

*A telemarketer called a home one day, and a small voice whispered, "Hello?"*

*"Hello! What's your name?"*

*Still whispering, the voice said, "Jimmy."*

*"How old are you, Jimmy?"*

*"I'm four."*

*"Good, Is your mother home?"*

*"Yes, but she's busy."*

*"Okay, is your father home?"*

*"He's busy too."*

*"I see, who else is there?"*

*"The police and the fireman."*

*"The police and the fireman?"*

*"Yes, but they're all busy too."*

*"Jimmy, what are they doing?"*

*"Looking for me," whispered Jimmy.*

It would seem, at least for the moment – Jimmy had found a good hiding place.

**We can't say the same for Jonah, can we?**

If you remember, God told Jonah to go to Nineveh to personally deliver a message to the wicked Assyrian people to repent or else face judgment – but Jonah didn't want to do deliver that message. He hated the Assyrians, and he wanted to see the wrath of God – hell, fire and brimstone fall upon them. It was unthinkable to Jonah that the Assyrians could possibly turn from their wicked ways and be forgiven by God. Jonah couldn't handle the thought of God's grace and mercy being extended to them, so, without any further discussion with God, Jonah essentially hands in his resignation as a prophet, boards a ship, and goes in the complete opposite direction towards Tarshish Spain. He's in hiding and on the run from God.

Well, out there on the sea, God sends a violent storm – it comes out of nowhere, and the ship is being severely battered. The pagan sailors try desperately to get back to the port, they are praying to all of their gods for help, and they are throwing cargo over the side to lighten the ship – but nothing is working for them. If you recall, Jonah was singled out by God with a roll of the dice, and since Jonah knows he is the cause of the storm – he tells the sailors *"Throw me over the side!"* The pagan sailors didn't want to do that, but when they had no other choice, they reluctantly tossed Jonah over the side into the sea to his certain death. Immediately, the storm ceased and the pagan sailors start worshipping the God of Jonah.

In the meantime, Jonah was bobbing up and down in the water and the Lord appointed a great fish to swallow him.

That word “*appointed*” is an interesting word. It’s a governing word – what a king would do if he was going to commission an ambassador or a messenger for a task. It was something you did to a person, but in the book of Jonah, it’s a fish that’s been commissioned for this official task. And, it’s important to note, the task is to *swallow* Jonah – not to *bite* or *chew* on Jonah. Obedience is really, really important here or the story ends very abruptly and this is a really short sermon series.

I was thinking about the ironies that we have seen in this story thus far – for example, the pagan sailors were praying and the prophet of God would not, the pagan sailors showed compassion to Jonah while, this man of God, refused to show compassion to those in Nineveh who did not know God. Here is another crazy irony I thought about. I doubt this is the case, but wouldn’t it be ironic if this great fish that swallowed Jonah was a massive great white “Jaws-type” shark that obeyed God, to the letter, despite its own nature to eat Jonah like a chew toy. **Wouldn’t that be ironic?** If the truth be told, no one knows what it was, we are simply told it was a great fish, but we do know this for sure – a great fish obeyed God – but Jonah, a man of God, did not. That’s ironic.

Anyway, Jonah is in the belly of this great fish and this is where we pick up the story. So, turn with me to Jonah **Chapter 2**, and we will read all ten verses.

**<sup>1</sup>Then Jonah prayed to the Lord his God from the stomach of the fish, <sup>2</sup>and he said, “I called out of my distress to the Lord, And He answered me. I cried for help from the depth of Sheol; You heard my voice. <sup>3</sup>“For You had cast me into the deep, into the heart of the seas, and the current engulfed me. All Your breakers and billows passed over me. <sup>4</sup>“So I said, ‘I have been expelled from Your sight. Nevertheless, I will look again toward Your holy temple.’ <sup>5</sup>“Water encompassed me to the point of death. The great deep engulfed me, Weeds were wrapped around my head. <sup>6</sup>“I descended to the roots of the mountains. The earth with its bars was around me forever, but You have brought up my life from the pit, O Lord my God. <sup>7</sup>“While I was fainting away, I remembered the Lord, and my prayer came to You, Into Your holy temple. <sup>8</sup>“Those who regard vain idols forsake their faithfulness, <sup>9</sup>but I will sacrifice to You With the voice of thanksgiving. That which I have vowed I will pay. Salvation is from the Lord.” <sup>10</sup> Then the Lord commanded the fish, and it vomited Jonah up onto the dry land.**

Chapter 2 is called Jonah's prayer. Yes, he finally decides to pray. I guess trouble has a way of making prayer warriors out of all of us – and Jonah is no exception. This prayer by Jonah is also referred to as the Psalm of Jonah, and I'm going to show you why. I'm am going to read **verses 2** through **9** again, but this time from a different source. Listen to this.

<sup>2</sup>*“In my trouble I cried to the Lord, And He answered me.” (Psalm 120:1)*

<sup>3</sup>*“All Your breakers and Your waves have rolled over me.” (Psalm 42:7)*

<sup>4</sup>*“I am cut off from before Your eyes; Nevertheless, You heard the voice of my supplications when I cried to You.” (Psalm 31:22)*

<sup>5</sup>*“Save me, O God, for the waters have threatened my life.” (Psalm 69:1)*

<sup>6</sup>*“Then the channels of water appeared, and the foundations of the world were laid bare at Your rebuke.” (Psalm 18:15)*

<sup>7</sup>*“In my distress I called upon the Lord, and cried to my God for help; He heard my voice out of His temple.” (Psalm 18:6)*

<sup>8</sup>*“I hate those who regard vain idols, but I trust in the Lord.” (Psalm 31:6)*

<sup>9</sup>*“To You I shall offer a sacrifice of thanksgiving, and call upon the name of the Lord. I shall pay my vows to the Lord.” (Psalm 116:17-18)*

What I just read was not a different Bible version of **Chapter 2**. Although it sounded very similar, what I just read was an arrangement of portions of seven different psalms that apparently came to Jonah's mind while he was in the belly of the fish. In other words, Jonah found himself led him back to the Word of God – in this case the Psalms, in his time of trouble.

There's a point to be made here. When we find ourselves plunged into difficult times like Jonah, what we know about God through His Word is necessary to sustain us, and strengthen us, and give us hope in the midst of our trouble. The other day, Trisha was experiencing some of her chronic face pain and I noticed her writing on a tablet of paper. When I asked her what she was doing, Trisha said she was writing down Bible passages that reminded her of God's promises and His character – His goodness, His sovereignty, His sustaining power, and His help in her time of trouble. That's what Trisha does. For me, I have a “go to” verse for all of my pain and suffering, even a hang nail – **“My God, my God why has thou forsaken me!”** Obviously, I being silly here, but I fear there are some who do just that. If you don't get to know God, if you don't trust Him, if you're not in God's Word – you will generally see God as *hurting* you instead of *helping* you. Although life can be hard, God loves you dearly, and He has a purpose and a plan for what He does – often times a purpose and a plan that is beyond you where something much greater is at stake. But you will only come understand this about

God and find peace in the midst of your circumstances as you get to know and trust Him. So, please get in His Word.

Okay, let's dig into our passage, **Jonah Chapter 2**, starting with **verse 1**.

**Then Jonah prayed to the Lord his God from the stomach of the fish,**

Jonah didn't pray about God's assignment for him to go to Nineveh. He didn't pray about booking a cruise to Tarshish Spain. When the pagan sailors were praying to their gods during the storm, Jonah kept silent, even when told to pray by the ship's captain. Jonah wasn't talking to God at all.

I guess when you're angry with God and rebelling against Him, prayer is the last thing you probably want to do – that is until you end up in the belly of a fish or find yourself facing some type of crisis – then talking to God might be the only thing you can do. Prayer reminds us that we need God, and that's where Jonah finds himself – in desperate need, he's got nothing else.

In our study in Revelation on Wednesday nights, I quoted this from Corrie ten Boom: *“You'll never know if Jesus is all you need until Jesus is all you have, and when Jesus is all you have, then you will discover that Jesus is all you need.”* If the truth be told, like it or not, we all need to get to this place in our lives.

Jonah continues in **verse 2**:

**<sup>2</sup>“I called out of my distress to the Lord, And He answered me. I cried for help from the depth of Sheol; You heard my voice. <sup>3</sup>For You had cast me into the deep, into the heart of the seas, and the current engulfed me. All Your breakers and billows passed over me.”**

This seems like a really good start for a guy who has been running from God. Jonah explains what happened to him when he was tossed into the sea. Jonah thought he was going to drown and sink to the bottom, but he called out for help, and God came to his rescue. Now, we now see Jonah thanking God for saving his life and keeping him from dying in the sea; although, if you recall earlier in **Chapter 1**, it seemed that Jonah would have rather died than obey God.

If you noticed, Jonah does not place the blame on the pagan sailors, but says that God cast him into the deep – it was God who put Him there. The sailors may have

done the heavy lifting, but it was God's hand of discipline behind their actions. So, it appears that Jonah understands that God is a sovereign God.

Let's look at **verse 4**.

**“So I said, ‘I have been expelled from Your sight. Nevertheless, I will look again toward Your holy temple.’”**

Now in his dire condition, Jonah feels that God has cast him out of His favor – out of His sight, **but isn't that what he wanted? Isn't that why Jonah got on the ship in the first place – to run and hide from God's presence?** Jonah believes that God has turned His back on him which wasn't true at all; otherwise, **why did God graciously appoint a great fish to save him?** In fact, Jonah didn't realize it, but he had a front row seat to one of the greatest miracles ever performed by God. God didn't turn His back on His prophet, but despite how Jonah feels, he admits that he looks forward to once again worshipping in the temple, a place of prayer in Israel.

Jonah continues to talk about what happened to him – **verse 5**.

**<sup>5</sup>“Water encompassed me to the point of death. The great deep engulfed me, weeds were wrapped around my head. <sup>6</sup>I descended to the roots of the mountains. The earth with its bars was around me forever, but You have brought up my life from the pit, O Lord my God. <sup>7</sup>While I was fainting away, I remembered the Lord, and my prayer came to You, into Your holy temple.”**

As Jonah was in the fish, he continued to think about his rescue from the sea. He had been in a hopeless and helpless situation. Jonah was plunged to what appeared to be his watery grave, sinking to the bottom while entangled in seaweed, which would have surely added to the problem. Again, Jonah seems very thankful that he did not drown, and even though he felt far away from God, he knows his prayer has reached God.

Maybe now that Jonah's life has been spared, he will have a change of heart and be willing to do whatever God wants him to do.

**<sup>8</sup>“Those who regard vain idols forsake their faithfulness. <sup>9</sup>But I will sacrifice to You with the voice of thanksgiving. That which I have vowed I will pay. Salvation is from the Lord.”**

Where did that come from? Have we seen any mention of idols so far in the story of Jonah? Yes, when the sailors were calling out to their false gods and pagan idols for help.

It would appear that Jonah is now being judgmental towards those pagan sailors, similar to his judgment against the people of Nineveh. He is basically saying, *“Those sailors worship their false gods in vain, they cling to worthless idols that cannot save them. I on the other hand will worship the one true God who truly does save.”* Jonah is also hinting that although the sailors made vows, they will not keep them, but he surely will. **And what does Jonah vow?** It would appear that Jonah vows to go the temple, as that’s where sacrifices are made to God. In the end, Jonah says, **“Salvation is from the Lord”** – in context, he is thankful that God has saved him. Jonah admits his deliverance was only as a result of God’s grace towards him.

Okay, we have reached the end of Jonah’s prayer, and I have been holding my thoughts about his prayer for the most part until now. My thoughts about his prayer stem from a single question that I have been wrestling with: **Was Jonah repentant?** That’s the question. Most of the resources I studied, resources that I trust, suggested that Jonah was repentant or at least partially repentant, but I just don’t see it even though I looked hard to find it. And I will freely admit, I am in the minority in my point of view, but let me explain what I see and don’t see.

- Nowhere in his prayer did Jonah confess or even suggest that he was disobedient and rebellious. Nowhere in his prayer did Jonah admit he was wrong. Nowhere did Jonah seek forgiveness.
- On two occasions in his prayer, Jonah mentioned the temple. It seems that Jonah is dead set on going to the temple to worship God, which is a really good destination, **but where was he commanded to go?** He was commanded to go to Nineveh – that’s where he was told to go – a place he still doesn’t want to go, because if you jump ahead to Chapter **3:1-2**, Jonah has to be commanded a second time to go to Nineveh.
- In his prayer, Jonah seemed to be focused on his own salvation from the sea, not necessarily other people, to include the people of Nineveh. **In fact, most of this prayer is about who?** Jonah, himself.
- God was gracious to Jonah, he should be dead; at least a chew toy for that great fish, and still Jonah cannot be gracious to others. In fact, in **Chapter 4**, he gets angry that the people of Nineveh actually repent and escape God’s judgment.

**Do you remember the story of the Pharisee and the tax collector in Luke 18:9-14?**

**<sup>9</sup> And He also told this parable to some people who trusted in themselves that they were righteous, and viewed others with contempt: <sup>10</sup> “Two men went up into the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector. <sup>11</sup> The Pharisee stood and was praying this to himself: ‘God, I thank You that I am not like other people: swindlers, unjust, adulterers, or even like this tax collector. <sup>12</sup> I fast twice a week; I pay tithes of all that I get.’ <sup>13</sup> But the tax collector, standing some distance away, was even unwilling to lift up his eyes to heaven, but was beating his breast, saying, ‘God, be merciful to me, the sinner!’ <sup>14</sup> I tell you, this man went to his house justified rather than the other; for everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, but he who humbles himself will be exalted.”**

Jonah is like this self-righteous Pharisee – actually he is like the nation of Israel who did not do what they were commanded to do – that is to deliver the truth about God, to shine His light in a lost and dying world. They did not do it, and Jonah didn’t want to do it.

Now, we know the story. God is going to use Jonah, but Jonah’s heart is still not in the right place. Like the Pharisee, Jonah will simply go through motions – like it or not. He’s the same Jonah who fled to Tarshish Spain, but this time he at least realizes he can’t hide and run from God.

And so, we close this chapter with **Jonah 2:10. Then the Lord commanded the fish, and it vomited Jonah up onto the dry land.**

The fish vomited Jonah onto dry land, and it paints an image of disgust. Jonah wasn’t dropped off by an angel, he wasn’t allowed to swim to shore, he was projectile vomited onto shore, covered in clam chowder, shrimp cocktail, and tuna tartar (or whatever the fish eats). Maybe this was God’s way of showing Jonah what He thought about his attitude.

*Jerry Levin was assigned as Middle East bureau chief for CNN. He viewed his assignment as a new adventure. But his adventure took a turn for the worst when in 1983 Jerry felt a light tap on his shoulder. A short-bearded man in his early twenties pushed a green handgun into his stomach. Two and a half hours later he was led into a building and shoved into a room, where they shackled his right arm to a radiator, and then they left. Jerry waited and listened; he was alone. Days passed in a blur of monotony and fear.*

*It was here that the most remarkable thing happened. Jerry prayed for the first time in years. He prayed, "God, please forgive men like these because they are in part responsible for bringing me to You and Your Son." Jerry realized – God used his capture and imprisonment as a way to get his attention.*

Many times, it's only when we are brought down that we really start to look up and turn to God in prayer. Listen to what the writer of **Psalm 116:1-6** says,

***"I love the Lord, because He hears My voice and my supplications. Because He has inclined His ear to me, therefore I shall call upon Him as long as I live. The cords of death encompassed me and the terrors of Sheol came upon me; I found distress and sorrow. Then I called upon the name of the Lord: "O Lord, I beseech You, save my life!" Gracious is the Lord, and righteous; Yes, our God is compassionate. The Lord preserves the simple; I was brought low, and He saved me.***

So, are you in over your head? Are you in trouble? *Pray.*

Is it your fault you're in trouble? *Pray anyway.*

Have you not been living the kind of life you think God wants you to live? *Pray.*

Are you concerned that even if you were to pray, your motives might be wrong or self-serving? *Pray anyway.*

Have you given up on talking to God? Are you angry with Him? *Pray*

You believe prayer will have no impact in your life? *Pray anyway.*

*An unknown Confederate soldier during the Civil War wrote the following poem:*

*I asked God for strength that I might achieve.*

*I was made weak that I might learn humbly to obey.*

*I asked for health that I might do greater things.*

*I was given infirmity that I might do better things.*

*I asked for riches that I might be happy.*

*I was given poverty that I might be wise.*

*I asked for power that I might have the praise of men.*

*I was given weakness that I might feel the need of God.*

*I asked for all things that I might enjoy life.*

*I was given life that I might enjoy all things.*

*I got nothing that I asked for, but everything I hoped for.*

*Almost despite myself, my unspoken prayers were answered.*

*I am, among all men, most richly blessed.*



Source Material:

Holman Old Testament Commentary – Max Anders  
Exposition Commentary – Warren Wiersbe  
The Bible Knowledge Commentary – Walvoord & Zuck  
Enduring Word – David Guzik