

## **Jonah Pt 3 A Prayer from the Belly of the Fish**

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Jonah / Jonah 1:17–2:10

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# I. Introduction

**Big Idea:** God meets us in our lowest point and hears us.

When we left Jonah, he had just been thrown into the sea. The storm stopped. The sailors sacrificed to God and made vows. And Jonah was sinking.

But the story doesn't end there. God is not done with Jonah yet.

Jonah 1:17:

### **Jonah 1:17 ESV**

<sup>17</sup> And the LORD appointed a great fish to swallow up Jonah. And Jonah was in the belly of the fish three days and three nights.

Notice the word "appointed." It sounds small, but it is crucial.

### **What does "appointed" mean?**

God didn't just let this happen by accident. God actively sent this fish. God made this choice. The word "appointed" will show up again in chapter 4 when God appoints a plant, then a worm, then a wind. It shows that God is at work in every detail of Jonah's story.

### **Why does this matter?**

The fish is both judgment and rescue. Jonah threw himself into the sea. He could have drowned. But God appoints a fish to swallow him alive. Jonah is still running from God, but God is still pursuing him.

God does not give up on us. Even when we are running as hard as we can, God sends things into our path to stop us and to save us.

## **II. Jonah's "Downward" Journey Completed**

Before we read Jonah's prayer, we need to see the full picture of how far down he has gone.

Look back at the "down" pattern we started to notice in chapter 1:

- **1:3** – "Jonah rose to go to Tarshish from the presence of the LORD. He went **down** to Joppa." (ESV)
- **1:3** – "He found a ship going to Tarshish. So he paid the fare and went **down** into it." (ESV)
- **1:5** – Then "Jonah **had gone down** into the inner part of the ship." (ESV)

Each step is taking him lower.

Jonah 2:3-6:

**Jonah 2:3-6** **ESV**

<sup>3</sup> For you cast me into the deep, into the heart of the seas, and the flood surrounded me; all your breakers and your waves passed over me.

<sup>4</sup> Then I said, 'I am driven away from your sight; yet I shall again look upon your holy temple.'

<sup>5</sup> The waters closed in over me to take my life; the deep surrounded me; weeds were wrapped about my head.

<sup>6</sup> To the roots of the mountains I went down, to the land whose bars closed upon me forever. Yet you brought up my life from the pit, O LORD my God.

Do you see it? Jonah has completed his downward journey.

- Cast into the deep.
- Waters closing in.
- Seaweed wrapped around his head.
- At the roots of the mountains.
- In a land from which he cannot escape.

He has hit the absolute bottom.

Running from God always takes us lower than we planned. Jonah thought he could escape to Tarshish. Instead, he found himself in the belly of a fish, in absolute darkness, surrounded by death.

## **III. From the Deep, Jonah Cries Out (2:1-4)**

Jonah 2:1-2:

### **Jonah 2:1-2 ESV**

<sup>1</sup> Then Jonah prayed to the LORD his God from the belly of the fish,

<sup>2</sup> saying, “I called out to the LORD, out of my distress, and he answered me; out of the belly of Sheol I cried, and you heard my voice.

Notice something strange. Jonah is in the belly of a fish. He is at the bottom. He is surrounded by death. Yet he speaks as if God has already answered him. He says "he answered me" and "you heard my voice"—past tense, as if rescue is already sure.

This is faith. Even in the darkest place, Jonah believes that God hears him.

Now read 2:3-4:

*"For you cast me into the deep, into the heart of the seas, and the flood surrounded me; all your waves and your billows passed over me. Then I said, 'I am driven away from your sight; yet I shall again look upon your holy temple.'" (ESV)*

Here is what is happening:

- Jonah admits that God cast him into the deep.
- He acknowledges that the waves and billows passed over him.
- He speaks of being driven away from God's sight.

- But then—"yet I shall again look upon your holy temple."

Honest prayer can hold both fear and faith at the same time. Jonah knows he is under God's discipline. He knows he is far from God. Yet he still believes that somehow, God will bring him back to the temple, to God's presence, to home.

This is not false comfort. This is real hope mixed with real sorrow.

## **IV. At the Bottom, Jonah Remembers the LORD (2:5-7)**

Read Jonah 2:5-7:

### **Jonah 2:5-7 ESV**

<sup>5</sup> The waters closed in over me to take my life; the deep surrounded me; weeds were wrapped about my head.

<sup>6</sup> To the roots of the mountains I went down, to the land whose bars closed upon me forever. Yet you brought up my life from the pit, O LORD my God.

<sup>7</sup> When my life was fainting away, I remembered the LORD, and my prayer came to you, into your holy temple.

Imagine the scene. Jonah is in the belly of a fish. It is dark. It smells. The walls are slick and warm. There is nowhere to go. There is nothing to do but think.

And in that place, something shifts. Jonah remembers God.

"When my life was fainting away, I remembered the LORD."

This is a turning point. Not because Jonah is suddenly good. But because at the bottom, when everything else is stripped away, Jonah faces the reality of who God is.

Many people remember God only when they hit the bottom. There is no plan B. There is no escape route. There is no backup. In that place of complete helplessness, God becomes real again.

Notice the result: "My prayer came to you, into your holy temple."

Even though Jonah is in the belly of a fish, his prayer reaches the holy temple. It reaches God.

## **V. Jonah Rejects Idols and Calls on God (2:8-9)**

Jonah 2:8-9:

### **Jonah 2:8–9** ESV

<sup>8</sup> Those who pay regard to vain idols forsake their hope of steadfast love.

<sup>9</sup> But I with the voice of thanksgiving will sacrifice to you; what I have vowed I will pay. Salvation belongs to the LORD!”

Jonah is making a contrast here.

**On one side:** People who cling to worthless idols give up on God's steadfast love. They exchange the real thing for a substitute.

**On the other side:** Jonah chooses to turn to God. He vows to offer sacrifice and to pay his vows. He declares that "Salvation belongs to the LORD."

This is strong language. This sounds like real repentance.

But here's where we need to be careful. We need to connect this to what happens in chapter 4.

### **Connection to Chapter 1:**

Remember the sailors in chapter 1? They already did what Jonah is saying he will do. They already sacrificed. They already made vows. They already showed a response to God.

Now Jonah is in the fish, saying he will do what the Gentile sailors have already done.

Jonah speaks true words, but his later anger in chapter 4 will show us that his heart is still divided. His repentance seems real, but it is not complete.

### **Why does this matter?**

Because it teaches us something important: God hears imperfect prayers. God meets us in places of mixed repentance. God doesn't wait for us to get our hearts completely sorted out before He rescues us.

But He also keeps working on the parts of our hearts that are still hard.

## **VI. God Speaks, the Fish Obeys (2:10)**

Read Jonah 2:10:

### **Jonah 2:10 ESV**

<sup>10</sup> And the LORD spoke to the fish, and it vomited Jonah out upon the dry land.

This is a quiet verse, but it is important.

God speaks. The fish obeys. Immediately.

No hesitation. No questions. The fish does exactly what God says.

Compare this to Jonah. God has been speaking to Jonah since 1:2. And what has Jonah done? He has run. He has hidden. He has slept. He has run some more.

Now God speaks to the fish, and the fish obeys at once.

All creation seems more responsive to God than His own messenger. This is about to prepare us for something amazing. In chapter 3, Nineveh—the great pagan city, Israel's worst enemy—will respond to God faster and more fully than Jonah has done.

## **VII. Application: Hitting Bottom and Finding God**

So what does this mean for us?

**First: God meets us in our lowest points.**

Jonah didn't get rescued because he was doing well. He got rescued from the belly of a fish. He was at absolute zero. He had nowhere to go and nothing to offer.

And in that place, God met him.

If you are in a low place right now, know this: God can meet you. God may have allowed you to hit the bottom because that is where He can finally get your attention. That is where you finally stop running and start praying.

## **Second: God hears imperfect repentance.**

Jonah's prayer in chapter 2 is not the prayer of a perfect saint. He is still angry. He is still resentful. But he is praying. And God hears.

Many of us wait for our hearts to be "pure enough" before we pray. We think our prayers need to be perfectly sincere or God won't listen.

But God hears the prayer of someone with a divided heart. He hears the prayer of someone who is just beginning to turn. He doesn't demand perfection. He demands honesty.

## **Third: Our repentance is usually mixed, but God keeps working.**

Here's the hard part. Jonah says he will offer sacrifice and pay his vows. He says, "Salvation belongs to the LORD." These are beautiful words.

But in chapter 4, when God actually saves the Ninevites, Jonah is furious. He says he knew this would happen and that's why he ran in the first place.

So Jonah's repentance in chapter 2 seems real. He does turn to God. But his heart still has a long way to go. He still has bitterness. He still has tribalism. He still has a hard time accepting that God's mercy extends to his enemies.

And yet God doesn't give up on him. God rescues him from the fish. God gives him a second chance. God continues to work on Jonah's heart.

## **VIII. Conclusion: From the Depths to New Life**

Jonah's prayer from the belly of the fish is not the end of his story. It is a turning point.

He has hit the bottom. He has remembered God. He has cried out. And God has heard him.

But the real test is coming. God is about to give Jonah a second chance. God is about to send him back to Nineveh. And when God shows mercy to the very people Jonah despises, Jonah will have to decide what he really believes.

Does he believe that salvation belongs to the LORD? Does he believe that God's steadfast love is real? Does he believe that God's mercy should extend even to enemies?

His words in chapter 2 say yes. His heart in chapter 4 will say something very different.

But here is the hope: God doesn't give up. Even when Jonah's repentance is incomplete. Even when his heart is still hard. Even when he is about to become angry at God's kindness.

God rescues him from the fish and gives him another chance.

That is the God we serve. He meets us in our lowest points. He hears our mixed and imperfect prayers. He doesn't demand that we have it all figured out before He saves us. He saves us, and then He keeps working on our hearts.

If you are in the belly of the fish right now—if you have hit the bottom and there is nowhere to go—remember Jonah. Remember that even there, God hears you. Even there, God can rescue you.