

**Gone Fishing**  
**Week 2**  
**Jonah 2:1-3:2**  
**"From Death to Life"**

**Introduction**

**And you were dead in your trespasses and sins in which you previously walked according to the ways of this world, according to the ruler of the power of the air, the spirit now working in the disobedient. We too all previously lived among them in our fleshy desires, carrying out the inclinations of our flesh and thoughts, and we were by nature children under wrath as the others were also. But God, Who is rich in mercy, because of His great love that He had for us, made us alive with Christ even though we were dead in trespasses. You are saved by grace! Ephesians 2:1-5**

Jonah's story has always served as a source of fascination for me. Not only because a man was swallowed alive by a big fish and lived to tell the story, but also because it is a wondrous illustration of God's unending mercy and grace. It is a story about how God loves and forgives the unlovable and irredeemable. For you see, there are two main parts to this story. First, we see Jonah, who thought he was morally upright. And in his self-righteous indignation, he felt it was beneath his station to go and preach to the Ninevites.

And then, we also have the Ninevites themselves, who were wicked, cruel, and pagan beyond compare. And yet, both Jonah and the people of Nineveh were in desperate need of salvation, by grace, through faith. This should be a wake up call for all of us. For no matter how good or bad we think we truly are, apart from God's mercy and grace, we are all dead in our trespasses and sins.

**...as it is written: There is no one righteous, not even one. There is no one who understands; there is no one who seeks God. All have turned away; all alike have become worthless. There is no one who does what is good, not even one. Their throat is an open grave; they deceive with their tongues. Vipers venom is under their lips. Their mouth is full of cursing and bitterness. Their feet are swift to shed blood; ruin and wretchedness are in their paths, and the path of peace they have not known. There is no fear of God before their eyes. Romans 3:10-18**

These days, we live in the most divisive of times. In fact, I have never seen a time where our own country is more divided. Everybody has a different cause, a different banner under which they gather. But we would do well to remember that we all are wretched sinners in the eyes of a Holy God. And maybe, just maybe, we might begin to view those with whom we disagree as people needing rescue, as opposed to some disposable multitude. For we needed the grace of our God to save us every bit as much as they do. And who knows, our enemies today may well be our bothers and sisters tomorrow! God's grace is all sufficient. And He can save whomever He chooses. Even those whom we have deemed unredeemable.

**"Come, let's settle this", says The LORD. "Though your sins are scarlet, they will be white as snow; though they are crimson red, they will be like wool. If you are willing and obedient, you will eat the good things of the land. But if you refuse and rebel, you will be devoured by the sword." For the mouth of The LORD has spoken. Isaiah 1:18-20**

It is the desire of The LORD to save lost sinners; both those who do not even **know** they need saving, as well as those who believe they are good enough just as they are. The book of Jonah illustrates this truth for us in the most vivid fashion. For in the end, it was not only the people of Nineveh who would cry out to God for salvation, but Jonah, the wayward prophet, as well. For ALL are in need of God's mercy and grace. As we look at the second chapter of this wonderful book today, we will see all of the elements necessary for salvation. Jonah went from rebellion to obedient faith in just a short three day period. It is amazing the lessons one can learn in the belly of the fish!

So let us look together and glean wisdom from Jonah's rebellion and subsequent repentance. For it is the story of a *Drowning Prophet*, a *Desperate Plea*, and a man *Delivered with Purpose!* Please allow me to explain.

### **A Drowning Prophet (2:1-6)**

**Jonah prayed to The LORD his God from the belly of the fish: I called to The LORD in my distress, and He answered me. I cried out for help from deep inside Sheol: You heard my voice. When You threw me into the depths, into the heart of the seas, the current overcame me. All Your breakers and Your billows swept over me. And I said, "I have been banished from Your sight, yet I will look once more toward your holy temple." The water engulfed me up to the neck; the watery depths overcame me; seaweed was wrapped around my head. I sank to the foundations of the mountains, the earth's gates shut behind me forever! Then You raised my life from the Pit. LORD my God!** **Jonah 2:1-6**

I once heard an old preacher say, "*Sin will take you further than you wanted to go, keep you longer than you wanted to stay, and cost you more than you wanted to pay.*" That, my friends, is wisdom! The devil's very purpose when he tempts us into sin is to drag us as far away from God's presence as he possibly can. No one ever starts off by saying, "I want to be a murderer, addict, or a prostitute. Those are simply the places that the strong undercurrent of sin eventually will drag them into. I myself over the years have had countless opportunities to counsel with people who, like Jonah, have done their best to flee from God's presence. And I always ask them this simple question, "How is that working out for you?" The answer is always the same. "Not good at all!" they will say. For you see, to be away from God is to be drowning in a sea of despair and regret.

No one is better off for being out in this world adrift on the course of their own choosing. We are **created for a purpose**, and that purpose is the very meaning of life. So why on earth would we even imagine that life would somehow be better if we could just simply escape from God's presence and "*do our own thing*", as it were? If that is your way of thinking, then don't be surprised, my friend, that you wind up in the belly of the beast!

God had chosen Jonah to be His prophet. And a prophet's job is to preach to the lost and dying. Jonah thought that he could have the option of choosing his own congregation, so to speak. But he found out the hard way that those decisions were far above his pay-grade; for it is God Who decides upon those who will receive His mercy.

During this study, I am determined to point out the many misconceptions that seem to afflict modern day Christendom. One of those misconceptions has to do with our mischaracterization of sin. Sin is not a "*mistake*", a "*poor decision choice*", or an "alternative path". No, sin... our sin, is open rebellion against God. Period. And we need to recognize it as such and stop excusing ourselves, when we sin. We like to compare ourselves to others in order to make ourselves feel better. I'm sure that in his own mind Jonah felt that his sin was no where near as bad as the sins of the Ninevites. After all, he faithfully worshipped God. And he endeavored to obey God's commands (So long as he agreed with them), compared to those evil and brutal people living in Nineveh, Jonah felt pretty good about himself.

Unfortunately, other sinners aren't our standard. **Christ is**. And compared to His righteousness our own righteousness is as filthy rags (**Isaiah 64:6**). And *The Bible* warns us:

**So, whoever thinks he stands must be careful not to fall.**

**1 Corinthians 10:12**

Jonah's arrogance led him to believe that he could do as he pleased. And he ended up a drowning man in desperate need of rescue as a result. What a perfect description of the person who is enslaved to sin. The current of it will always pull him under until he is drowning. At that point all that can be done is to cry out for a rescue from The Only One Who is able to save us.

We will probably never know all the words that Jonah prayed as he saw that great beast of a fish swimming toward him mouth agape and ready to swallow him whole! What we are given in this chapter is a summary of his prayer in retrospect. But safe to assume, he probably prayed more earnestly from inside the fish than he had ever prayed in his entire life! When we hit the bottom, we have only two choices, perish, or cry out to God for mercy. Thankfully, heaven stands at the ready to come to our rescue, when we cry out to God for mercy!

**A Desperate Plea (2:7-9a)**

**As my life was fading away, I remembered The LORD, and my prayer came to You, to your holy temple. Those who cherish worthless idols abandon their faithful love, but as for me, I will sacrifice to You with a voice of thanksgiving. I will fulfill what I have vowed.**

**Jonah 2:7-9a**

The question may arise as to why God would punish Jonah so severely for his sin, while showing tremendous patience with the wicked people of Nineveh? The answer is easier than you might think. They were ignorant, and Jonah knew better! Listen to what *The Bible* says about those who should know better:

**Not many should become teachers, my brothers, because you know that we will receive a stricter judgment. For we all stumble in many ways. If anyone does not stumble in what he says, he is mature, able also to control the whole body.**

**James 3:1-2**

Jonah knew The Law, and he knew full well the folly of disobedience. How do I know this? Because of the way he quoted from Scripture in his prayer from the fish's stomach. Not only does he quote several passages from the *Psalms*, but listen closely to what he prays about looking toward God's Temple in Jerusalem.

**"...yet I will look once more toward Your holy temple."**

**2:4b**

And:

**"I remembered The LORD, and my prayer came to You, to Your holy Temple."**

**2:7b**

Now compare that to the words of Solomon when He dedicated the temple:

**When they sin against You—for there is no one who does not sin—and You are angry with them and hand them over to the enemy, and their captors deport them to a distant or nearby country, and when they come to their senses in the land where they were deported and repent and petition You in their captor's land, saying, "We have sinned and done wrong; we have been wicked," and when they return to you with all their mind and all their heart in the land of their captivity where they were taken captive, and when they pray in the direction of their land that You gave their ancestors, and the city you have chosen, and toward the temple I have built for Your Name, may You hear their prayer and petitions in heaven, Your dwelling place, and uphold their cause. May You forgive Your people who sinned against You.**

**2 Chronicles 6:36-39**

Jonah knew that he had absolutely no chance of extracting himself from the belly of the fish. He knew there was only one course left to take. And that was the course of repentance and a desperate plea for mercy. So that is exactly what he did. Although he had no idea in the darkness of the fish's tummy the direction of God's temple in Jerusalem, in his heart he pointed himself back in God's direction and vowed to obey for the rest of his natural life.

After all, repentance isn't simply being sorry for our sins, but rather, it is being sorry enough to turn away from them in order to follow Christ. Jonah had no desire to do things his way any longer. **"There is a way that seems right to a person, but its end is the way to death" (Proverbs 14:12).** Jonah knew full well the peril to which his own rebellion had brought him. So, he desperately cried out for forgiveness and grace.

To my way of thinking, the two most compelling statements in this chapter are from verse 8 and verse 9. In verse eight, Jonah says, **"Those who cherish worthless idols abandon their faithful love..."**. I am not sure that the CSB gives a thorough enough translation of what is actually being communicated here. There are two key components to this sentence; first, the use of two Hebrew words, namely *shav* and *hebel*. The CSB translates these as "worthless idols", while the KJV translates them to say "lying vanities". *Shav*, in the Hebrew, carries with it the meaning of something that is untrue or empty and *hebel* most certainly means that which is vain or worthless. I believe the broader meaning of Jonah's words here are to warn us that the pursuit of anything other than God is a wasted effort.

The second part of the statement, translated "abandon their faithful love" in the CSB is even more telling. The word used for faithful love is "chesed" in the Hebrew, and it is *The Old Testament* version of our word for *grace*. Now, listen to the statement in context: "Those who pursue or cherish things other than God are wasting their time and forsaking the grace of God that could be theirs."

Jesus put it this way:

**For what profit is it to a man if he gains the whole world, and loses his own soul?**

**Matthew 16:26a - NKJV**

To repent is to offer up a desperate cry for forgiveness and to turn away from chasing after vanities in order to follow after Christ. Do this, and you shall receive the grace of God!

### **A Deliverance with Purpose (2:9b—3:2)**

**...Salvation belongs to The LORD. Then The LORD commanded the fish, and it vomited Jonah onto dry land. The Word of The LORD came to Jonah a second time: "Get up! Go to the great city of Nineveh and preach the message that I tell you."**

**Jonah 2:9b-3:2**

The second most compelling statement in this passage is, **"Salvation belongs to The LORD."** Jonah realized, after he had hit rock bottom, that only God could deliver him from his predicament. There was no escape from the living hell to which his sin had deposited him. Now he needed a miracle of grace. So, he repented, and God answered. The same is true for any of us. Only God can deliver us from our sins, and not only *can* He, but He *will*, if we will simply repent.

The word "saved" in the Scriptures actually means "to be delivered". This deliverance, or salvation, as it were, actually comes in three phases; past, present, and future. When we cry out to Jesus, we are saved/delivered (past tense) from our sins. Then The Spirit begins His work in us, and we are transformed, literally *delivered* from our old way of life. In short, He changes us from the inside out (sanctification). Then, ultimately, we will be delivered from the very presence of sin. The best I've ever heard it described is: salvation is to be delivered from the *penalty* of sin, the *power* of sin, and ultimately the very *presence* of sin. And **only God can do this for us**. We can't earn it. It is a gift of grace. He not only begins the work, but He completes the work in us. So, all we have to boast about is Jesus!

The old prophet gave that fish such a bad case of indigestion that it vomited Jonah out onto dry land! Jonah made some serious promises inside the fish's belly, and now was the time to keep his word. God had given Him the miracle of deliverance, and now it was time for Jonah to deliver! That is how you can tell that someone has truly experienced saving faith, by what they do *after* they have received it! Jonah intended to keep every vow he had made, for he had spent more than enough time on the inside of the fish!

Once again, God gave the command to go and preach to Nineveh, and this time, Jonah went. He still wasn't thrilled about the commandment, but he obeyed nonetheless. I have discovered in my own personal walk with God that sometimes He asks me to do things I'd rather not do. But obedience is far better than rebellion, my friends. I'd rather be uncomfortable in God's will, than doing my own thing. For truth be told, there are a lot of fish out there who would be more than happy to swallow me whole (figuratively speaking).

When God calls us to Himself, He calls us to a purpose. Some of the most miserable people I know are so-called Christians, who do nothing for the cause of the Kingdom. Church pews are filled to the brim every Sunday with folks who think they aren't required to do anything other than just "show up". And as a result, they end up being some of the most miserable, critical, and judgmental people on the planet. All of us have had some form of encounter or another with these folks. They are always ready to offer criticism of how things are done, but sadly, they never lift a finger to get anything done. I've had more than my share of folks telling me how I should do my job, but unfortunately, they never offer to help.

I read about such a person who attended a revival message given by the great preacher D. L. Moody. After the service she came up to him, and said, "I really don't care for your method of evangelism." Being the humble servant that he was, Moody replied, "Well, I am always looking for ways to improve my ministry, so tell me, what is your method of evangelism." The lady replied, "Well, I don't have one." And Moody said, "In that case, I think I'll just stick to the one I have!"

The church would be so much better, if we all tried to help one another, rather than critique. I'll be the first to admit that I feel inadequate most of the time in ministry. But I also know this; movie critics never actually make movies. So I try not to pay attention to those who would only distract me. I want to follow Christ. And all I have to offer Him is my personal best. **We are saved for a purpose.** And if God can feed a multitude with five loaves and two fishes, and if He can speak to a misguided soul through a donkey, then he can certainly use you, and even me! So serve Him. Don't let the critics talk you out of what God has called you to do. Or you just might wind up in the belly of a fish!

TRUTH!!!