse 9 could either be translated Salvation comes from the lord or belongs to the Lord. Both help us understand that God is the only one with the power and authority to deliver Jonah from death.

And here is the point, we are never too bad or done too much or too far away from God. God's forgiveness has the magnitude to cover all sins. For all people, throughout all of history.

### 3. God's grace brings life from death

As we get to the end of Chapter 2 we see in verse 10 God's great salvation of Jonah. Our third point is that 'God's grace brings life from death'. God delivers Jonah Salvation, by the skin of his teeth, with the vomit of judgement still on him. He is spat on to dry land.

This is a really horrible image. A few weeks ago we had a stomach bug go through our family. And poor Keziah had it at night. As we came in to get her in the morning all I will say it wasn't a nice place to be.

But through the horrible image of Jonah being vomited out, we see something amazing. God want Jonah alive for a purpose. To complete the commands that he gave to Jonah back in verse 1 of chapter 1.

We also see that God really does bring life from death. Jonah was dead, at the bottom of the ocean, in the belly of a fish. In the depth of Sheol, the realm of the dead, barred at the root of the mountains, the deep surrounding him. Jonah's prayer is covered with metaphors of death. *'But, you, Lord my God, brought my life from the pit'*. God bought Jonah up from the grave.

I hope we can see one of the most incredible things about the Book of Jonah here. The shadow of Jesus looms over Jonah.

I'd love to very briefly tell you about something called Typology. Some of us might know what that is and some may not. But I hope we can all understand it because it is significant to the book of Jonah but also a lot of the Old Testament.

As I started off last week, let me show you one of Eliza's books. It's called 'I See Jesus'. And I found it so helpful for understanding Typology.

It uses the example of a shadow. When we see our shadow we see an outline of our body but we don't see all the detail in it. This is what Typology is like in the bible. We might see a shadow of Jesus in something, a story or another character in the bible but we don't see him completely in the Old Testament.

*Colossians 2:17 says 'These are a shadow of the things to come, but the substance belongs to Christ'.*

Let's bring it back to Jonah.

There are a number of illusions that we can see between Jonah and Jesus. Jonah is a prophet declaring God's word, as Jesus does. He is from Gath-Hepher, a small insignificant village, near Nazareth in Galilee. The sailors call Jonah Innocent before sacrificing him to the waves. Jesus is actually innocent before his death. Verse 4 in chapter two we see Jonah Banished from God's sight. Well, what does Jesus say on the Cross 'My God, My God, why have you forsaken me?'. God abandonment of Jesus at that moment.

We can see all of this because verse 17 says '*Jonah was in the fish for Three Days and Three nights.*' Well, that term was an ancient idiom for the journey to death. We see this in other passages in the Old Testament. But it is similar to saying '*someone is six feet under*'.

Where else do we see 3 days and 3 nights when talking about death? Well, with Jesus from death to resurrection, it was 3 days and 3 nights.

So we see types or shadows of Jesus in the story of Jonah.

Jesus confirms this himself when, in Matthew 12:38-42, he talks about the Sign of Jonah.

In verse 40 Jesus says '*For as Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of a huge fish, so the Son of Man will be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth.*'

Jesus shows how Jonah represents the journey of death that he is going to go through.

The real beauty is that Jonah is an imperfect shadow whereas Jesus fulfils it perfectly.

Jonah spent three days in the belly of a fish because of God's judgement on him, because he sinned and got it wrong, but God in his mercy saved him and bought him back to life, delivering him to dry land.

Jesus experiences judgement in the heart of the earth for three days and nights. But he was innocent. What judgement was he experiencing?



Ours, the sins of the world, he took it all in him. Jesus fulfils Jonah beyond what Jonah could ever achieve.

You see Jonah couldn't defeat death, only God himself could bring him back to life. Only God's steadfast love. Whereas Jesus defeated death. He was resurrected. He was God himself.

Jesus completes the work of the Old Testament. God brings life from death. He does that in the garden of Eden, breathing life into creation, he does it in Ezekiel, bringing an army from dry bones, he brings life.

And that is the beauty of the Gospel. By the Grace of God, he breathes life into us. We are spiritually dead at the bottom of the ocean like Jonah until the God of all creation brings life to us. Through the miraculous work of Jesus on the cross.

## **Application**

Whatever your past may be, whatever it may include, whatever you may still struggle with now. God's mercy is for all people, you may be sitting here thinking I'm the worst sinner in this room. But you are never too far away from God. God's mercy extends to the most undeserving sinner.

Mercy means having a debt removed from us. Our debt should be death for all the sins we have committed. That is what Jonah saw, death in the ocean for all his disobedience.

God cover all that debt with his mercy. Removing that debt.

But God doesn't stop there. He doesn't just let us off, he also forgives us. Jonah was caught up in sin in so many different ways. Even in his prayer, he has a heart problem but God's forgiveness covers all his sins. As he calls out to God, God's steadfast love never abandons Jonah.

God's forgiveness covers you completely if you trust in him. 'Jesus' death was once for all sins'.

God removes the debt from us, covers our sins with his forgiveness and ultimately lavishes his grace upon us. What that means is that he freely gives

us the gift of new life. Ephesians 2:8-9 says *'For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God— not by works so that no one can boast.'*

Jonah didn't deserve God's mercy, but God covered all his sins with forgiveness. On top of that, God bought Jonah new birth.

The reality is we must stand in awe of the magnitude of God's work through Jesus. How it brings us mercy, forgiveness and grace in our new lives with Jesus.

I think it a wonderful blessing to be able to finish our service today with worship and communion. To be able to sit and think upon Jesus' work on the cross. The heart of our salvation. The sacrifice made. The new life that God has given us.

Let's sing together.