

[4 : 08] Let's pray together tonight. Father, we thank you for this time now to, to hear your voice through your word. We pray, Lord, that you would come and talk to us, that you would speak to us in a powerful way. May we look past just a weekend of celebration and may we experience a moment of worship.

May this be your time where you speak to your people and I pray it in Jesus name and God's people said. Amen. Amen. Amen. You can be seated. Marriage is a dying institution. Something that I will never be associated with. Those were the words of Hollywood movie star and actress Cameron Diaz.

Cameron was being interviewed sometime back and, and in that interview, she not only swore off marriage for good, but she went on to say this, quote, I don't think we should live our lives in relationships based off of old traditions that don't suit our world any longer, close quote. Now, Cameron was not the only person to swear off marriage. Also, Charlize Theron. She not only said that she would never get married. She said she'd never even really cared for marriage. In an interview, she said, quote, even when I was a little girl, I never dreamed of a white dress and all that stuff, close quote.

And then there's actor and heartthrob, George Clooney. 20 years of being single and George said, quote, I keep telling everyone I'm never going to get married. I'm never going to have children, but people just don't believe me. In a 2013 interview, Maroon 5 lead singer and star of The Voice, Adam Levine said, quote, if you don't get married, you can't get divorced. Why could we not learn from the devastatingly low percentage of successful marriages the last generation went through, close quote. And then there's Halle Berry. After two failed marriages, she said this, quote, I will never, never get married again. I wish I had known then that I am not the marrying kind, close quote. Those are just five and they're not the only ones. Those are five celebrities who swore off marriage. And would anybody here tonight like to guess what all of those celebrities have in common?

It is not just that they swore off marriage. It's that every single one of them is married today. What happened? I mean, husband, wait a minute. What was all that one in a million talk?

[7 : 03] I thought marriage wasn't for you. I thought marriage was just some old tradition that's outdated. Faith family, do you know why all five of those celebrities who swore off marriage are married today? The answer is very, very simple. The answer is they met someone. They met someone. I know that seems simplistic, but what I mean by that is at one point, marriage was this intellectual category that had all kinds of skeptical reasons to avoid. I don't want to give up my freedom. I want to protect my money. I'm afraid of commitment. What if I marry the wrong one? But listen to me, that intellectual category changed through a personal experience. That intellectual category that they said they would never do changed when they met someone. And faith family, that happens all the time in more ways than just marriage. There are some of you here tonight that you said at one point in your life, I will never, ever, under any circumstances, ever drive a minivan. And then you had kids.

Before kids. Wait, did the Flendersons get a minivan? Gross. Gross. After kids. We would never, ever. And now you're driving around in the land barge, right? Some of you, after you had kids, you said, I will never, ever let them sleep in the bed with me. And then one night, your little girl comes to you with that face you cannot resist. Some of you are house hunting and you told yourself, no matter what, we will not go over our budget. We are disciplined. But then you found that home you could not resist. Or you were on a diet and you said, there is no way I'm going to break my diet. I'm going to stick to this. I'm an oak. And then you noticed that they had bread pudding on the menu. And all God's people said, glory, hallelujah. Others of you, others of you said, there's no way I'm ever going to be a Christian.

I'm never going to go to church. I'm never going to read the Bible. And here you are today. And you can't get enough of Jesus. What's my point? My point is this, Faith Family, every single one of you, in one way or the other, has had a category that moved from intellectual to personal. It was something that you could intellectually say, oh, I will never do that. But then you had a personal encounter. That is exactly what happens here in Jonah chapter two. Now, some of you are just joining us and we're thankful for that. But let me take you back to the very, very beginning of this book.

God comes to Jonah and he tells Jonah, I want you to deliver my message to the city of Nineveh, which was a part of the Assyrian empire. Now, Jonah says, no, I'm not going to do it. In fact, not

only does Jonah say no, he runs in the total opposite direction. He gets on a ship bound for Tarshish. Why? Jonah's got a history with Ninevites. He hates Ninevites. They were a people that were brutal to his people. And not only does he hate Ninevites, he hates the idea that God would show grace to Ninevites. See, Jonah knows something about God, which he reveals in Jonah chapter four, verse two. He prays to the Lord and he says, Lord, you know, when I was in my country, you know, this is why I fled to Tarshish. This is why I said no to you. It's because I know you're a gracious God and you're merciful and you're slow to anger and you're abounding in steadfast love and you're relenting from disaster. And if I can just be honest for a moment, I hate that about you.

[11 : 31] I'm fine that you're that way towards me, but you can't be that way towards anybody else, particularly Ninevites. Jonah's actually wrestling with the right dilemma. His question is not, how can bad things happen to good people, which is a totally flawed question of which I don't have the time to deconstruct. Jonah's asking this question, how can grace be given to sinful people?

How can God be gracious to people who do not deserve his grace? Amen? In other words, notice it on the screen. Jonah knew God's grace intellectually, but he needed to experience God's grace personally.

And God so loved Jonah that he teaches him. He comes after him. And the first way that God comes after him, we looked at this two weeks ago, is he appoints this great storm. But the storm doesn't get Jonah's attention. No, he's too hardened towards God, resistant and defiant. Not even this storm can get his attention. So Jonah gets thrown into the sea. And so God moves from appointing a storm to appointing a fish, 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. Now, this is the part of story that everybody knows, right? If you know anything about the book of Jonah, you know the whale. First of all, we don't even know that it's a whale. You tend to think of like cartoon kind of imageries, like this is something off of Pinocchio or something like that. And inevitably, people will ask this question, pastor, can this really happen?

Can this really happen? You mean to ask me that the God who made the world out of nothing, who brought light out of darkness, who put the heavens in order, who created mankind out of dust, can he appoint a fish? I'd say that's way down the list of the miraculous things that God has done. Amen? In fact, we're here tonight celebrating a man that walked out of a grave.

So, can God do this? Of course God can do this. And according to Jesus, who's far greater authority than we are, he says, God did. The question is not, can God do this? The question is, why did God do this?

[14 : 12] And the answer is, here it is, that God in the life of Jonah, and I'm hoping in your life as well tonight, God is moving the concept of salvation from intellectual to personal. Look at what Jonah experiences through this. First of all, Jonah experiences death and separation. Death and separation.

There are several things throughout chapter 2 that indicates that Jonah experiences a real death. In fact, I think it's interesting, the text actually never tells us if Jonah is alive the entire time.

It is possible that there is even a physical death. We don't know. But even if that doesn't happen, it doesn't change that this is a type of death. For example, the fish. Whatever the fish is, whatever this large fish is, it is symbolic here, or it represents a grave.

Jonah is what? Everybody with me? Jonah is swallowed up. That is biblical language of death. Like the earth swallows someone up. And not only this fish, but it's the sea. And in the ancient Near East, the sea was seen as a place of death or judgment. They didn't understand things the way that we understand them. And so they looked at the waters. They looked at the sea as a place of death. It's why, for example, this is the teacher coming out here. In the book of Revelation, it says, and the sea will be no more. That doesn't mean there's not going to be water. That's an expression that says, and death will be no more. Not only the fish and not only the sea, but notice the language that's used here in these verses. He speaks of out of the belly of Sheol. Well, Sheol was the place of the dead. And then he talks about how all your waves and your billows passed over me. He goes on to say, I'm driven away from your sight. Does everybody see that language of separation? I'm separated from God. The waters closed in over me to do what? Say it. Take my life. The weeds are wrapped about my head.

[16 : 38] You see, on and on, this language is that of death and separation. Here's the point. Jonah is in a physical grave. Jonah is in a physical grave. Now listen, if you've zoned out, what do

you do?

And how could you zone out? It's Easter. Why is Jonah in this grave? Why is Jonah here? The answer is that's where rebellion to God takes you. Sin leads to death. Rebellion separates you from God.

Is this not what Romans teaches us? For the wages of sin is death. Faith family, listen, God is the source of life. He is the source of everything living. And when you unplug from God, death happens. Think of it, I know this is kind of a simplified illustration, but when you unplug your cell phone, what's going to happen to your cell phone if you leave that unplugged for very long? It's going to? Die. Die. Why? Because you've unplugged it from the life source. When you unplug from God, death happens. Physical death happens. Spiritual death happens. And this is the reality of all humanity.

[18:01] Paul says this in Romans chapter 5 verse 12. Therefore, just as sin came into the world through one man. And what? Death through sin. And so death spread to all men. That's all mankind because all have sinned. What does Jonah's experience teach us? That sin against God leads to physical and spiritual death. It did for Adam. It did for Adam. It did for Jonah. And it has for us. But notice when Jonah realizes he's in this separated position. He's in this grave. Notice what he does. Chapter 2 verse 1.

Jonah, say it? Prayed. He 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, say it, I cried and you heard my voice. In other words, when Jonah, somebody say preach preacher, when Jonah realized the situation he was in, he knew the only place he could turn was God. The only way out of this grave is God. I can't swim out of this fish. I can't get out from underneath this situation. The only hope I have from my separation from God is God. And so he cries out to God in faith. And in crying out to God through faith, look at what Jonah experiences. Verse 6 says, at the roots of the mountain, I went down to the land whose bars closed upon me forever. Yet you, that is you, God, you brought up my life from the pit.

Oh, Lord, my God. Jonah goes from experiencing death and separation to experiencing grace and compassion. Jonah in this fish is saying, I deserve death. This is where my rebellion has brought me.

But when I cry out to God in faith, great words, yet, but, nevertheless, God brought me up.

God delivered me. Jonah is experiencing in the belly of this fish the grace and compassion of God.

[20:37] God. And Jonah actually, here's how we know he understands this, is that word yet.

Meaning Jonah understands, I do not deserve to be delivered yet, but God. See, here's what grace is, faith family. Notice it on the screen. Grace is the undeserved gift. We usually get that part about grace right. But it's from an unobligated giver. Jonah understands God is not obligated to save him. Grace is not only undeserved, it's from a giver who's unobligated. Let me give you this illustration. Imagine a little boy wants to buy ice cream. Let's say the cost of this ice cream is \$3. It's probably \$8, but we'll say it's \$3.

And he has a dollar. Doesn't have enough to buy the ice cream. And so someone walks up to him and sees him in this condition. He can't get out of this condition on his own. And so they give him \$2. Now he has three, according to my Tennessee math. And he buys the ice cream, okay? Is the store owner obligated to sell him the ice cream? Yes. Now imagine the same scenario. The little boy wants to buy the ice cream. He only has a dollar. And so instead, he steals the ice cream and he runs out of the store.

After he runs out of the store, he's caught by someone brought back into the store. And when he's brought back into the store, someone gives him \$2. Now he has three. He asks if he can buy the ice cream.

Here's the question. Is the store owner obligated to sell the ice cream? No. The store owner has the choice to either show justice or give grace. I don't have to sell you the ice cream because you stole from me and you ran out. Jonah understands here that the whole point, come on faith family, the whole point of God's grace is he is not obligated to give it to you. Why? Because we're runaways. We have taken the gifts of God. We have run out of the store and we have come back in asking for mercy and he is not obligated to do it. But let me tell you the kind of God that we serve when you cry out for help yet, but nevertheless, God will save you. He is not obligated to do so, but he will do so because that's just who he is. The apostle Paul puts it this way. He says, Ephesians 2 verse 1, you were dead. You were just like Jonah, dead in your trespasses and sins. Best two words in the

Bible, right? But God, it's the same thing of Jonah too. But God being rich in mercy because of the great love with which he loved us, even when we were in that fish that is dead in our trespasses, he made us alive together with Christ. Everybody say it together. By grace, you have been saved. What's going on in this story? You thought this was about Pinocchio. No, this is about a real man who experiences firsthand death and separation from God. And he calls out for help and he experiences the grace and compassion of God.

[24 : 15] And then notice what happens in verse 10. The Lord spoke to the fish and it, everybody say it? I just wanted to make you say that word. And it vomited Jonah out upon the dry land. What's the third thing that Jonah experiences? Jonah experiences life and resurrection. That is, God not only shows Jonah grace, God gives Jonah new life. One minute, he's a dead man trapped in a watery grave. The next minute, he's walking on a shoreline. Like the blind man, Jonah once was blind, but now he sees. Like Lazarus, he once was dead, but now he's alive. To further prove this, this week in my preparation for this message, I did a word study on the word vomit. I got nothing else to do, so I figured why not? I'll just do a biblical word study on the ancient Near Eastern understanding of fish vomit. And I did.

And this is what was very interesting. I'm not making this up. This is actually true. I used a little sarcasm, but this part's true. The word for vomit here in the Septuagint, which is the Greek translation of the Old Testament, that word is the same Greek word used in Mark chapter 5. You say, okay, what happens in Mark chapter 5? I'm glad you asked. While he was still speaking, there came from the ruler's house someone who said, your daughter is dead. Why trouble the teacher any further? But overhearing what they said, Jesus said to the ruler of the synagogue, do not fear, only believe. Taking her by the hand, and he said to her, Talitha, kumi, which means, little girl, I say to you, same word, arise.

And immediately, the girl got up and began walking. Listen, same word, because it's the same experience. That little girl went from death to life, and so did Jonah. Jonah experienced a resurrection.

Amazing grace, how sweet the sound that saved a wretch like me. I once was lost, but now I'm found, was blind, but now I see. And you put it all together, death and separation, grace and compassion, the resurrection, the resurrection and new life. Put it all together, and what does Jonah personally experience in the belly of that fish? Verse 10. This is the main point of the chapter. But I, with the voice of thanksgiving, will sacrifice to you what I have vowed I will pay. Say it with me. Salvation belongs to the Lord. Oh man, Jonah experienced personal salvation.

[27 : 32] In the belly of this fish, he experiences the salvation of God. In other words, notice it here. Jonah has gone from salvation as intellectual to personal. There's no more, well, the theological ramifications of this, and the unfair implications of that, and I could never love a God who could do this, and if God allows this kind of stuff, and how could he be loving. No, no, no, no. All those intellectual categories get simplified. Because Jonah, listen, in a real way, experiences the way the New Testament describes the salvation of the Lord. Are you listening? Romans 3. The wages of sin is death.

He's swallowed up by that fish. Romans 10. Those who call upon the name of the Lord will be saved.

Jonah cried out for deliverance. Ephesians 2. It is by grace you've been saved, not by works. Yet, but nevertheless. And lastly, Romans 6. Risen to walk in newness of life. Jonah is spit out, and a new life has been born. Jonah has just personally experienced the salvation of God.

And you say, what does this have to do with me? Or maybe even more importantly, what does this have to do with Easter? Seriously, pastor, Jonah is not an Easter story. It's why I've probably heard no preacher ever preached Jonah on Easter. It's not an Easter story, and I would say to you that according to Jesus, Jonah is the Easter story. And you say, what do you mean? I say, listen to what Jesus says.

Listen to what he specifically quotes in Matthew chapter 12. I'm almost done. Give me an hour. Matthew chapter 12. Matthew 12. Then some of the scribes and Pharisees answered Jesus saying, Teacher, we wish to see a sign from you. We're intellectuals. We need answers. Give us proof.

[30 : 07] And Jesus answered them. An evil and adulterous generation seeks for a sign, but no sign will be given except the sign of the prophet Jonah. For just as Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of the great fish, so will the Son of Man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth. The men of Nineveh will rise up at the judgment with this generation and

condemn it, for they repented at the preaching of Jonah. And behold, oh behold, something greater than Jonah is here. Can we start the timer over? Can everything else be introduction and have to? There's so much in those verses. Let me just briefly give you three quick observations that Jesus makes here from the story

Jonah of Jonah that has to do with his own life and resurrection. Number one, it's this. Jesus here in Matthew 12 says that the story of Jonah teaches the gospel. The story of Jonah teaches the gospel. Here's what I mean. Jonah's story is our story. Faith family, you and I are runaways. We've stolen the ice cream.

We have rebelled against God. We've run the opposite direction in more ways than we even know. The Bible says we like sheep have gone astray. We have turned from God. We've gone our own way. We've lived our own life. We have unplugged from him and that has led to our spiritual death. But the good news of the gospel proclaimed through Jonah is that if you will call out to God for help, he will not only give you grace, he'll give you a new life and he will save you from your sin. This is the gospel of Jesus. Notice it on the screen, faith family. The good news of Easter is that even though like Jonah, you have gone down, God can bring you up. And that is what Easter is all about. That is what we are celebrating. We're a whole bunch of Jonas who have been resurrected in Jesus. Amen. Here's the second thing that I think

Jesus makes abundantly clear in Matthew 12 as to why Jonah is the perfect Easter sermon. And that is that the story of Jonah proclaims the resurrection of Jesus. The story of Jonah proclaims the resurrection of Jesus to say it a different way. The story of Jonah is the Easter story and the connections are everywhere. I don't have the time to point them all out to you, but here's a few. Jonah is thrown into the sea on account of his sin. Jesus was nailed to the cross on account of ours. Jonah cries from the fish, I am driven from your sight. Jesus cries from the cross, my God, my God, why have you forsaken me?

Jonah is three days in the fish and then he spit out. Jesus is three days in the grave and then he is risen. After Jonah's resurrection, he goes where? To a Gentile nation. After Jesus's resurrection, what does he do? Commission his followers to make disciples of all nations. And one more thing, what happens to Jonah in Jonah two, he's eaten by a fish. Anybody remember what Jesus was doing the first time the disciples saw him after the resurrection? He was on the shoreline eating a fish.

[34 : 00] the Jonah story is the Easter story. Except for one thing, someone greater than Jonah is here and his name is Jesus Christ. Jesus says, you want an Easter story? Jonah. It's the only sign I'm giving you.

It's the only sign I'm giving you that proclaims in advance the very thing I came to do. And lastly, I would be, I think, not faithful to Matthew 12 if I left this part out because it's the whole context. Not only is the story of Jonah teaching the gospel and proclaiming the resurrection, the story of Jonah offers a serious warning. Listen, why, why of all the Old Testament stories did Jesus pick Jonah? I could think of a hundred Old Testament stories that Jesus could pick. Why did he say, I'm only giving you one? And that's the sign of Jonah. Here's the question. Who is asking for the sign in Matthew 12? Listen, don't miss this. Read it again. Then some of the scribes and Pharisees answered him saying, teacher, we wish to see a sign from you.

Why did the Pharisees miss the salvation of the Lord? For the same reason Jonah ran. They knew of God's salvation intellectually, but never experienced it personally. I beg you to listen to me. Notice it here on the screen. The Pharisees demanded a sign when what they needed was a Savior. And I am terrified that that same thing might be true right here tonight. I fear that there are some of you in this room who have an intellectual knowledge of God, but have never experienced God. You're skeptical. You've got your reasons. You've got your arguments. You've got your questions. And they're probably good questions, probably even questions that should be asked. But if you're really honest, Jonah, they're just excuses to keep you running. Others of you, you're religious. You do church from time to time. You know a little bit about the Bible. You've convinced yourself that you're good enough. But it's never become personal. And I would get down on my knees and beg you. I would beg you tonight to hear this and to receive this. The resurrection of Jesus is not a sign intellectually answering every question in your mind. Look at me. It's why you listen to years of me preaching Easter messages.

I rarely preach an Easter message that's just all the 15 reasons why the resurrection happened. And there's lots of reasons to prove why the resurrection historically happened. But here's what I

know. The resurrection of Jesus is not a sign intellectually answering every question in your mind. The resurrection of Jesus is about a Savior who can personally change your life.

[38 : 29] I can give you all the reasons for the historical reliability of the resurrection of Jesus, and you'll leave like Jonah. You'll leave like the Pharisees with more head knowledge of the salvation of God while never personally knowing the salvation of God.

So I do not stand before you tonight giving you a sign. I stand before you tonight giving you a Savior. His name is Jesus. And He can change every category you've ever had in your life. Just like He did for a Samaritan woman. Who on one particular day she found herself in a conversation with Jesus. And boy did they talk about a lot that day. They talked about marriage. I don't know this for a fact but I wonder if she told Jesus I've sworn off marriage. I've already had two. They didn't work out. The guy I'm with is not my husband because quite honestly I don't really want to get married again. And they talked about relationships. And they talked about worship. And boy did this woman have her theological categories.

Our fathers worship on this mountain. But you say in Jerusalem is the place where people ought to worship. And on and on she continues. I know that Messiah is coming. And when He comes He'll tell us about all these things. It was seminary at a Samaritan well. And she had no idea that all those categories were about to be changed when Jesus said this. I who speak to you am He. And in that moment every intellectual and theological category she had vanished. And her life was forever changed. And her life was forever changed. And do you know why it was forever changed? I'll let her tell you why. Because it's what she told everyone else in the village.

[41 : 02] I met a man. I met a man. And he told me all I ever did.

Is this not the Christ? Dear Faith family, what changed all those celebrities who swore off marriage? What changed Jonah inside of the fish? What changed the Samaritan woman at that well? Was it they got all their questions answered?

No. What changed is they met someone. They met someone. And I'm praying today the same thing happens to you.

And all God's people said amen. Let's pray. Father, thank you for the sign of Jonah.

[42 : 19] And thank you for how it not only proclaims the gospel that we are runaways just like Jonah. We have unplugged from you. And we are in a physical and spiritual grave.

But if we call out for mercy, yet but nevertheless, you will bring us up. And you will give us new life. Because that's what Jesus came to do. It's what the resurrection is all about. It's not to sit around and have intellectual debates.

That's important. the resurrection happened so we could meet a man. And let that man shatter all of our categories.

And change everything we ever thought could be true. And I pray by your spirit that that has happened here tonight.

[43 : 34] That every person in this place would not be a scribe and Pharisee saying give me a sign and answer my question. But every person in this place like Jonah would experience that salvation is from the Lord.

Lord, that's the sign of Jonah. And we pray this in Jesus' name.

Amen. Amen.

