

Jonah - Submitting to Grace

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[0 : 00] And it's on page 927, and Harry is going to read that, so Jonah 2, he's going to perish.

Jonah chapter 2, the whole chapter. Yeah, the whole chapter, Harry. And don't generally get sight of the fish, right? From inside the fish, Jonah prayed to the Lord his God.

He said, In my distress I called to the Lord, and he answered me. From the depths of the grave I called for help. And you listened to my cry.

You hurled me into the deep, into the very heart of the seas, and the currents swirled about me. All your waves and breakers swept over me.

I said, I have been banished from your sight. Yet I will look again towards your holy temple. The engulfing waters threatened me. The deep surrounded me.

[1 : 03] Seaweed was wrapped around my head. To the roots of the mountains I sank down. The earth beneath barred me in forever. But you brought my life up from the pit, O Lord my God.

When my life was ebbing away, I remembered you, Lord. And my prayer rose to you, to your holy temple. Those who cling to worthless idols forfeit the grace that could be there.

But I, with a song of thanksgiving, will sacrifice to you. What I have bowed I will make good. Salvation comes from the Lord. And the Lord commanded the fish.

And it prompted Jonah unto try not. Thank you very much. Keep your finger. 1, 2, 1, 0. Hebrews chapter 12, verses 1 to 6.

And then verse 11. Thank you. Hebrews chapter 12, verses 1 to 6. And verse 11. Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, let us throw off everything that hinders, and the sin that so easily entangles, and let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us.

[2 : 16] Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy set before him endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God, considering him who endured such opposition from sinful men, so that he will not grow weary and lose heart.

When you struggle against sin, you have not yet resisted to the point of shedding your blood, and you have forgotten that word of encouragement that addresses you as sons. My son, do not make light of the Lord's discipline, and do not lose heart when he rebukes you, because the Lord disciplines those he loves, and punishes everyone he accepts as a son.

And verse 11. No discipline seems pleasant at the time, but painful. Later on, however, it produces a harvest of righteousness and peace for those who have been trained by it.

When I first came to Carigoline, I met somebody who works with seaweed.

I've never met anybody before who's met with seaweed, wrong. Is that man? Now I've discovered that Jonah was probably the first seaweed man. The first five seaweed was wrapped around his head.

[3 : 47] Maybe he was the founder of cyber colloids. I don't know. But we're not here to think about that. We're here to think about Jonah. The title we've given to this morning is Submitting to Grace, and we're going to pray and ask for God's help as we look at this together.

Let's do that. Father, thank you for your grace to us.

We're people who are in need. We need your help. And so in your grace, pour out your Holy Spirit upon us. Generously fill us so that we may understand better your word to us, how it applies to our lives, and how it all works out in practice.

Please encourage us through this morning, we pray. In Jesus' name. Amen. The Horse Whisperer.

It's a bit of a chick flick, but it's a film starring Robert Redford, who is highly regarded as a horse tamer.

[5 : 08] He takes his wild and stubborn and aggressive horses, and he gently breaks them to the control of the owner. By gently applying pressure, at times it can seem cruel and harsh.

He tames the stubborn will till it submits to the will of the Master. Now in our story of Jonah in chapter 2, it seems that God is having to tame a very stubborn runaway.

In chapter 1, Jonah verse 2 was told, Go! But verse 3, Jonah ran away from the Lord. God had called him, do you remember, to go to Nineveh to preach against that great city.

But Jonah had other plans. Stubbornly and disobediently, he ran in the other direction. The last thing that Jonah wanted was for his enemies, the people of Nineveh, to experience God's grace and forgiveness.

So God gently applies a little bit of pressure to tame this stubborn will so that he submits to the will of the Master.

[6 : 26] And that pressure comes, verse 4 of chapter 1, that the Lord sent a great wind on the sea and such a violent storm arose that the ship threatened to break up.

Surely this is going to tame Jonah. But it seems Jonah is somewhat arrogant. Look at verse 5. All the sailors were afraid and they cried out to their own God and they began to throw the cargo into the sea to lighten the ships.

But Jonah had gone below deck where he lay down and fell into a deep sleep right the way through the storm. It seems that he is quite content to be disobedient.

It's as if Jonah is saying, God, you can do what you like. You can throw storms, but I ain't going. But God, through the storm, does not back down.

And eventually Jonah begins to be tamed. Verse 11. The sea was getting rougher and rougher. So they asked him, what should we do to make the sea calm down for us?

[7 : 39] Jonah replied, pick me up and throw me into the sea. I know that it is my fault that this great storm has come upon you.

It seems that God, through the storm, has got Jonah's attention and he's beginning to be tamed. Now at one level, Jonah's request seems a little bit like a mad act of suicide.

Throw me into the sea! They all knew if he was going to be thrown into the sea, that would be the end of it. But this isn't a rash decision by Jonah.

This is a purposeful submission to God's grace. The request of being thrown overboard is admitting defeat. It's saying to God, I surrender!

You see, Jonah knew who God was and what he was like. Look back at chapter 1, verse 9. He knew that he was the God of heaven who made the sea and who made the land.

[8 : 52] We sang about it at the beginning. Indescribable, uncontainable. God is so big. So for Jonah to be thrown into the sea was in fact to be thrown into the hands of God's grace.

Just to be thrown into the sea wasn't the end of his life. He was throwing himself upon God. And I think that's what Jonah is getting at in chapter 2, verse 8.

Where we have this phrase, those who cling to worthless idols forfeit the grace that could be theirs. An idol, explains Tim Keller in his book *Counterfeit Gods*, he says, an idol is anything more important to you than God.

Anything that absorbs your heart and imagination more than God. Anything that you seek to give you what only God can give.

Now for Jonah, his idol was autonomy. He wanted to be his own boss, to rule his own life, to be in charge of his life, to do what he wanted.

[10 : 08] That was what was most important to him. But as Jonah was discovering to push God out, to rule your own life, is to forfeit the grace that could be yours.

I think we all need to be tamed just like Jonah needed to be tamed. Because we all have the same kind of idol as Jonah. We all want to run our own lives, we all want to live our own way, we all want to pretend that we're God.

We want to be in control of everything and we make up the rules for our own life. But to fight God, to run away from him, to disobey, and stubbornly refuse to submit to his will, is to forfeit the grace and love of God that could be ours.

So Jonah has come to see that the only place to be is in the security of God's hands. it's no good running away from him. The only place for him is to be with God.

And so Jonah throws himself or he requests that they throw him into the sea because in doing that he is submitting himself to God's grace.

[11 : 32] We all need to be tamed and we all need to submit and surrender. But how do we do it? Does that mean we all have to jump into our cars and drive off down to cross Aden and jump off the pier into the sea and expect a great big fish to swallow us up?

Now I don't think we should do that. That would be suicide. But I think here in chapter two through Jonah's prayer we do have a model of how we should submit to God's grace in our life.

So first in this prayer submitting to the personal God who listens. Verse one chapter two From inside the fish Jonah prayed to the Lord his God.

He said In my distress I called to the Lord and he answered me. From the depths of the grave I called for help and you listened to my cry.

Now there's something that seems not quite right about this prayer. It sounds a little bit presumptuous and almost disrespectful.

[12 : 46] Remember Jonah has stubbornly and disobediently run away from God but yet he has the audacity look at verse one to pray to and he refers to him as the Lord his God.

In fact in verse six it's even stronger at the very end of verse six he called him O Lord my God.

How could he do that after all his running away? How could God still be his God my God? Well this is the kind of God that we have that even in the midst of our sin and disobedience he is still the personal intimate God.

He doesn't block his ears to our cry and say sorry can't hear you wouldn't listen to me Jonah so I'm not going to listen to you tit for tat.

No God's not like that. God is gracious slow to anger and abounding in love and so Jonah can say with confidence that he cried out he answered me he called for help and you listened to my cry.

[14 : 06] Jonah had written God out of his life but for those who belong to God God will never write you out of his life.

God remains steadfast and loyal so that we can always turn to our personal God confident that he will listen. Sometimes people say to me when they're in a state of running away from God I can do it myself in my own dialoguing with God.

There's no way after what I've done that God is going to have me back. There's no way after what I've said that God is going to listen to me.

Well we should never blame God that he is not going to listen. His grace is wider than we could ever imagine and even in the midst of our sin and disobedience even in our running he is still the personal and intimate God who comes close and who will answer and who will listen.

So this is where submission to grace starts. It's crying out independence on a personal God who will always listen and answer.

[15 : 38] But then we discover something else. Submitting to the sovereign Lord who intervenes. If the first part of the prayer seems somewhat disrespectful this next part seems contradictory.

look at what Jonah says in chapter 1 verse 12. He said to the sailors pick me up and throw me into the sea.

Then in verse 15 of chapter 1 the sailors took Jonah and they threw him overboard and the raging sea grew calm.

man. Now look at chapter 2 verse 3. Remember he's praying talking to God and look what he says in verse 3.

You God you hurled me into the deep into the very heart of the sea and the current swirled about me all your waves and breakers swept over me.

[16 : 50] So my dear Watson who threw Jonah overboard? Was it the sailors or was it God? Well the sailors physically manhandled him and picked him up and threw him into the sea.

but I think the bigger one behind it that God stands behind their action. I think this is what chapter 2 is telling us.

That God is the one who has ordered these events to take place. Chapter 1 verse 4 told us that it was the Lord who sent this great storm.

He sent the winds. He purposed and willed that Jonah would go overboard. Now that tells us that the events and circumstances of our lives do not happen by chance.

There's no such thing as luck. The trouble that we find ourselves in, the suffering that comes our way, yes, God stands behind it all to fulfill his purpose in our lives.

[18 : 06] what? In protest, we stamp our feet, we say, God could never bring anything bad or unpleasant into our lives.

The God that I know is a God of love. He would never do anything rotten and mean. Well, who are we that created to tell our creator what he should do?

And as much as we may come to struggle and try and work out what's going on, and it will take a whole other sermon and a big series to explore that idea, in this context, it seems that God is ordering the events deliberately and purposefully in the life of Jonah to bring him back to himself.

And if God will do that for Jonah, why can't he do it with us? In fact, Jonah has come to see that what God did, he did for the purpose of changing his life around.

Look at verse 4. He said, I have been banished from your sight. Verse 5, the engulfing waters threatened me, the deep surrounded me, seaweed was wrapped around my head, to the roots of the mountains I sank down, the earth beneath barred me in forever.

[19 : 37] Do you remember back in chapter 1, verse 3, it tells us there that Jonah ran away and the translation is literally Jonah was running away from the presence of the Lord.

Of course, it's rather silly, isn't it? We can't run from the presence of God. How can we run away from the creator who made the sea and the land?

We can't get away from God even if we tried. But you know what? God can remove his presence from us. And that's what Jonah was experiencing in verse 4.

He said, I have been banished from your sight. God took Jonah and he put him into the storm. He allowed Jonah to sink beneath the waves.

He allowed him to struggle under the weight of seaweed. He allowed him to fall to the very foundation of the mountains. As if God was saying through it all, if you want to run away from my presence, Jonah, this is what it's going to be like.

[20 : 45] And it's only when Jonah begins to submit to God's sovereign control over his life and over the world that he made that God intervenes.

Look at the end of verse 6. In the midst of all that going down, he can say, but you brought my life up from the pit.

O Lord my God. It's at this point, I imagine, when the great fish was provided that God intervenes in his life and Jonah is saved.

And no wonder he can finish his prayer at the end of verse 9. Salvation comes from the Lord. Now I'm not saying that everything bad that happens or every experience of suffering is because you are running away from God.

It does not necessarily mean if you're in that place that you are running from God. We mustn't think like that. But what we can say see is that God will bring into our lives whatever it takes.

[22 : 10] He will let us experience distress. He will even let us experience the removal of his presence only to cause us to submit to his grace when we are running away from him. who are we to tell the creator what he should do in our life.

And this is where submission to grace begins. Trusting in a sovereign God who is in control of every single detail of our life. A sovereign God who works to intervene to bring us back to himself.

But then there is also submitting to the gracious God who restores. Jonah's experience inside the fish of the belly and through the storm, it couldn't have been easy.

There is no pretending that this was hard. But God uses all of these experiences to bring Jonah back to himself. And thankfully God doesn't do things in half measures.

[23 : 26] Verse 8 chapter 2. Those who cling to worthless idols forfeit the grace that could be theirs. But I, says Jonah, with a song of thanksgiving will sacrifice to you what I have vowed I will make good.

Salvation comes from the Lord. In other words, Jonah is making a vow, he's making a promise to commit himself to God. In response to God's amazing grace intervening into his life on the ship, putting him into the storm, providing this great big fish, Jonah responds and says, you did this for me.

In thanksgiving for all that you have done, I am going to give my life to serve you. God's God's intention all along.

God's call to Jonah had never changed as we will see next week in chapter 3. God still comes to Jonah and he still sends him to Nineveh. Rather than throw Jonah up onto the trash heap because he failed, he graciously restores him to the work that he had originally been called to.

The culture that we live in and the society that we are used to gives no room for failure and very often the church family can look down on those who sin and disobey and just write them off and say, I mean look at them, all their disobedience and their sin, out.

[25 : 08] We need to take time to see how God works with his people and we need to be gracious with one another. God does not throw us out on the garbage can every time we fail.

He graciously restores us, bringing us back to himself. Have a look please with me at Hebrews chapter 12.

It's on page 1210. When Jonah was running away from God, he had certainly lost sight of God's grace God's love.

Jonah had taken his focus off the God who saves. So for us, chapter 12, verse 2, let's not lose our focus.

Let us, verse 2, fix our eyes on Jesus, Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith.

[26 : 40] He is the one who starts our salvation, and he is the one who will complete our salvation. And how does he do it? Well, look at the rest of verse 2.

who for the joy set before him endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.

When Jesus was on the cross, it was like he was thrown by his father into the ultimate storm, into the storm of God's wrath, where Christ on the cross was taking all of our sin, and all of our disobedience, and all of our failure on himself, and we're told here that Jesus submitted himself to the cross, he didn't run away from it, because of the joy that was before him.

The joy would be our salvation. And when Jesus died on the cross, it was as if he was overcome by the waves of judgment, he sank down into the depths of hell for you and for me, so that we would never be banished from his presence, so that we would know his grace in our lives each and every day.

God not only saves us, his desire is to keep his children, and to never lose his children, even if and when we run away from him.

[28 : 34] Look at verse 5 of Hebrews 12. Have you forgotten that word of encouragement that addresses you as sons or as children?

My child, do not make light of the Lord's discipline. Do not lose heart when he rebukes you.

Jonah knew what it was to be disciplined. Verse 6, 9, he gently corrects everyone he accepts as a child.

verse 9, we have all had human fathers who disciplined us, and we respected them for us.

even if our human fathers were wrong in the way they did it, and even though they can get things wrong, the comparison is not to say God is like our fathers, but how much more should we submit to the father of our spirits and live?

[30 : 08] Verse 11, no discipline seems pleasant at the time, but painful. Later on, however, it produces a harvest of righteousness and peace for those who have been trained by it.

And we see that the hard things that we go through in life at times is all part of God's love, all part of his grace, that he doesn't want us to wander too far away, but he wants to bring us back, he wants to tame us, he wants to train us, he wants us to submit to the will of the father.

God in his grace sent his son, the Lord Jesus, to save us, and should we ever run away from God, by his grace, he will discipline us, he will tame us, he will train us, he will bring into our lives whatever he sees fit, so that we stay close to his grace, so that we stay immersed in his love, so that he will never ever lose us.

This is where submission to grace begins, entrusting ourselves ourselves to a gracious God who will restore.

Let's pray together. Thank you.

[32 : 20] Thank you.

Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. And in so doing we forfeit the grace that is ours.

Lord, please that you would forgive us for the times we run our own way and cling to other things instead of you.

Please be gracious to us. In your love, gently discipline us so that we come back to you.

Father, if we have drifted, please forgive us.

[33 : 48] Please restore us afresh. Fill our lives with the joy and the wonder of your amazing grace.

Please overwhelm us with your love. And let us stay close to you as you hold on to us.

We thank you for the gracious God that you are. In Jesus' name. Amen.

We're going to sing a, I think it's a new song.

Some of you may...