

Jonah 2

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[0 : 00] Well, good morning. It is really cool. I don't know about you guys, but it is really cool for me to be preaching to people instead of preaching to people instead of preaching to people instead of preaching to people.

Wonderful thing to be here with you today. I am going to try to make sure my notes don't blow away. I'm really excited to be here in chapter two of Jonah with you. So if you have a Bible, please turn to Jonah chapter two as we continue this series here.

I just like to say thanks for everybody who made this happen. Thanks for the leeches for hosting. Thank you for everybody who is waving and smiling and directing traffic who put these, you know, the decorations up and took care of giving everybody children's activities.

And this is, you know, the church coming together to be the church. And it's really cool to fill out this whole backyard together. And I still see my, I mean, so this is just awesome to be together again. I'm really, really blessed by this. And I hope that you are as well. So let's friends, let's open up to Jonah two. When last we left. Oh, and if my mom is watching the live screen. Yes, mom, I have sunscreen on my head.

[1 : 37] Um, um, um, had to get that one in there. Um, when last we left Jonah, uh, he was in quite a predicament. Uh, the end of chapter one, uh, verse 16, verse 15, the sailors picked up Jonah and hurled him into the sea and the sea ceased from its raging.

And the men feared the Lord exceedingly, and they offered a sacrifice to the Lord and made vows. 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.

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 have 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 away 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. Weeds were wrapped around my head at the roots of the mountains.

[2 : 56] 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. But I, with the voice of thanksgiving, will sacrifice to you what I have vowed I will pay.

Salvation belongs to the Lord. Salvation belongs to the Lord.

But as we look closer at this book, especially as we venture into here into chapter two, Jonah is one of the most perplexing books in the whole Bible.

We notice that some things seem out of place, right? This is a prayer of what? Thanksgiving. What would we expect to see here?

[4 : 26] What has Jonah been doing in chapter one? He has been disobeying and disobeying and running away. And we would expect a prayer of repentance. But that's not what this is.

Jonah is even speaking in the past tense, looking back almost to a rescue that hasn't yet happened. And in the moment that he prays, the prayer isn't guaranteed.

I intentionally did not read the last verse of chapter two. Jonah is speaking here of a vow that we've never heard about before.

And we're not going to hear about again. All of this seems very out of place. And we want to ask, you know, have the fish fumes gotten to him?

Is he getting loopy? Like this doesn't fit the story. And so I want to do two things today. First, I want to face that mystery head on and discern what the Lord might be communicating to us through the perplexity of chapter two and how it doesn't seem to fit.

[5 : 34] And then secondly, I want to look at how the entirety of the first two chapters, how they are structured to tell us a story. There's a shape to this book, and it has a deep and lasting message for you and for me.

So let's pray to the Lord. Let's ask his blessing upon his word and in our lives. And then let's dig into those two things. Oh, Father, our God in heaven.

Thank you that you've brought us together again today, that we might together proclaim your name and worship. And that we might together seek you out in your word.

I pray, Father, that this would be encouraging and enlightening to us all. I pray that in the name of Jesus Christ, our King. Amen. Now, the book of Jonah, I think the book of Jonah is a mystery.

In some ways, this prayer in chapter two seems like it's very well fit to the situation. If you look at verse three, it seems, you know, you cast me into the deep, into the heart of the seas.

[6 : 42] That sounds like Jonah's situation. The flood surrounded me. Your waves, the flood surrounded me. All your waves, your billows passed over me. Then I said, I am driven away from your sight.

Now, it sure seems like Jonah is praying an appropriate prayer for his circumstance. But there are other ways where it seems as if he doesn't really understand what's going on.

It sounds tone deaf almost. Right? Why is this a prayer? It's a psalm. And in fact, if you have a Bible with cross references, there are a ton of quotes and allusions to the psalms here.

Why is this a prayer, a psalm even, of thanksgiving and not one of repentance? It's like, hey, hey, Jonah, are you not, are you just going to gloss over all of that disobedience, all of that rejection and rebellion of God and his ways from chapter one and just saying, start saying thanks?

And it's not just thanksgiving in general. It's thanksgiving for deliverance, which, I mean, has he been saved yet? Long shot, right?

[7 : 49] We're going to look in a moment. But suffice to say that being swallowed by a great fish is only an improvement to the situation if you already know where that fish is going.

If we already know what happens at the end of the chapter. But do we? Not until verse 10. So it's not clear and evident yet that he has been saved.

A prayer of thanksgiving for deliverance is even more out of place here. Now, there are some people who look at this and say that this is so out of place that it wasn't even originally part of the book of Jonah.

Someone saw in the liturgy of Israel a prayer about water and said, oh, Jonah is like that. So we'll combine the two in our order of service.

And it somehow got shuffled into the Bible somewhere. Right. I can't go with them there. I can't agree with that assessment. Right. Because, you know, you'd have to think that the editor is so unintelligent and that the people of Israel are so inattentive that they would go along with it.

[8 : 58] I don't have enough faith for that. But on the other hand, there are some people who would look at Jonah chapter 2 and see a full and complete restoration to the Lord. A true prayer of faith here.

And Jonah has come to his senses and that repentance is somehow implicit here. Maybe it's bound up in verse 9 a little bit. And they see, and this is quite cool, like a correspondence between chapter 1 with the sailors and what they do and Jonah in chapter 2.

In chapter 1, the sailors abandon their false gods. And in chapter 2, Jonah seems to be abandoning his false pursuit. The sailors prayed to Yahweh, the one true Lord.

And Jonah finally, in chapter 2, prays to the one true Lord. The sailors sacrificed after they were delivered. Jonah pledges to sacrifice again after his deliverance.

The sailors made vows, and Jonah pledges to fulfill a vow. Now, that's an interesting correspondence between the two. But it's not a complete correspondence because we're going to see soon Jonah's attitude changes dramatically.

[10 : 08] And the text doesn't explicitly call it out, so I would be afraid to put too much weight on that. So I can't quite follow those who would call this Jonah's complete revival and restoration.

He doesn't confess his high-handed disobedience. He said in chapter 1, essentially, No, Lord, I'm not going to Nineveh. I'm going as far away from Nineveh and your will as I possibly can.

And in fact, away from your presence. That's the whole point of chapter 1. Over and over again, it said, away from the presence of the Lord. Friends, that requires repentance, right? Both the old covenant and the new.

And so Jonah, the next time we see after chapter 2, the next time we see him interacting with God, chapter 4, we're going to find that he's not exactly on the best of terms with the Lord.

When we hear him voice his feelings, Jonah is going to explicitly reject God, his actions, and even his character. So what are we left with?

[11 : 12] On the one hand, some think that this book, chapter 2, is so misfit for the book of Jonah that it's a late edition.

And I can't go there. And on the other hand, some people would say that this is a restoration of a runaway prophet, a true religious revival. I can't, in the whole context of the book, I can't see that either.

And so there are, in between those two ends of the spectrum, there are a myriad of other interpretations. What are we left with? Is that wind noise in my mic?

Is that what I'm hearing? Sorry, guys. What are we left with? We're left with ambiguity. The book of Jonah is a mystery, right?

Why doesn't he clearly repent? Ever. Why does he thank God for a rescue that has not yet come to pass and is not yet guaranteed? Right?

[12 : 12] Think of Nineveh, chapter 3. I'm sure many of you have read this book before, right?

Nineveh mourns. They turn from high-handed wickedness for a time. But in turning from sin, have they turned to God?

Unclear. We don't know. The book never tells us. Another mystery. Why doesn't Jonah want God to show mercy to Nineveh? We don't know.

He never explains himself. And most central to the book, another mystery, the biggest mystery, is what is Jonah's relationship to the Lord? He prays this beautiful prayer of thanksgiving.

But as we're going to see again in chapter 4, he is not happy with God at all. So where does he stand with God? I think that the book of Jonah is designed to keep us guessing.

I think the mystery is here on purpose. I think, in fact, that's the point of it. And in fact, it's a cliffhanger ending. The very last verse of the book is God asking a question to Jonah that is left unanswered.

[13 : 29] The final verse is, And should I not pity, this is the Lord speaking, should I not pity Nineveh, that great city in which there are more than 120,000 persons who do not know their right hand from their left and also much cattle?

And that's it. That's the end of the book. We don't know Jonah's answer. We don't even know if Jonah answers.

And this confusion, this lack of clarity, I think that is actually one of the points of the book of Jonah. The fact that the book keeps us wondering about the state of Jonah's soul, keeps us wondering, refuses to provide the answers, and leaves us on a cliffhanger.

It keeps us dwelling on that question and considering it from beginning to end. Is Jonah right with the Lord? And pondering that question from the word go to the concluding verse prompts us also to be thinking about ourselves.

The scriptures are full of commands to examine ourselves. Let a person examine himself, 1 Corinthians 11. Then and so eat the bread and drink the cup.

[14 : 55] 2 Corinthians 13. Examine yourselves to see whether you are in the faith. Test yourselves. Or do you not realize this about yourselves that Jesus Christ is in you?

Galatians 6. Let each one test his own work. 2 Peter 1. Be all the more diligent to confirm your calling and election.

The ambiguity in Jonah gets us thinking about the state of his soul. But not only about his soul. But ourselves.

It's a wake-up call that stirs us from our slumber. Right? If a prophet, a prophet of God can be so at odds with God, where are we?

Are we praying beautiful prayers like chapter 2? But still have massive blind spots?

[15 : 55] Are we obeying only in reluctance? What do we want? Like, what do you want deep down?

Are your desires conformed to his or to the world's? To your own sinful desires? Do we dislike the way God does things?

And do we even love the Lord? It's possible to be here right now. It's possible to be a prophet.

Jonah shows us. It's possible to be a prophet of the Lord.

With a successful ministry, nonetheless. And still not love God. And so it's possible for us to be here in this backyard and not love him.

To participate in church out of tradition or for the social benefits or for your reputation or what have you. Jonah is a reminder to us.

[17 : 05] Friends, examine your own soul. Who are you deep down as you stand before the Lord? What do you believe?

What do you want? What are you after? Do you know yourself to be a sinner? Do you know that on your own, you stand condemned before a holy God?

That you are entirely unable to atone for even one of your sins by your own striving. But do you also know that in love, the love that Jonah is going to point out in chapter 4.

That the Lord is a gracious God and merciful, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love and relenting from disaster. Do you know that in love, he took on a human nature in order to go to the cross.

In order to taste death in your place. The king dying for the convict. Do you know that in love, he took on a human nature in the world. Do you know that in love, he took on a human nature in the world. And do you know that he is risen? And that he offers free pardon and restoration and renewal and life with him forevermore to all of those who would repent and believe.

[18 : 29] And examine yourself. Do you trust him? Do you look to Christ and see a glorious savior? Strong to save.

And willing. I hope that you do, my friends. I hope you do. And so that, that was the light stuff.

That was clearing up some ambiguities. Or, in fact, it was more likely that we were wrestling with the ambiguities, I hope.

Now I want to shift our focus into that second thing that I said. And look at the structure of the book. And show you something, you'll see that this is a pun.

Something beneath the surface. Last week, I told you that the book of Jonah records a journey. But the primary journey that we are looking at here is not geographical.

[19 : 35] It is not west towards Tarshish and then back east towards Nineveh. The main journey is not back and forth, east and west, across the face of the earth.

If the journey has a dimension to it, it is vertical. Now, I am not much for naming sermons. But if I gave this one a title, it would be Jonah's descent.

Jonah's downward journey spans the whole of the first two chapters. And as we read it, part of the descent is literal and part of it is figurative.

Because his descent is both physical, literally he goes down, but also it chronicles his spiritual descent as well. So, look with me.

Start in chapter 1, verse 3. It's the first indication there. The book is full of indicators about down. Chapter 1, verse 3.

[20 : 41] The Lord said to Jonah, arise, go to Nineveh. So, he went down to Joppa. He probably lived in the, we're pretty sure he lived in the central, like, mountain ridge that runs north-south in Israel.

Joppa was on the coast. So, he physically went down as he went west to Joppa. When he found a ship, where did he go? He went, what does it say? Down into it.

When the storm came, the sailors found that Jonah had gone down into the inner part of the ship, verse 5, and laid down and had fallen asleep.

What did the sailors do with him? They cast him down into the sea. And verse 17, a creature of the depths swallows Jonah. Now, and as we said earlier, right, that great fish might look like salvation to us because we know where the story is going.

But in that moment, the fish isn't salvation. It's digestion, right? Jonah is not being preserved so much as his plight is getting worse.

[21 : 56] In being swallowed by this monster of the deep, his chances, again, are going down. And that's just what he says as this downward journey continues in chapter 2.

Look at verse 2. He says that he is down in the belly of Sheol, down in the grave. Because, verse 3, the Lord has cast him into the deep.

And the waters have, verse 5, passed over him. And they have closed over him, trapping him there. And he is surrounded by the deep where he is entangled and buried even in the weeds until his descent, verse 6, ended figuratively at the very foundations of the world where he felt that he would be trapped and held forever.

And he calls it simply the pit. Jonah is a kinetic book. Jonah is plummeting down into the depths, both literally and figuratively, physically and spiritually, with no end in sight.

And the descent, initially in physical terms, begins to turn metaphorical in his physical situation that exposes the spiritual reality and concludes in cosmological terms in verse 6.

[23 : 25] At the roots of the mountains, I went down to the land whose bars closed upon me forever. It's as if creation itself, the fabric of the universe, is either being undone for Jonah or he is so separated from it that life and light and goodness are gone.

They are but a memory. This is among the darkest places in all of Scripture. And who is there? Friends, after you and I sin, thumbing our noses at God, after we suffer the consequences of our own sin, after we are laid low, brought bare, who is there?

Verse 6. The living God. And is he there in judgment and condemnation?

No, he is there with salvation in his arms. Jonah says, Friends, Friends, no matter how low you have sunk, no matter how mired you have gotten, no matter how far you have gone, at the bottom, at the very bottom, the Lord is there.

[25 : 32] Last week, we read Psalm 139 as a condemnation. Jonah, don't you know you can't flee from the Lord as he ran away?

And this week, we can read Psalm 139 as a consolation. Jonah, know that you cannot be separated from the Lord.

Psalm 139 reads,

In the lowest pit. The deepest grave. Of your own sin, like Jonah. Or of grief.

Of suffering. Of loneliness. Who is there? Who is right there? The Lord.

[27 : 23] So do not fear. Do not hesitate. To cry out to him. In repentance. In sorrow.

And in hope. At the bottom. At the very bottom. In death's clutches. Far from the land of the living. God is present. He is present there. For the last two years, we've been in the book of Matthew. Matthew. We saw in the chapters 12 and in chapter 16. That Jesus. Called. His descent into the grave.

A sign of Jonah. Matthew 12, 40. 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.

[28 : 22] Now. The emphasis here. That we ought to see is not. He was gone three days. And now he's back. As if the time is the most important thing. The sign of Jonah.

The big thing. Is he went to Sheol. He went to the grave. And returned. And so when we aren't the lowest low.

When life feels to us like a grave. We don't only say God is there because you know he's omnipresent. And we can't get anywhere away from him because he's everywhere. That's not the chief thing that we can say.

About being in that low place. We also say God is here at the very bottom. Because the author of life went to the grave for you.

Amen. And so when you're there. He's there with you. Friends in Christ.

[29 : 25] The Lord himself descended. Not just down to the earth. But down to the pit. So that. Child of God.

When you find yourself in the pit. In the grave. You are in good company. The one who formed you. Who loved you.

Loves you. Died. And rose for you. And he is present with you. Even. Even. Far from home.

Or lost at sea. Cast overboard. Swallowed by a creature in the depths. Wherever. The pit is. You can call out to your God.

And be heard. Because he is with you. Let's pray. Lord. Even as Jonah called out.

[30 : 23] To you. Thank you that we. Can call out to you. Lord. I pray that you would cause us. To examine ourselves.

And not take. For granted. Our faith. Lord. In finding. Our faith in you.

I pray that you would help us. To not forget. That in. The pit. That you are there.
With love. And healing in your wings. Lord. We pray these things. In the name of Christ. Our King.
Who went to the pit.
For us. Amen. Amen. Amen.