

# Jonah 1:17-2:10

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[ 0 : 0 0 ] Again, that's Jonah chapter 1 verse 17 through 2 10, page 774. Please stand for the reading of God's word. 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. 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 floods surrounded me.

All your waves and your billows passed over me. Then I said, I'm driven away from your sight, yet I shall again look 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.

[ 1 : 0 4 ] 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. 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. Good morning.

Let's pray together and ask the Lord to bless our time. Gracious God, we are so thankful for your word this morning. Father, for those of us who are in the depths of deep despair, come and speak to us.

[ 2 : 1 4 ] Come and liberate us, Lord. Allow our hearts to revel in the fact that salvation belongs to the Lord.

Lord, grant your grace through the power of your Holy Spirit to illuminate this passage to us this morning. We pray this in Christ's name.

Amen. Well, this morning we are in our third week of the story of Jonah. The literary structure and the literary genre of Jonah, of course, is that it's situated in the minor prophets.

It's primarily narrative, except for our passage this morning here in chapter 2. In this passage, we mainly have a prayer. Have you ever written down your prayers, your journals, in your journals?

How are your prayers as you're writing them down? Mostly polemical in their nature, aren't there? And yet this passage is framed with narrative inclusions there in chapter 1, verse 17, and the end of chapter 2, verse 10.

[ 3 : 2 0 ] His prayer, Jonah's prayer, is arranged symmetrically, though, with this final unit that speaks about Jonah's thankful commitment of vows and his sacrifice and his vow to sacrifice to God.

Today, we'll be confronted with a theme that declares to us that God's salvation enables Jonah to look beyond the grave and to the temple.

The theme of our passage this morning is that this passage enables Jonah to look beyond the grave, even though he is in the grave, to the temple.

In other words, this passage, the big idea of this passage is that Jonah extols the Lord because salvation comes through judgment.

And isn't that the big metaphor of the whole Bible? That salvation comes through judgment. The act of facing God's justice has secured for him salvation.

[ 4 : 32 ] He's faced God's justice. And he encounters salvation. But how did we arrive here?

Perhaps this is your first time here. So let's just do a bit of a recap here, a little background. We're told that God commissioned Jonah to announce judgment against Nineveh in chapter 1, verse 1.

Nineveh is the capital city of Assyria, who was at that time Israel's great enemy. But Jonah refused God's word.

And he feels as though he directs his own life. And he goes down to Joppa, on board this ship, heading totally the opposite way from Nineveh.

This is the case of this prophet, a prophet going AWOL in our passage. I mean, you can hear Jonah here, can't you? No, thank you, God. I'll do what I want to do.

[ 5 : 29 ] I'll go where I want. I have my hard-earned money in my pocket. I'll spend it the way I want. I always did want to have a holiday in Spain.

That'd be a great place to go. Thanks, God. But no thanks. That's the sentiment of our prophet this morning. God, of course, judges the prophet.

If God can judge a wicked and pagan nation like Nineveh, then certainly he will enact judgment on his prophet for his disobedience. And he gives them what he ultimately desires.

Do you remember in chapter 1, verse 3, Jonah was fleeing from the presence of the Lord. From the presence of the Lord. He wasn't really running away from his orders to go to Nineveh.

He wasn't running away from his mission. You see, his failure of acting upon this mission was an incidental cause. It was the byproduct of his heart.

[ 6 : 29 ] He ultimately wanted to run away from God. And so what does God give him? Well, last week we saw the just verdict, the penalty of disobeying God's word.

Namely, Jonah was hurled out of this ship. He was thrown into the sea, this raging sea, as the tempestuous storms went all over the place.

That was the consequences of disobeying God's word. The punishment of being cast into this raging sea was just.

The logic is simple, isn't it? His disobedience, the commandment of the commanding of the Lord, and God gives him what he wants and what he desires.

You see, experiencing the absence from the presence of the Lord was his just verdict. That's what it was. The dark depths of the sea, the abyss, shale.

[ 7 : 30 ] It really is the irony of this passage that we find here. And it teaches us, doesn't it? God says to this rogue prophet, Oh, so Jonah, you wanted to run away from me?

And I do what I've created you to do? Okay, go for it. But remember, ultimately you will receive what you want. You want separation from me?

I'll throw you out into the sea, and there you'll be far away from me, as far as you wanted to be. And God gives him what he desires and what he deserves.

But it's the illusions of this book that teach us a lot, don't they? I mean, the author, Jonah, of this book, you know, the author, he blurs the lines between the protagonist and the antagonist, doesn't he?

The pagan versus God's prophet, God's messenger. At times we don't even know who to root for. Who should we cheer for in this book? Should we cheer for the prophet or the pagans?

[ 8 : 41 ] The pagan, it seems that they're the ones that are moving closer to God while the prophet of God is running away from God. Jonah doesn't care about Nineveh, but they care about him.

I mean, he's asleep downstairs in the boat while they're bailing the water out of this boat. He doesn't fear God while the pagans in this book are terrified of offending God.

And ultimately, the pagans, they show up the messenger of God, don't they? They shame the man, the preacher of God. And yet, both of them need salvation.

Well, if the agent of God's judgment was unusual, that is, to be thrown into the sea, then the agent of God's salvation of this rogue prophet is doubly amazing, isn't it?

The great fish in our passage. Salvation comes through a fish. He experiences God's justice and the judgment in the raging seas.

[ 9 : 47 ] And how does God provide salvation? Through this fish, through this massive sea monster creature thing that gives him salvation, that enables him to live and to breathe another minute, another second so that he can write down this prayer for us so that we can feel the visceral, emotional weight of this prayer and say, I've been there.

I've been down to the deeps of the pain and hurt. God allows us to hear this prayer.

This is God's mercy upon a rogue prophet. How are you doing today? Where are you in your relationship to your Savior, to your Creator?

How do you respond to the situations of your life where it seems as though it's completely difficult? You can't find a way out. How do you respond to the trials in your life?

You see, there are usually three responses that we generally have, right, to our trials. One, we get angry. We get angry, disgruntled, embittered.

[ 11 : 03 ] I can't believe this happened. And we lash out. That's our natural response. We lash out. I can't believe this happened. Number two, it's just completely deny it, right?

We respond by denying. We'll move to the next TV series and we'll go on and on. We move to the next thing that distracts our mind away from the trials of life.

Or thirdly, we will embrace the one who's trying to call out to us and find salvation and rescue in him. Well, this morning, we hear Jonah's prayer.

It's a prayer for us. It's a prayer for the Chicagoan who finds himself situated in the midst of complete, dire situation of the city.

Five people shot. Eleven wounded last night. Despair. Shock. We might not feel it here in this room, but that's the situation and the climate that we find ourselves in.

[ 12 : 07 ] The outline of this passage is really simple. It's for simple people like myself. Jonah prays to God.

That's what we see in chapter 2, verses 2 to 9. And then God preserves his prophet in chapter 1, verse 17, and then chapter 2, verse 10. Jonah prays to God.

Simple enough. Children, you can write that down in your little journal. Jonah prays to his God. And God preserves his prophet. So let's look at our first section here.

Jonah prays to his God. There are really five points in this prayer. And the beauty of this prayer is that it's poetry. I mean, it's the psalm.

It's this poetry here. And poetry provides us with texture, doesn't it? It's like a painting with layers upon layers of colors. And as you see this painting, the textures just come alive and flow through.

[ 13 : 06 ] And it provides this deep masterpiece. And it's retrospective, isn't it? It's filled with symmetry in this passage. But also, it's this polemical prayer that invokes emotion for us.

I mean, we're intended to feel the deep pain and the deep joys that come from this passage. So Jonah prays the psalm. If this book begins with God giving Jonah a word in chapter one, now in chapter two, Jonah gives God some words through prayer.

There are humble, there are hopeful words in the midst of deep despair. And let's be clear here. Let's be clear from this prayer. Jonah's prayer is not a request to be saved from the ship, from this fish, but it's a thankful prayer for being saved by the fish.

You see, the prayer crescendos there with the confident prayer of salvation in verse nine, isn't it? That salvation belongs to the Lord. Remember also that in chapter one, when the sailors ask him to pray, pray to your God, maybe your God will hear you, he refuses.

And now, he realizes that this is the only thing that he can do. He prays. He prays. He doesn't try to Google for a solution. He doesn't try to find the latest, latest this for a solution.

[ 14 : 42 ] He's done. And all he does is he prays. We have an introduction to this psalm, don't we? This little prayer.

It's really, the psalm is summarized there in verses one and two. It's calling out for help. Verse two begins with the only sensible and logical action that a rebellious messenger or preacher can do when he has shirked his responsibilities to proclaim God's word.

It's simple. He called out to the Lord. And don't you love the fact that God actually hears the prayer of this rogue prophet? God listens to his prayer.

Did you also notice that in verse one he calls out to his God? He calls out to his God. Even in the midst when he's run away from God from so far, he knows that it's his God.

There's something about the idea of being identified with this personal response to a God who loves you, who created you. It's his God.

[ 15 : 48 ] It's a deep and personal reflection. But it moves to lament, doesn't it, in verses three to six. It's the problem is described there. He's driven away.

He says, yet I will do something. In this section we see the framework of this circumstantial despair, but it also yields us to this hopeful worship in this section, this lament.

Verse three begins with an acknowledgement. You see, Jonah was first of all disciplined under the loving hand of God and Jonah admitted it was God who cast him into the sea.

Verse three, it wasn't the hands of sailors. It was God who sent him into the sea. You see, when trials and afflictions come to us because of our sin, it's important for us to acknowledge that God is at work.

God's working. At the hand of God's justice, you see, God disciplines his children and he disciplines those whom he loves.

[ 16 : 56 ] I have three little boys, five, and three-year-old twins. Discipline is a very big active part in our family. Not merely correction, not merely lashing out, but speaking and correcting in a sense that educates a child.

Because I love you, I will discipline. And listen, this is the way we respond, my child. You see, God has put this prophet in that situation in order to wake up his heart.

In order to stop the bleeding, he severs the prophet. And the prophet responds, well, doesn't he? Verse 4 has a hopeful shout, doesn't it?

I'm driven away from your sight, yet I shall look upon your holy temple. He wants to go back to his homeland.

He wants to find the comfort and the aesthetics of the temple to actually worship and find great comfort in God. who's given him great comfort.

[ 18 : 10 ] He wants to look to this temple. He knows that. And it's confident, isn't it? Shout in verse 4. But even though there is hope in verse 5, even though there's hope there in verse 4, verse 5 reminds us of this visceral weight of the situation, the sensation, the deep surrounding me, verse 5.

Look at that. Weeds were wrapped about my head. I mean, not only can you go a few verses, not even a sentence, before you're back to the, he's back to the reality of the depths of the pain and the hurt of the situation.

I will go to the temple, but I gotta get these weeds out of my head. And he reminds of a situation and it hurts and it's painful.

And finally, he laments there in verse 6, a first section of verse 6, and it reminds us again of this reality, the weight of how it feels like eternity when you're in pain.

He cries out, I went down to the land whose bars closed upon me forever. And isn't that true of us today?

[ 19 : 24 ] Isn't it true when we are in the moments of deep despair and painful trials that we actually cry out the same way in verse 6? I mean, you might feel like it's never gonna end, right?

The pain of the death of a loved one feels like eternity. The pain of losing your job, your home, feels like a long time.

The pain of falsely being accused in the office is, when is this gonna get over? It hurts. I can't see the end of this.

This prayer is a prayer that we should leave with tearful reflections this morning. But his prayer moves us away from the depths of pain to acknowledge God's activity, to raise him from the deep there in verse 6b, the second half verse 6.

It's a proclamation. He proclaims that Yahweh's mighty acts of deliverance and he extols in them. Look at that. Yet you brought up my life from the pits.

[ 20 : 38 ] Oh Lord, my God. God's active engagement in this prophet who's gone awol is one in which God resurrects a disobedient child.

God resurrects and brings them back and saves them. Not because of his work, not because of Jonah's work, but because of who God is.

And so Jonah proclaims and he has an appeal there in verse 7. It moves from this proclamation to an appeal there there in verse 7. He went down yet.

Again, this idea here. When my life was fainting away, I remembered the Lord and my prayer came to you and to your holy temple.

In verse 4, he was seeking the temple and looking forward to the temple. He now recognizes with complete confidence that his prayer will revive the temple, that he actually will do its work in accomplishing his purposes for this prophet who's run away.

[ 21 : 57 ] And then finally, this escalating pinnacle reality in verses 8 and 9. Those who pray regard to vain idols forsake their hope of steadfast love, but I with the voice of thanksgiving will sacrifice to you what I vowed I will pay.

salvation belongs to the Lord and if I were to shout it out, that's what it's intended to be, to do, were to shout out verse 9, to cry out and to say amen, salvation comes from the Lord.

The pinnacle there of this prayer, it comes, salvation comes through judgment. and isn't that the pattern of life?

C.S. Lewis says in his *The Problem of Pain*, God whispers to us in our pleasures, he speaks in our conscience, but shouts in our pains.

It is his megaphone to arouse a deaf world. He also writes, we regard God as an ear man, regards his parachute.

[ 23 : 13 ] It's there for emergencies, but he hopes he'll never have to use it. Where are you at today? Do you feel as though you're too far from his reach?

Do you feel like you've hidden for so long, and perhaps your consciences are seared? What this passage this morning should remind us that no one's ever too far.

No one has run away for too long to be in God's grip, to find God. Today is a day of returning. Today is a day that in your intense situation, whatever it might be, you didn't get into that college, that school that you wanted to.

You can't imagine how you're going to afford that bill. You don't know how this relationship is going to be brought back.

Whatever your situation might be, this passage should shake us and remind us that God is a God who brings salvation in the midst of judgment, that it is through, through judgment that we find salvation.

[ 24 : 39 ] So let us pray. Let us pray daily. Let us commit ourselves to pray. Are we instructing our children to pray?

Are we praying for our neighbors, for our co-workers? Should we not write down our prayers? This prayer is not accidental.

It's not here so that we could just say, that's another one I've heard. It's here to remind us that indeed salvation belongs to the Lord.

Well, not only does Jonah pray to his God, but God preserves his prophet. These are the bookends of this section there in chapter 1, verse 17. Look at verse 17 again.

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. And then chapter 2, verse 10. And the Lord spoke to the fish and it vomited Jonah out upon the dry land.

[ 25 : 43 ] God's active, his activity, his cruelty even over nature, creation itself, and speaking to this incredible fish.

fish. How does God preserve Jonah's life? He sends a fish. And he's in this fish for three days and three nights, we're told. And also, by this divine activity in chapter 2, verse 10, the fish vomits him out.

Let's talk about this fish that much speculation has been brought about. You see, God literally brings salvation to him. if this seaweed was literal, if the depths of the valleys of the ocean and the sea were literal, why can't this be a literal great fish to swallow up this rogue prophet?

Why do we distrust God's word at this point? Why is it so hard for us to believe something like this yes, a literal fish?

Again, it's pointless to speculate whether or not it was real or not. Yes, it really, this passage is actually telling us that it really did happen.

[ 27 : 08 ] It wasn't metaphorical, figurative. It was actual, it was literal here. Was it a whale, you might ask? Or some massive sea creature?

No, of course it wasn't a whale. Whales aren't in the Mediterranean Sea. Whales just aren't found in that ecosystem. So what kind of fish or species was it?

We don't know, except that it was a great big fish. It was massive. And every children's coloring book can show you what kind of fish it was.

if God can make a donkey speak to a rogue prophet as he did in Numbers 22, if God can allow the seas to separate and allow the nation of Israel to find freedom out of being enslaved for over 450 years, if God can raise Lazarus from the dead after being dead for four days, if Jesus can predict his death and that he would rise in three days, then I'm going to believe, I'm going to believe that it was a fish that swallowed up and brought salvation for this man at that time.

Salvation comes in an unconventional way. at this point of the story, salvation comes not by convention, conventional means, not by comfortable means.

[ 28 : 55 ] Salvation comes through the pain of being swallowed up by a fish. And should this passage not remind us of a pattern that is found in the New Testament, that indeed salvation comes through the pain of a cross, of God's Son, hanging there on the cross, feeling the weight and pain of God's judgment, should it not remind us about God's great work in Jesus.

You see, Jonah, in Jonah, we need to see that there's actually a pattern here of God's grace that actually is magnified through the reversal that's found in Christ.

If Jonah gave us a bit of a pattern for God's redemptive work, that is that salvation comes through judgment, well, don't we see the fulfillment of this one through Jesus, his Son, who actually fulfills all of Old Testament, who actually enjoys God's mercy, Jonah indeed is a pattern for us to look to Jesus.

You see, Jesus receives the just penalty of condemnation of God's anger. If Jonah was thrown into the sea, so Jesus receives God's judgment.

Jesus goes down to Sheol for three days, to death, buried there in the tomb for three days. Jesus' death results in many being saved.

[ 30 : 49 ] Jonah, as he's thrown out into the sea here, is saved, saves the sailors, who actually end up worshiping God as a result of his judgment.

Jesus is raised from the dead on the third day, and so Jonah is spit out out of this mass of fish, as God directs it.

Why? Because death cannot keep a hold of him. Because the pains and the chains of death cannot keep a hold of him.

Wasn't that Peter's first comment when he preached there in Acts chapter 2? this Jesus whom you crucified, it was impossible for death to keep hold of him.

And did not Jesus in Matthew chapter 12 affirm that the sign that they were to have was a sign of Jonah concerning him?

[ 31 : 47 ] How does salvation come to us this morning? Salvation comes through the person and work of Jesus. Salvation comes to those of us who are so far removed from God's grace, we feel as though we're removed from God's grace, and yet Jesus is saying come, come find life, come find freedom in me, come and embrace the love that I extend to you.

you are not so far away, your problem will not kill you, but rather find life in Jesus, find life in the one who actually is the fulfillment of Jonah.

This morning, may we embrace the hope and the reality that salvation belongs to the Lord. May we recognize and not be embittered at what God is doing in our life.

May we not see that the painful situation that we're in is not God's hand of anger towards you, but actually might be a temporal situation to actually bring us closer to the hand of God and the heart of God.

Our passage this morning is about embracing God. And how are we to end this passage? Well, again, verse 9, but I will with the voice of thanksgiving will sacrifice to you.

[ 33 : 32 ] Thankful hearts, thankful hearts. this morning, may we leave thankful that salvation has come through the one who presents himself to us this morning.

This table is a tangible picture to give us a reminder that this one Jesus extends this kind of love and grace to you and to us.

Let's pray. We're thankful, Lord, for this rich passage. We're thankful, Lord, that you hear our prayers.

We're thankful, Lord, that not only do you seek to instruct the children in this room, but you seek to instruct us. You seek to call us, Lord, from the depths of seas into the holy throne of God, where we can cry out thank you, Lord Jesus, for life in you.

We celebrate your goodness to us, and we ask, oh, God, that you continue to grow a burden for one another, for each other, that you would grow a burden, Lord, that we would continue to grow into maturity.

[ 35 : 04 ] Liberate us, Lord, from anger in our situation. Liberate us, Lord, from feeling embittered. Lord, may we continue to trust in Jesus this morning.

It's his name we pray. Amen.