

But You, Lord

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Date: 13 August 2023

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[0 : 00] Well, good morning. My name is Ray Sweep from First Christian Church in Greensburg, Indiana. You can always check us out at fccgreensburg.com.

But we just want to thank you for tuning in today to this audio broadcast. And we just pray that God will use His Word in your life in a powerful way, growing you and maturing you, just like I pray for myself, more and more into the image of Christ every day.

Now, there was a fourth grade girl named Stella who had the opportunity to tell her class a story. And after recently learning all about it at church, she chose to tell the story of Jonah and the whale. And she really did a fabulous job. She was very expressive. And what she didn't realize is that her teacher not only didn't believe in God, but was honestly known to try to squash any Christian teachings that ever came into her classroom.

And so Stella gets done with her story. She did a wonderful job. So the kids start to clap. But right away, her teacher says, Now, Stella, you know that's not a true story, right?

[1 : 06] But she was pretty well grounded for a fourth grader. And she said, Well, yes, it is. It's true because it's in God's Word. And so her teacher kind of smirked and reloaded. She said, She said, If you actually study about whales, you'll learn that their throats are rather small in comparisons to the rest of their bodies.

And they could never swallow a human whole, let alone keep them alive in doing so. But even if they did, there's also no way that a human could survive for three days inside the belly of a whale. And that's when Stella said, Well, I honestly don't know much about throats and bellies of whales, but I know this is a true story. So what I'll do is when I get to heaven, I'll ask Jonah how it happened. And that's when the teacher kind of smirked back and said, Well, what if Jonah didn't go to heaven? And very quickly, Stella said, Well, I guess you'll just have to ask him then. You know, I almost feel bad for telling that story.

So good thing that joke isn't a true story. But hey, welcome back to the second week of our series called The Runaway. You can go ahead and start to make your way to the Old Testament book of Jonah.

[2 : 17] We're going to be in chapter two today. But the reason this book is just so much fun for me to preach is because all of us know some of the basic parts of this story.

Whether you grew up in church as a kid, or whether you never darkened the doors or somewhere in between, you probably know this story that's often been called Jonah and the Whale.

In fact, it was even one of those golden books that many of us would have grown up reading. It's the story of a prophet who was told to go to the great capital city of the Assyrian Empire called Nineveh, but instead of going 550 miles northeast through the hot desert land to preach to some pretty evil people, Jonah decides that he just doesn't want to go.

And so he takes off south to Joppa to get on a boat headed 2,500 miles west to a city called Tarshish in the opposite direction of Nineveh.

So to put it very quickly, God said go. Jonah said no. And that's what God said, oh. And last Sunday, we kind of just talked through chapter one, where Jonah and a bunch of guys who basically lived on the water were in a storm like they had never experienced before.

[3 : 37] A God-sized storm where the boat was going to go down, and each of them would have most likely drowned. And yet the truth came out. The prodigal prophet was running from God because of his hatred toward the Assyrians.

And his rebellion and disobedience are what caused this storm. Willing to give his own life instead of all of them dying, Jonah makes them throw him overboard where he becomes the original chicken of the sea.

That's when a giant fish swallows him whole, and the sea instantly becomes calm. For the guys in the boat, it's now smooth sailing. But for Jonah, I can't imagine what he was experiencing in the depths of the Mediterranean Sea in the belly of a great fish.

And today, we're going to look at Jonah's prayer here in chapter two that shows his heart of repentance before God. But even more importantly, it shows the heart of our God towards Jonah, and even people just like us who are often prone to wander ourselves.

Now, I like how Phil Vischer said this, and you might recognize that name, Phil Vischer. He was the creator of Veggie Tales, the popular children's cartoon about Bible stories for years.

[4 : 56] Not as popular now, but it was for a couple decades, actually. But Phil Vischer once said this. He said it's pretty clear in the Bible story that the whale swallowing Jonah wasn't meant as a punishment from God.

It was God saving him from drowning. So it was actually provision, he says, to give Jonah a second chance. The whale itself was the start of his second chance.

And I don't know about you, but I'm so thankful for the many, many second chances the Lord has given me when my heart has been prone to wander. So, if you got your outline, and don't forget, you can always go to that by going to the YouVersion Bible app.

You can download that for free. YouVersion, Y-O-U-Version Bible app. Go to the menu. Go to events. Click on First Christian Church of Greensburg, Indiana.

And you can get to the outline that way. But here's the first truth about the Lord I want to share with you today from this story. You belong to the God of the impossible. You belong to the God of the impossible.

[6 : 06] Now, here's the thing about this story. Over and over, you hear people say that Jonah was swallowed by a whale. I've been saying it for the last several minutes, even though I know what some of you are thinking, okay?

And scientists have even speculated what kind of whale could have swallowed Jonah whole. And yet the Bible never says it was a whale. I think people make that assumption because a whale is the biggest fish in the sea.

But if you'll look back at the last verse in Jonah 1, verse 17, and then we're going to kind of jump into chapter 2 here. But here's what Jonah 1, 17 says.

Now, the Lord provided a huge fish. By the way, that's the New International Version of the Bible. In the NASB and the ESV, it says the Lord provided or prepared a great fish.

So basically the same thing. To swallow Jonah. And Jonah was in the belly of the fish for three days and three nights. Now jumping into chapter 2, verse 1. From inside the fish, Jonah prayed to his God.

[7 : 14] To the Lord his God. So we will never know on this side of eternity what exactly that great fish was like. Maybe it was a whale that God allowed his throat to be bigger and his belly to just hold Jonah.

But maybe it wasn't a whale. Maybe it was something like we've never seen before. But in one sense, the great fish was kind of like a submarine. In that after it swallowed Jonah up, it was able to keep him safe and protected for three days.

As the Lord did some real work on his heart. And that phrase, three days and three nights, that's used here. But you may also recognize it used in the New Testament to refer to Jesus when he was in the tomb.

When he died on the cross, it says he was in the heart of the earth for three days and three nights. That phrase, as literal as it sounds, is actually not meant to be literal.

That phrase in the Jewish culture meant any part of three days. And so when we talk about Jesus' resurrection, it's a common question that people have when they learn that he died on Friday afternoon.

[8 : 23] So he would have been in the tomb sometime on Friday, all day Saturday, and then just a little bit into Sunday morning. They're like, listen, that's not three days and three nights. So what's the deal?

Well, here's why. Okay? The phrase actually means any part of three days. So that could be Friday, Saturday, and Sunday, any part. So Jonah could have been in the belly of a great fish for 72 hours or even a little less.

But the bigger point for us to understand is that we have a God so awesome in power and majesty that he could prepare a special fish just for this occasion to swallow up a rebellious prophet who will soon be a repentant prophet, restored and ready to go preach in boldness.

You know, one of my favorite things that the well-known minister, Bob Russell, has said is this. And by the way, this may not be original from him, but that's where I heard it, so I'm going to give him credit.

But he said, if you can believe Genesis 1-1, if you can believe the first verse of the Bible, then you'll have no problem believing the rest of the Bible. What's Genesis 1-1 say?

[9 : 31] In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth. So if you can believe that we have an eternal God who made everything out of nothing in creation, he spoke into existence this amazing creation, as beautiful as it is, even though it's in a fallen state because of sin.

Then if you can believe Genesis 1-1, that your God is that awesome in power, and listen, I do. I believe that with all my heart and with all my brain. If you can believe that, then it doesn't surprise us at all that he can prepare a great fish to swallow and house Jonah for three days.

And I wonder today what you've maybe brought into this, listening to this message, because I know you're just as human as I am. See, one thing that we do as followers of Jesus is we can believe that God created everything in six days.

We can believe that Jesus is the way, the truth, the life, and that salvation is found in no other place but the name of Jesus Christ. And we can make that eternity-altering decision to repent of our sins, to surrender our lives to the Lordship of Christ, to be baptized into him.

And yet, how often do we believe in his salvation? But here's the irony. But not believe by our actions in his daily protection, his daily leading, and his power over every problem, every circumstance that we face in life.

[10 : 56] Listen, I know I'm not just preaching to me today, okay? You and I, if we are redeemed children of God, we belong to the God of the impossible. We belong to a God who spoke and creation sprang into existence.

A God who told Moses to raise his staff and who parted the Red Sea for his children to walk across on dry land. A God who went into the fire with Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego and kept them from singeing even one hair.

A God who took a teenager and used him to defeat one of the greatest warriors to ever live named Goliath. And he did it with no armor and just a slingshot and a stone.

A God who protected Daniel all night in the lion's den and brought him out unharmed. And even a God in the New Testament that we see healed the blind, healed the lepers, and raised Jesus from the grave.

See, while life doesn't always go the way we've planned, and sometimes things happen that we may never fully understand on this side of eternity, okay? But even though those things happen, we can say this phrase, But you, Lord, are enough.

[12 : 11] But you, Lord, are enough. In our joys and our mountaintop experiences, he's enough. In the everyday rat race of life, the everyday stresses and busyness, he's enough.

In the pit, whether it's our own doing or something we couldn't control, he is enough. And we see the Lord show Jonah a tremendous amount of grace by saving his life when he was prepared to die.

By housing him in a huge fish when I'm sure Jonah was more surprised than we are. And as you're going to see here, not giving up on him, but giving him another chance to say yes to God's perfect will.

Now, I know I said the phrase, God is enough, several times. But probably a better way to say it, God is more than enough. He is the God of the impossible.

And maybe right now you feel like you're sitting in the belly of a big fish in a deep pit with seaweed wrapped around your head like we're getting ready to read about. Well, this is the perfect moment for you to stop running from the Lord.

[13 : 18] To realize that you serve a God who's more than enough for you right now in everything that you're facing. And he is ready to do a great work in you.

And that leads us to our second truth that we learn about God from this belly of a fish experience. That we serve the God of redemption. You serve a God who redeems.

Okay, so look back with me here in Jonah chapter 2. And let's pick up here in verse 2. And this is Jonah's prayer.

Okay, there's a few more verses after this, what we're going to read. But this is the start of his prayer. Jonah said, Can you imagine?

We don't know how quickly a fish swallowed Jonah. We don't know. Maybe he could hold his breath for three minutes. And he did as long as he could. And he got to experience and see, as he explains here, just the depths of the sea in ways that no one's ever lived to tell about except for Jonah.

[14 : 35] But it's awesome just to hear his description. Now look at verse 4. He says, And then he explains more of what he saw.

The engulfing waters threatened me. The deep surrounded me. Seaweed was wrapped around my head. To the roots of the mountains I sank down. The earth beneath me barred me in forever. And then here's my favorite part of this whole chapter today. And as I read through Jonah chapter 2 several times in preparing this message, this is the three-word phrase that kept jumping out to me. Here's what he says at the end of verse 6. Now, I know Jonah uses different words than we might to express his repentance to God.

But we see this description of the pit he was in. And then this beautiful redemption story where Jonah, in a place he never thought he'd be, in the belly of a great fish, turns his hardened, disobedient, arrogant, and calloused heart back to his gracious, loving, compassionate, and relentless God who could have wiped him out right there in the ocean.

[15 : 58] And no one would have blamed him if he did. But instead, God chose to restore. I got to tell you, as I was preparing this message and I typed out those sentences I just spoke, I got goosebumps.

Because I'm very aware that even though we all look nice when we sit in church on a Sunday morning, there are some people that are listening to this or even sitting in pews on Sunday mornings that are not doing okay.

Who are struggling big time. And you might be surprised because Satan loves to convince us that we're the only ones who feel stuck or depressed or lonely or who maybe even are having thoughts like those.

He loves to tell you that everyone around you is doing great. But here's the real truth. We all have our Jonah moments when oftentimes our own disobedience and rebellion has led us into this deep pit of frustration and despair.

Now, not making any excuses, but your pastors here at the church, we have those seasons in life too. And yet Jonah speaks these powerful words that will make all the difference.

[17 : 07] But you, Lord. But you, Lord, are there. But you, Lord, are enough. But you, Lord, when your circumstances have put you in a place that you never expected to be.

When you've made a big mistake or maybe even a series of them with consequences that followed. When everyone else may have given up on you and sometimes tough love can be a healthy thing. When you're in the belly of that great fish, this is what I love about our God. This is what separates Jesus from every other religious figure. And I'll be honest with you, I don't even like the word religion.

Because it's about a relationship with Christ. What John Newton, a man who lived a wicked life before he came to a saving faith in Jesus. This is what he called amazing grace.

But you, Lord, my God. And one beautiful thing about this story of Jonah is how it parallels the story of Jesus in several ways. And if you'll look up this passage with me in Matthew 12, starting in verse 40.

[18 : 14] Here's what Jesus says. He says, For as Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of a huge fish, so the Son of Man will be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth.

The men of Nineveh will stand up at the judgment with this generation and condemn it. For they repented at the preaching of Jonah, and now something greater than Jonah is here.

I even like the passage Romans 5.8 that puts it like this. But God demonstrates his own love for us in this. While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.

While we were running the opposite direction to Tarshish, Jesus gave his life on the cross to pursue us and offer us the greatest gift of salvation and hope.

And even as children of God, because sometimes we do this. When we've allowed our hearts to get hardened. When we've run in the opposite direction of where he's called us to be. His grace, his

redemption are there to meet, to restore, and to send us back into our mission field.

[19 : 18] You know, I love this quote by Randy Alcorn. When he said, The cost of redemption cannot be overstated. The wonders of grace cannot be overemphasized.

Christ took the hell he didn't deserve so that we could have the heaven that we don't deserve. But here's the thing. You can't experience redemption without repentance. Let me say that again. You can't experience redemption in Christ without repentance to Christ. Without heart change. True heart change. And we see this with Jonah in some phrases like, In my distress I called to the Lord. Verse 2. Or in verse 7, When my life was ebbing away, I remembered you, Lord, and my prayer rose to you, to your holy temple. And then even in verse 9 where Jonah talks about making a vow to the Lord.

See, it's our hearts realizing our sins committed against our holy God. And not only feeling sorry for that, but sorry enough to make the commitment to follow and trust him going forward.

[20 : 22] To lay my pride and my control down and say, Lord, my God, my heart and my life, they are fully yours. Lead me and I will follow.

You know, I'm so thankful that we belong to the God of the impossible. That we serve the God of redemption. And let me share one more truth about our God today. You worship the God who deserves your praise.

You worship the God who is so deserving of our praise. And let's close out this chapter about the huge fish as we look at Jonah 2, starting in verse 8.

Jonah, still praying to God, says this. Those who cling to worthless idols turn away from God's love for them. But I, with shouts of grateful praise, will sacrifice to you.

What I have vowed I will make good. And I will say salvation comes from the Lord. Now that's the end of his recorded prayer. And then we see verse 10 that tells us, And the Lord commanded the fish, and it vomited Jonah onto dry land.

[21 : 26] Now, we have this beautiful prayer of repentance and praise to the Lord. And then we very quickly shift to a big fish vomiting Jonah onto the shore.

And that's probably the holiest puking experience that you're ever going to read about. And to paraphrase Bob Russell again, Even a great fish couldn't stomach a wayward prophet. And he vomits Jonah up on the shore.

And Jonah looked up and saw a sign that said, Nineveh, 500 miles. And he said, okay, I think I'll go preach now. But did you notice that Jonah makes a point to say that when we turn to idols, We are turning away from God.

And I honestly think that it's safe to say that Jonah had turned to some idols. Maybe it was the idol of fame as he was a prophet of God.

And he got caught up in that fame. And even today, pastors fall into those traps and find themselves in that pit way too often. If we're not careful to keep our hearts humble and keep ourselves in the rightful place, Placing the Lord where he needs to be and keeping our hearts in his word and in his presence.

[22 : 34] Maybe Jonah's idol looks a lot like what I've seen in too many churches. Now I told you last week that the Assyrians were constantly attacking God's people.

And it appears that one reason Jonah at first refused to preach to them was because of his patriotism. And listen, don't misunderstand me. I love my country. I am so thankful for all the freedoms we get to enjoy here in the United States of America.

I want to be the first guy to thank our veterans and wave that flag and say that I love America. But even in saying that, we have to be careful as Christians never to place our devotion to our country above our devotion to Christ.

And I know that may be controversial to some, but not if you know and love the word of God. Not if your heart fully belongs to Jesus. But maybe today for you and me, our idols look different than Jonah's.

It could be your family. It could be your spouse. It could be a relationship that you've entered into that you've put before Christ. I've seen this so many times in ministry where someone, you know, is struggling and they're at church and they're growing.

[23 : 44] And then they begin a new relationship and then you don't see them anymore. Because that becomes the altar upon which they worship. And it's an easy trap to fall into. It could be our pursuit of success or power or titles that really sits on the throne of my heart.

It could be the desire to always have the nicest car or the nicest house that shows the world that I am somebody, right? It could be a fascination with appearance.

Or maybe even your children's success that comes before a commitment to Christ and to his church. It could even be our obsession with comfort that doesn't let us follow the Lord where he leads.

But here's the point. Just like with Jonah, our idols will always pull us away from God's purposes for our life. And I love the fact that Jonah came to these realizations in the belly of a great fish.

And not only did he repent and get his heart right before a God of redemption, a God of second chances, but he even starts to praise the Lord because he knows, even before, he starts to praise the Lord even before he knows the next chapter of the story.

[24 : 52] See, he realized that these idols didn't satisfy. But you, Lord, are my God and you're so deserving of my praise. I know you've heard of the name of the famous composer, Johann Sebastian Bach.

But what a lot of people don't realize was his faithfulness to the Lord. And he once said that all music should have no other end and aim than the glory of God and the soul's refreshment.

And I love the fact that on every one of his compositions, at the top of his paper, his heading, he would write JJ or Jesus Juva, which means Jesus help me.

And then at the bottom, he would put the initials SDG, Soli Dei Gratia, which means to God alone be the glory.

Well, listen, I'm glad we've had the opportunity today to break down Jonah's belly of the fish prayer a little bit. And I hope you can see that you belong to the God of the impossible, who loves you and who's got you under control as you trust him.

[25 : 57] A God of redemption and second chances who meets you in your messes and turns it into a message, a testimony of God's grace. And yes, he's more than deserving of our praises as he sends us on our journey to be used in ways that we would have never imagined.

But you, Lord, are awesome. And like Johann Sebastian Bach said, to God alone be the glory. Pray with me. Heavenly Father, we are just so thankful for who you are and how awesome you are in power, in majesty, in splendor, that you love us, that you're not only an awesome, powerful God, but you're a personal God who wants a relationship with each of us.

That just blows my mind. And I'm so thankful that you are relentless, that you pursue us in our disobedience, in our rebellion. You're always trying to call us back home.

So thank you for being such amazing God of grace. But right now, I just pray for every person listening to my voice, that, Lord, that you will be what they need in this moment.

If it's salvation, that they will call on to you. If it's just hope as a believer and struggling with something in life, that you will come and help them in this time of need.

[27 : 22] But, Father, we know you are the answer. But you, Lord, are enough, more than enough for each of us. So, God, may we trust you more.

May we follow you faithfully. And when we find ourselves in the belly of a great fish, will our hearts repent and turn back to truly following you faithfully.

You are good, Jesus. You are holy. You are righteous. And we pray all this in your precious and your holy name. In the name above all names, Jesus Christ. And God's people said, right from where you are, Amen and Amen.

Hey, let me give you this quick invitation. If you are ready to talk about surrendering your heart to the Lordship of Jesus Christ, maybe you have some questions about faith before you get there, reach out to us.

We would love to help you. You can call the church office, 812-663-8488. That's 663-8488. My name is Ray Sweet.

[28 : 23] I'm the lead pastor here at First Christian Church of Greensburg, Indiana. You can always check us out at FCCGreensburg.com. But hey, reach out. We would love to help you.

Or you can email me at Ray at FCCGreensburg.com. Hey, God bless you. And I hope you have a great week.