

# In the Extreme Hour

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**Bible Verse:** Jonah 2:1-10  
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You know, as you open the word of God to a group of people, it's always a privilege, it's always a privilege to stand in this pulpit to speak the word of God and you are mindful as you speak with a sense of vertical responsibility, there's also a sense of horizontal concern and compassion and recognition of the different trials and spiritual states with which people come, part of the wonder, part of the beauty of preaching the word of God is knowing that it has the power to break proud hearts and to humble them and to bring them to Christ. No human speaker has the ability to do that. You as a parent don't have the ability to truly humbly your child's heart that they would become tender before the Lord Jesus Christ and receive him for salvation. We do our best to raise them in the nurture and admonition of the Lord, but ultimately we are dependent upon the help of the Holy Spirit to humble them and to lead them to faith in Christ. We can't manipulate that. We can't orchestrate that through human means, through powers of persuasion or even worse, powers of manipulation; a superficial response rendered under pressure is not something that has any lasting eternal value. So we appeal as we preach the word of God, we appeal to individuals like you to take the word of God to heart yourself because we know that we can't generate that and we depend upon the Holy Spirit to help us as we do, as we preach the word and we just commit the results to the Lord as we bring the word of God.

You know, Scripture says in that regard and as a means of just kind of giving you a sense of the attitude with which you would approach God's word today, it says that God is opposed to the proud but gives grace to the humble, and Scripture lays out before us and lays open our heart with that thought to recognize that we could either humble our hearts and respond well to Christ, respond well to the word of God, or we can stiffen our neck and confirm ourselves even more in our lostness and in our stubborn love for sin. So the nature of the preaching of the word of God is just very direct and immediate to your heart. And I beg you, I beg you as you hear the word of God today, to humble your heart before it because we're going to see an example of a man who was humbled by life, humbled by his own sin, humbled by his condition that was extraordinary and yet in the extraordinary circumstance in which he found himself, there was put on display the character of God which is more than ready to give grace to the humble, the character of God which is more than ready to forgive sinners who call upon him.

You know, if you would walk out of here still confirmed in your sin, still lost in sin, you will walk out in that condition not because God was unwilling to save you but because you were unwilling to humble your heart before him, and we've been teaching on Sunday mornings through the book of Jonah, for those of you that are with us, and we have come to chapter 2. I invite you to find the book of Jonah in your Old Testament, the familiar story of Jonah. This is about the seventh message that we've preached on this book and so for those of you that are joining us, we just last week saw the great fish swallow Jonah and we have complementary copies of CDs and other messages out on the round table. You're free to take as many of those as you'd like. I would love to see that table emptied as you leave today. You know the story of Jonah being swallowed, now in chapter 2 we find out what happened to Jonah and we see how he humbled himself in the midst of those miserable conditions inside the stomach of the fish.

Jonah 2:1, we'll cover the entire chapter here and I'll read it now to set it before your minds.

1 Then Jonah prayed to the LORD his God from the stomach of the fish, 2 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. 3 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. 4 So I said, 'I have been expelled from Your sight. Nevertheless I will look again toward Your holy temple.' 5 Water encompassed me to the point of death. The great deep engulfed me, Weeds were wrapped around my head. 6 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. 7 While I was fainting away, I remembered the LORD, And my prayer came to You, Into Your holy temple. 8 Those who regard vain idols Forsake their faithfulness, 9 But I will sacrifice to You With the voice of thanksgiving. That which I have vowed I will pay. Salvation is from the LORD." 10 Then the LORD commanded the fish, and it vomited Jonah up onto the dry land.

I guess I would start with this general thematic question as we dive into the text, mindful that some of you come into the room today perhaps dealing with very real consequences of very real sins, perhaps weighed down in your conscience with things that no one else knows about and that you have not confessed to the Lord and there is just that overwhelming sense of doom and gloom that attends your soul as the reality of your sin before God has been brought to bear upon your mind, and there is a critical question to be asked in those circumstances in that spiritual condition: is God willing to forgive your sins? Can your guilt be removed or not? Or are you destined to try to hide and cover this up with a sense of shame with no hope of relief for your guilty conscience? Well, what you see here in this passage is an indication of the great willingness of God to forgive great sinners. The great willingness of God to forgive great sinners. Here is Jonah, and we'll deal more specifically with the text, this is just a little bit of an overview, here is Jonah in verse 1 praying to God from the stomach of the fish and Jonah is entirely

responsible for being in that condition. It was his rebellion, it was his direct defiance of God's call to go to Nineveh to preach, it was his choice to go and try to find a ship to take him in the opposite direction so that he wouldn't have to do what God had called him to do.

It was Jonah's sin that brought the great storm upon the sea that God hurled upon the sea in chapter 1, verse 4; it was Jonah's sin that led God to identify him by the casting of the lot in verse 7; it was Jonah's confession that it was on account of him that a great storm had fallen upon the ship and upon the humanly speaking, innocent men who allowed him onto their ship; it was Jonah, the sinner, who was thrown into the sea and the sea stopped its raging. So Jonah here has pursued a long pattern of sin as a prophet of God, no less, that has brought him to this very humbling point that he finds himself in. Imagine, if you will, imagine the discomfort, the shame, the physical discomfort, the spiritual recognition of sin that was attending and pressing down upon Jonah as he is inside the stomach of a great fish. What do you do with that? Jonah found himself in the midst of horrible circumstances utterly beyond his control and it's all his fault. He can blame no one else for this. He is in this situation as a result of his own actions and while I have no specific things in my mind, it's the nature of ministry, it's the nature of humanity, it's the nature of the preaching of God to know that some come with us and they are in those circumstances and, beloved, in the circumstances, none of you are in the stomach of a fish. Let me just be clear. I get that part, but in uncomfortable difficult circumstances that have overtaken you, that have swallowed you up, and you are to blame, what do you do in the midst of that?

Well, as we move into Jonah 2, we see Jonah humbling himself before God. We see him reciting the way that God has delivered him. What we see is God ultimately showing grace to the one who humbles himself before him, and in that, and the fact that God delivers Jonah from the fish and delivered him from drowning, in that we see the reality that God is willing to forgive sinners who deserve no mercy from him, and it is that attribute of God, that mercy of God, that sovereign compassion of God that we cry out to. It is that sovereign compassion of God that gives you a ground of appeal to him in the midst of your sin. Nay, more here on the other side of the cross, it is the willingness of the Lord Jesus Christ to go to the cross of Calvary to lay down his life for sinners just like you that gives you grounds to appeal to God in the midst of your sin, in the midst of the conviction, in the midst of the suffocation not of the inside of a fish but the suffocation of your own accusing guilty conscience. That God would show mercy in the midst of such suffocating circumstances is to the praise of his glory, that God would show mercy to one like you is to the praise of his glory and the thing that you need to see is that the cross of Christ gives you the grounds to appeal to God for mercy even though in yourself you don't deserve it. It is the nature of grace that you don't deserve it. By definition you don't deserve grace. By definition it is undeserved favor from God to you.

So the question becomes then: on what ground do I appeal to God for deliverance from my sin, for forgiveness? On what ground do I appeal to him because I know I don't deserve it? Well, beloved, it is exactly that, it is exactly on the basis that you humble yourself before God, that you acknowledge your sin, that you come to him saying, "I

have nothing to offer you. I come to you, I ask you to receive my prayer solely on the basis of your grace," and only when a sinner approaches God on that basis will he be saved. Only when a sinner abandons his self-righteousness, abandons his sense of worth and deserving, only when you humble yourself before God like that can you come, but when you come like that, God gives grace. God gives grace to the humble.

So beloved, it has never been the case with God that a sinner approached him conscience of a sense of deserving to come to God, deserving grace that it was shown to him. God is opposed to the proud. God is opposed to those who consider themselves worthy of God's favor. We come to him not as worthy men, not as righteous men, we come to him as those who are unrighteous and in need of favor we don't deserve and that needs to be clear in your mind because one of the great things about biblical salvation is it drives out pride from the human heart, it drives out that sense, and that's why self-righteous people detest the Gospel. It's why they hate it, because it is an indictment of their self-righteous souls and it is a statement to them that you are not good enough for the presence of God. So men in their pride reject and hate that.

Okay, we get that, but do you see to the one who is crushed under the burden of sin, crushed under a sense of a guilty conscience, crushed under the recognition, "I'm the one to blame," do you see then, do you see there, do you see how clearly the Gospel is the sweetest music to the sinner's ear that could ever be? That God will receive you when you put your faith in Christ and that God is willing to forgive your sin, but you come in a humble way confessing it, not resisting and trying to hold onto your pride. Well, the glory of the sovereignty of God, the glory of the power of God is that he utterly and completely has the ability to put us in situations where we have no alternative but to confess our sin. He is utterly able to put us in circumstances that leave us with nothing else to do but to cry out to him, and if you're in the midst of a circumstantial overload here today, beloved, this is great news to you to know that you can cry out to God and know that he will receive you in mercy as you cry out to him in the sense of your utter desperation and destitution.

That's what Jonah did and so what we see here in Jonah's prayer is we see the response to God modeled for us, but as God shows mercy and releases him from the stomach of the fish, we see that God is willing to receive us in compassion. That's the best news that there could be and this is not the superficial sense of a sinner's prayer, just mouthing words that are given to you by someone else to, "Repeat this prayer after me and you'll be saved." That's not what we're seeing here. That's not what any of this is about. This is about a human heart mindful of its guilt, crying out in humble desperation to God for deliverance and finding that God meets that prayer with grace. That's the great news but Jesus said, may I remind you, Jesus said, "I did not come to call the righteous," Luke 5. He said, "I didn't come to call righteous people. I didn't come to give deliverance to people who don't really think they need it, who think they are good enough." Jesus said, "No, I came to call sinners to repentance, those who know themselves to be guilty, those who are crushed under the weight of guilt, who are convicted by the law of God and who mourn that, who know the sense of their spiritual bankruptcy," Matthew 5:3 and 4, to those it is the sweet privilege of a Christian preacher to say, "The Lord will have mercy

on you. Absolutely. Clearly. Certainly." But as we hear these words, it is mindful, it is incumbent upon us to search our hearts and to see whether we come as those conscious of unworthiness or if we come with a sense of entitlement to God. That sense of entitlement is the death of the soul. We come with a sense knowing that we don't deserve it.

With those things in mind, let's move into Jonah 2. Look at verse 1 with me,

1 Then Jonah prayed to the LORD his God from the stomach of the fish,

Now, one of the reasons – this is kind of incidental just to the whole story of Jonah and this is a little bit humorous to me to talk about – the book of Jonah doesn't anywhere say specifically who wrote it but it's clear, it's obvious that this book, this four chapter book, was written by Jonah himself even though he's referring to himself in the third person. Think about it just from a human level, who would have been with Jonah in the stomach of the fish to know what he said while he was there? Jonah is recording his own prayer here in chapter 2, giving an account of what he prayed from inside the stomach of the fish. He was the only one there. There weren't any tape recorders going on there wasn't any recording device there.

So Jonah, humanly speaking, is the vehicle by which this is given to us and recorded to us and here is what happened, here is what you have in Jonah 2. Jonah 2:1 through 9 is the prayer that Jonah prayed from inside the fish. Jonah 2:1 introduces the prayer that follows. Jonah, remember when we left chapter 1, Jonah was sinking into the sea and a fish swallowed him. Well, what happens next? Chapter 2 tells us that Jonah prayed from inside the stomach of the fish and now in verses 2 through 9, we get the report of his prayer to God and, beloved, there is something really really important to recognize at the start here to frame the way that you receive and understand what's being said here for the next 40 minutes or so. Jonah in this prayer is not asking God to deliver him from the fish. It might seem like, if you read it superficially, that that was the case. That might seem to be the natural prayer that someone would pray, "God, get me outta here!" But that's not the nature of Jonah's prayer. He's not requesting to be delivered from the fish, beloved, he is doing almost the exact opposite. He is giving thanks to God that God delivered him by the fish. It's not, "Give me deliverance," it's, "Thank you for the deliverance you've already given to me." And having that clear in your mind will help you have a sense of clarity about what is being said here. Part of the humility of Jonah in this prayer that you see being expressed here is his statement of gratitude that God saved him because otherwise he would have drowned, and you see that as you go through the prayer here.

Look at verse 2. He starts with a summary statement of what he was praying earlier before the fish had swallowed him. He says in verse 2,

2 ... "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.

You see, he is referring to a prayer that he had made prior to this time. He's praying and he's recalling an earlier prayer that he had made. And what was the distress? Where

would he have been praying in such great desperation? It was when he was in the water. Here Jonah is praying with his full mental capacities inside the fish and Jonah is looking back to the very recent past. He had called for help and God had delivered him and so that's what he's saying here in verse 2, "I called out of my distress and He answered me. I cried for help, You heard my voice."

What is he doing here? Jonah in the midst of this aquatic submarine that he finds himself in, perhaps we can speculate a little bit without violating the text, perhaps after recovering from a little bit of disorientation in utter darkness inside the belly of this fish, perhaps feeling around, "What's happening?" Not able to see anything with his eyes because it is total darkness there, he's inside a dark belly inside of fish that's inside a sea that's dark, and so there is no light here at all. He can't see a thing in what he's saying but he realizes that something has happened. He realizes that he's been delivered, that his condition has stabilized, and now he is safe even though he is in a very strange environment. So he is thanking God for saving him from drowning. He is still in the stomach of the fish when he is praying this way.

Look at verse 1 again: Jonah prayed from the stomach of the fish, and after the summary statement that he gives in verse 2 where he says, "I called out of my distress," he goes into more detail and he explains what distress it was that he was delivered from. Verse 3, chapter 2, "I had cried out of my distress for," in other words, "I'm going to describe in greater detail what just happened as I give thanks to God for my deliverance. I called out of my distress for, and here's the distress in which I found myself," verse 3,

3 "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.

Now, beloved, let's stop for just a moment here and think through the wonderful mix of human responsibility and divine sovereignty that is being expressed even in this prayer. When you read chapter 1, you see clearly that it was the sailors who hurled Jonah into the sea. It was the sailors, humanly speaking, verse 15 of chapter 1, who picked up Jonah, threw him into the sea and the sea stopped its raging, but Jonah here as he is praying, recognizes that it was God himself who had directed the course of events so that God could properly be said to be the ultimate cause of why Jonah was in the sea in the first place. Jonah says, "You," praying to the Lord says, "You had cast me into the deep, Into the heart of the seas. It was because of what You had done, O God, that I found myself in this dangerous situation." He acknowledges that God was directing the actions of the sailors. All that had happened to him came from God's hand just as we can rightly say here today, that whatever circumstances you find yourself in life right now, this is the life that God has given to you. Do you find yourself prosperous and healthy and successful and enjoying it? God has given that to you. You should give him thanks. If you find yourself in difficult distressing circumstances, you should realize God is in providential control of everything in human existence, everything in the universe, so that somehow what you have in life right now is what God has given to you. That is a punishing thought against Arminian thought, I recognize that and gladly state that, but it is the great sense of hope and comfort that it gives to you in the midst of the difficulties, the sorrows, and the

trials of life that you have. What you have in your life right now is God's timing, what God has circumstantially given to you. Don't think about this as Satan having inflicted something on you or having other kinds of silly thoughts, ultimately God is directing everything that happens in the universe and that is true on a macro level and it is true on a micro level. It is true of your individual life. Jonah expresses that truth when he says, "You cast me into the deep. God, You were working when those men threw me overboard." So he recognizes that what was happening to him came from God's hand.

For those of you that are visiting our church, I realize you won't be able to appreciate exactly what I'm about to say but those of you that are members of our church, certainly know that this is true. We have taught a lot about the nature of divine providence over the course of our years here. God is over all. He is over us. He is over you. God is at work in everything that happens and that means something, beloved, that means something so utterly essential for your spiritual well-being, it means that when difficulties come into your life, you should see them through the lens of divine providence, "Somehow whatever is happening to me is what God has given to me here," and if you are suffering and it is a direct consequence of your own sin, of your own foolishness that you find yourself in the midst of very difficult circumstances, you should step back and realize, "Okay, perhaps I'm experiencing some divine discipline here but the fact that God is sovereign over all means that there is hope going forward because God is in control here. He hasn't lost his ability to be in charge of my life and my circumstances." And Jonah recognizes that, "You cast me into the deep."

Now, what happened while he was in the sea? Jonah continues in verse 4 to remember the experience that he had just been delivered from. Remember, he's remembering his deliverance here and he's still describing that deliverance in verse 4.

4 "So I said [at a prior point in time], 'I have been expelled from Your sight.

He had the sense, his mental capacities were at work while he was in the water and all of a sudden he realizes the utter gravity of the situation that he finds himself in. He is not able to swim to safety. He realizes that humanly speaking he is doomed to drown. "I have been expelled from Your sight," he says, and he starts to see the gravity of the situation and for Jonah in that situation, his danger was even greater than imminent drowning. Remember why he is there, he is there as a result of divine discipline upon his sin, and so Jonah realizes he is in the water, he is in danger of drowning, and he has the sense of mind, the capacity and clarity of mind to recognize that God had put him there and by all appearances it looks like that God had abandoned him. What else could you think when you are moments from drowning as far as you know, perhaps thrashing in the water trying to get his head above for just a couple more gulps of oxygen before he goes down again. What could he think except that he had been expelled from the sight of God, that God had utterly abandoned him. Perhaps you as a disobedient Christian find yourself in the midst of those kinds of thoughts here this morning. Jonah recognized that he was in the midst of divine discipline for his sins and it's utterly desperate. He's minutes away from death from his perspective as he is sinking down. But, that glorious word of hope,

but we see that even as he is sinking down, his faith had not been extinguished, his faith had not been lost, better stated, God had preserved him and had continued the fires of faith in him even for that critical moment.

Look at verse 4 with me again. He's quoting himself. He said, "This is what I prayed in the midst of the water,

4 ... 'I have been expelled from Your sight. Nevertheless I will look again toward Your holy temple.'

Nevertheless I will look again. The temple, of course, was the place where God manifested his presence to the Jewish people. What is Jonah saying here? In his most extreme moment when he had no control over his situation, when every conviction of guilt helped him recognize that God had done this to him for his own sin, in that most extreme moment he looked to God. He looked to the covenant-keeping God, the promise-keeping God, and in his hour of extremity, in the extreme hour, in the extreme moment of desperation, he called out to God by faith and said, "I will look again toward Your holy temple." This is a prayer of faith, it is a prayer of repentance. "God, here I am in the midst of this and I will look not so much," he's not talking physically, "I'm going to look to the temple," because he's nowhere near the temple at this point, he's saying, "I'm looking to Your presence. I'm looking to Your manifestation of Yourself. I'm looking to You for grace in the midst of the situation as I'm sinking down." It takes a whole lot longer to describe and talk about this than what the time it took for Jonah to do it in the midst of the water. He says, "God, I'm looking to You. I'm looking to Your holy temple."

So that's his prayer. "I cry out to You. I'm looking to You. I'm looking to You alone." And what happened next? Well, as I understand the text, God let him wait just a little bit longer. He had quoted his prayer and then he goes on to say in verse 5,

5 "Water encompassed me to the point of death. The great deep engulfed me, Weeds were wrapped around my head. 6 I descended to the roots of the mountains. The earth with its bars was around me forever,

Jonah here in these verses is closer to drowning than ever. He is at the very very end. He has submerged and he is starting to sink.

Look at 5 with me again to see that understanding, "Water encompassed me to the point of death." In other words, water is all around me and I am about to die. Now, he's looking back on what happened, 'Water encompassed me to the point of death. The great deep engulfed me,' and his condition was so miserable and so desperate that weeds were wrapped around his head. Somehow he's in the midst of the water, he's surrounded by water and there are even weeds wrapped around, seaweed, you could think about it, wrapped around his face and he is in an utter point of complete desperation, and in that condition, he sinks down even further, verse 6, "I descended to the roots of the mountains. The earth with its bars was around me forever." So he's anticipating death. He had taken his last breath and think about it in context of everything that happens. Now he

is sinking down. He can't get back up for another breath. He knows it's over from his perspective. So water has engulfed him, he's sinking down, down, down, poetically speaking, to the roots of the mountains way underneath the water. The earth had swallowed him, so to speak, and he had no hope of escape. No hope. There was absolutely no human deliverance possible for this situation.

Beloved, have you ever been in that situation? I have. In those situations, a couple of things come to mind. You know, when loved ones have died and there is no getting them back, when a situation of employment or lack thereof and there is no one to call that has the ability to help you, and you are utterly left with helplessness, as Jonah was in this situation, understand that for all of the human discomfort of such a condition and grief that it brings, understand that spiritually speaking you are at the point of an opportunity. You are at the point where God has now positioned himself to put his glory on full display in a way that only he will get the credit, only he will get the glory. You will be humbled and precluded from taking any credit for yourself. "God did this. God delivered me because I couldn't have orchestrated any of this." That's what Jonah is describing here and as long as you have breath, beloved, you know that God hasn't abandoned you. As long as God lives, as long as God reigns on the throne, as long as God is over all, there is always a bright shining hope for those who know Christ even if you don't see the human deliverance of it. I say this from Scripture, I say this from personal experience, and so I don't say it lightly but knowing that you need to have it. If you're in that situation, you are in the most glorious of positions because when God acts to save you, it will be a point of praise and glory and magnificence, and that's what God did for Jonah.

Look at verse 7 with me, actually at the end of verse 6, I should say. I'm sorry. He says,

But You have brought up my life from the pit, O LORD my God. 7 While  
I was fainting away, I remembered the LORD, And my prayer came to  
You, Into Your holy temple.

What you have in this verse and a half is Jonah is describing what his thoughts were, what his prayer was at the very moment before the fish swallowed him. He is descending into the bottom of the sea and he recognizes, "But You have brought up my life from the pit, O LORD my God. I was going to die but You saved me. You brought up my life from the pit." Then he looks back and he says, "While I was fainting away." When was he fainting away? It's when he was about to drown. It was when he could hold his breath no longer. He's slipping out of consciousness but still just enough thought, he said, "I remembered the LORD, and I prayed to You." He cried out from his heart one last time, "O God, save me. O God, help me. I remembered the Lord in my hour of extremity, in my moment of extremity. While I was fainting away, I remembered the LORD." In what Jonah thought was going to be his very last breath, his mind was on the Lord, "my prayer came to You."

Look at it there in verse 7, "my prayer came to You, Into Your holy temple." Again, the temple being the place where God manifested his presence. He's saying that, "In Your most holy manifestation of Your presence, there and from within that Shekinah glory,

You received my prayer. As I was about to die, I remembered You. My thought prayer went up to You and You received it into Your presence. In other words, You received my prayer favorably. You looked on me with mercy in my hour of extremity." And it was at that exact point, not late but not a moment too soon, that God rescued him.

Look at verse 7, "While I was fainting away, I remembered the LORD, And my prayer came to You, Into Your holy temple." And there's a lot wrapped up in this verse but it was in that moment that he was fading away. When he says, "my prayer came to You," it means he's saying that that's when God answered. In other words, Jonah sinking all the way down, he can't breathe because he's under water and his thought, "God, help!" And God answered him. And what was the answer? We know from what's said earlier, it was at that moment that the fish came and swallowed Jonah and that was God's answer to his prayer. You see, the fish was not God's punishment on Jonah, the fish was God's deliverance and Jonah understands that. "In this environment, whatever I am in right now in this utter darkness, I realize that somehow God has delivered me. God has saved me," and that's what he is describing. Jonah had sunk to a point in the sea where fish that large could swallow him. The fish had saved him from drowning and given the desperation of the moment that he had just recently been in, what could Jonah do except say, "God, thank You. I cried out to You and here I am, I'm not drowning."

You see, beloved, the Lord was acting when the sailors threw him into the sea and he was acting when the fish saved him from the sea. In your human distress, you know, we are conditioned to think all wrong about these kinds of things. I get to hopefully help clarify this for you. We tend to think that troubles happen randomly, or the troubles come out of nowhere, or "Satan is after me again," and then when the deliverance comes, then we say, "Oh, God rescued me from it," and we divorce, we separate the circumstances from the deliverance. The circumstance is bad, God not involved with it. Deliverance, good, God involved with it. No, Jonah wasn't praying from that perspective at all. Jonah said, "God, You cast me into the sea and, God, You now have delivered me. God, You were at work in this from beginning to end. You're at work in all of this." This was not a coincidence in the animal kingdom. The Lord had saved him and that is why his prayer to the Lord here in chapter 2 after the deliverance was the appropriate response. "God, in my sinful condition, You disciplined me. God, in Your grace You delivered me by this fish." So we have seen inside Jonah's mind when he was close to death. We see the nature of prayer.

Beloved, you know, there are so many things I want to say. Let me say this: there are all kinds of teachers, materials that want to give you formulas for prayer and you do this and you've got to pray this and then pray that, and give you all kinds of methods that you want to follow. Whatever. Whatever. What I want you to see is that there are circumstances in life where the formulas can't possibly work. There are times where the formulas of prayer cannot possibly be appropriate and when you are brought into those circumstances, that's actually a good thing where you are stripped from human methods and you are left simply with crying out in a humble desperate faith, "God, help me! I can't do anything to save myself or deliver myself from this situation!" And you are stripped away from all human mechanisms and you are just laying hold of the presence of God with the simplicity and the clarity and the urgent desperation of a prayer for help, and

what I want you to see is that that desperation which is so often condemned by the prayer formula guys, you know, that desperation, that desperate cry of an eye of faith toward the presence of God when nothing else can help, is a prayer that God gladly receives. You don't have to have it all together to cry out effectively to God. You don't have to go through a four step formula with a clever acronym of prayer before God will answer you. God's ready to answer your prayer right now. God is present. God is willing to listen. God hears the prayer of the desperate. He hears the prayer of the depressed. That's what we see here in Jonah and that, beloved, is what Jonah is giving thanks for. "God, You had no reason to answer my prayer. I deserved to be in that sea. I deserved the discipline that had come upon me, but I cried out to You in faith anyway. I looked to You in faith anyway and You graciously received me. You delivered me. You got me out of this mess that I had put myself into. So God, what else can I do except to give You thanks?" And that's what he does here in chapter 2 up to this point.

You see, the whole point of what I'm saying here is to just give you a sense of confidence in your desperation, give you a sense of confidence in your conviction of sin that God will hear your desperate cry and that it is worth your effort to turn your eyes, as it were, to Jerusalem. What I mean by that is to turn your eyes to the presence of God. Better stated, to turn your eyes to Christ where God has most made himself known; where God has given his final revelation; to turn to Christ in your desperation with a sense of trust that he'll have mercy on your unworthy soul just like he had mercy on Jonah's unworthy soul. Just like he had mercy on the Apostle Paul's unworthy soul. Paul said, "In me is the foremost of sinners." God had mercy so that everyone would see that God has mercy on sinners who cry out to him. That's who God is and that's what Jonah points us to.

Now at this point, at the end of verse 7, his prayer pivots. He has thanked God for the deliverance, he has recited what God has done and given thanks for it, now he pivots and he turns to the future in verse 8. Now he's still inside the fish because the fish hasn't spit him out yet, but there is a thought that is evident in Jonah's mind. If God delivered him by this fish, there's an assumption that underlies what Jonah prays now: God delivered him from drowning and must have a future purpose for him in mind. He didn't save him from drowning simply to let the fish digest him. He's not going to die in the belly of the fish. God had answered his prayer for deliverance and, therefore, there must be more to be said about what lies ahead.

So he pivots in verse 8 and he reflects a conviction of heart, he reflects a commitment, there's an earnestness to what he says now. "God, now that You have delivered me, I'm going to be committed to this." He says in verse 8,

8 "Those who regard vain idols Forsake their faithfulness,

Now, you see, Jonah is no longer remembering what happened to him in the sea at that point, is he? He's not talking about fainting away or water or anything like that. Now his mind has shifted and he's talking about something else. Jonah was living in Israel when wickedness was at a premium. We've covered that in the past. And he says, "Those who regard vain idols, those who are unfaithful to You, O God, my people may be like that

but, God, I have a different resolve now. There's something else in my heart. I will not go on with those who are unfaithful. I will not join with those who are in rebellion with You. I will not join in the idolatry." What Jonah is doing here is he is repenting. He is turning away from sin. He refuses to join further in disobedience and he expresses that in verse 9 when he says,

9 But I will sacrifice to You With the voice of thanksgiving. That which I have vowed I will pay. Salvation is from the LORD."

He says, "God, I'm going in a different direction. I'll sacrifice to You. I'll give thanks to You. That which I have said, I'll do." He's promising his worship in the form of thanksgiving and vows. "God, once I get out of here, You will find me to be obedient. You will find me responsive." In the midst of that, he gives thanks. In the midst of that, he affirms his hope. He says, "Salvation is from the LORD." Do you understand, this is an astounding prayer of faith? This is an astounding expression of repentance. This is what the real thing looks like. Jonah is finally living up to his prophetic office. He has recognized the hand of God in his discipline, he has recognized the hand of God in his deliverance, he recognizes the claim of God on his life going forward. He gives thanks. He resolves in his heart and expresses with his voice the commitment of his future direction, "God, I'm going to give You thanks and I'm going to do what I vowed to do." He resolves to follow the Lord again once he is released.

Do you know why this is in part so astounding, not just the circumstances but what makes this so astounding? Part of what makes this so astounding is he's still inside the fish. There is a great element of faith here that says, "I know I'm going to be delivered," because he's talking about what he's going to do when he is. But he's still inside the fish. He is expressing his commitment to do things in the future when he has no control over getting there, but he is driven by the recognition, "God didn't save me from drowning just to let me die." And it wasn't a phony repentance. It wasn't, "God, deliver me and then I'll give You thanks." If you're in the midst of those suffocating circumstances right now, don't wait until you are delivered to give your thanks, give thanks in the midst of them now as an expression of your faith. Now at the end of verse 9, it had taken a severe discipline to bring Jonah to this point but God had achieved his purpose. Jonah was ready to obey now.

Now, we'll get to this in chapter 4. Some question whether Jonah was really repentant here because it's not an unreasonable question to ask, Jonah sins again in Jonah 4, doesn't he? He barks against God, complains that Nineveh repented, wants to die in Jonah 4, so on that basis of what happens later, people look at chapter 2 and say this wasn't real repentance. But I think that's a wrong assessment of the situation. Jonah here has forsaken his unwillingness to go to Nineveh. He makes spiritual commitments in a spirit of thanksgiving and, yeah, yeah, he stumbles again later in Jonah 4, but let me ask you a question that applies to every one of you, it applies to me: isn't it true that you've had times, Christian, of genuine repentance, genuine faith that were real, but you stumbled later? Doesn't your own spiritual experience tell you that your own repentance is not perfect? That your own repentance falters at times? Here's what you need to see. This is

really crucial, again, another word of encouragement: repentance does not have to be perfect to be genuine. Your repentance does not have to be perfect to be genuine and Jonah's repentance absolutely was genuine. Do you know how I know that? Because I keep reading, just like you can. I can read verse 10.

10 Then the LORD commanded the fish, and it vomited Jonah up onto the dry land.

Beloved, think with me. Think with me here. We're almost done. In the extreme hour, Jonah is thrown into the sea. God commanded the fish to rescue Jonah as he is sinking down. When God commands the fish to spit him out, what is he saying except this, "Jonah, I'm no longer holding those prior sins against you. I am releasing you from this fish because I accept your repentance, I accept your faith. I receive you." And the reason that Jonah's repentance was real was because God himself accepted it and it led to Jonah's release from the fish.

Verse 10, look at it with me again, "Then the LORD commanded the fish, and it vomited Jonah up onto the dry land." Jonah's sin was no longer being held against him. Isn't that sweet? Christian, isn't that what the reality of the death and resurrection of Christ means for us? When God saved you, when you received Christ by faith, you were born again. Don't you see that the point of salvation is that God does not hold our sins against us? "He made Him who knew no sin to be sin on our behalf that we might become the righteousness of God in Him." Jesus said, "The one who comes to Me, I will certainly not cast out." 1 John says if we "confess our sins, He is faithful and righteous to forgive our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness." Beloved, don't you see what this tells us about the nature of God's sovereign compassion? He is a God who is willing to forgive sin. He is a God who is willing to deliver us. Look at Jonah and see the gracious act of God in saving his rebellious prophet from drowning and releasing him for further service when he had repented. Look at that. Look as I alluded earlier, look at Paul participating in the persecution of the church and Christ meets him on the road to Damascus, saves him, puts him into service. Look at the cross of Calvary. Look at Christ dying and shedding his blood, "Father, forgive them for they don't know what they are doing." Don't you see what all of this tells us? God is willing to forgive sin. God is able to forgive sin. God is able to deliver us when we do sin.

Jonah displays for us the sovereignty of God as the sailors throw him into the sea. Jonah displays for us the sovereignty of God as the fish swallows him and delivers him from drowning. Jonah displays the sovereignty of God when he commands the fish to release him. Jonah later in chapter 3 will show us the sovereignty of God as he saves an entire city in a citywide repentance. A sovereign God, willing to forgive. A sovereign God who took the price of sin on himself, on his own shoulders at Calvary. That's who the God of the Bible is.

Sinner, you can cry out to him in your desperation, in your utter unworthiness, and he'll hear you. He'll receive you. He'll forgive you. Christian under discipline for sin, it's time to soften your heart, isn't it, and to respond like Jonah did? Why let the discipline go on

any longer when God is ready to receive your repentance? And Christian trying ever so earnestly to walk with Christ by faith, stumbling along the way, take heart. It was never your righteousness upon which God received you in the first place. It was his own willingness to forgive, his own provision of the sacrifice that God received you. That same God who saved you in the beginning is willing to hear your prayer of confession now.

Let's bring that to him, shall we? Let's bow together in prayer.

*Our great God, our great Lord Jesus, our God of sovereign compassion, have mercy on each one with us today according to each of their needs. As sinners even now confess before you, Father, show them the same mercy that you showed to Jonah, that you showed to Paul, that you have shown to so many of us. Build in them a faith premised on the revelation of God in Christ, trusting not in the strength of their own faith or the strength of their own repentance, but trusting in the promise of Christ alone who said, "The one who comes to me, I will certainly not cast out." As Christians, Father, you are our heavenly Father. We are your children. We come to you, of course, in need and desperation. We praise you because you do not despise our desperation but rather you look on it in sympathy and you graciously help. Let your character be manifest to each one. May your Spirit apply the essence of these things according to the need of each heart. As believers, may we grow in the grace and the knowledge of Christ. For the rebel sinner that is with us, Father, break their heart now and draw them to a saving faith in Christ. We pray in Jesus' name. Amen.*

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