

Jonah 2

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 13 November 2022

Preacher: Jeremy Meeks

- [0 : 0 0] Jonah 2 is our passage this morning. Then Jonah prayed to the Lord his God from the belly of the fish, 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. 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. Then I said, I am driven away from your sight, yet I shall look again upon your holy temple.
- 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. When my life was fainting away, I remembered the Lord, and my prayer came to you into your holy temple.
- [1 : 1 0] 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.
- Salvation belongs to the Lord. And the Lord spoke to the fish, and it vomited Jonah out upon the dry land. This is the word of the Lord.
- Thanks be to God. You may be seated. Amen. Well, good morning.
- It's good to be with you. And back in this strange little book of Jonah. 4,548.
- 4,548. According to my not-so-academic research, That is the largest number of stars able to be seen by the human eye under ideal conditions.
- [2 : 1 6] If I were a wise man, I would have consulted the expert on stars in our congregation. You're not able to say that in a lot of churches?
- He'll correct me if I'm wrong afterwards. I promise. Let's just assume that roughly that's the number of stars you could ever see at one time, given ideal circumstances.
- Apparently in Chicago, like all major cities, due to the severe light pollution, the most you can ever see at one time is about 100. There are billions and billions of stars.
- But only 4,548, roughly, that we will ever be able to see with our naked eye. The funny thing about stars is that they're always shining.
- We just don't always see it. Interestingly enough, the darker things get, the more we can see the light. Why talk about stars on a Sunday morning?
- [3 : 1 9] Well, it's because I think that just as with stars, so with life. That sometimes things have got to get pretty dark before you see the light that's always been shining.
- Do you believe that, friends? Whether you do or not, I hope to convince you it's true as we look at one of the most well-known and crazy stories in all of Scripture.
- I take for my title this morning, seeing light in the darkness. Now, if you're new to the Bible, or if you're surprised to find yourself in church this morning, well, then you came on an interesting day.

They usually call this story Jonah and the whale. But the fish, whatever it was, isn't really the focus of this story. This story really should be called, if anything, Jonah and his merciful God.

I think there's something in here for all of us if we just have the ears to hear what God's Word might have to say to us. And to put it real simple right up at the top, here's what I want to persuade you of this morning in the retelling of this story.

[4 : 32] That God will bring us down to death. To give us life. In other words, it's God's mercy that he takes us down into the darkness.

Because it's in the darkness that we end up seeing the light that's always been shining. I want to look at this rather interesting story in three moves. The way down.

The way up. And the difference the journey makes. Know this, though. God will bring us down to death to give us life.

I think the story of Jonah is both unique and common. It is the story of what God will mercifully do to each one of us in order to give us what we most long for in life.

So let's talk about the way down. The interesting thing about this chapter is the fact that it is a very bizarre short story interrupted by a song.

[5 : 41] I mean, did you notice all you really need is chapter 1 verse 17, chapter 2 verse 1, and chapter 2 verse 10. I'll read it. Here's the story. This whole story goes like this. 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.

Chapter 2 verse 1. Then Jonah prayed to the Lord his God from the belly of the fish. Chapter 2 verse 10. And the Lord spoke to the fish and vomited Jonah out on dry land. That's all you really need.

The song in the middle is interesting. It is a poetic and prayerful interruption. But the song is vital because it explains how you get from the belly of a fish onto dry land.

What was it that happened with Jonah that got him from point A to point B? It's also vital for us because it should demonstrate how we should respond to the mercy of God at work in our own lives.

You and I should begin by asking a question. Why on earth was Jonah in the position to be swallowed by a fish in the first place? I won't assume you were paying attention last week.

[6 : 54] Or that you were here. Simply put, it was all due to rebellion. You can go ahead and read chapter 1. That's all you can summarize just like that. Jonah was in rebellion. He was running in the wrong direction.

God came to him because he had seen the sin of Nineveh and his response was mercy. Jonah's was one of rebellion.

I wonder if the story sounds familiar. God tells Jonah, arise and go speak to them. And Jonah obeys only the first part of that commandment. He arises and runs in the opposite direction.

But in running, Jonah learned something. Some of us have learned and some of us have yet to learn, even this morning, that you can run.

You can't hide. Jonah's boat is struck with a storm. And in an act of rebellious cowardice, he tells the sailors, Well, just toss me overboard.

[7 : 56] I won't do it myself. You can do it. I'd rather die than obey God. The sailors try to save Jonah's life and their own, but they are ultimately unsuccessful.

So they do what he says. They toss him overboard. Peace comes down and prayers go up. For all they know, Jonah drowned.

Yet as we find out, Jonah was delivered. How? Well, in the strangest of ways. As it says in chapter 1, verse 17, a great fish obeyed the command of God.

The very thing that Jonah was unwilling to do. It's bad when animals become the object lesson. I don't know about you, but I have a million questions about this event.

Most of them stemming from the fact that I cannot get the 1940s cartoon version of Pinocchio out of my brain. What kind of fish was it?

[9 : 04] How did Jonah survive this? When did he write all of this? Did he have a pen and a piece of paper down in the belly of the fish? Where is Geppetto and Jiminy Cricket?

I don't have answers. Let's be honest, you don't either. So we won't waste our time inventing how this all happened. Let's just go with the fact that it did happen and roll on from there.

Here's what I do know. Jonah was buried alive in a fish for three days and three nights. And it's from this living tomb that Jonah begins to pray.

The prayer begins by describing the way down. How far down? Well, he'll say that it's all the way down to Sheol.

A real common word on the south side of Chicago. Verse 2, all the way down to Sheol. The place of the dead. God drug me all the way down to death is what Jonah will say.

[10 : 14] Yet even before he begins to recount his way down, Jonah gives us some good news. And I want you to hang on to it as we think about the way down. It's right there in verse 2.

I called to the Lord out of my distress and he answered me. Friend, can I tell you that there's nowhere you can go where God won't hear you?

I don't know how far down you are this morning. If you're here, you're going like, bro, you don't know me. You don't know anything about me. I am down deep. I passed a rock in a hard place a long time ago.

I feel like I am in an impossible situation. Could God hear somebody like me? Well, just let me ask you a question to that very good question. You ever been down in the belly of a fish three days and three nights in the heart of the ocean at the gates of death?

You go, that's the way I feel. Well, congratulations. God heard Jonah. He'll hear you. I'm not just speaking to non-Christians, by the way.

[11 : 23] Some of us get so trapped up in our own thoughts that we think, I mean, God used to hear me, but I've been wandering away so long. I've been like Jonah, running in the wrong direction that I can't possibly be heard now. Just know this, friends.

That says more about what you think about God than what you think about you. God heard Jonah. God will hear you. We should be clear, though, that his way down was brutal.

The author goes out of his way to show how brutal it was. In chapter one, he had gone down to Tarshish. Then he went down into the belly of the boat. Then he's down in the belly of the fish.

And as he puts it in verse six, I went down to the land whose bars closed on me forever. By far, the worst part of the journey down is found in verse four.

I'm driven away from your sight. What's the worst thing that can happen to a person?

[12 : 27] Well, you can read across the pages of Scripture, and time and time again, those who have run in the wrong direction feel that they have been taken to the place of death and been abandoned by God himself.

It doesn't get any worse than that. I wonder if it sounds familiar. If so, I'm sorry. I know it sounds familiar to me.

Friend, I got a question for you that I'm going to ask a couple times today. How far down does God have to take you to get you to see the light in the darkness? Know this.

He'll keep dragging you down as far as you have to go. The question is, for what reason? When we're to answer that question, let's think about the way up.

We've seen the way down. Let's think about the way up. You see, surprisingly, it's in the darkness that Jonah begins to see the light. In the place of abandonment and despair, Jonah says something very interesting in verse four.

[13 : 45] He decides in the place of absolute darkness, yet I shall look again on your holy temple. In other words, you may have abandoned me.

You have taken me to the point of death, perhaps. But the reality is, is that even from this place, I will look towards your place. I'm turning around.

I'm done running in the wrong direction, even if I never get out. This is what repentance looks like, friends, for Jonah, for you, for me, for all who truly see light in the darkness.

This is it. God may bring us down to death, but it's to give us life. Not much more needs to be said here, and that's important.

You see, that while your way down to death might be agony and be a long, long journey, your way up is as quick as verse six.

[14 : 44] You brought up my life from the pit, O Lord my God. Friends, here's the good news. It doesn't matter how far down the journey is, the way up.

It's that quick. You ever see kids in a pool playing with a beach ball? There was nothing better as a kid growing up in warm, not cold, San Diego, California.

I lived every day in a pool. Me and my brothers would fight physics and gravity or whatever the heck it is with a beach ball every day of our lives.

We would take that thing and try to bury it in the water. I wasn't exactly the brightest kid in the world. We're also real poor, so we didn't have a lot to do. It was a lot of fun.

But the crazy thing is, it doesn't matter whether you did it in the shallow end or the deep end, whether you had three of us fighting to get that ball down or just one of us. If you struggled and struggled and struggled to get the ball all the way down to the bottom, regardless of how deep it was, you let that ball go and it shoots right to the top.

[15 : 55] Friends, so it is with the merciful, saving work of God. It's as quick as that. It doesn't matter how far down you go.

Call out to God and he will hear you and give you life. And believe it or not, friends, what you and I are offered today is far better than anything that Jonah ever got. See, Jonah was spared, but you and I are shockingly offered salvation.

How? Well, you see, there was another man who was swallowed up. By something far worse than a whale or whatever that fish was.

He was swallowed up by death itself. Who is this man? None other than the God-man, Jesus Christ, born to set us free.

You see, unlike Jonah, Jesus had run in the right direction every day of his life. Obeying God, his Father, at every step, and yet he found himself in a similar yet far worse predicament.

[17 : 05] Jonah here, as he had been brought down, felt as if he were dead. He had the sense that there was no hope left. When it comes to Jesus, he died, died, all the way died.

Position far worse than Jonah would ever know. You see, like Jonah, it was three days and three nights, but it wasn't in the belly of the beast. It was in the belly of a borrowed tomb.

Unlike Jonah, Jesus really dies. For what reason does he die? Really die? Well, it's in order to set people free, like you and me, who cannot save themselves.

People who, like Jonah, do all we can to run from God. Even to the point of trying to drown ourselves in despair. How could he do something like that?

Well, it's because unlike Jonah, and unlike you and me, he did not deserve what he had received. He was sinless, and thus able to be our Savior.

[18 : 18] Paul, in the book of Ephesians, chapter 2, verses 3 and 5, puts it this way. We all once lived in the passions of our flesh, carrying out the desires of the body and the mind, and were by nature children of wrath like the rest of mankind.

But God, being rich in mercy because of the great love with which he loved us, even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ.

By grace, you have been saved. Friends, Jonah escaped from a fish. And that was the acts of a merciful God.

But through faith in Christ, we escape from all of the powers of sin and death. This act of sacrifice sounds too good to be true, doesn't it? I don't know about you, but I wake up about every other morning and go, Yeah, I don't know about that.

How can we have confidence that Jesus did all of that for people like us? Well, just like Jonah, Jesus was swallowed up for three days and three nights, and no more.

[19 : 38] You see, Jonah escaped from the whale. Jesus escaped from death itself. Jesus may have been swallowed up by death, but he did some swallowing of his own.

On his way down, he swallowed up all the wrath that God rightly pours out on people like you and me. Why? I mean, let's be honest.

You know why. It's all the things that you do and know you shouldn't, or don't do and know you should. Call that sin. And you go, I don't sin.

Yeah, right. You know those times where you're there all by yourself and go, Oh, that was not a good idea. Or, whoops, should have done different there. That's what sin is right then. And God justly pours it out on those sins because he rightly pours it out on all sins.

And that is what Jesus swallows as he goes down into death. Here's the good news, though. When he got down into death, he was still thirsty. So on the way back up, he swallows death itself and stands eternally for all time and goes, Believe in me.

[20 : 47] And you get the same thing. Jonah found life as he turned toward the dwelling place of God in the temple. You and I find eternal life as we turn toward the dwelling place of God in human flesh, Jesus Christ.

So, friends, here's the most important question you will be ever asked in your life. What will you do with Jesus?

Feel like you're in the belly of the whale today? It would be shocking in a room this size with this many people if nobody felt like they were being drawn to death.

The question is, what will you do with Jesus? It's the way up. The question at this point is, well, what's Jonah going to do?

We've seen the way down. We've seen the way up. So in closing, I want to talk about the difference the journey makes.

[22 : 02] We get the answer to what Jonah will do in verses 8 and 9. 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, salvation belongs to the Lord. In other words, I'm done running in the wrong direction.

I'm looking to you, and I will, when I get out of this situation, which is crazy because he's in the belly of a fish, and that usually doesn't happen. But when I get out, I'm going to do the right thing.

There's some dark humor here. Jonah, the prophet of God, has officially arrived at the level of the pagan sailors in chapter 1.

Friends, sometimes God has to take some of us a bit deeper down into death to see the light. Jonah is on the right track, and his dedication is carried out in the text that we'll study next week.

[23 : 13] See, the interesting thing is that while Jonah was in the fish, the Ninevites didn't change. His resolve did. Makes sense.

Jonah has been shown a mess of mercy by being swallowed by this whale. I won't lie to you.

Jonah doesn't run real well going forward. I'd like to tell you that he gets out of the fish. He goes to Nineveh happily ever after. That's not the way it works. But we must not discount what he does here.

This is a triumph of mercy in the text. And it will serve to highlight the tragedy that is to come.

But know this. When it comes to this moment in Jonah's life, you should follow his response to the overwhelming mercy of God. Remember this.

[24 : 17] Jonah deserved to drown. And so do you. And so do I. You go, but I feel that God has put me in the belly of a fish and drawn me down to death.

You're right, and you're welcome. You don't deserve to be breathing, and neither do I. You don't deserve to be breathing. the question is, you see a light in the darkness yet or not?

You and I have far more reason to act like Jonah. We've been shown a greater mercy. Jonah was spared, but we, through Jesus, through faith in him, can have salvation.

So may those of us who are Christians reflect on the journey that God has brought us through and realize that we were on our way down, but God in his great kindness has shown us light in the darkness and given us life.

What if I'm still on my way down, Jeremy? What if I want to see light in the darkness? And what if I think I'm seeing something that looks like stars, but everything looks so dark?

[25 : 41] What do I do? Well, be like Jonah, friends, and turn to the Lord. In the mercy of God, you have been given this moment.

You are promised none others. Trust in Christ. How far down does God have to take you to get you to see the light?

Friends, regardless of whether you see the light or not, whether you feel as if you are at the point of death or not, my prayer is that we would run together in the right direction this morning.

For in the mercy of God, through this text, He has shown us light in the darkness. Let's pray.

God, we thank you for this story. that in the mercy that you have shown to us, we have seen once again, or maybe even for the very first time, just how merciful you are.

[26 : 55] Help us to appreciate both the way down and the way up. We pray that it would make a difference every day of our lives.

I pray for those who don't see it. Christian or not. Who think that their strategy of running is going to work.

drag them down as far as you must in order to give them life through faith in Jesus Christ in whose name we pray.

Amen. Amen.