

INTRO:

Let's begin with a question: What is the most hopeless situation you've ever been in before; your deepest hour of darkness and despair? Are you there now? Maybe you've lost a loved one before and you're left feeling like you're locked away in a deep dark cave. Maybe the cave is your own mind or heart, and you wrestle with thoughts or anxieties or just internal gloominess. Maybe it's simply the crushing weight of sin and shame and guilt. God's word was clear to you but you disobeyed anyway. You feel trapped by your rebellion. Jonah 2 is a text that reminds us that salvation belongs to the LORD. If we ever to come to a point where we despair of life itself, we can call out to a God who raises the dead.

1. Down to Sheol (2:1-6a)
2. Up from the pit (2:6b-9)
3. Out of the grave (1:17, 2.10)

1. Down to Sheol (2:1-6a)

Our first point is this: Down to Sheol.

Jonah goes down to Sheol, because of his rebellion.

To set the context, God called Jonah at the beginning of chapter 1 to be his messenger to the morally bankrupt city of Nineveh, in Assyria. He was to go warn them of God's judgment for their sins. But Jonah fled in the opposite direction from the presence of God. He went down to Joppa, paid for a ticket and went down into a ship and then down into the bottom of the ship, where he falls into a deep sleep. But God hurls a storm onto the sea until Jonah himself is finally hurled into the sea by the sailors in order to appease God's wrath and still the storm. Now, you would think this is were the story of the prophet ends. He rebelled against God and now he is judged. But, in the broader context of Jonah, God is determined to send him to Nineveh. And so we pick up in chapter 1:17 and read this,

17 Now the Lord had prepared a great fish to swallow Jonah. And Jonah was in the belly of the fish three days and three nights. 2.1 Then Jonah prayed to the Lord his God from the fish's belly.

Jonah should be dead. But God appointed this great fish, whatever exactly it was we don't know, but it swallows up Jonah. And this type of swallowing in the Old Testament is rarely a good thing. It actually often carries the sense judgment, or even destruction. Jonah might be saved because God sent the fish, but that doesn't mean he is on easy street. Jonah prays to God. And it's really a prayer of thanksgiving.

Let's look at just how far down Jonah was.

2 And he said:

"I cried out to the Lord because of my affliction, And He answered me.

"Out of the belly of Sheol I cried, And You heard my voice.

3 For You cast me into the deep, Into the heart of the seas,

And the floods surrounded me; All Your billows and Your waves passed over me.

4 Then I said, 'I have been cast out of Your sight;

When you read through Jonah 1 you feel like you're on pins and needles the whole time, eagerly anticipating that at any moment Jonah will call out to God. Even the pagan sailors tell Jonah to pray, but he doesn't. And now finally Jonah cries out to his God from the belly of the fish. But Jonah doesn't call it the fish's belly, he calls it the belly of Sheol. Sheol is the underworld. It's the realm of the dead. It's the place furthest away from God's presence. Jonah had been trying to run from God's presence, and now he finds himself in the place where he can go no further from God's presence.

Notice the effect of sin. Even though it was technically the sailors who pick Jonah up and hurl him into the sea, in an ultimate sense, it was actually God who threw him deep into the sea. Jonah was cast out. This same word for "cast" was used when Adam and Eve rebelled against God. Gen. 3:24 says that God drove out the man from the garden, away from the Tree of Life Adam and Eve were driven away from God's presence. Then in Gen 4:14 Cain is driven away from before God because he killed his brother. Jonah was driven from out from God's sight. Sin and rebellion exile people from God.

But what is Jonah's hope? It is this, that even though he was driven from God's sight, he will again look at God's temple. He is confident in God's ability to hear his cry for mercy and to save him from this desperate situation.

Yet I will look again toward Your holy temple.'

In the OT God's presence was manifested in the garden of Eden. Then after that it was in the Tabernacle that Moses put up in the wilderness. And finally, it was the temple that Solomon built. The temple is so crucial because it was through the mediation of the priests that God's presence could dwell among his people. Without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness of sin and no access to God's presence.

Jonah is confident that he will again be allowed into God's presence. And even though the floods are ominously surrounding him, and God sent his waves to crush him, Jonah makes an appeal to the temple, where God promised to extend his mercy to those who ask.

5 The waters surrounded me, even to my soul;

The deep closed around me;

The word for *The deeps* is significant. It is a word that speaks of chaos. Like in Gen. 1:2 when the earth was void and without form, it is described simply as the face of "the deep." Also, in ANE mythology there were three realms: the firmament above, the earth in the

middle, and the deeps below. And in the great flood of Genesis 7 God sandwiches earth in his judgment by opening the windows of heaven above and breaking open the fountains of the great deep below. Up top on dry land Jonah tried to run from the God of heaven, now he only finds the chaos of the underworld closing around him like quicksand. Do you remember Pilgrim in John Bunyan's famous *Pilgrim's Progress*? Pilgrim sinks in this great bog, he is being engulfed by the swamp of hopelessness. What a picture.

Weeds were wrapped around my head.

*6 I went down to the moorings of the mountains;
The earth with its bars closed behind me forever;*

Understand this is of course highly charged poetry. Jonah uses exaggerated language to evoke our emotions and create a powerful word picture. This is quite understandable. Imagine if you were trapped in a house with rising floodwaters in Grand Bahama when hurricane Dorian hit back in August. Afterward you could tell us, "Well, the water was high and I was scared." Or you could emphatically say, "Man I was so terrified I was shaking like a leaf, my heart was like a runaway train, the water was pouring in the window a million buckets per second!"

The sea weed wraps around Jonah like great chains. It's as if he is shackled to the very bottom of the floor of the sea. Have you ever watched discovery channel? Have you seen how pitch black it is at the bottom of the sea? You watch people in these little submarines down there and you feel Claustrophobic just looking at it through a tv screen! Did you know that your body can be crushed by just a mere 20-40 pounds per square inch of pressure, if the change in pressure is rapid. Much of the deep ocean is under 3-9000 pounds of pressure per square inch. I used to swim at a pool where the deep end was only 16 feet. And I remember every single time I dove down and touched the bottom of the pool my ears popped and I could already feel the pressure on my chest.

Now Jonah of course is not giving us a scientific analysis of how deep he actually went, who knows, maybe the fish gobbled him up at 10 ft. But the point simply that we get a sense of the crushing weight of the sea, into which God has thrown him, and which is really symbolic of the crushing weight of his sin and rebellion.

Did you notice he used the word "down?" It was used in chapter 1. Jonah tried to flee down, away from God's presence, and now he has hit rock bottom.

The bars of the underworld slammed shut behind Jonah. Think of the deepest darkest castle dungeon man has created.

It's as if Jonah says, I was down there chained up, it's pitch black, I can't see my hand in front of my face, I'm shackled to the floor, the door is shut, and the key is thrown away. There isn't a ray of hope.

And yet he assured himself, "I will again look at your holy temple, oh YHWH my God!"

There seems to be no reason in the text to think he physically died. But it's as if we're close enough to death to "taste it." And this was God's doing, because of Jonah's rebellion. And yet Jonah's confidence is that he will again see God's temple. He will again come into the presence of Yahweh his God. And so he humbly calls out to the only one who can save him from an everlasting stay in Sheol.

Lessons:

First, You can't function with seaweed around your face. In the same way you can't function when sin is wrapping its claws around your life. Humble yourself and ask God for mercy. Call upon his name!

Secondly, have you ever thought that you have sunk so far from God that he would never be able to reach you. You could be in the most desperate of situations, but know that God is able to hear your cry. Remember David's words in Psalm 61, "Hear my cry, O God;

listen to my prayer. From the ends of the earth I call to you,

I call as my heart grows faint;

lead me to the rock that is higher than I."

- When we are in trouble we can so quickly take our eyes off of Christ. We forget to pray. Often we don't pray. But especially in our hour of need we must pray. Remember Paul and the Silas sitting in a prison in Philippi and they prayed to God and God heard them.

Even in the crushing darkness of distress or the heavy weight of your sin and rebellion, God will hear you. Your confidence is that you will again come into God's presence. Rebellion against God often brings the heavy rod of discipline. But salvation belongs to the LORD, so that whether we live or die, our soul is safe with Christ.

2. Up from the pit (2:6b-9)

Yet You have brought up my life from the pit,

O Lord, my God.

This is the great reversal in the text. Like a revolving door that swings on the central pivot, the text turns here on this verse. Jonah's situation could not be more bleak. Yet it is the LORD who brings Jonah's life up from the deepest, darkest place of despair. God bursts the shackles, pulls up the chains, flings the doors open and pulls his prisoner up from certain eternal destruction.

Jonah goes on in verse 7:

7 "When my soul fainted within me,

I remembered the Lord;

And my prayer went up to You,

Into Your holy temple.

The expression of one's soul fainting, often signals that death is close. In Lamentations 2:12 we get a horrific picture of a starving child, ebbing away in its mother's arms. In other words, Jonah says, "Lord I didn't remember you until my foot was on the threshold of death's door. And yet you heard my prayer." The picture is powerful isn't it, Jonah is lost to the world, as good as dead, anchored to the roots of

the mountains, that is, the bottom of the sea. But his prayer for deliverance has bridged the distance. Jonah was seemingly out of reach, but God wasn't!

Paul, to the Thessalonians, commands this: pray without ceasing. Jesus tells his disciples not to lose heart but to pray always. And he gives a parable about a widow who pesters the pagan judge for justice until he finally answers her. And Jesus says, "if that judge answered how much more won't God answer his elect who cry to him day and night. Oh, and your heavenly Father won't delay long, no I tell you he will respond speedily." God is not far away; he is very near.

Do you ever feel as though God is too far away to hear you? Do you ever feel too ashamed of your sin and guilt? Do you ever feel you're out of God's reach? Salvation belongs to the LORD, never tire of calling out to him for mercy. Jesus is ultimately the one who bridges the gap for us. He is at God's right hand even now, interceding for us.

Psalm 18:6, 16 In my distress I called upon the Lord,
And cried out to my God;
He heard my voice from His temple,
And my cry came before Him, *even* to His ears... He sent from above, He took me;
He drew me out of many waters.

The next verses of Jonah's prayer flow logically from here:

8 *"Those who regard worthless idols, Forsake their own Mercy.*

9 *But I will sacrifice to You, With the voice of thanksgiving; I will pay what I have vowed.*

Salvation is of the Lord."

If you do not seek God's presence, there is no hope for you. If you serve other gods, there will be no salvation from death, from distress, from sin. Steadfast love is found only in the God of Scripture.

In verse 10 the LORD then speaks to the fish, *and it vomited Jonah onto dry land.*

"Vomiting" in the Old Testament was never a pleasant thing. I'm not sure I can come up with a time vomiting was a good thing either. The land of Canaan "vomited" out its inhabitants because of their sin. Israel also would be "vomited" out of the land because of their rebellion against God. Isaiah talks about how God confuses the wicked so that they are like a drunken man who staggers in his own vomit.

We alluded to this earlier: in Scripture there is often not a choice between salvation or judgment, but often there is salvation through judgment. I think this is often confused in our modern Western churches. That's why so many people don't understand Christ's atonement. What do we mean by salvation through judgment?

Salvation is often a messy process. It is surely a humbling process. The word for vomit never has a good connotation. Yet Jonah is safe.

Lessons:

This text shows us the nearness of God doesn't it?

But it also sounds the same theme as chapter 1. When the sailors on the ship are saved from the storm they offer a sacrifice to God and make vows. Here also, out of thanksgiving for salvation, Jonah promises to make sacrifices and fulfil his vows to the LORD. God has shown him grace that he did not deserve.

If you are a redeemed child of God do you daily offer your life as a living sacrifice to God? Each day do you say, "Lord you have redeemed my life from the pit of sin and you've saved me from destruction and hell. Thank you! I offer to you my eyes, what I look at, my mouth, what I say, my ears, the things that I listen to. I sacrifice my motives, my desires, my time and energy. I want to live a pure and blameless life before you and I offer myself to your service, do with me as you please."

Our third point is:

3. Out of the grave (1:17, 2.10)—and out to Nineveh.

Jonah's prayer of thanksgiving is bracketed, like bookends, on either end by those few short verses telling us that Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of the fish, and then God commanded the fish to release him.

[17 *Now the Lord had prepared a great fish to swallow Jonah. And Jonah was in the belly of the fish three days and three nights. 2.1 Then Jonah prayed to the Lord his God from the fish's belly... 10 So the Lord spoke to the fish, and it vomited Jonah onto dry land.]*

Let's now briefly consider this text in the broader context of the book and even of redemptive history. Three days and three nights Jonah is in the fish, until at the direction of God, Jonah is spewed out of his watery, and very fishy, grave. Death has passed. God has brought Jonah's life up from Sheol.

In the immediate text before us we are not told more than that God spared Jonah's life. But for the Jews this text became a picture of going from death to life, even though Jonah didn't fully die. There was even a long-standing tradition that Jonah was son of the widow of Zarephath whom Elijah raised from the dead in 1 Kg 17. Now we're not going to argue about that now, the point is simple: the Jews saw Jonah 1 and 2 as a picture of God saving life from the grave.

Now if you have your Bible close at hand, turn with me to Matt. 12. As you do so let me set the context. In Matt. 12 Jesus is healing many people. And Matthew gives a long quote from Isaiah in which we are told that the Gentiles will hope in name of God's chosen servant. Then Jesus goes on to heal a demon-possessed man. In response the people ask, "Could this be the Son of David?" Well who is the Son of David? He is God's servant who will bring in God's kingdom, who will reign in justice and righteousness, who will bring an everlasting rule of peace." Do you know what the Pharisees say in verse 24 of Matt 12? They say, "No, Jesus casts out demons by the power of Beelzebul," who is the prince of demons. Jesus answers them by saying a kingdom divided will fall. Basically, if you lead

your armies to battle, are you going to go shoot down one of your leading generals? Jesus says, (vs28) “If I’m casting out demons, not by the prince of demons, but by the power of the Spirit of God, then God’s kingdom is here!”

But now look at this: Matt. 12:38 says that scribes and Pharisees want to see a sign from Jesus. Jesus rebukes them and says halfway through verse 39, “no sign will be given to it (this generation) except the sign of the prophet Jonah. 40 For 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.” (remember Jonah was cast into the heart of the sea)

Three days, in typical Jewish thinking means that you’re good and dead. You’ve arrived in Sheol and you’re not coming back. What is the ultimate sign of Jesus being the Son of David and bringing in God’s kingdom? It is that Jesus would be three days and three nights in a tomb and then God would raise him victoriously from the grave. Paul says to the Corinthians, “And if Christ has not been raised, then our preaching is in vain and your faith is in vain.” The text we looked at in Jonah today helps lay the foundation for this. Jesus had to die a brutal and shameful death on the cross, in your place, for your rebellion against God. He had to be buried and raised again, on the third day, in accordance with the Scriptures.

God has ultimately extended grace through Christ. Salvation belongs to the LORD because Christ came into this world to save sinners. Paul tells the Philippians that Christ humbled himself by being born in the likeness of men; he humbled himself to the point of death, even death on a shameful cross. But God has highly exalted him, and given him a name above every name, so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father!

The Pharisees didn’t need another sign, they needed to humbly call out to God for salvation. Jesus picks up the prophetic sign of Jonah simply to say, “Listen, salvation belongs to the LORD, all you must do is believe in the power of the resurrection. Your sins can be washed away and your life is hidden with me.” Jonah could ultimately be lifted up from the pit because Christ would himself pass through death. It’s the same for you and me. Your rebellion against God would rightly land you deep in the heart of Sheol, in hell itself. Praise God there is salvation. Christ died on a cross, was buried and rose from the grave, so that you may live! He alone is able to burst the bonds of sin that cripple us, to free us from the grip of the devil, to burst the bars of death wide open. If you believe in Jesus you are a fellow heir to the imperishable kingdom of God, through Christ.

In Conclusion:

There is no other god who could possibly win this salvation for us. So don’t trust in any other god. Whether it’s Buddhism, or Hinduism, or Islam. Don’t trust in your own abilities, in your own power or wisdom. Don’t run from the clear word of God. Trust in the name of Jesus Christ.

Rebellion exiles, but Christ reconciles. Believe then, that salvation belongs to the LORD. Believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of David, that he shed his blood to purchase your soul and bring you into the kingdom of God. Are you weighed down by the crushing weight of guilt and shame? Do you feel shackled by your own sin and weakness? What griefs or sorrows, what anxiety or distress have you faced, or do you face? Even if you despair of life itself, put your confidence in this, that Jesus died to save you, God can hear your prayers, he is able to life your soul up from the pit, so trust in the God who raises the dead. Rebellion exiles, but Christ reconciles. Jonah did not deserve God’s grace. Neither do you or I deserve God’s grace.

And how then should we live?

We ought to live as those snatched from death’s clutches because Christ took our place. This should produce thankfulness.

This should also produce obedience.

Right after Jonah lands on dry ground God again charges him to go to preach to sinners who don’t deserve mercy. But God saves Jonah in order to send him to the pagans and call them to repent. In a very similar way, soon after Jesus came out of the tomb he commanded his disciples to bring the good news of the promise of forgiveness of sins and of the hope of the resurrection, to the whole world. We’ve recently finished a series on Mark, do you remember how Mark records it? “Go into all the world and proclaim the gospel to the whole creation. Whoever believes and is baptized will be saved, but whoever does not believe will be condemned.”

And on that final day of judgment may you and I be among those who rise up as those who believed in God’s Word, like the Ninevites who in Jonah 3 will repent at Jonah’s preaching, or like the queen of Sheba who believed in God when she listened to Solomon’s wisdom. And you and I will be a witness against those who did not believe and repent at God’s message of salvation. And in thankfulness and obedience to Christ, go out and seek to live your life in such a way that you proclaim to others that salvation belongs to the LORD, through Christ Jesus.