

# Lessons from Rock Bottom

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[ 0 : 0 0 ] In Jonah chapter 2, we're actually going to start at the end of chapter 1, verse 17, and we'll read through chapter 2. Hear now God's word.

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 water closed in over me to take my life. The deep surrounded me. Weeds were wrapped around 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 : 2 7 ] 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 onto dry land. Amen. This is God's word.

When I was preparing for this sermon, I came across a book this week, and it was totally unrelated to the sermon. But this was the title. Things are never so bad that they can't get worse.

And I think that was about the political situation in Venezuela. That was the topic of the book. But that could have just as well been about Jonah. Things are never so bad that they can't get worse. Because if you notice, when you read the first and second chapter of Jonah, there's a direction to the whole story that's actually written into the story.

Because you see the word down repeated over and over again. So Jonah, in verse 3, he goes down to Joppa. Then he goes down into the ship.

[ 2 : 3 4 ] Then in verse 5, during the storm, he went down into the inner part of the ship. And then the sailors cast him where? Down into the sea. And then where do we find him now? Down in the heart of the sea.

And Jonah stays there for three days and three nights. And Jonah, in chapter 2 of this book, this is him at rock bottom. Both metaphorically and literally.

He's literally at the bottom of the sea. Because it says he went down to the land. He touched the bottom. And Jonah was at a point in his life where, when I say he's at rock bottom, he's at a point in his life where, think about it, he looks at these sailors and he says, The best thing that could happen in this life is for me to get thrown into a stormy ocean.

And, of course, he wasn't thinking about being swallowed by a fish. He was literally saying the best thing that could happen is for me to die. And that's rock bottom. And that's where God meets Jonah with a fish.

Chapter 2 is the only place where you see the fish. And there's all kinds of questions. You can get stuck there if you want to. Because everybody wants to know, what kind of a fish was it? And maybe it was a whale.

[ 3 : 44 ] We don't know. And what kind of a fish could keep you alive for three days and three nights? We don't know. But if God can bring a storm, he can bring a fish that can keep you alive for three days and three nights. The writer just assumes that that's almost irrelevant to the story.

But what is most relevant, what you see the writer focusing on, is what's the one thing you get out of the belly of the fish? You get a prayer.

That's what you see. That's all of chapter 2. It's just a prayer. That's what we find. And the prayer is about what Jonah learns at rock bottom and how God brings him out of rock bottom.

And I think it makes it out of the belly of the fish, this prayer, because it's not a Jonah-specific prayer. Jonah is learning something that we all need to know. He's learning something that we all need.

And rock bottom, all of us have a rock bottom moment. And it's relative, too. Right? So, you know, sometimes you'll hear a pro football player, and he thinks he's going to get drafted in the first round, and he gets drafted in the third round.

[ 4 : 44 ] And when you hear him talk about it, he talks about it like that's rock bottom, getting drafted in the third round. And so rock bottom's relative. But we all have those moments where we say, I've been brought lower than I ever thought I could go.

And, you know, for the expectations that I had for my life, this is the pit. And Jonah has something to say to those moments, to the rock bottom moments, and what they can teach you.

And that's what we're going to see this morning. Jonah summarizes everything that he learned in verse 1. You see it there? He says, I called out to the Lord out of my distress, and he answered me.

And the rest of chapter 2 is just explaining that statement and what it really means. Because it's one thing to say it. It's another thing to live it. And Jonah's lived it. So what we're going to see this morning is just briefly two lessons from rock bottom and what they can teach us.

And the first one is this. We're not ready to let God be God until we're ready to admit our own helplessness. We're not ready to let God be God until we can admit our own helplessness.

[ 5 : 49 ] And if you're a Christian, that should be obvious. The Christian religion revolves around the fact that you're not good enough. That we have a problem and that we're helpless in a very real sense. But you know, right, that it's one thing to say that you believe that.

It's another thing to experientially live like that's true. You know, on any given day, I can feel like I am the man. And that I'm in control of what happens in that day.

And sometimes the mercy of rock bottom is that it does away with all those illusions. It does away with all the illusions that we are in control of every part of our life.

And it's a severe mercy. We talked about that in Sunday school this morning. And that's what God does for Jonah is he brings him to the place where he can't hide his helplessness any longer.

So you see how he describes his helplessness. He says, God led me out of my distress. But he uses a really strange phrase to talk about the darkness that he was in.

[ 6 : 52 ] He says, I was in the belly of Sheol. Out of the belly of Sheol I cried. And that's good Old Testament language. Sheol in the Old Testament was, it was the place of the dead.

So, you know, in the Old Testament, what happens after life, what happens after you die was less clear. Not perfectly clear like we see in the New Testament. And Sheol was the word that they used to describe what would happen right after you died.

It's just the place that every dead person goes. And think about it. Jonah says, that's where I was. I cried out to God from the belly of Sheol. I was in the place of death.

And what made it especially painful for Jonah wasn't just the fact that he was in the place of death. It was that he knew that he had deserved it. You see the way that he describes it.

If you read Jonah chapter 1, how did Jonah end up in the ocean? The sailors threw him in there. But what does he say? He says, you cast me into the deep.

[ 7 : 56 ] He's looking at God and he said, God, you brought me here. You pulled me. You're pulling me down to death itself. And he says, you cast me into the deep. All your waves and billows are over me. You know, a lot of times in life, your rock bottom and my rock bottom can seem totally random.

And there's no real direct connection between, you know, maybe a sin that we commit and what happens. You know, a company has major layoffs and you're a casualty of something that you had no control over.

Or maybe you get an unexpected diagnosis and there's nothing you could have done about it. It just happened. It's random. Jonah is dealing with a rock bottom that's one step below that because he's facing death.

But it's a death that he knows that he caused, that he was the problem. And he's learning right now the gravity of running away from God. And what the way that he emphasizes the gravity of his situation is by saying, I reached the point of no return.

So do you hear how he talks about where he goes? He says, the waters closed in over me. The weeds were wrapped around my head. At the root of the mountains, I went down to the land.

[ 9 : 10 ] In other words, Jonah is saying, you know, you think you've had problems? I went down to the place that you don't come back from. And the final way that he puts it, he says, I was trapped in a place where the bars were closed upon me forever.

Sometimes we feel like that, that we were in a situation that there is no escape from. And Jonah is saying, I went there. I went to the place where you cannot look around and say, how do I get out of this?

You have to just say, I'm stuck here forever. He went down to the deepest darkness, to death. And what did he learn? He learned the meaning of helplessness.

He learned that there is a place in life where you get to where you have to truly say, I can't fix this. For Jonah, it was both, I am the problem and I can't fix myself.

And the one reason why we all need to hear this is because what Jonah is illustrating for us is the gospel, right? Every Christian has to come to a place where they say, if what the Bible says about sin is true, then that means that it's way deeper in me than I ever imagined and that I can't fix it.

[ 10 : 22 ] And that it has put a distance between me and God that I can't cross over myself. It's death. It's death itself. Ephesians, Paul put it like this in Ephesians.

He says, he's talking to people who are Christians now, but he's describing who they were before they met Jesus. And he says, as for you, you were dead in your sins and your transgressions.

You probably heard that language before. What the Bible says to every single one of us is that the human condition, when you're born, the day you're born, we're estranged from God.

We're alienated from God all the way back to the moment when God kicked Adam and Eve out of the Garden of Eden. That's the human condition. We're born estranged, alienated from God.

And Joan, but here's the thing. We've got to learn that. Sometimes that doesn't come naturally to us. Sometimes we want to say, you know, there are bad people in the world and I'm not one of them. Because do you remember if you were here, if you've been through the Jonah series, you know that the book starts out with Jonah being called to deliver this message to Nineveh.

[ 11 : 28 ] And he doesn't want to go. And the reason he doesn't want to go is because he knows that if he goes there and he tells them about God's judgment, they may repent. And if they repent, oh, God might show them mercy.

And for Jonah, that was just the worst thing imaginable, that God would show mercy to people that were so bad as the Ninevites. And Jesus put this whole problem in a parable.

You remember the story of the prodigal son? The worst named, maybe the worst named parable of all the scriptures. Because the story is not just about the prodigal son. It's about the merciful God.

And if you read the story, if you go back and reread it, you see half the story is about the prodigal son. But the second half of the story is about his older brother. Do you remember what happened?

So the prodigal son runs off, ruins his life. But then he repents. He realizes that he's hit rock bottom and he comes back. But the brother, the story ends with a brother who's really mad.

[ 12 : 27 ] Because the brother looks at the son who's run away. And he says this to his dad. He says, when the son comes back, the dad throws a party. And this is how the older brother responds.

He says, dad, look, all these years I've been slaving for you. I'm quoting here. All these years I've been slaving for you and never disobeyed your orders. Yet you never even gave me a goat.

Have you ever said that to your parents? You never even gave me a goat. Maybe Rita Faye has said that before. Her kids have said that to her. You never even gave me a goat so I could celebrate with my friends.

But when this son of yours who has squandered your property with prostitutes comes home, you kill the fatted calf for him. So that's where Jonah was at the beginning of the book of Jonah.

He was the older brother who was saying, oh, Lord, these people do not deserve your mercy. Think about how they have squandered all your blessings. But, of course, that just means that the older brother doesn't understand what love is.

[ 13 : 30 ] He relates to his dad like he has earned the right to be loved by his dad. And what God does in Jonah's life is he brings him from being the older brother who's judgmental to being the prodigal son who has run away.

Because that's what happens, right? Jonah is the one who ends up running away. And God shows him the cost of running away. Just like the prodigal son had to learn. And so here in the belly of the whale is Jonah's prodigal son moment where he says, maybe my father will let me back.

You know, I am in a place where I can't fix myself. And the only hope I have is to look for mercy in my father, in my God. Now, let me say there's a really important way to get this whole passage wrong that Jonah almost does.

You know, when you're at rock bottom, it's one thing to say that you're helpless. It's another thing to say that you're hopeless. And what the gospel always tells us is that you are helpless, not hopeless.

But Jonah struggles with that for a minute. And you see that you see in verse four. He's sinking down into the water. He knows he's about to die. And then he says this.

[14:44] He says, Then I said, I am driven away from your sight. I am driven away from your sight. What Jonah felt like was happening was that God was actually, you know, as he was bringing Jonah down into the water, he felt like God was pushing him away and saying to Jonah, you're done.

This is the end of you. I can't take you anymore. And I'm going to bring you to your death. That's what Jonah felt like. And maybe you could put Jonah's words like this. Jonah's thinking to himself when he says, you've driven me from your sight, he's saying, how could I ever expect to see God's mercy again?

How can you go so far away from God and ever expect to fall on God's mercy again? And Jonah, for a moment, he lost hope. He lost hope and he accepted death.

And I think that's a familiar feeling for a lot of people, for even Christians, where, you know, we've been faithful followers of God, we think. And then we make a big mistake and we say, you can't come back from this.

There's got to be a point where God simply is tired of forgiving you. Isn't, isn't, must that not be true? And John Calvin, he wrote about this and he said, that is a lie.

[16:02] If you ever tell yourself, God is, can't forgive me anymore. John Calvin says, what you've got to do is you've got to pick up your shield of faith. Because it is temptation that tells us you can't run back again to God.

It's temptation. He puts it like this. He says, when the flesh tells us that God is opposed to us and that there's no more hope for pardon. That's when faith has to set up its shield.

Remember, remember Paul called, he said, you've got to put on the shield of faith every day. He says, that's when faith has to set up its shield and repel the onset of this temptation by remembering the hope of forgiveness.

See, when you feel like God has driven you away from his sight and that he wants nothing to do with you. If you're going to trust the Bible, you have to be willing to say that's a lie.

That feeling is a lie. And how do you know that's a lie? Because the promise of prayer. Anytime you pray, say you feel like God has literally driven you away from his presence.

[17:10] Prayer fixes that. Because every time you pray, what are you doing? You're putting yourself back into the presence of God. And the Bible says this all over. I'll give you one verse just as an example.

Psalms 145. The Lord is near to all who call upon him. To all who call upon him in truth. Isn't that a simple fix? If you ever get to the point where you say, God has pushed me away from himself.

Pray. And you're back in his presence. It's that simple. It's an obvious solution to that feeling. And when Jonah, that's what Jonah does. He says to himself, God's pushed me away.

But then he says, no. I remember. I remember the Lord. And I remember the temple of the Lord. And I cried out to God. That's the answer that Jonah finds. So Jonah gets to the place where he accepts his helplessness.

But then the second. He makes this final declaration. Which is the second lesson. It's the most important lesson this morning. Salvation belongs to the Lord. That's how his prayer ends. And I'm sure.

[ 18 : 11 ] Surely Jonah knew this truth already. You know, if you're a Jew. You know. Salvation belongs to the Lord. And we all know that. Right? Hopefully. I hope you do. But again. It's one thing to say it.

It's another thing to really know what that means in the bottom of your heart. And Jonah. Jonah clearly knew that it was true. But he didn't know it yet. He needed to be taken to rock bottom.

So that when he said salvation belongs to the Lord. It meant something different down at rock bottom. Because it meant that there was. He played no part in his own salvation.

All he could do was simply cry out to God for mercy. That's what rock bottom teaches you. That there's no. There's no other salvation. Now. As we kind of work towards a close here.

How did Jonah get there? How did he get to the place where you're in the belly of a whale. And you remember the Lord. And you cry out to him. As your salvation. How do you get there? And.

[ 19 : 09 ] He remembered one thing. Which was the temple. You see he mentions the temple twice in the passage. And one of them he says. I remember the Lord. And my prayer came up to you in your holy temple.

Now we don't talk about the temple very much. We don't worship in a temple even. We worship in a sanctuary. But for an ancient Hebrew. The temple wasn't just the place where you go and worship God.

It was a symbol of something so much bigger. Two things that are really important that the temple meant. One was. The temple was the place. That you looked at.

To remind you that God had come to be among his people. You know God's. In the Old Testament. God's presence dwelt in the middle of a temple. And so if you're walking around Jerusalem.

Or wherever you are in Israel. If you kind of know where the temple is. You can kind of look over in that direction. And you can say to yourself. My whole world may be falling apart. But I know that God has come to be with his people.

[ 20 : 11 ] And the proof of that is in the fact that he is in his temple. In the temple that I worship at. That I bring my sacrifices to. And that's the second point. The temple wasn't just the place where you worship God.

It was the place of sacrifices. Because the whole religion. Of worshiping God in the Old Testament. Wasn't just that God had chosen a people. It was that he had been merciful to a people.

That he says to his own children. To the Israelites. I'm not here because you're sinless. I'm here because I love you. And I've chosen you. And God makes a way for his people.

To be with him. Even though he's holy. Because he has promised to take care of their sins. I showed those kids this morning.

That picture of Jesus. That he's a priest. And it's a picture of a lamb. Because in the Old Testament. The lamb. You bring your sacrifices to the temple.

[ 21 : 11 ] And that sacrifice is a reminder. That your God has made a way. For your sins to be forgiven. So that there's nothing that keeps you from him. Okay. Now what does that have to do with Jonah?

Well Jonah remembers these two things. That God is with him. And that God has made a way. For the worst sins to be forgiven. That's what the temple represented.

And in a sense. That means nothing to us. Because we don't worship at the temple anymore. The temple was destroyed. In 70 AD. A long time ago. But the reason why we can still pray.

This same prayer. Is because. When Jesus came. He. He made sure everyone knew. That he was everything. The temple was meant to be.

He was what the temple. Was always pointing to. Because what is Jesus? He is the presence of God. Come to dwell among his people. We sing that at Christmas. Right? He is Emmanuel. God with us.

[ 22 : 09 ] And what does he go to the cross to do? You know. You go to the temple. To sacrifice. To remind you that your sins are atoned for. God. Jesus goes to the cross. And in his body.

All sins are atoned for. So. When you look to Jesus. You've got to always be thinking about two things. He is proof that God is with us. And he is proof that our sins can't keep us from him.

If you look to him. And. It's beautiful. You know. Jonah. Jonah. All Jonah had to hope on. Was a temple. And a Messiah. That he had not seen yet.

But think. This should be so much easier for us. To go down to rock bottom. And. And to have hope. Because. We can see Jesus. We can see what he's done for us.

You know. Jesus. He doesn't just. Jonah thought to himself. God sees me. Even though I'm in the whale. Even though I'm in the belly of Sheol. We can look.

[ 23 : 06 ] And we can say. Jesus shows me. That God doesn't just see me in the belly of Sheol. But he has come down into Sheol itself. To be with me. And to rescue me from death itself.

That's what Jesus does. He comes down to earth. Into. Into the pit itself. The worst parts of life. He. He tastes death. So that we can get out of it. That's the hope that we have in the gospel.

Jesus. Jonah goes down into the belly of the whale. For three days. Three nights. Jesus goes down into death itself. For three days. And three nights. And comes out to redeem us. Let me.

Let me close with this. When we hit rock bottom. You know this. If you've ever really suffered. The last thing you need. Is someone to come along. And teach you lessons.

Right? You know. When you're at a funeral. You don't want someone to come. And explain to you. Theologically. That everything will be okay. What we need though. We don't need lessons. But what we do need.

[ 24 : 03 ] Is a savior. We need salvation. In the rock bottom moments. We don't need a lesson. But we do need something. That we can look to. Someone that we can look to. That we can say. Even at rock bottom.

There is a way out. Not because I can help myself. But because in my helplessness. The Lord has shown me. That salvation belongs to the Lord. Let's pray.

Heavenly Father. We thank you for your salvation. We thank you for the gospel of Jesus Christ. And for those who even today. May be in. May feel like they're in the belly of the whale.

In deep darkness. Would you help them to look. To the savior. And remember that. In the Lord is salvation. In your son's name we pray.

Amen. Amen.