

Jonah 1:17-2:10

Jonah: Man On The Run  
*The Greatest Miracle*

Last time we had left Jonah he was still on the run from God. He had just been cast over the side of a ship bound for Tarshish and was sinking into the Mediterranean Sea.

Jonah was a prophet in Israel who had been called by God to go to the foreign people of Nineveh to preach a message to them of impending judgment.

Just about everybody would have been happy to see the Ninevites destroyed. They were cruel, ruthless, and powerful conquerors. At the peak of their power the Assyrian empire controlled 75% of the known world. They were also the sworn enemies of Israel and so Jonah the Jewish prophet decided that even though God himself had told him to go, he was never going to preach to these heathen people.

In fact, Jonah even admitted that he would rather have them destroyed by God for their wickedness, than to chance preaching to them having them believe his message and turn to God, and then God sparing them.

So Jonah disobeyed God and went his own way. How often we think we know better than God and so we try to live our way instead of His. But God didn't allow Jonah to hand in his resignation. He allowed him to get so far and that was it. He gave him so much time to have a change of heart, a change of mind, and then God began to work in Jonah's life.

First, there was a great storm, and now as we get to our section from today, there was a great fish.

**Turn to Jonah 1, pg 816**

I want you to see first of all, that

I. *Even At The Height Of Their Rebellion, God Never Abandons His Children.*

**Read Chapter 1 Verse 17**

Its funny that this fish had attracted so much attention. The average person, whey they think about Jonah, always thinks about "Jonah and the whale."

Actually there's a number of miraculous things that happen in this book but somehow the story about the fish has gotten all the publicity.

We don't want to become so obsessed with what was going on inside the fish that we miss seeing what was taking place inside Jonah because the focus of this chapter is really how God worked in Jonah's life to change his attitude.

But the Bible does say that Jonah was swallowed by a great fish and that seems to trouble a lot of people and has generated a lot of ridicule and so I'd like to take just a moment to think about this miracle of God.

It is shown by study of the structure of the sperm whale and its habits that it is perfectly possible for a man to be swallowed alive and after an interval vomited up.

A generation ago the liberal critics of the bible delighted in informing us that a whale's throat is too small to swallow a man. The biblical text didn't say it was a whale, both the Hebrew word in Jonah and the Greek term in Matthew merely mean a big fish.

Today we know of sperm whales that have mouths and throats large enough to easily swallow a human being.

There would be air to breath, because air in the stomach or other parts is needed to keep the animal afloat. But it would be really hot and the stomach acid would bleach or burn the mans' skin. It would probably make him really sore.

But now the fish shouldn't be our main focus. Just as the sailors in chapter one were the supporting cast, while the main character was Jonah, so the fish only has a minor part. Our main concern is the prophet Jonah and what is going on in his heart.

And just as the sailors provided a contrast with Jonah so does this fish.

Remember the pagan sailors were brought to trust and believe in the God of the Scriptures because of the storm.

But that storm wasn't enough to affect Jonah. He kept running from God. They provided a sharp contrast.

Now compare Jonah and the fish. When we do we see an obedient animal and a disobedient prophet.

Verse 17 says Jehovah had "prepared" a great fish. It could be that he created that fish

especially to swallow Jonah. But the Hebrew word translated “prepared” is normally translated “called” or “ordained” or “approved.”

And really the idea is there was the big sea creature, whale or whatever, swimming thru the Mediterranean sea and God gave the call and the fish responded.

Jonah wouldn’t listen, but the fish did.

This is fascinating to me. When you go thru the Word of God you see the obedient response of the creation to God and the often times disobedient response of people. The creation always responds in obedience to God. But people don’t always respond that way.

You think of Noah and the ark. How did Noah get all the animals in the ark? Obviously, it was the working of God. God used Noah, but it was the divine call that caused them to come in.

But you now outside of Noah and his family no human beings came on board. They were too smart. Peter calls Noah a preacher of righteousness but no one listened to his preaching.

I can just see the people mocking old Noah as he built a great boat in an area that had no water deep enough to float it.

But after Noah and his family and the animals were in and God had shut the door and the rain was getting up to their waists I’m sure that people had a change of mind, but by then it was too late. The animals obeyed. The people scoffed.

I think of Jesus out on the sea of Galilee stilling the storm. Even the winds and the sea obeyed him. But men didn’t want to obey Him, they wanted to kill Him and eventually they succeeded.

All of creation is at God’s beck and call, but not man.

Christianity Today magazine had a cartoon entitled “What If?”

They pictured Jonah sinking down into the sea and the whale is underneath and he’s looking up to God saying, “Why me Lord?”

If the whale would have responded to God’s call the way Jonah did, Jonah would have drowned in the depths of the sea.

But even at the height of their rebellion God never abandons his children and so he causes this great fish to swallow up Jonah to save him from death.

God's timing is always perfect. Here is this fish appointed by God who shows up at the right place and the right time because God is still steering Jonah back to the place of blessing.

If there's one thing that stands out in this book it's how God can work in the circumstances of life. And when I think about God's perfect timing and his sovereign control over life it shows me that I never need to be worried, I never need to be upset. God knows what's going on. God cares about me and you.

God is perfect. In everything, at every time, at every place, in all that He does God is perfect.

Not only that but when we look at the testing of Jonah and see the horrible experiences he went through because of his rebellion and because of his sin we have to realize that God is not bringing these events into Jonah's life to punish Jonah.

Now he is chastening Jonah no doubt about that. Jonah's certainly not enjoying what he's going through right at this time. But God's chastening is never to beat us up, it's always to teach.

The writer of Hebrews says:

"We have had human fathers who corrected us, and we paid them respect. For they indeed for a few days chastened us as seemed best to them, but He for our profit, that we may be partakers of His holiness."

"Now no chastening seems to be joyful for the present, but painful; nevertheless, afterward it yields the peaceable fruit of righteousness to those who have been trained by it."

Jonah wasn't in the fish because God was angry at him and was trying to get him. Jonah was in that fish because God led him there. It was the only place where he was going to learn the spiritual lesson he needed to learn.

And God often has to put us in tough circumstances because we refuse to learn any other way. Jonah couldn't leave that spot until he had learned the lesson which God wanted to teach him.

- I. *Even At This Height Of Their Rebellion God Never Abandons His Children*
- II. *What Seems To Be Rejected By God Is Often A Manifestation Of His Greatest Care.*

## **Chapter 2 and vs. 1 tells us.... Read 2:1**

Jonah seems to have done an excellent job of avoiding prayer.

When God first came to Jonah and said “I want you to go to Nineveh” Jonah didn’t pray. Jonah apparently didn’t pray on the way down to Joppa. He didn’t pray when he got to Joppa. He didn’t even pray on board the ship in the mist of the great storm.

It wasn’t until he ended up in the fish’s belly, that he finally prayed.

Jonah seemed to miss something that none of us should overlook.

If you've come to the place in your spiritual life where you've recognized that your a sinner just like the Bible says we all are. And you've put your trust in Jesus Christ as the only one who can forgive you of that sin, then your God's child.

And God has given something amazing to his children, called confession of sin.

If we disobey God we don’t cease to be his child but we do hinder our fellowship with Him and God wants us to confess and to name our sins to Him and to believe that they are forgiven on the basis of the cross so that that fellowship can be restored.

God certainly knows all about us. Everything we say, everything we do, everything we think. And so we can be completely honest with him.

Jonah could have been completely honest with God but he wasn’t.

Way back in his homeland Jonah could have said to God, “God I hear what you are saying, I know what your will is, but something inside me doesn’t want to obey. Something inside of me wants to turn and run.”

And I believe if he would have been that open with God. If he would have confessed his rebellious nature right up front, he could have begun to deal with the reason why he didn’t want to obey God.

God wants us to be so honest and up front with him that we can say to him

“I know what the Bible says but here is an area where I just don’t want to obey.”

We think we can’t confess a sin until we’ve done the whole thing, then we turn to God and lay it out before Him.

But since he knows all about our rebellious nature and what’s going on in our minds to start with we can confess our sinful attitude or desires before we even carry out the actual act of sin.

And see if Jonah would have done that it would have been the first step toward coming to grips with the real reasons behind his rebellion. He would have seen his own selfishness. He would have seen the fallacy and the foolishness of what he was doing because it would have forced him to take the time to stop and look at things from God’s perspective. That is what confession is for.

Now he eventually did that. But look what he went thru to get to that point.

How much easier it would have been to be honest with God in the hills of Gathhepher than to do it from the belly of a fish.

How much easier our lives would be if we lived what we claimed to believe.

Theologically, we say we believe in the omniscience of God. We say since God is God that he knows all. But we live as if he didn’t. We live as if we could withhold our thoughts and our own desires from Him.

How God longs for us to be honest with him, to realize that He knows the hidden things of our hearts and confess and let God work in our lives.

Well here we find Jonah having been exercised by the chastening of God and now he prays.

And remember as you read thru here, and thru the whole book that Jonah is looking back after the events had taken place and he’s describing his thoughts and his actions. He didn’t have a pen and a piece of parchment and a candle down in the whale’s stomach to write his thoughts but after all has taken place he looks back over it and writes in the 3rd person.

The prayer of Jonah is in the form of a psalm. It is a psalm of deliverance.

## **And in verse 2 we read: Read 2**

This is a very unique prayer for a number of reasons. First of all you'll notice as you read thru this prayer that Jonah doesn't ask to be delivered.

Jonah doesn't pray, "God get me out of here and I'll go where you want me to go" There was nothing phony or self-centered about this prayer. It wasn't to save his own skin.

This prayer showed that Jonah was finally being honest with his own sin.

And if you are familiar with the psalms you'll notice how many references Jonah makes thru here to the psalms of David. There's a number of references to other scriptures but especially the psalms.

S. Lewis Johnson commenting on this says, "How important it is to hide the word of God in our hearts. When we are overwhelmed with grief and affliction, when trials in life seem to swallow us up it's what we know of Gods' word that really sustains us.

And when Jonah finally got to the end of his rope. When he was down as low as he could go. He turned back to the Bible.

He didn't turn to some philosopher. He didn't turn to Dr. Phil, He didn't turn to some guru. He turned to the Word of God.

And just scripture after scripture reference comes flowing out of his man's heart because its only the truth of the Word of God that sustains us. And sometimes it could even be that the reason God allows some trials and hardships to come into our lives is to bring us back to the scriptures.

And so here is Jonah crying out the Lord and the Lord heard.

Isn't that a beautiful verse? When runners decide to pray, God listens. When we've bought the lie. When we admit we've been on the run. When God said don't do it. Mamma said don't do it. Friends said don't do it. All of wisdom said don't do it. What ever it was:

Don't get in. Don't get out. Don't marry. Don't borrow. Don't get into that business relationship with those people. Whatever it is, in the midst of your distress, when you know better, God hears the prayer of a runner.

### verse 3

Look at the acknowledgement that Jonah makes at this point.

He says God you cast me into the deep. It was your billows and your waves that passed over me.

It wasn't the sailors. They were just tools.

Christians ought to be the greatest realists in the world. But they're not. Especially when they are disobeying God or running away from God. We try to explain away our situation or our troubles but notice -Jonah is finally being realistic. No more excuses or ignoring God.

He says, I am in trouble and I acknowledge that it was you God who brought me to the place where I am now. Finally he's willing to admit that God has been in the picture working all the time.

He says, "This totally a God thing. Not to pay me back, but to bring me back.

And then he says in vs. 4 **Read 4**

When Jonah was turning his back on God, it didn't seem to bother him at all that he was abandoning God. But all of a sudden here he was sinking into the sea to his death and it finally hit him that he was being abandoned by God.

(He wasn't but that's the way it appeared to him.)

And as he's going down into the sea, he is thinking to himself "Its God that has allowed this, and I'm cast away from him, He's judging me."

I believe that the the last half of verse 4 was what Jonah thought after he was in the fish. Not while he was still in the water. Remember he has written this after the fact. After he was in the fish he said. Yet I will look again toward they Holy temple. Because he knew he had been delivered.

But while he was sinking he thought he was cast out from the sight of the Lord.

In verse 5 he says: **Read 5 & 6a**



As far as Jonah knew this was it. He was a goner. The seaweed was wrapped around him. He was down in the blackness of the depths.

He said "I went down to the bottom of the mountains."

He had been on top of the mountains and he didn't even realize it. He had walked with God and now he was at the lowest point that he could go. And he thought to himself

"what a place for a prophet to be, drowning in the Mediterranean Sea."

He's as low as he would possibly go but it's here that God rescues Jonah.

And again, speaking from the belly of the whale he says *"Yet You have brought up my life from the pit, O LORD, my God."*

And then finally in verses 7 is the turning point. **Read vs. 7**

I believe it was at this point that the fish swallowed Jonah.

When he finally got to the point where he no longer desired to run from the presence of God, but he feared being out of the presence of God, then God brought about his deliverance. We are fools - scary place to be.

When Jonah got inside that fish, I believe he knew his deliverance from death was assured. A lot of commentators say that Jonah had no idea whether he was going to live or die, but I believe that in the ocean he thought he was going to die but once he got in the fish he knew that would live.

What seems to be rejection by God is often a manifestation of his greatest care.

And even though it was dark and hot and frightening beyond anything that we could imagine, Jonah knew it was no accident that he was there.

Remember God's discipline is thorough. He's often not gentle. But it's Not to pay us back, but to bring us back.

**He says in verse 8.**

What Jonah is saying is that everything that happened to him was really his fault. God may have allowed or caused it but it was his fault. He deserves it.

Verse 8 sums up the lesson that Jonah learned.

Jonah is saying “they that put something or someone before God, forsake their own mercy.”

In other words, when we put something else in the place of God and then turn away from God, we inevitably also turn away from the mercy which God constantly shows us. God isn't any less merciful but we've rejected that mercy and therefore we deserve everything that comes upon us.

It wasn't God who had forsaken Jonah. It wasn't that God had withdrawn his mercy. It was Jonah who had forsaken God. Jonah was forsaking his own mercy.

But now that was going to change. Because now Jonah realized that God had been showing his mercy all the time. The storm and the ocean and even the fish at first appeared to be signs of God's rejection. Now Jonah recognized them for what they were - manifestations of God's care.

- I. Even At This Height Of Their Rebellion God Never Abandons His Children*
- II. What Seems To Be Rejected By God Is Often A Manifestation Of His Greatest Care*
- III. God Is A God Of Second Chances*

Jonah had learned a powerful lesson through what had happened and now he cries out - **verse 9**.

This is the greatest miracle of all. Not fish. Not storms. But God changing a human heart.

Jonah had said “I'm a Jew,” I don't want to preach to these heathen. I don't care what God says.” But now he was willing to take his place alongside the Ninevites as one who needed God's mercy and who found it.

Jonah was offering a sacrifice of praise to God from the belly of that fish.

He was now coming to God not as a Jew who deserved special privileges but as a sinful human being who was just like all other human beings. just a guy who desperately needed God's grace.

And it was only when Jonah got to that point that he was willing to say, I will pay that that I have vowed.”

Jonah had vowed to be a prophet of God in response to God's call. But Jonah had reneged on that vow because God had called him to go where he didn't want to go. But now he says, "I'm going to pay that vow." Salvation is of the Lord.

In the darkness of the belly of a fish the light had dawned on Jonah. The ultimate truth about God wasn't that he was Israel's God or Jonah's God. The ultimate truth about God was that he was a saving God. When Jonah learned that he was ready to go to Nineveh.

**Read verse 10.**

The thing that God requires from us is faith. When Jonah said, "God you've asked me to do something, but I don't want to do it, I've got something else in mind." His big problem was lack of faith.

He couldn't believe that God really knew best. So God's brought him through all that he's brought him through all the way down into the belly of a fish to teach Jonah faith. When Jonah was in the fish and said "I will pay the vow that I have vowed" he was expressing faith.

He didn't say "I will pay the vow that I have vowed, if you get me out of here, God."

He knew he was getting out. He knew that God was a saving God and that fish had been sent for his deliverance.

And this morning you and I need to learn that God is trustworthy.

If your a Christian you need to recognize that everything that God has commanded in his word is not only there that he might be glorified by your life, but that you might experience his greatest blessing.

And when you disobey his word at any point your actually saying that God can't be trusted there, and that actually you know better, what's best for your life. A simple lack of faith.

If your not a believer this morning and you don't know Jesus Christ as your personal Savior you need to learn that God is trust worthy too.

Salvation is of the Lord. Its not of a church, its not of good works, it's not of human effort or merit. Salvation is trusting and resting in God and believing that He sent Jesus Christ to die and provide forgiveness for all of your sins.

There was nothing that Jonah could do to save himself. All he could do was rest in the fact that God was his Savior and that's all that we can do too.

Before the Lord Jesus was ever born the angel appeared to Joseph and said "You shall call his name Jesus for he shall save his people from their sins."

Have you received by faith, that salvation which God has provided for you?

Runner, God isn't through with you. When you quit running, God will restore your heart and mind. The only thing that God can't give back to you is the time you spent running.

If you've been running from God don't waste another year, another month, another week, another day.

*But He gives more grace. Therefore He says: "God resists the proud, But gives grace to the humble." Humble yourselves in the sight of the Lord, and He will lift*