

# THE BOOK OF JONAH

the relentless pursuit of God's mercy

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## INTRO:

God is good all the time (correct?!). A little phrase that is quite popular among Christianity. Some even retort with “all the time, God is good.” And while I absolutely believe that God is good (because our Bible’s tell us so & because I see His goodness in creation & His kind care for all things) — I’m also aware that at times God’s goodness is hard to see.

Let’s be honest — in your experience, does God always seem good? The quick answer — the obvious answer — NO. In our experience, God does not always seem to be good. And actually, for some of you, you are having a hard time believing in the God of the Bible because if He is good, why is there so much pain & suffering in the world. If He is good and if He is God, why do “bad things” keep happening to you.

Well today - we are going to look at one reason why bad things happen to us. This isn’t a comprehensive talk on suffering & pain. But it is going to pull the curtain back and provide for us one clear and obvious reason regarding why God brings pain & suffering into our lives.

Like I said - this is not comprehensive. So please — do not leave today thinking that ALL suffering and ALL pain fits in Jonah 2, but Jonah 2 will help make sense of much of the pain & suffering we endure in this life.

You see in Jonah 2, *God’s going to reveal to us just how merciful He is when we turn our backs on Him.* When we run from Him. God is merciful. This mercy and kindness is not displayed by leaving us alone or by giving us what we want. When we run from God, His kind mercy is displayed in His pursuing of us. The Bible often calls this the discipline of God. That’s right — Jonah 2 confronts us with a God who loves us so much that when we run from Him, He has promised to discipline us.

**TEXT:** Jonah 1:17-2:10

**BIG IDEA:** God’s Mercy When You Run

**KEEP THE MAIN THING THE MAIN THING:** Don’t get hung up on a fish swallowing Jonah - the story is NOT about a fish. The story is not about Jonah. The story is about the relentless pursuit of God’s mercy towards all people. The fish is just a vehicle of God’s mercy towards Jonah. The fish is a tool being used by God to preserve Jonah’s life & get Jonah’s attention.

And quite honestly - Jonah being swallowed by a fish is a relatively small miracle in the overarching story-line of the Bible (i.e. God spoke and literally created the universe in six, literal, 24 hour days OR God parted the Red Sea for all Israel to walk through on dry ground OR Elijah praying and fire coming down from heaven...and the list could go on and on).

- Distinct language - *the Lord appointed (occurs multiple times in the book of Jonah)*
- Historical fact - nothing in Jonah is presented as a parable or allegory. Not only that Jesus believes Jonah was just as much historical fact as his own death, burial, and resurrection in 3 days (Matthew 12:40).
- Jonah is filled with the miraculous working of God — a fish swallowing Jonah is much less impressive than Nineveh repenting in mass (*be more amazed by spiritual/eternal miracles than by physical miracles*)

## 1. God is Merciful When He Disciplines You - **Jonah 1:17-2:6a**

### A. God Preserved Jonah in his Running - **Jonah 1:17b**

- Jonah was so hard-hearted that he was ready to die - **Jonah 1:12**

TRUTH: You can be so hard-hearted in one area of your life, you'd rather die than submit that one area to God.

- In unstoppable mercy, God was after Jonah's heart (*even though Jonah thought himself pretty clever and was about to end the entire ordeal*)

TRUTH: When you run from God, He loves you too much to let you go your own way. His mercy won't always look merciful in the moment, but He will stop at nothing to get to your heart!

APP: Haven't we all heard stories (some of you have them) — I should be dead. There is no reason that I'm alive right now. But God got my attention. That's a Jonah story - he should have been dead, but God was just getting Jonah's attention in his hard-hearted state.

- LET'S BE CLEAR: The fish was not designed to kill Jonah but to be the vehicle of his salvation!

### B. God's commitment to bring Jonah to the end of himself - **Jonah 1:17c**

- The discipline of God will endure until you are ready to return to Him (*for Jonah it was 3 days & 3 nights in the belly of a giant fish*)
- The discipline of God will grow more severe if you refuse to repent (*even if it is just that one thing that you are not ready to submit to Him*)

REVIEW: Jonah runs // God sends a storm // Jonah sleeps // God intensifies the storm // Jonah gets thrown overboard at his own suggestion // God sends a fish

TRUTH: If you are unwilling to say yes to God over one area of your life, He will come after you in a merciful and kind discipline (*much more on this in a moment*)

C. God used severe suffering to bring Jonah back to Himself - **v. 2, 5-6**

- God uses suffering (which is painful) to bring you back to Him - **v. 2a**
- God is willing & ready to take you to places of serious despair to cause you to return to Him

*Out of my distress - v. 2*

*Out of the belly of Sheol (i.e. the place of the dead) - v. 2*

*Waters closed in over me to take my life - v. 5a*

*The deep surrounded me - v. 5b*

*Weeds wrapped about my head - v. 5c*

*At the roots of the mountain (i.e. cannot go any farther down) - v. 6a*

*I went down to the land whose bars closed upon me forever - b. 6b*

- **APPLICATION:** Don't you know this saints? Has not your life proved this? Is not your life proving this now for some of you?

You have ONE area, just one, that you are unwilling to say yes to God. REMEMBER — rebellion is when you are willing to say yes to God one every area but one.

You are unwilling to say yes to God regarding romance - you just don't trust that God's way is going to work.

You are unwilling to say yes to God with your money - you just need to have a little bit more and you need to be in complete control of all of it.

You are unwilling to say yes to God with your hobbies - you've got something you enjoy and your afraid God is going to take it away from you.

You are unwilling to say yes to God with your career or direction of your life, because maybe He'll change it.

You are unwilling to say yes to God regarding where you live, because maybe God's calling you move to somewhere less comfortable for the sake of the gospel.

You are unwilling to work less (even though it's destroying relationships or causing health problems) because you find your identity in your job.

You are unwilling to give God your children - to actually trust Him with them entirely - so you are a helicopter parent hoping to control them into success.

You see when God puts his finger on the very core of who you are and says, I WANT THAT — if you say no, God comes after you. And some of you are being come after right now by God. His love right now for you looks like discipline. He's not letting you go.

D. Suffering is directly from the hand of a merciful God - **v. 3**

- The suffering of discipline isn't allowed by God, *it is brought by God*

The emphatic *you cast...your waves...your billows* are unmistakable in this verse

- God is the consummate Good Father who lovingly disciplines His children - **Hebrews 12:11**

The suffering of discipline is God's kind providence to wake you up and bring you back

KEY POINT: God is not getting you back as His child, He is bringing you back.

E. Jonah finally cried out to his God - **Jonah 2:1**

- **TEXTUAL CLARITY:** It took three days of abject misery for Jonah to cry out to God

I BET: Jonah had cried out to God for relief from the pain but he had yet to cry out to God in repentance (isn't that what we do in our suffering & pain)!

DON'T MISS IT: Jonah was one tough nut to crack // Jonah had to come to a place of total & complete hopelessness to cry out to His God.

- **APPLICATION:** This is exactly what God has to do in our lives — He brings us to a place of hopelessness. A place of misery. A place of despair.

It is the hopelessness that God's discipline brings that wakes us up and draws us back. Sometimes it is the report of a disease. Sometimes it's financial ruin. Sometimes it's getting caught red handed in your sin of adultery, substance abuse, gambling, or whatever else it was that you were hiding in. Sometimes it's prison. Sometimes it's the death of a loved one. Sometimes it's a broken marriage. Do you get the picture - God has a host of means to get our attention — to bring us low — to put us in the belly of a fish for 3 days & 3 nights!

NEWS FLASH: Sometimes Christians can be critical of decisions made for God in crisis (you know, in the moment of crisis you tell God, I'll never do this again if you save me...). However, we must be honest with our Bibles, God is the one bringing the suffering & pain in your life SO THAT you'll stop running and turn to Him.

**Psalm 119:67** — Before I was afflicted I went astray, but now I keep your word.

It is always the afflictions of life that God is using to correct our rebellious ways & bring us back to a place of glad-hearted submission to His Word!

- **QUESTION:** When God puts you in the pressure cooker of affliction & pain, will you stop running? When God turns up the heat — will you blame others, will you blame your circumstances, will you blame your family, will you blame your addiction, will you blame your upbringing, or will you stop running from God and start running towards God?

After the severe storm, after living in The Fish Belly Hotel for 3 days — Jonah is finally ready to have some real talk with God!

#### F. Suffering is God's Tool to Bring Back Those He Loves - **Jonah 1:4**

- Jonah ran from the very presence of God (**Jonah 1:3**) & that is exactly what He received - **v. 4a**

**TRUTH:** The absence of God's presence & care is a truly miserable place to be.

**TRUTH:** When you run from God's presence, God will give you what you want.

**QUESTION:** Was Jonah outside of God's presence? **NO!** But did Jonah feel like He was outside of God's care? **YES!**

- Jonah hoped that he could one day again know the goodness of God's presence & favor - **v. 4b**

He is not confident but hoping that maybe he will one day know the goodness of God's presence.

- When you refuse to say yes to God in every area of your life, your rebellion will always catch up with you. When it does, you'll beg God for "the good ole days" when you knew the joy of His presence!

**TRUTH:** When God brings you this low, you aren't even sure if you will be welcomed back to His presence (i.e. the story of the prodigal son — Luke 15:21)

**TRUTH:** God is merciful when He disciplines you // God's discipline is not to get you back for your sin, but to bring you back from your sin!

## 2. God is Merciful When He Restores You | **Jonah 2:6-10**

### A. God brings the Suffering & God ends the Suffering — Jonah 2:6

- TRUTH: When God has you in a season of suffering, no matter what you do you will not ultimately remove the suffering, that's God's job
- REALITY: *When God is bringing the paddle of His discipline into our lives, all we want is for the pain to stop.* But God is a good Father (think Hebrews 12:11) who is coming after your heart through the pain of discipline!

B. When you finally cry out to God, He is right there - **Jonah 1:7**

- When you truly have nowhere else to turn but God, He will finally have your heart - v. 7a
- Rebellion is functionally forgetting God // Repentance is choosing to remember God - v. 7b

Remember = submitting to God (not simply bringing God back up in your thoughts)

- The pain of discipline has yet to be removed for Jonah BUT he is confident that he is in God's presence - v. 7c

KEY POINT: God may not immediately remove the pain of discipline from your life, but He is still good & He is still God.

C. The Frightening Reality When You Rebel (*even in just one area of your life*) - **Jonah 2:8**

- Let's Just Say: The pain of God's discipline will awaken you to the worthlessness of idols (**1 John 5:21** - *Little children, keep yourselves from idols*).

Jonah has applied the sin of idolatry to all people, even to himself, as a prophet. Idolatry was the source of his own sin. He thought it would be better to disobey and hold on to the things that he loved than to obey and hold on to God. He valued what he loved—his life, his identity, his racial hatred, more than he valued God. And now he realizes that has kept him from the one great source of life and fulfillment and peace and joy (JD. Greear).

- The sobering reality of rebellion is that you actually forsake the mercy & grace of God in your life - **Jonah 2:8b**

THE LIE: You can live in rebellion to God but still know His grace

THE TRUTH: when you believe the lies of idolatry and go your own way, you forsake the mercy of God!

- APPLICATION: Brothers & sisters - what lies of idolatry are you believing today? What is your functional God? What do you look to for hope? Where do you go for comfort? What is that one thing you want more than God?

SCARY TRUTH: Jonah, as a prophet of the One True God, accuses his own heart of idolatry. But he doesn't stop there — he states that when you go down the path idolatry, *you forsake your hope of knowing God's mercy & God's grace.*

Brothers & sisters - what is it for you. What is that one thing you have yet to give to God. That one thing you are bitter at God for taking from you? That one thing you think you are getting away with? Oh - run to God who is ready & eager to show you mercy! Do not continue in your sin because if you do, you are forsaking the very mercy & grace of God that is yours in Christ.

D. Joy is Restored When You are Right With God - **Jonah 2:9**

- Even if the suffering continues, there is joy in simply being right with God

*You see, there is a greater deliverance than deliverance from circumstances. It is deliverance from sin* (J.D. Greear).

- Even if the suffering continues, there is a renewed commitment to walk with God (*thanksgiving...sacrifice...vows*)

CONCLUSION:

God mercy is unquestionably on display when you run from Him. God is so kind, so gracious, so merciful to let you destroy your life in rebellion. And so in Fatherly love & compassion, He disciplines His own. He is not out to get you, He's out to win you.

Friends — God may have you in the proverbial belly of the whale because you are Jonah. You've been in your suffering for a minute (like 3 days & 3 nights) but this morning God has woken you up. This morning you finally realize that God is after your heart in your pain. This morning you are ready to finally and fully submit to the merciful God of heaven who is after your heart. You are finally ready to stop running from the presence of your God and begin running towards His presence!

PRAY: Give time for reflection, confession, repentance, and rejoicing.