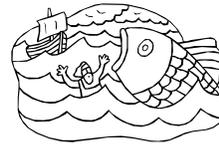


*The Psalm of Jonah*, chapter 2 • Pastor Bob Leroe • First Parish Congregational Church, Wakefield, Massachusetts



There is still a storm brewing in chapter 2...in Jonah's heart. The great fish was Jonah's means of deliverance, and we see here his prayer of thanksgiving for rescue from a watery grave.

Verse 1 tells us where Jonah prayed. We might prefer going to a nice, quiet place to pray...Jonah had a *very* secluded spot. Now God has Jonah's undivided attention, and the prophet prays. How could Jonah be so profound and calm? It became apparent that God had other plans for him. He wasn't going to be eaten. When God brings a trial into our lives, He gives us time to contemplate the lessons He is teaching. Jonah had 3 days. We may feel swallowed up by circumstance, but we have the assurance that what God brings to us is always for our good and His glory.

Jonah knew his plight was his fault; his brief psalm is an honest prayer. Often ours are not. We overlook the real issues we should be discussing, or we ignore some sin God wants us to confess, or we ask for things which He has already clearly denied.

Summarizing his answered prayer—answered in a way he couldn't possibly have anticipated—Jonah states that he found himself in the “depths of Sheol”, verse 2. This is a Hebrew term referring in a very general sense to the grave. Sheol is the condition of death. Jonah is admitting that he was as good as dead, but God reached out and rescued him!

Jonah next acknowledges the Providence of God, in verse 3: “*You* hurled me into the deep...all *Your* waves and breakers swept over me.” Note the words “*You*” & “*Your*”. Jonah realizes that it wasn't chance, circumstance, luck, or blind fate that caused his dilemma. Neither does he blame the sailors; they were merely God's means of discipline and restoration. Jonah understands that his rescue had been directed by the Hand of God, Who rules His creation.

God's intention is to return Jonah back to a right relationship. How do *we* respond to correction? A father who loves his children doesn't turn his back when they go astray. God's discipline is evidence of His love for us. “It is better to fall into the hands of God, even in correction, than to be apart from Him” (Boice).

Jonah recognizes that he was alienated from God. Everything seemed lost as he sank beneath the deep. No more would the voice of God come to this prophet...or so he thought. Jonah cries in verse 4, “I have been *driven* from Your sight.” Who did the driving? The word “sight” could be translated “favor”. The door of life appeared to shut with a terrible finality. Each wave howled into his ear: “Jonah, you *deserve* this.” In verses 5-6 Jonah describes the horror of his plight. The “roots of the mountains” refers to the mountainous ocean depths. Underwater archeology reveals that some of the largest mountains on earth are those beneath the ocean.

Though things couldn't seem worse, Jonah holds out hope in verse 4: "...yet I will *look again* toward Your holy temple." In faith we dare to approach God, knowing that we're sinful people undeserving of mercy. Faith drives us to "look again". There is life in such a look.

If God had done nothing, Jonah's fate would have been fitting. Though deep in sin as well as water, Jonah prays in verse 7: "I remembered You, Lord, and my prayer rose to You." Jonah prayed; he couldn't help it. He prays to One he knew personally, not some impersonal force. I may know that there's a bank around the corner, but that doesn't make me rich. I know God exists, and He wants me to live trusting Him. Most of what Jonah prays may sound familiar, because it's borrowed from the Psalms; not much is original, and that's fine. Our prayers don't have to be creative; they have to be sincere. It's been said, "For every sigh there's a psalm" (Gothard). It is encouraging to pray the Psalms and make them our own.

We may sink spiritually as deep as Jonah, yet God will not abandon us. Jonah was thrown out of a ship, but not out of the sight and grace of God. We have Christ's added promise: "I will never cast you out"...you "will never perish" (John 6:37, 10:28). In Psalm 94 David affirms, "The Lord will not abandon His people." How dreadful that some people actually want to have nothing to do with God! To be apart from God is a hell worse than we could imagine.

Verses 8-9 prove that Jonah means business; this is his vow of praise. It's one thing to confess our sins; it's entirely another to do something about them. Both chapters one and two end with sacrifice and vows. Jonah is at last brought to the point the Gentile sailors had already reached. Jonah agrees to obey God's call.

Jonah speaks of "worthless idols" in verse 8, referring to Nineveh. "Worthless idols" could be translated as "vain, empty vanities". People throw away any hope of salvation by creating substitutes for God. We may not think we're idolaters, yet idolatry is any worthless endeavor we take on, apart from trust in God. We may be bowing to the counterfeit idols of ambition, greed, comfort, or pleasure. Then Jonah mentions "the grace that *could* be theirs", finally admitting that Gentiles were savable. Jonah re-enlists in God's service, renewing his commitment to his prophetic office in verse 9 with a song of thanks.

We could easily skip over Jonah's important concluding words. He admits in verse 9, "Salvation comes from the Lord." This is the theme of the entire Bible (C.I. Schofield) and the key verse of this book. Salvation is a gift, and God isn't obligated to limit it to those we may think deserve it. Jonah's attitude in chapter one was, "I'm not going to be a part of God saving the Ninevites." God has miraculously saved Jonah from drowning, and he is brought to understand that God is sovereign in salvation.

It's as if God were saying to Jonah: "Salvation is Mine to give--I give it to whomever I choose. I gave it to you. If I choose to save the Ninevites, that's none of your business." "Salvation is possible only because God makes it possible" (Boice). God chooses to

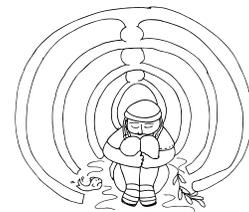
reach out to people who aren't reaching back. He accepts and entitles the undeserving. "God loves us not because of who we are and what we have done, but because of who He is" (Phillip Yancey). He loves us, not because we're good, but because He is.

In verse 10, the fish obediently spews up this indigestible prophet. Many scholars believe that Jonah was brought back to Joppa. Just like in Monopoly: "Return to GO". I think that Jonah's arrival back at Joppa was likely in full view of everyone...so that, by the time he arrived in Nineveh, news of his miraculous deliverance would have preceded him, adding considerable weight to his message.

The most terrifying aspect of Jonah's plight is when he realizes that God almost gave him what he wanted--to be *free from Him*. Jonah wanted to run from God. Now the implications of separation bring Jonah to repentance. He rejected God, and it looked as though God was about to reject him! Jonah was unwilling to say "Thy will be done." In the waters of the Mediterranean he realized the awful significance of hearing God say to him: "All right then—*your* will be done." If we try to run from God He may grant our wish for awhile, but we'll never want it. "The belly of a fish wasn't a pleasant place to live, but it was a good place to learn" (Boice).

The most dreadful part of Christ's suffering on the cross wasn't the physical agony; it was being separated from His Father. Jesus died in our behalf to bring us to the Father. He does not want any to perish.

Jonah returned to God, not as someone expecting special privileges, but as a rebel in need of forgiveness. In the depths of the sea he discarded his pride. The highest moment of our life is the moment when we kneel in the dust and turn to God, confessing our sins. May we seek the same mercy that rescued and forgave the prophet Jonah.



Questions about Jonah chapter 2...

- Do you only pray when there's a crisis?
- Do you see life's events as accidental, or part of God's purpose?
- What does it mean to "fear" God?
- Did Jonah come to his senses, or did he just give in to God's plan?
- What are some of the worthless, counterfeit idols we rely on today?
- "Salvation comes from the Lord"—what does that mean, and why do some believe it is the theme of the entire Bible?
- When we run from God, what's the *worst* thing that could happen to us?