

God's Mercy and Forgiveness: Jonah Prays

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[0 : 00] Well, good morning again, everyone. Last week, we learned that Jonah found himself out of the will of God and found himself in the belly of a fish. We have been going through the book of Jonah these past few Sunday mornings, and Jonah was in God's biblical school of correction.

So he found himself out of the will of God. God had called him, commissioned him, and sent him to share about himself, share about God, to a city called Nineveh and to a bunch of people who were, as God said, were wicked.

And God wanted Jonah to go and to tell them about him so that they would repent and even save their own lives. But Jonah did not want to go. He wanted them to suffer.

And so instead, he got on a ship, went the opposite direction. God sent a storm upon the sea, and the sailors, figuring out that it was Jonah that was the problem, Jonah said, yes, I'm the problem. God's angry. God's upset with me. And he said, throw me overboard into the sea, and then the wind is going to stop. Sure enough, the sailors ultimately ended up doing that.

[1 : 17] God stilled the storm. God called a great fish to come, swallowed Jonah up. And we learned last week that Jonah was in an uncomfortable classroom.

There were no state-of-the-art computers. There was no proper lighting. And it was a really smelly belly that Jonah found himself in.

And we learned the dilemma of the disobedient. And today, we're going to see that Jonah calls out to God, not because of affection, but because of affliction.

He found himself in a really, really bad place. And so he begins to cry out to God. In verse 17 of chapter number 1 of the book of Jonah, the Bible says that God prepared a great fish to swallow up Jonah.

Now, there are many people who have not believed the account of Jonah and the great fish. But I'm here to tell you the Bible says that God called a great fish.

[2 : 19] We don't know what kind of fish it was. But I believe a literal fish swallowed a literal man named Jonah and then spat him out three days, three nights later on dry land.

And then Jonah ended up following, continuing on and following the will of God. And so during his time in this smelly belly, Jonah had time to ponder his path.

He had time to meditate on his mistakes, on the things that he had decided. And he was thinking about the correction that he was involved in.

And he repents of his rebellion. And then he seeks his Savior. And that's the prayer that we're going to be looking at this morning. And it's Jonah's despair, not his affection for God, that brought him to God.

Jonah was in an extremely uncomfortable classroom, as we looked at last week. We talked about our motives for praying.

[3 : 20] You know, when we pray, primarily it's for God's will to be done on earth and not for our will to be done. You know why we pray?

Most of the time when we pray, we pray to get ourselves out of trouble, right? Or we pray for God to fix something that we messed up.

And I think we need to be sure that we pray for the right reasons. I heard about a little boy who went to the altar one Sunday morning and he was praying fervently.

And the pastor overheard this little boy's prayer. And he heard him praying, Tokyo, Tokyo, oh God, Tokyo.

And after the service, the pastor went to the little boy and he said, he said, son, he said, why were you praying Tokyo, Tokyo, Tokyo?

[4 : 15] And the little boy said, well, sir, you see, I had a geography exam Friday and I've been praying all weekend that the Lord would make Tokyo the capital of France.

You'll get that in just a minute. And so, you know, sometimes we pray for God to fix our mistakes, right? Well, the thing is, we come to God in repentance and realize, God, I messed up. And God doesn't always fix the mistakes, but God can and will do what's best for his honor and his glory. And he can help us learn from it in our lives.

So be careful how we pray. We've learned about the place of prayer. We've learned about the purpose of Jonah's prayer. But this morning, we're going to look for just a bit at Jonah's despair. Jonah chapter 2, verses 3 through 6. And Jonah chapter 2, verse 3 says, Jonah prays to God, he says, For you cast me into the deep, into the heart of the seas, and the floods surrounded me, and your billows and your waves passed over me.

[5 : 23] Then I said, I have been cast out of your sight, yet I will look again toward your holy temple. The water surrounded me, even to my soul.

The deep closed around me. Weeds were wrapped around my head. I went down to the moorings of the mountains, the earth with its bars closed behind me forever.

Yet you have brought my life from the pit, O Lord my God. As Jonah begins his prayer, the first thing that we see is Jonah's got a very, very grim outlook.

He's got a grim outlook on his circumstances, on his situation, where God has brought him in this school of correction.

And we get a picture of the prophet Jonah, of his perspective of the situation that he finds himself in. Jonah's got a pretty grim, pretty dark outlook.

[6 : 28] He said, it felt like I was in the grave. It felt like the, the, the, the, the earth, the bars of the earth closed in around me. He felt like he was in a prison cell, and he was in the place of the dead and shield.

And, and Jonah mentions things in this prayer that really none of us would ever want to have to mention in prayer. Think about that, where, where Jonah found himself.

He was in utter despair because of his affliction. In, in chapter one, verse 15, the Bible says, uh, the sailors picked up Jonah, threw him into the sea, but Jonah realized it was really God that put him there.

God had placed him in that biblical school of correction, and had, and God had him exactly where he wanted him. And Jonah confesses that it was God that cast him into the sea.

And he realized that the waves, the wind, the billows that were around him were, were the Lord's, where God had sent them to correct him. So Jonah comes to the depths of misery, realizes that he's there because of his own problem.

[7 : 37] Uh, Jonah, uh, began with a really stiff neck, but we see it begin to bend a little. Harry A. Ironside wrote, uh, we, we are a long way on the road to recovery when we are ready to admit God's righteousness in disciplining us, and when we recognize that we are under the hand of God.

Uh, see, we have people all around us that are dying in their sin. God told Jonah, go tell the Ninevites about me.

I love them. I don't want them to live like they're living. I want to rescue them. You see, we have people all around us. And that was one of the catalysts for, uh, for us, uh, getting men together, getting men that we wanted them to hear about the good news of God.

And, uh, and as Nathan said, uh, Brother Don Barrett just presented very, very clearly the gospel, uh, last night. Just like it's, uh, it's, it's clearly presented every summer at camp.

And, and, uh, all these men together last night heard a clear presentation of God's word. We need to be understanding what will happen in people's lives if they don't hear the gospel.

[9 : 00] General William, General Booth, the founder of the Salvation Army, would often say that he wished that all of his soldiers could be hung over the environs of hell for an hour so that they, having seen the torments of the damned, might have greater zeal for the salvation of all men.

Think about that. If we but had a glimpse into the torment of those who go, uh, to a dark place without God for eternity, if we just had a glimpse of what they're suffering, I think it would affect the way we deal with people today and the heart that we have for them.

Now, you see, God disciplines us. And we have to understand that as God is disciplining us, I don't know about you, but I've been through some times where, where it felt like God had to take a two by four up the side of my head and say, you know, you got to get right.

You know, that was wrong. Or I want you to do something. And this morning, I was walking down the aisle. As Jeremy said, we had some technical difficulties. Uh, uh, Elaine, Megan, they were back there and, and, and Megan had wanted something from me.

And I was walking and I had my attention on something that I needed to get done in the office. And, uh, I don't remember how she said it, but she said my name a bunch of times. Uh, she said dad a bunch of times and then she called out my name and finally she got my attention.

[10:24] God's got to do that with us sometimes. He's got to get our attention, but he's not doing it to punish us. He's doing us to move us back to him. A young boy one day was playing with a little sailboat in a, in a lake, at the edge of a, at the edge of a lake.

The wind came up and began to pull his little boat away from him. And then, a gentleman near him began throwing rocks at his boat.

upset, he went, he looked and he was wondering, why are you throwing rocks in my boat? Until he realized that the rocks were going over the boat. And the ripples that were being caused by the rock, rocks were pushing his boat closer and closer back to the shore.

Sometimes God throws rocks at us, but not to hit us. It's to pull us closer to him. Don't despise the discipline of God.

God's word says, let him do it. Now, you may not be being disciplined by God this morning, and I trust that's not the case. But if you find yourself in that place, submit to him and say, God, you're right.

[11:40] You're always right. Now, Jonah's despair brought a grim outlook, but that's not where he stayed. There was not only a grim outlook in his prayer, but there was also a glorious outlook that we see as he's praying.

He says, verse 4, Then I said, I have been cast out of your sight, yet I will do what? I will look again toward your holy temple. I will look again toward your holy temple.

He says, I went down to the moorings of the mountains, the earth with its bars closed around me forever. Yet you have brought my life from the pit.

Oh, Lord, my God. See, this prayer by Jonah, I think, could be interpreted as a statement of faith.

He said, I trust in you, God. You pulled my life out of the pit.

And he says, you saved my life. Now, Jonah was confessing that he was down, but he was not out because of God's mercy, because God was with him.

[12:41] Warren Wearsby, one of the commentators, writes this. He says, discipline is to the believer what exercise and training are to the athlete. It enables us to run the race with endurance and reach the desired goal.

How we respond to discipline. Here's the key. How we respond to discipline determines how much benefit we receive from it. We can either rebel against it, grow bitter, or we can say, God, you're right.

I messed up. I sinned. And then return to the path, just like Jonah gets up and he goes to Nineveh. So God is disciplining him, starts off with a grim outlook, but then he ends up with a glorious outlook.

God, you saved my life out of the pit. You brought my life out of the pit. Oh, Lord God. So we've looked at the purpose, the perspective of his prayer, and then in verses 7 and 8, we notice Jonah gets reconnected with God.

I trust this morning if there's been a disconnect in your relationship with him that maybe it's because of sin, maybe it's because of just the busyness of life, and maybe it's not something bad or horrible, but because maybe, and there are mornings when I'm so busy.

[13:57] It's either with meetings or it's something that's coming up or appointments, and I may say, oh, wow, I didn't even read God's word yesterday. I didn't even pray.

What's wrong with me? And then I have to get reconnected. My relationship with God didn't change, but my fellowship, it's just like you're talking with someone, and maybe you go distant, you haven't spoken to them, and you reconnect.

I did that this past week when I was inviting some men to our time together, men that I haven't spoken to, and it's my fault, haven't spoken to in three years. So we reconnected.

Some, we stayed on the phone for 10, 15, 20, 30, one of the guys, Friday, I stayed on the phone with them over 30 minutes, just reconnecting. See, our relationship with God is like that.

When we don't talk to Him, our relationships suffer. So Jonah gets reconnected with God. He says, When my soul fainted within me, I remembered the Lord. We're like that a lot.

[14:58] We're in trouble, and we call out to God. I remember the Lord, and my prayer went up to you into your holy temple. Those who regard worthless idols, he says, forsake their own mercy.

So an encouraging word. Even in the belly of the fish, the disobedient child of God was able to make connection with heaven. So it's not line of sight prayer.

We can pray with God anytime, anywhere, and God will hear us. There's a new TV in the nursery, so the nursery workers can see what's going on in here.

And this morning, we're talking about casting it to that TV, and we're worried about, well, do we have to be there or not? And we found out that, no, we can cast it from anywhere in the building, and they can watch the service from here.

Same with our prayer. We don't have to be in the room. We don't have to be in heaven for God to hear us. He hears us anywhere. So it took, but it took getting into the belly of fish before Jonah got to that point where he was ready to come clean with God.

[16:06] He says, I remembered. This word he used, it means to think of, to mention, to remember. Jonah remembered God when he was in the pit of despair.

He remembered that God was the only true God. He remembered God's grace. He remembered his mercy. He remembered his salvation and his commission. And here's the thing.

When the child of God prays to God, God will hear him. Proverbs 31, 1 and 2 says, Blessed is he whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered.

Blessed is the man to whom the Lord does not impute iniquity and in whose spirit there is no deceit. Jonah's prayer came up to God even in the fish's belly.

Verse 7, the Bible says, And my prayer went up to you in your holy temple. So Jonah recognized who God was. He called on the name of the Lord.

[17:03] And then Jonah realized he messed up. He realized his rebellion. He says in verse 8, Those who regard worthless idols forsake their own mercy.

mercy. Jonah understood that he had forsaken his own mercy with his rebellion. Your version might say lying vanities, but he's talking about worthless idols.

What had Jonah done? I think Jonah understood that his rebellion had become to him like an idol. And it was a worthless idol. And he was even forsaking God's mercy because what he had, he had made his comfort, he had made his own thinking an idol rather than God.

So Jonah knew firsthand what it was like to forsake the Lord. See, God allowed Jonah to go down to the depths of despair so he could bring him back up to the heights of repair.

God allowed Jonah to get down at the belly of the fish so he could get his attention, turn his heart back to God, and so God could bring him back up.

[18:11] See, God restored him. God restored Jonah by means of the winds, of the waves, of the weather, and the fish. See, I did it again.

We don't know that it was a whale. But God used this great fish to get Jonah back to him. So verse 9, we see Jonah's despair and he brings a promise to God.

He promises something. Notice what he says. But I will sacrifice to you with the voice of thanksgiving. I will pay what I have vowed. Salvation is of the Lord.

So Jonah promises to praise the Lord, pay his vows to the Lord, lift up his voice, carry, he prays that he will carry out his vows, gives thanks to the Lord, and then he will go tell others about it as well.

Here's the thing. We can praise God even in tough times. What are you going through this morning? Could be a health problem. Could be a relationship problem.

[19:15] It could be a financial problem. It could be anything. God is with you. His mercy, his grace is abundant this morning.

We can praise God in the tough times even when we are in the midst of trials in our lives and we can, just like Jonah, praise God no matter where we are.

Jonah was like a psalmist in Psalm 66 verses 13 and 14. Psalmist said, I will go into your house with burnt offerings. I will pay my vows with my, excuse me, which my lips have uttered and my mouth has spoken when I was in trouble.

And I pray it doesn't take that in our lives to bring us back to God. And in verse 10 we see God delivers Jonah as we're winding this down this morning.

We see God delivering Jonah in verse number 10. So the Lord spoke to the fish. And it vomited Jonah onto dry land.

[20 : 22] It's been well said that prayer does not get man's will done in heaven but it gets God's will done on earth. As we pray we are praying to the God of the universe, the creator.

And not to get what we want done but we ought to be praying what God wants done and that he sees it done. And God responds to Jonah's prayer and Jonah turns to God and repents.

He submitted himself for the Lord's use. Pastor Johnny Hunt once said this, a backslidden prophet will make a fish sick. Well the thing is a backslidden follower of Jesus will make God sick.

He wants to see us with him. You know when I think of the prodigal son I think of families who have been praying for their wayward children, their wayward family for years, you know God is not happy with that.

And God is doing his very best. But sometimes it takes just like the prodigal son getting to the very very end of their rope, getting to the point where they're doing the worst thing imaginable that for the prodigal son it was feeding pigs to come to his senses and come back to his father.

[21 : 41] Now we understand it wasn't the it wasn't the wayward prophet that caused the fish to vomit it was God. And the amazing thing that I see it says God spoke to the fish.

That word spoke means to tell to command and to answer. So God told the fish vomit Jonah out and the interesting thing is the fish didn't vomit Jonah out in the middle of the ocean.

what did God do? God commanded the fish to spit Jonah out where? On dry land.

Why? So Jonah could hit the ground running, right? And he says I got a job for you and I want you to do it now. And so he speaks to the fish the fish swallows up, bombish Jonah out on dry land so

Jonah could hit the ground running and God had another God had another work for the fish to do.

He dropped he vomited out on dry land. One commentator said the next time you feel God has been hard on you by giving you some duty that causes you pain and bring suffering and trial

remember the directives God has given the fish.

[22 : 53] Many times God gives us unpleasant tasks. But it's for God's honor and for God's glory that he gives it to us. And so as we wind this down what's the great biblical principle?

When God delivers us from that uncomfortable classroom in Jonah's case it was that uncomfortable classroom the smelly belly of the fish he wants us to immediately respond to his call and do it in our lives.

See Jonah graduated from the school God's school of biblical correction to go preach his message to the pagans to those who didn't know him.

God has called us to deliver his message to a lost and a broken world. God said go so let's go.

Let's pray. Father this morning we're so very thankful that you have saved us. You've made it possible for us to come to know Jesus to be a part of your family.

[24 : 02] And Father we thank you that although your word tells us that because of what Adam did in the garden of Eden when he took a bite of that fruit he disobeyed you and at that point mankind was separated from you began to die in his flesh but died spiritually.

And everyone that has been born since Adam has been born with a sinful nature separated from you. But we thank you Heavenly Father that because you love us so much you sent your son Jesus Christ to die on the cross in our place.

And Father we thank you that you made it possible for us to be reconciled with you. Lord you told us that you demonstrated your love toward us and that while we were still sinners Christ died for us.

Jesus died on the cross being the full payment for our sin. And that you tell us for by grace are we saved through faith and that not of ourselves it is the gift of God not of works lest any man should boast.

And Father you tell us that all who call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved. So Father this morning if there's anyone here or under the sound of my voice this morning that is not sure whether they're a part of your family Lord I pray that you would be working in their hearts and their minds and their life this morning.

[25 : 59] And so if you're here this morning and you are not sure that you've ever surrendered your life to him not sure if you've ever completely trusted in the work Jesus did on the cross for your salvation I pray this morning I ask this morning that you would consider praying a prayer something like this Lord we know that it's not a prayer that saves us it's not a it's not magic words but it's simply telling God God I know I'm a sinner I know I don't deserve to be a part of your family because of my

sin but thank you for sending Jesus to die on the cross in my place and I place my whole faith and trust in Jesus right now for my salvation Father thank you for saving me in the name of

Jesus Savior and if you came to pray I sixth alone for your salvation to redeem you, to forgive you, to make you a part of his family.

And as he says, all who call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved. If you prayed that prayer this morning, no one else looking around, just lift your hand and say, Pastor, I pray to trust Christ this morning.

This morning, maybe you need to reconnect with God. Maybe through the busyness of your life or maybe just not having spoken to him in some time, not having spent time in his word.

Maybe this morning is a time where you say, Father, I want to reconnect with you. Forgive me.

We're not spending time with you.

[28 : 18] Father, I pray this morning that your Holy Spirit would be at work in each of our lives.

Draw us to you. Lord, as though the rock create the ripples to bring that little boat back to the shore,

Lord, may you draw us back to you, into your loving arms.

Father, we thank you for what you're going to do in each heart and each mind and each life this morning and bless each one here. And under the sound of my voice. Father, we pray this in Jesus' name and for his sake.

Amen. Amen.