

# Praying In the Belly of the Beast.

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[ 0 : 00 ] Father, we ask that you would gently but deeply pour out the Holy Spirit upon us, that we might receive from your word. Father, we need your word to come to the very center of who we are, the control center of our life, our heart.

We need your word to come there, that you might grant us freedom, that you might grant us deliverance, that we might know you, that we might follow you, that we might be changed from one degree of glory to another as we serve you and bring you glory in this world.

Father, we need the help of your Holy Spirit to bring your word deep to the center of our heart. And we ask this in the name of Jesus, your Son and our Savior. Amen. Please be seated.

So, we're looking at the story of Jonah. And last, we're on chapter 2. So there's sort of a—I didn't talk about it at all last week.

There's a very obvious question that most people want to ask when you study the book of Jonah. I don't care if it's Christians or non-Christians, but especially non-Christians. But usually the non-Christian question would be something like this.

[ 1 : 05 ] Of course, George, you don't believe the story's true, that something like this actually happened. And for a lot of Christians, when you have a question like that thrown to them, that's when you get to see how well Christians can dance.

They start to do a little bit of shuffling and a little bit of this and maybe this and maybe that and in the Hebrew this. And so the question would come to me, George, do you think the story really happened, that this Jonah being swallowed, etc., etc.?

And the answer is, yes, I think it really happened. And I really—I think it happened for three reasons. The first reason I think it happened is an inconvenient truth for Christians, and that is that the way at the level—actually at the level of the original language, the way the book begins actually is the way that historical books usually begin.

So Joshua and Judges and 1 and 2 Kings begin the exact same way, and everybody who reads it reads it understanding that they are claiming to tell us the basic historical thing.

That's the first reason why I would believe it. The second reason is that Jesus—even more inconvenient for us—is that Jesus treats the story as real. He does it in both Matthew and Luke.

[ 2 : 23 ] He treats Jonah as if Jonah was a real person and as if he actually was in the belly of the fish. And that's not as big—I mean, that's actually a pretty big deal for a Christian.

I don't know where you are with the Lord, but at the very, very simple level, what a Christian is is somebody who's heard about Jesus, heard about who he is, what he did, and accomplished for us, and we've now put our faith and trust in him.

He is our Lord, our Savior. He is our Master, and I am his disciple. If you go back and read the book of Acts, you'll see that disciples of Jesus were called Christians for the first time in Antioch.

So the way that people would have understood being a Christian at the very, very basic level is a Christian is a person who's a disciple of Jesus. He is my Lord. He is my Master. I trust him.

I follow him. I believe him. And I'm not a disciple of Jesus if I say, Jesus, I trust you. I believe you. Oh, but by the way, you're wrong about this. You're wrong about that.

[ 3 : 24 ] You're wrong about this. And you need to learn from me because I can set you straight on these other matters. At that point in time, you're no longer a disciple of Jesus. You've put yourself up to be the Master, and he's your disciple.

You can ask me about this at the coffee time, but the reason I left the Anglican Church of Canada is because at a very official, solemn level, they said, by the way, Jesus, you're wrong.

And you need to learn from us. And at that point in time, at an official doctrinal level, I could no longer be part of the Anglican Church of Canada. It goes against what it means to be a Christian.

And so some of you might say, well, George, that's all very interesting, but couldn't you just be wrong about this? You know, like, don't get all high and, you know, go, whoa, all the way over there. Like, no, like, I told you there's three reasons.

I've just given you two. Here's the third reason. At the heart of the very, very, very, very heart of the Christian faith is the belief that Jesus lived among us, and that time and time and time again, he said he was going to die on a cross, and on the third day, he would rise from the dead.

[ 4 : 32 ] And he said that time and time and time again. All of the historical records, all of the ancient documents say that that's what he claimed. And I believe that there's good reason, good historical reasons, not to compel, but that that's, in fact, what happened.

That he really did die on a cross by crucifixion, something he couldn't have arranged by himself. And that he did, he was, the Romans guaranteed his death, so to speak.

He was put in a tomb on the third day. The grave clothes were there. The body was not there. And Jesus then appeared on many, many occasions to many people in different places, showing that he was fully and utterly alive.

And so here's the thing. If I believe in the resurrection, this is a small miracle. It's just as simple as that. This is a tiny miracle, if that big miracle of the resurrection is true.

And so I believe we're hearing the story of a miracle, which is the story of Jonah. But however, having said that, I believe in Jonah in a far deeper way.

[ 5 : 41 ] It's not just that I go, aha, there's proof of a miracle here. The fact of the matter is, is the story of Jonah. Most people just know about Jonah and the fish. But it's actually a very, very, very fascinating story.

And the way to understand it is, imagine that you're watching a BBC series or a Netflix series of four separate stories or episodes. And each story has its own integrity, its own drama.

But the four of them together tell a bigger and far more subtle story. And that's what's going on here in Jonah. There's actually four stories. And last week, we looked at the first story. The first story begins with something that many people in our world would just, they say they would love it.

I've had so many people tell me, George, if God wants me to believe him, why doesn't he just show up? Why doesn't he just appear to me and tell me? Just show me that he exists and then I'll believe in him.

Well, that's what happens to Jonah. That's how the story begins. God shows up. But unfortunately for Jonah, God shows up and also gives him something to do. And Jonah's response to being given something to do is to run away from God.

[ 6 : 48 ] He flees from God's presence. In fact, he's so committed to fleeing from God's presence, he basically sells his possessions or whatever. He gets enough money that he can go one year away, one year of traveling away from where the Lord has met him.

And that's, you know, he would have had to go like quite a way just to go to where the Lord wanted him to go. But he takes enough money to go a year away. And then the Lord, he's on a ship. The Lord sends a storm.

And the pagans believe the same thing as the pagan sailors believe the same thing as most Canadians do today. Because most Canadians today believe in some form that you get what you give.

What goes around comes around. That there's a reason why everything happens to you. In fact, it's a type of form of karma. It's something that the most postmodern hipster barista and a pagan sailor in 755 BC both believe.

Hard to believe, eh? But that's in fact the case. It's a very, very deeply held human belief. What goes around comes around. You get what you give. And because these pagans believe that, they said there's a storm going on.

[ 8 : 02 ] It must be because a god has been angered. And they start to try to figure it out. And eventually it comes to Jonah. And Jonah reveals that it's in fact precisely because of what he's done that the storm is here.

So the pagans being good pagans, they want to hedge their bets. They try to get free. But they want to hedge their bets. And if Jonah, but at the end of the day, they throw Jonah overboard. And that's really how chapter one ends. The storm stops. And so the pagans know that the Lord was really the one responsible for the storm, that he really exists.

And so they sacrifice, sacrifices, vow, vows, and fear fearfully. And that's really in the Jewish version of the Bible. Chapter one ends right there. In our version, we sort of give away what happens and then have chapter two.

But what happens? Jonah goes over. The storm stops. Obviously, the Lord is real. And in a sense, it's left right there. Perfect. Andrew, I'm so glad you have that up there. That's where chapter one ends.

[ 9 : 06 ] Episode one, a cliffhanger, except at the end of chapter one, basically, they don't know there's a huge aquatic beast in the water. Jonah goes overboard. And now let's pick up the story.

Chapter one, verse 17. 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 now just sort of pause there. Believe it or not, there's lots of stuff in here, which is really important to understand the story. The first thing is that he uses the word Lord.

I didn't talk about this last week. One of the things which is very interesting about the Jewish people, the Tanakh, is they had a different name for their God, so to speak, than for generic God, the God of other people.

And so Jonah, all the way through this, uses the word the Lord. It's the word Yahweh. And what this is, is it's the name for the personal God that can be known.

[ 10 : 10 ] It's not just God in general. It's not just a deistic, vague God. The Lord has revealed himself to Israel. He's spoken to Israel.

He is their covenant God. It means that he's entered into a relationship with them. He loves them. He cares for them. He knows them. And they are to know him. And that's the name of God that they use.

Not just covenant, just not abstract God, but the Lord. Would be really handy. I wish so many times that that would be true in Canada today. Because as you've heard me say many times, I don't believe in the God that most Canadians believe in.

I don't believe that God exists. I believe in the God that's revealed by Jesus. That's the God who actually does exist. And that's the God who's being talked about all the way through this story. And the Lord appointed a great fish.

And what that word appointed means is that God worked through the natural processes so that at the very time that Jonah is being thrown into the water, as he starts to sink, at the very exact time God has, through circumstances, arranged for a great fish to be there who's going to swallow Jonah.

[ 11 : 20 ] That's what the word appointed means. That God is acting in the natural processes to see that the thing that he wants to be done will be done. And the word for great fish in the original language actually means aquatic beast.

So it is a great aquatic beast that has swallowed. It doesn't actually, I mean, as we all know, whales aren't fish. They're mammals. So it might have been a whale.

But whatever it was, is it was a great aquatic beast. And that great aquatic beast comes by the Lord's command and swallows Jonah. So what happens?

Well, that's what we're going to see in the rest of the chapter or chapter 2, verse 1. 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. And just pause here for a second. When it says here, Then Jonah prayed to the Lord his God from the belly of the fish, part of the literal meaning of that word belly is the entrails of the fish.

[ 12 : 36 ] It's not just the belly. I mean, he's into the intestines. And then it says, So I called out to the Lord.

So what Jonah's doing here, So we're going to see, actually, when it says later on, it's going to say three days and three nights, which is just an idiom. An idiom is just like a saying.

You know, if I say somebody's cuckoo, you all know what I mean. If I say somebody's, you know, missing, you know, a few screws or has a screw loose, you all know what I mean. Those are idioms.

And so later on, when it says three days and three nights, it doesn't necessarily mean literally three days and nights. It's an idiom for the Jewish people. And it might mean 26 hours. It means a period of time that would have touched on three days.

And so what Jonah's doing here is that Jonah spends, is going to spend quite a few hours in the inside, this great aquatic beast. And obviously, Jonah's going to survive it because we have this story.

[13:37] And so how is Jonah going to communicate what went on for him for those hours and hours and hours that he is completely and utterly caught up in the entrails of this great aquatic beast?

And obviously, Jonah has thought about this and prayed about it. All of the things in the story, including all of the really embarrassing things about Jonah, must have been revealed by Jonah, written by Jonah.

And Jonah decides to summarize his experience in the form of an eight-verse prayer, a psalm. That's how he decides that he wants to communicate what goes on to him.

And he's going to use this very powerful, powerful, powerful poetic language. And it's all going to be the language of hopelessness and doom.

That what Jonah wants to communicate is that he was doomed, his life was hopeless. But for some of us, that's how we like to communicate.

[14:46] You like to hear me just say, Jonah was doomed and hopeless. I've just summarized most of chapter two. But for a lot of us, that doesn't do very much. Our minds and hearts are wired a different way.

To say, one foot up, one foot down, that's the way to London town, is a very different thing than saying, I walked to London. For some of us, we like just the straight, bland phrase, I walked to London.

But for others, one foot up, one foot down, that's the way to London town. It's going to communicate far more. It was far more memorable. It grips you. And so what Jonah is doing here is he's going to communicate through this very simple message of being completely and utterly hopeless in the form of this very, very powerful prayer filled with poetic imagery.

And what more fantastic way to communicate the hopelessness of life than to say, I found myself in the entrails of a great aquatic beast.

And while in the entrails of a great aquatic beast that's going to take place for many hours, I prayed to the Lord my God. In the beginning of his prayer, verse two, I called out to the Lord out of my distress and he answered me out of the belly of Sheol.

[16:10] I cried and you heard my voice. The belly of Sheol, it's a different word here for belly than in verse one. And this one actually does mean belly. So what he's saying is he's picturing Sheol is the land of the dead.

And now the other image he's giving is that the land of the dead has consumed me. I've been eaten by the land of the dead.

That's where I find myself. Verse three, 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 again look upon your holy temple. And just sort of pause. There's a debate amongst scholars. And some of you, if you look at different translations of the Bible, that last little bit, your Bibles will translate them a little bit differently.

And for some, this little bit, yet I shall again look upon your holy temple, is the first little glimmer of light in hopelessness. That's how some people translate it.

[17:18] But it can also be translated that I will never again see your temple. That his sense of doom is ongoing. He's getting deeper into the sense of doom.

And when Jonah is referring to the temple of the Lord, in the Jewish, in the Tanakh, the Old Testament, often when people talk about the holy temple, they're using a very, very powerful and rich image to communicate two different ideas.

And it's hard for us to have a single, sort of just to try to grasp this double, that's the way their mind worked at two levels at the exact same time.

And on one hand, when they talk about the holy temple, they're meaning, of course, the temple in Jerusalem. And they're meaning that the Lord is present amidst among his people. He's not a God far away, but he dwells among his people.

He is, in a sense, Emmanuel, God with us. But at the same time, when they were using this imagery, they're also referring to heaven. They're referring to the transcendence and majesty of God.

[ 18 : 26 ] And so when he is saying that I'm cast away, or I don't know if I'll ever be again in your presence, he's acknowledging that the Lord is transcendent. He's high over all of human affairs. He is in the place of holiness and beauty and splendor. But at the same time, he's not just a God who's high over all human affairs. He's the same time he is the Lord who is among us, who is among his people, at the center of his people, caring for his people. And so Jonah is giving this imagery of he's sinking in water. Read it again. 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, verse 4, I am driven away from your sight. Now we don't know. Is this the first little tiny pinprick of light? Yet I shall again look upon your holy temple, or should it be translated, but I'll never see your holy temple. But he continues on in his prayer. The waters closed in, verse 5, to take over me, to take my life.

[ 19 : 29 ] The deep surrounded me. Weeds were wrapped around about my head. At the roots of the mountains, I went down to the land. And this is now referring to the land of the dead. 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. And the image, I don't like, okay, I'm a first world wimp. I hate swimming in weeds.

Like I know I'm a, I just, I imagine terrible things if I go swimming in a lake or a stream, and there's all these weeds. I was visiting my son, Tosh.

They'd rented a cottage last summer. And to get to where it was good to swim, you had to swim through weeds. And so, I just gird up my loins and manned it out and swam through those weeds. But I hated it. And so, I think it's a common thing. And here, the image is, not just that he's swimming through weeds, the weeds have wrapped itself around his head because he's completely and utterly hopeless.

[ 20 : 32 ] Those of you who don't like weeds, that's a terrible image. And then the image of the land of the dead, it's as if you've been sent to jail. You know, when you see all those movies, or maybe for some of you, it's your experience, and they put you in jail, and then the door clangs shut.

That's the image which is there. I've gone down to the land of the dead. Not only has the, am I in the belly of the land of the dead, but when I went down to the very, very depths, when I went down to the land of the dead, the door, the prison door clangs shut.

That's my experience. Listen to it again. Verse 5 and 6. 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 clangs shut upon me forever.

Yet you brought me up. You brought up my life from the abyss, O Lord my God. Verse 7. When my life was fainting away, ebbing away, I remembered the Lord, and my prayer came to you in your holy temple.

I'll just sort of pause there. He remembers the Lord. His life is completely and utterly hopeless. He is praying, thinking, in the entrails of the beast.

[ 21 : 49 ] And in the entrails of the beast, he remembers the Lord, and he calls out to him. And while he says this in verse 8, those who pay regard to vain idols forsake their hope of steadfast love.

Now just sort of pause there. This is a profoundly offensive statement to Canadians. Those who pay regard to vain idols forsake their hope of steadfast love.

What Jonah is acknowledging, the two words vain and idols, in the original language, the first word is the word, if you read through the book of Ecclesiastes, you know, vanity of vanities or futility of futility, that's the same word.

And what it means is vapor, something which is completely and utterly impermanent. Do you want to get an image of it? In fact, they couldn't use this in the Old Testament because they lived in a warm climate.

But we know this perfectly. It's January, and when you breathe out and see your breath, you see your breath. How long does that last? Not at all.

[ 23 : 00 ] That's the image. All the way through Ecclesiastes, when it's talking about life being vain, that's saying life is like when you're on a cold day and you breathe out and you can see your breath for just a moment and then it goes away.

That's your life. And what Jonah is saying, you see any God, you see anything that you put your trust in, those of us who put our trust and get our identity, maybe from the fact that we are, you know, in the alt-right, they put their trust and identity in the fact that they're white, that is a vain idol. And it's this vaporous, and the word for idol is the word for worthless nothingness. So he's put together that anybody who puts their trust in something other than the Lord, what they're putting their trust in is like a breath on a cold day which describes a type of worthless nothingness. And if you are in the alt-right and you put your faith and your hope in being white, that is an idol. It is vapor. It is nothing. If you put your faith and trust in your sexuality, in your ethnic identity, if you put your faith and trust in your job, if you put all of your faith and your trust in your identity and how good-looking you are, or your athletic ability, or your IQ, or your academic attainments, or the place that you live, or the money that you make, that is a vain idol. And it also extends to other religions. That's what Jonah is saying, which is profoundly offensive to Canadians, including Canadian Christians, because we, like everybody else, are very prone to make idols.

[ 24 : 45 ] To stop remembering the Lord who is to give us a secure identity, which we'll talk about more in a moment, and we start to get our... We serve, we believe, we trust in, we get our identity from these things, which are nothing.

Which are nothing. And what he's saying here, it's very, very powerful. Those, once again, verse 8, those who pay regard to vain idols forsake their hope of steadfast love. In other words, what it's just saying, it's just making common sense. Like, if I turn my back, the word here for steadfast love, it's one of the most important words in the Old Testament. It's hesed, which I didn't pronounce because in Hebrew, you'd have to go hesed, or something like that. Like you're going to spit. Hesed. And it's this image that the Lord is a God who's unfailingly loving, unfailingly kind, unfailingly affectionate, unfailingly merciful, unfailingly good. And he invites you and me to accept him as our Lord and as our God, and nothing can stop him from that loving kindness and mercy and goodness.

[ 26 : 09 ] And Jonah is just speaking common sense. If I turn my, if I pursue what is worthless and empty, and I pursue it, I seek it, then I'm turning my back.

I'm forsaking the reality that there is in fact a God who does exist, who's described as being unfailingly kind, unfailingly loving, unfailingly good, unfailingly merciful, who cries out because he longs to be once again your God.

And we turn our back on that. And if we turn our back on that, we are walking towards nothingness. We are walking towards putting our hope in what comes out of our mouth on a cold January day which lasts hardly a second.

This is Jonah's meditation in the entrails of the beast. How he wants to communicate what went on in his life and in his thoughts and bear witness to us in the form of a prayer.

But it goes on, verse 9, but I will, I with the voice of thanksgiving will sacrifice to you what I have vowed I will pay. Salvation belongs to the Lord.

[ 27 : 27 ] It's his statement of faith that he's called out to the Lord even in the entrails of the beast, even with the bars of the land of the dead having clanged shut behind him.

Salvation belongs to the Lord. For all of you, health and wealth, I know there's probably nobody here. If you're into health and wealth gospel, you wouldn't come to this church. But there's a problematic text because what happens?

Well, does Jonah become a superhero? Does this happen? No. Verse 10, so funny. And the Lord spoke to the fish and had vomited Jonah out upon the dry land.

Jonah's humbled. I just guarantee, if you're spit out of, if you're vomited out of a fish, that would be a very humbling experience. It's not something that you want to put on your resume and you probably would want to get a bath as quickly as you could to smell way better.

So what does all this mean in terms of trying to bring it home for us? Andrew, if you could put up the first point. You know, Amy has done a spectacular graphic for us.

[ 28 : 40 ] I really love it. And you'll notice that the name of this, one of the ways to understand what happens in all four stories is, because I said the sermon series is called No Other, the story of Jonah.

And it's working in two levels. And all of the different stories in some way or another develop this common idea. It develops lots of other stuff as well. And so one of the ways to put it is because the

Lord is God, there is no other God.

Hence, there is no other when it comes to people. We Christians have had a terrible history of this and it's still something which is a problem for us.

We share the normal, human, fallen fear of the other, the stranger. Those of us who are more on the left of the spectrum, people who would vote for Trump are the other.

Those of us who like Trump, those at the other extreme, those maybe who, I don't know, the postal union, they are the other. It can do across bridges of race, across sexuality, across ethnicity and nationality, this common human problem that we're afraid of the other.

[ 29 : 51 ] But actually, once it actually, and part of what Jonah is all about is not only Jonah's constant testimony that the Lord is God, that means there is no other God.

But what the consequence of that should be as it grips us within the context of salvation, it should mean that ultimately, when I meet another human being, he is not other.

See, the fact of the matter is, and actually, we can see this as the belief in one God has waned in our culture. What's happening in our culture is not greater unity, but more and more tribes listening to their echo chambers and only leaving their echo chambers to yell at people in different tribes and to shake our fists and give them fingers.

But you know what? If, in fact, there is only one God who truly exists, if I meet somebody in North Korea, he was made by the only God who does exist just like me.

If I meet somebody in Saudi Arabia, I meet somebody who is made by the one God who exists, who made that person and made me. If I meet somebody in China, if I meet somebody in Nigeria or Kenya or Rwanda, if I meet somebody who goes to the gay pride parade or goes to an alt-right thing, in every case, I am meeting a human being who's been made by the only God that does exist.

[ 31 : 24 ] And as this belief grips us, it means that we start to learn that there is no other when it comes to human beings. It's one of the big messages of Jonah. But get to this story in particular.

If you could put up the second point, there's sort of two big things that are going on here in this story. Death swallowed Jonah and the Lord had death spit Jonah out alive.

Death, in a sense, that's what it says, the land of the dead. The beast swallowed Jonah and the Lord had death spit Jonah out alive. You know, I mean, I've talked about this a lot because it's just very, very, very deeply true is that it's no matter how virtually anybody I talk to, they all have a sense that there has to be some way that human life continues, that death can't be final.

But at the end of the day, other than the fact that there's a hope or a longing for that, there's no basis to believe that. And it's, and we human beings are so hardwired for a sense that there's something beyond death that even though the way we understand how all life came to be or how we understand ethics or how we understand spirituality or how all of those types of things, you know, end up just leading, they don't actually solve the problem either and they end up deepening the problem.

But it doesn't matter, you know, we still just have this sense. And here we have this very, very powerful story, which I believe is true, that speaks very deeply to the fact that on one hand we know that death is final, but on the other hand we really feel that death should never be final, cannot be final, there must be something else and we have this powerful story of death swallowing a man and the Lord, who is the God of life, the Lord of the living, causes the fish to spit Jonah out.

[ 33 : 31 ] But for us, this points us to a far greater story. If you could put up the next slide. Death swallowed Jonah and the Lord had death spit Jonah out alive. Death swallowed Jesus and the Lord spit death out dead.

death. The story of Jonah is preparing us for one who is vastly greater than Jonah. Obviously, unless Jesus comes back before I die, I will die.

But the entire teaching of the New Testament time and time and time and time again is to tell us that death, the death of Jesus was the death of death.

It was the beginning of the death of death. When I put my hand, when Jesus, he calls me to be his child and his friend and he is, in a sense, on one hand, an infinite distance away from me, I put up my very finite, limited hand towards him, but he crosses the distance of infinity itself and when I put my faith and trust in Jesus, when I say, Jesus, I've heard about you and what you said and who you are and what you accomplished for me and having heard it, I want to put my faith and trust in you. I want to have you as my master. I want to be your disciple. I want to learn how to follow you in my day-to-day life. I want to trust you and when I put my hand out, my feeble little hand out, Jesus

reaches his resurrected hand all the way from infinity and grabs mine and I share in his defeat of death.

[ 35 : 17 ] Jonah had to die. He was swallowed by death but eventually he would be swallowed by death and not live. But Jesus was swallowed by death and death died.

That is the Christian hope. But the Christian hope is even more than just a deliverance from death. If you could put up the next point, Andrew, in religion and spirituality, if you're religious, if you're spiritual, here's how it works.

You make vows and you do sacrifices and if you make vows and do the right vows, you're very good at doing vows. You know, Lord, I'm not going to have bad thoughts anymore.

I'm only going to be good to my wife from now on. I'm going to be a better employee and I'm not going to go eating double Big Macs at McDonald's anymore for the rest of my life because it's bad for me and if we're really good at making those vows and we're good at making the right type of sacrifices, didn't I say I gave up double Big Macs, Lord, and maybe doing the right rituals?

If we do all of that, something like salvation will eventually happen to us. That's how all religion works. It's how all people who are spiritual, it's just different. You know, you recycle and you do yoga, you know, rather than giving up the double Big Macs or whatever.

[ 36 : 45 ] I don't know what it is, but it's the same type of process. But the gospel works in a completely different way. With the gospel, salvation leads to vows and sacrifices.

With the gospel, salvation leads to vows and sacrifices. Like, how does this scene in the story, look at the story of Jonah. What did Jonah do to save himself?

Nothing. What could he have done to get himself out of the entrails of a great aquatic beast underwater? Nothing. Absolutely nothing.

Only the Lord could do it. Was Jonah worthy of the Lord paying attention to him and saving him?

No. He was a man who doesn't like pagans.

We would call him prejudiced. We would call him racist. He had God show up and his response was, I want to run away from you.

[ 37 : 55 ] Jonah's not worthy. He's not good. He can't do anything to save himself. Who does all the saving? The Lord.

And it's only after the Lord has saved him that he says, I'm going to make vows and sacrifices. And this is preparing us to understand, you see, it's not just that the New Testament gives you this idea that the Old Testament never had.

You go back and read the Exodus. You read the Ten Commandments. How does the Ten Commandments begin? The Ten Commandments don't begin with, listen, people, if you're really good at having no idols, if you're really good at not committing adultery, if you're really good at not stealing, if you're really good at not coveting, I will be your God.

No. The Ten Commandments begin with, I am the Lord who delivered you out of Egypt. therefore, keep these. Salvation comes first. And out of that comes anything else that we're going to do.

In fact, if you could put up, this is a very startling thing, if you put up the final point, Andrew, this is very, very, very, very, very, very startling. Grace leads to faith and obedience.

[ 39 : 11 ] So your faith and obedience flow out of grace. It isn't as if I have faith and then I receive grace. It's this profound mystery which Jonah is preparing us to understand.

God shows unmerited, powerful grace to unworthy, dead, and dying Jonah. Jonah.

And Jonah finds himself still alive, even in the entrails of the beast. And out of the entrails of the beast that the Lord has shown him such grace and favor, out of that comes his statement of faith and his commitment to vow vows and make sacrifices.

And the same it is with you and me. The gift of grace is what creates faith. The gift of grace is what creates a desire to make sacrifices.

The gift of grace is what makes his desire to make vows. Grace comes first. And there's no point in time that grace for a Christian isn't to be that out of which a life flows.

[ 40 : 32 ] Please stand. Thank you. Thank you. No matter how hopeless your life might be this morning, the story of Jonah is there for you to call out to the Lord.

And in heaven we'll find out it is because God's grace is even coming to your heart even now that you feel that tug or desire to call out to him and have faith in him who does not weigh your merits but pardons your offenses, does not look upon your beauty but makes you beautiful, does not look upon your power but gives you power, does not look upon your favor but gives you favor, that it all

comes from him, it all comes from grace.

And for many of us the way forward in the Christian life is to be gripped and reminded by grace rather than vows and obligations. Let's bow our heads in prayer.

Father, I am a recipient of grace. I am unworthy. I am finite.

I am fallen. I am all of those things. Your grace came to me unmerited. And I don't know what to say, Father, other than thank you.

[ 42 : 06 ] And that may your grace grip me more and more and form me more and more and help me to understand myself and my identity and my present and my past and my future more and more and more.

And forgive me, Father, for the idols that I start to turn to as I forget grace and for the ways that I feel that by making a vow or a sacrifice, I can somehow bind you or make you do my, but Father, I can't do anything.

It's all grace. You are the great giver. You are the one who forgives. You have provided Jesus. You have done everything. And your grace even gives me faith. Father, I can do nothing other than say thank you and ask that you would make me a disciple of Jesus gripped by the gospel, learning to live day by day for your glory to lift Jesus high in my life and to the ends of the earth.

And all God's people said, Amen.