

Hard to Swallow

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[0 : 00] Good morning, everybody. And good morning, friends and family. I truly hope that though you've come to hear my, some of you have come to hear and to visit, visit here to hear me speak. It's probably a novelty for some of you having never heard me speak. And that's not important, not so much that I'm speaking. But rather, that I would rather you understand and hopefully hear the voice of the Lord as I'm talking.

I don't presume to be the Lord, obviously, the point is that you would actually hear the word of God today. That you all, that we all, would hear the word of God today.

Hard to swallow. For those of you who have been invited, you would have gotten my sermon text, which I outlined it to be hard to swallow.

Ecclesiastes 7, 2-4 reads, It is better to go to the house of mourning than to the house of feasting, for death is the destiny of everyone.

[1 : 06] The living should take this to heart. Frustration better than laughter. Frustration is better than laughter. The living should take this to heart.

The heart of the wise is in the house of mourning. But the heart of fools is in the house of pleasure. In 2020, August in particular, we had a devastating hurricane that hit the bombers and that changed people's lives forever.

As a result of that, some are even sitting here in the audience. I won't call you out. But the point is, events that changed our lives.

Sometime in October, I was, due to my business interactions, I was in a lawyer's office, actually, where we transacted our corporate business.

[2 : 11] And there was a lady there. And while she was there, she just said to me, she said, Oh, Mr. Draco, I know we've been doing business so many years, but I'll be retiring in December.

And due to knowing her personally, beyond outside of the business, very dear Christian woman, I simply asked, I said, So what are you going to be doing?

And she said to me, I'm going to be doing the things that I couldn't be doing because I was working all these years. So I'm going to just enjoy my family.

I'm just going to do the things that I need to get done. That was in October. I don't remember if it was October, November. In February, just yesterday, I should say, she buried her husband.

Two weeks prior, her son is diagnosed with a disease, potentially lethal. Last week, I was interacting with my staff.

[3 : 23] And the staff that I work with, we have like a warm exchange. So we say things like, y'all meaning all of us. That's what we use the terms. So I walked into the door on Monday.

of the store. And I said, and this is what I said, making a little light of the events of the earlier happened that morning with the foil, the foil robbery on Mackey Street.

And as I walked in, I just said, y'all up to this nonsense again? Just taking it very lightly, just making this, this is the type way we, we interact with each other.

Not, not as a sense that it's not serious, but just, just to bring things that are happening to bear in our lives. Well, to my surprise, the lady who is closest to me, she just breaks off in tears.

And she said, you know, I had just sent, a couple of moments ago, I had just sent the video out. I had not even seen the video, by the way. She said, I just sent the video of the shootout.

[4 : 27] And she said, I just told the person next to me, you never know who he's sending his videos about. That's somebody's brother. That's somebody's cousin.

As it turns out, it's her cousin. Three life-altering experiences. Job also had a life-altering experience like no other.

And while we, those who read the story, have the advantage of seeing the story unfolded through the divine perspective, Job had no such advantage.

He loses all his cattle, thousands of sheep and camels, hundreds of oxen and donkeys. And if that were not bad enough, he loses all his children, seven boys and three girls, in a single day. All of it happens in a single day. One after the other, the news comes, the Sabaeans strike the oxen, the strike is work helpers, and the oxens and the dockings are gone.

[5 : 28] Right after that, fire came down from heaven, consumed the sheep and the herds, the sheep and the servants, the shepherds, except for one who just came to, you know, just one, just one was left to come to bring the bad news, right?

And the Chaldeans raid his camel herders, killing them, killing all, and taking the camels. And one is left to tell the story. And then we have the feasting of all his children together in one place. And a mighty wind comes, destroys the house, and all the children are gone. How does Job respond?

For this we turn to Job 1, 20 to 22. Then Job arose and tore his robe, and shaved his head, and fell on the ground, and worshipped. I don't know about you.

Now let's think about it. I don't know about you. But God must have been a mighty man.

[6 : 34] And he said, this is his moment of worship response. Naked I came from my mother's womb, and naked shall I return.

The Lord gave, and the Lord has taken away. Blessed be the name of the Lord. And all this Job did not sin or charge God with wrong.

Tragedy and suffering. If any of you follow me on Facebook, you'll know this is a recurring theme every now and again. And I constantly come back to this, and I say, tragedy and suffering have a way of revealing what's hidden deep in the heart.

When the glass is shaken, what's inside tends to come out. Job humbled himself. I was reading a book the other day based on Jonah and Micah, and Richard Phillips, the author says, in order to truly turn to God, we must accept that God is sovereign.

Not only that, but God is holy, just, and good. We must acknowledge that God is sovereign, is the sovereign, saving Lord. Just as Jonah had to bow to God's sovereign call in his ministry, we must bow to God's sovereign purpose in our circumstances.

[8 : 00] Job had the right perspective in life. He recognized that it was God who gave him what he possessed, and it was God who took it all away.

The Lord gives, and the Lord takes away. His response is one of humble submission to the will of God. Some, and I dare say, most, of us in the household of faith are not nearly as humble as Job was.

Most of us find it hard to swallow that despite the fact that we freely make choices day in and day out, that God himself is indeed entirely sovereign over us.

Few of us are like Job. Instead, most of us are like Jonah, the Jonah variety. We know what the will of God is, and yet we find ourselves going in the completely opposite direction.

Some preachers say, can I get a witness? Few of us are like, few of us like Job. In today's text, we will see Jonah finally submitting.

[9 : 24] In fact, he is finally praying for the first time. The only thing left to do given his reality since he is now in the belly of a fish.

You know, I've studied, I'm going to make a little sub-point here. I've read through this book like many, many times preparing for this sermon, and I could have gone in so many different directions. Just the belly of the fish. Jesus referred to the belly of the fish as Jonah was in the belly of the fish. So will the son of man be? And I could go in that direction. I have to resist. But we find Jonah is praying.

And we have a clear view of what he says. Many of us pray when we are in difficult circumstances. However, some of us treat prayer like it's a magical wand.

Something you do when there's nothing else to do. So we pray. I mean, what can we lose? Let me remind you.

[10 : 30] Prayer is not a magical wand. I want to make an observation about Jonah's prayer. Twice in the prayer, he says, he uses the phrase, holy temple.

The first time, the first instance follows God's active participation in Jonah's plight when he says, yet I shall again look upon your holy temple.

By the way, I'm in the ESV. if you want, if you're following me. The second follows what Jonah is feeling throughout his ordeal, which ends by saying, and my prayer came to you into your holy

temple.

Prayer, like I said, is not magical. What makes Jonah's prayer meaningful is that Jonah is repentant. His heart shifts and he's now worshipping again.

Job worshipped. Remember that? He is now worshipping again. You can truly worship, you cannot truly worship without recognizing that God is indeed sovereign.

[11:39] sovereign. It's hard to swallow that God is sovereign and that he extends mercy even on those whom we think most undeserving.

and given all that Jonah has done and if you were here for prior sermons you would have heard it. Given that all he has done, God speaks and he goes completely in the opposite direction.

I know some of us are parents here. We know what that means, right? We speak and the opposite is done. We know what that means, right?

And given that all he has done his determined disobedience by going completely in the opposite direction of what God did, why should God grant mercy to Jonah?

And yet he does. The irony in all of this if you follow the whole book, the book ends with a question. The irony in all this is that Jonah himself was being disobedient to God because he didn't want God to grant mercy to the Ninevites.

[12:53] Imagine that. If you want to check that out, see Jonah chapter 4 when Jonah is praying to God for the second time in the book. Jonah, the undeserving, was already the recipient of God's mercy but yet is angry with God because God desired to be merciful to the undeserving Ninevites.

And now to our text. So we'll read it. And the Lord, and if you're reading with me, this is Jonah 1 chapter 17. I meant to get this, the page in the book because the Bibles are in front of you.

But I'll read it for you. And the Lord appointed a great fish to swallow Jonah. And Jonah was in the belly of the fish three days and three nights. Then Jonah prayed.

Now, I don't know about you, if you've ever seen a drawing of Jonah in the belly of the fish, anybody ever seen a drawing of that? You see this guy in the belly and he's kneeling down and he's praying like this, right?

Right? Okay. Well, that's a myth. That didn't leave us. Jonah is praying. You know, we could pray standing up, right? We could pray in any circumstance even when we can't move.

[14:13] Jonah is in the belly of a fish. How big do you think this belly is? I call out to the Lord, continuing on verse 2, let's start chapter 2 again.

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 am driven from your sight, yet I shall look again upon your holy temple.

The waters closed in over me to take my life, the deep surrounded me, the weeds were wrapped about my head. At the roots of the fountains I went down to the land whose bars closed upon me forever, yet you brought up my life from the pit.

Oh 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.

[15:29] But I, with the voice of thanksgiving, will sacrifice to you what I have vowed I will pay. Salvation belongs to the Lord.

Then the Lord spoke to the fish and vomited Jonah out upon dry land. I don't know how that works. Dry land, I don't know how it works, but this is what the text says.

Today's text finds Jonah in the most unusual of circumstances, a story that is for some itself hard to swallow. by the way, I'm on social media discussions all the time, and there are friends of mine who say to me, you actually believe the donkey spoke?

Then they say, you actually believe a fish swallowed a man? And then I retort and say, yes, I do. But by the way, they're mocking you, right? It's a mark, right? Look what you believe. Well, we believe that God created the earth, right? From nothing, right?

[16:47] What's a fish? Today's text finds Jonah in the most unusual of circumstances, a story that is for some in itself hard to swallow. It's one-of-a-kind story that likely never happened before, nor since.

Nobody heard of anybody being swallowed by a fish, right? I'm being spat out, I mean. No, right? It's probably gotten chewed up by a fish, but you know what I mean, right? Jonah is praying from

within the belly of the fish with his life fainting away.

Now, this is what Jonah says, his life is fainting away. What can we glean from this portion of Scripture? And two things I wish to draw to your attention.

the first one, what is God doing? You know, Jonah is praying, what is God doing? And number two, what is Joel experiencing?

These two things run concurrently and clearly show, by the way, it runs concurrently in everybody's life. These things run concurrently and clearly shows how the sovereignty of God and the will of man converges.

[18 : 05] It's important to point out here that this account is of a believer who disobeys and is not to be construed simply as anyone living in disobedience.

Let me be clear. Jonah is a prophet of God. He is not a non-believer. So, let's keep the context proper. This is a believer living in disobedience.

That's what we're talking about. There are persons within the household of faith who are disobedient. And then there are those not in the household of faith who live in disobedience.

This account is about someone in the faith who, one who willfully disobeys God. So, hard to swallow.

What was God doing? And if you have your Bibles, I'd like you to pull it up. Because I should have, my failure, I didn't get the stuff to them in time.

[19 : 12] But I'll draw your attention to it. So, what was God doing? The first thing we pay attention, the first thing we say, know off the bat at what God was doing.

And the Lord appointed a great fish. So, this is not a happenstance, oh, I see some lunch, I'm going to eat some lunch.

Okay, this is God sending the fish. God commands the fish to come and swallow Jonah. Later, we see that he tells the fish to vomit Jonah up.

So, God, what is God doing? God is exercising his sovereignty over the fish. Now, I know most times you might miss this, but the last time I checked, fish do what fish do, right?

Right? Right. All right. But in this instance, the fish was doing, as we read the text, what God wanted the fish to do. By the way, in a real light sense, fish do what God wants them to do anyway.

[20 : 25] You know what I mean? Do you know what I mean? Right. Fish swim. That's what God fish. In the water, they fish. They swim around. They do what fish do, but that's the way God designed it anyway.

But in this particular case, God is doing something very specific. It seems like a one-off thing. way. And so God is exercising his sovereignty over the fish.

We see that again, like I said, in Jonah 1.17 and Jonah 2.10. Secondly, in verse 3 of chapter 2, it reads, For you cast me into the deep.

Now, hold on. Let's step up. You cast me into the deep. Wait, who threw that? How did Jonah get overboard?

What did we learn last week? The man in the boat reluctantly tossed him into the water. But Jonah is saying, yeah, they did that, but God did it.

[21 : 36] You, Jonah says, for you cast me into the deep. So, what is God doing? God is exercising sovereignty, his sovereignty, over the affairs of men.

Did you get that? Jonah says, God threw him into the deep. However, the narrative of the story says that the men threw him into the deep.

So, the only conclusion we can come to is, God had it and saw to it that that was done. That's the point. Thirdly, God is exercising his authority over the seas.

In this case, nature. Remember last week, Jonah is tossed into the water, and the water automatically becomes calm. Jonah says, the first three again, for you cast me into the deep, into the heart of the seas, and the flood surrounded me.

This is what you did, God. And he's not blaming God, he's just saying that this is what God did. So God is exercising, so we have three things now.

[23 : 06] God exercises his sovereignty over the fish, his sovereignty over the men, and he's exercising his authority over the seas. And then fourthly, and this one may not be so readily obvious, so I'm going to read verse four for you.

Then I said, I am driven away from your sight, yet I shall look again upon your holy temple.

Now let's go back. Jonah says, you were the one who had the fish, swallow me.

You were the one who had the men throw me over the boat. You were the one, who had the seas close in on me. Then he says, I, then I said, this is Jonah now, then I said, I am driven away from your sight.

Well, who drove him away from his sight? Who did the driving away? This is Jonah now talking, and he's speaking, he's speaking about things God has done.

[24 : 24] Then I was driven away from your sight. Brothers and sisters, if you think you can disobey God, and be coochie coochie coo, with God, you may be physically present.

That may be true. But that don't mean that you're not driven away. And that's part of the deception. Jonah says, I am driven away.

And then he says, I'm driven away from your sight, yet I shall again look at your temple. What is God doing?

Here's the point. God is exercising his authority over Jonah's response. And that's what I'm trying to get you to see. Yes, Jonah is responding.

That's true. By the way, Jonah is in the fish. That's true too. Jonah is in the belly of the sea. That's true too. Now, all I'm trying to get you to see is God's exercising of authority and sovereignty over Jonah.

[25 : 33] So, that's what God is doing. So, we see four things in the text that God is doing. This is in Jonah's prayer. Now, Jonah then moves to, starting in verse 5, his experience.

What is he experiencing? He says, life was closing in on him.

He feels the life closing in on him. Verse 5, the waters closed in over me to take my life. The deep surrounded me.

So, Jonah's experiencing the world closing in on him. He's experiencing a fall into the darkness.

This is the second thing in verse 5 we learn.

And the third thing we learn in verse 5 is his head is becoming entangled. Now, I am sure everybody in this room have experienced that sort of thing if you have ever had a similar type of disobedience from God.

[26 : 48] Life feels like it's closing in on you. You feel like the light is moving out and now darkness is moving in. And all of a sudden your brain becomes confuddled.

You don't know what to do. You don't know where to go. You don't know what next. Anybody have that experience? Don't all show your hands at once. I'll take it to silence means consent.

Then we find Jonah at the same place that we find ourselves when we live in disobedience which is in verse 6. We find ourselves at the root of the mountains.

I went down to the land whose bars closed upon me I went down. He tanked.

A local way of saying it he tanked. He was to the bottom couldn't get no waste in this. Remember Jonah's in the belly of the fish. And I don't suspect at this point Jonah's thinking that I'm going to get out this one alive.

[28 : 01] I don't think he's thinking that. He's tanking at this point. And then in verse 7 he comes back and he says when my life was fainting away I remembered the Lord.

Now he says up in verse 4 I was driven away from your sight yet shall I again look at your holy temple.

This is what God is doing. Now he's coming back that's the God doing. Now he's down to verse 7 and he said when my life was fainting away I remembered the Lord who's doing the remembering? No I'm Jonah he's doing the remembering and I remember the Lord and my prayer came to you back to your holy temple.

You see the two converging? The sovereignty of God and Jonah's disobedience converging the will of man converging. In verse 2 Jonah summarizes his entire experience after being thrown overboard.

[29 : 29] Now it is highly unlikely that Jonah prayed his prayer in this order. This is a summary of his prayer. Okay? Remember now this is a book being written to us to convey a message.

The writer wants to convey a message to us. And what is he conveying? And he starts off with a summary in his prayer which is I called out to the Lord.

We see that later in the text. Later in his prayer. 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.

So this is a summary. The opening line is a summary of Job's prayer. His entire prayer. I am serious. By the way, have you ever been in a situation where you are in a very, very tight situation

and you are praying for hours.

Undoubtedly Jonah is praying for a long period of time. By the way, it only takes about two minutes to read this. If that. So you know his prayer is longer than that. In summary, and I want to just bring a summary to this sermon.

[30 : 41] What is God doing? First, God is sovereign over all things. The good, the bad, the ugly.

And R.C. Sproul always alluded to God's sovereignty in this way. He said that if there were a single molecule anywhere in the entire galaxy, anywhere, that was going rogue, that was on its own, then that would mean that God is not sovereign.

Brothers and sisters, God is even sovereign over evil. One of the struggles my non-believing friends have is, if God were good, why does he allow evil to exist?

And the simple answer to that, the simple answer is, because we can't come up with a good reason why evil exists, doesn't mean that God doesn't have one. Remember, he's God, we're not.

So if evil exists, God must have a good purpose in its existence. You understand? Yes?

[32 : 01] Okay. Okay. in Job's case, we see a righteous man experiencing an unprecedented landslide of loss that is not due to any fault of his own.

In fact, I'm thinking back to Job. Job. In fact, if anything, the story reveals that he is experiencing these things because he is a righteous man.

and that's hard to swallow. Imagine, Job, there's none righteous, none like him.

And yet, we can sit back and say, I don't think, I think we can almost truly say, ain't nobody experienced that what Job experienced. And we find that hard to swallow.

it's likely that some of you here are now experiencing great difficulty due to no fault of your own. Be encouraged. Suffering has a way of keeping us humble, keeping us worshiping.

[33 : 19] This lies in the face of today's come to Jesus and watch him realize your goals and your potential.

I often tell people that from what I read and what I see, it seems that the closest people to Jesus are the very ones who experience the greatest tragedies.

I couldn't think, there ain't many more beautiful women, and I'm talking about character, that I could speak of than the lady I referred to. I attended a husband's funeral yesterday.

Wonderful woman. By the way, wonderful man. Honorable Christian people, the prophets, just to make a point, the prophets, John the Baptist, Stephen, James, Peter, and Paul were all martyred. Those who followed Christ in foreign lands, today, as we sit here, today, are being martyred for the faith in Christ. The recurring theme throughout the biblical history is that the righteous are most often those who experience the greatest of suffering and persecution, often with their own martyrdom.

[34 : 46] Today's account of Jonah is nothing of the sort. Jonah. In fact, Jonah finds himself in the most tragic of circumstances as a result of his own sin and disobedience.

From the belly of the fish, we learn that Jonah was about to drown before being swallowed by the fish.

Jonah thought he was going to drown. Then he got in even worse circumstances. He was swallowed by a fish. Now, to me, that seems like bad to worse.

No? Yeah, that seems like bad to worse. But yet, the worse is what brought about Jonah's restoration. No doubt Jonah thought he was going to lose his life.

Our experiences, and I'm talking to believers now, our experiences compels us to submit. If in your disobedience, and I just want to point out something to you, whoever you are, whoever I am, whoever we are, if in your disobedience you do not feel in any way, shape, or form a chastening of God, that you don't exist, well, maybe, just maybe, you're not who you think you are.

[36 : 24] Our experiences compels us to submit all imbibed ones, whether caused by ourselves, or whether brought upon us, are meant to bring us to a place of humility, the experience of Job, and now the reluctant experience of Jonah.

For others, who knows, and here's what I want to say, God in his mercy vomited Jonah up on the belly of the fish because God had, God sovereignly had chosen Jonah for a specific mission.

For others of us, God is only drawing us back to himself, which is itself, the entirety of his sovereign will. Who knows, perhaps, God does have something still for you to do.

no matter how old you are or may not be, you cannot possibly fathom what effect your disobedience, what effect your obedience will have.

In Jonah's case, we know that a whole city repented. As for Jonah, and once on dry land, the word of the Lord comes to Jonah a second time.

[38 : 01] Chapter three opens, which I'm not going to get into that, but it says, Arise, go to Nineveh, that great city, and call out against it the message that I tell you.

And Jonah arose and went to Nineveh according to the will of the Lord. Jonah did.

Now, I want you to catch what I'm saying here. Why is Jonah on the land? God put him there.

he put him back there. Why is Jonah going to Nineveh? He's willfully going, but God made it so.

The message that Jonah took to the Ninevites is the same message that Jesus told his disciples to preach. And every church should preach this message.

[39 : 15] And it's simple. Repent. From the belly of the fish and in his prayer, Jonah reveals how those within the household of faith, in the end, respond to suffering brought on by God due to their disobedience as compared to those not of the household of faith.

Do you want me to repeat that? That was a long sentence so I'll repeat it again. From the belly of the fish and in his prayer, Jonah reveals, Jonah himself reveals how those within the household of faith, in the end, respond to suffering brought on by God due to their disobedience as compared to those not of the household of faith.

Jonah says, and I want to draw your attention back to verses 8 and 9 of the same prayer. Jonah says, those who pay regard to vain idols forsake their hope of steadfast love.

But I, with the voice of thanksgiving, will sacrifice you. What I have vowed, I will pay. Salvation belongs to the Lord. Let's go back a minute.

It's opening lines. Those who pay regard to vain idols forsake their hope of steadfast love. Those, as the Jonah said, those not in the household of faith, lack hope.

[40 : 57] they are void of steadfast love. The steadfast love of God.

They pay regard to vain idols. Job is describing the unregenerate. Because he wants to come back and say, but I'm unregenerate.

I know. That's the point he's making. I'm not regenerate, so I ain't going to respond that way. I don't respond that way. I respond this way because I'm regenerate. He's not thinking that in his head like that.

Like, I'm going to obey because I'm a believer. I'm not going to obey. That's not the point. The point is, God brings him to a point where he responds in a particular way versus if he wasn't a child of God, he would respond another way.

This is what Jonah is saying. Sorry. They pay regard to vain idols.

[41 : 58] Oblivious to the creator of the universe. They live in utter disregard for the things of God. This is the unregenerate. Now, I am developing something.

Jonah doesn't say this. I'm just pointing out how the unregenerate live. And if this somehow matches your narrative, all I would say to you is just be a little careful.

This is how the unregenerate behave. They live in utter disregard for the things of God. They are indifferent and in hot pursuit of the things that suit their fancy.

Be it intellectualism, fame, fortune, or frolic. the suffering they experience, because no one is exempt of suffering, even the unregenerate.

The suffering they experience are mere incidentals and things that just happen. So they believe.

[43 : 08] They deny God outright at a whim and falsely believe that their own faith is in their own hands. They are sovereign over their own life.

That's the unregenerate. And such were the Ninevites. And such were you and me.

Those within the household of faith. That's how we went for it. But for God's mercy, mercy, but for God's mercy on us, the undeserving.

It's hard to swallow that God is sovereign and that he extends mercy even on those whom we think are most undeserving.

suffering. So I ask you, are you suffering in any way? Do you feel hemmed in on every side?

[44 : 17] And you know it is because you have been disobedient? Do you feel most undeserving? Good for you.

you are at the right place. Turn and worship the Lord once again as Jonah did. For others, perhaps you've been attending church for years or not at all.

Perhaps you're merely here because you're invited. Whatever the case, perhaps during these moments it all started to make sense.

the call of the gospel is simple. Repent and believe. Worship the Lord.
Thank you.