

Way Down in the Middle of the Ocean
Jonah in Crisis

Introduction: Last week we began this series on Jonah—Jonah on the Run

Review Story

- Called to great and wicked city of Nineveh
- Said “no” to God—too great a cost
- He fled to Tarshish—a ship was ready
- Fled the presence (panim of God)

Highlight: “You are never further from God than when you are close to Him and say, “no!” (Tozer)

- Storm (yarad-decline)
- Sailors in panic
- Overboard—storm stopped

Lessons

1. Profound gravity of sin (won’t surrender) what we love most
2. Depths of God’s saving work
3. Some still try to run from God

I. A God who pursues His fleeing children.

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. Jonah 1:17 NKJV

A. Jonah running in disobedience so God commissioned a great fish to swallow him.

1. Sailor’s panic
2. Jonah says throw me over
3. Storm stops
4. Fish swallows

B. This is not divine meanness but divine mercy

1. Does not have Jonah’s attention yet
2. This was not God paying Jonah back for his sin—if was God bringing Jonah back from his sin.

C. God is trying to get the attention of some of you.

II. A God who patiently waits for us in our struggle.

Then Jonah prayed to the Lord his God from the fish's belly. 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. Jonah 2:1-2 NKJV

A. 3 days and 3 nights—miserable

1. 108-113 degrees
2. Couldn't move arm
3. Bleached by gastric juices

QUESTION: Do you really believe this?

(Miracle—YES!)

B. Stubborn and unmovable for 3 days

1. Depth of his struggle to let go
2. Nineveh was difficult for him
3. Vicious people he did not want to preach to

C. Jonah had said “no” to God.

D. So many like this!

QUESTION: What area of your life do you say “no” to God in?

E. Finally he prayed

His prayer is a prayer of repentance

III. A God who responds to our genuine repentance.

Three fold

A. A realization of the futility of life without God.

1. Jonah felt that God had forgotten him

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. Jonah 2:3-4a NKJV

- a. Had he?
- b. No!
- c. Some of you feel that way (relationships, finances, job, etc.)

2. God has not forgotten you—He is relentlessly pursuing you!

The waters surrounded me, even to my soul; The deep closed around me; 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; Yet You have brought up my life from the pit, O Lord, my God. Jonah 2:5-6 NKJV

- a. Place of hopelessness
 - b. Weeds wrapped around head
 - c. He was in a place of hopelessness
3. **Are you there?** Hopelessness? (Maybe not dramatic, sense of joylessness, life is dull, giving your life to numbing activities—food, alcohol, tv, pornography)
 4. **Repentance begins with a sense of despair**

"When my soul fainted within me, I remembered the Lord; And my prayer went up to You, Into Your holy temple. Jonah 2:7 NKJV

- a. Thought there was no hope
- b. But God was at work

TRUTH: Jonah is celebrating deliverance while he is still in the belly of the fish.

v. 6 “You brought my life up from the pit.”

Won't be vomited up until v. 10

IMPORTANT: There is a greater deliverance than deliverance from circumstances—deliverance from sin!

Better to be at one with God, even in the belly of a whale—than to be on dry ground apart from Him.

B. A realization of the emptiness of idols

"Those who regard worthless idols forsake their own Mercy. Jonah 2:8 NKJV

1. Middle verse of Jonah—24 verses before it—23 after it.

2. Idols and mercy (hesed)—(covenant law)

- a. Idols—pagan sailors?
- b. Himself—he is the one praying for deliverance?

3. He sees idolatry as source of his sin and he's a prophet

- a. Better to disobey and hold onto what he loved—his life, identity, hated many from God
- b. He has chosen them over God

4. All of sin begins with idolatry

- a. No gold statue?
- b. Worship—"worth-ship"
- c. What do you value as worth more than God?
- d. What can you not live without?
- e. What are you bitter about losing?
- f. What keeps you up at night?
- g. To what do you run for refuge? (friends, family, bottle, RX)

5. When you turn to an idol you forfeit the one thing that can help you.

Has a nation changed its gods, Which are not gods? But My people have changed their Glory For what does not profit. 12 Be astonished, O heavens, at this, And be horribly afraid; Be very desolate," says the Lord. 13 'For My people have committed two evils: They have forsaken Me, the fountain of living waters, And hewn themselves cisterns — broken cisterns that can hold no water. Jeremiah 2:11-13 NKJV

6. You forfeit—grace, mercy, hesed

7. Why do we keep digging in worldly wells?

Tim Keller—4 responses to disappointing idolatry

- 1. Blame the idol
- 2. Blame yourself
- 3. Blame the world
- 4. Turn to God

C. Realization that salvation belongs to the Lord

But I will sacrifice to You with the voice of thanksgiving; I will pay what I have vowed. Salvation is of the Lord." Jonah 2:9 NKJV

1. Message of the whole Bible
2. Three kinds of people:
 - a. Irreligious—don't need salvation
 - b. Religious—earn salvation
 - c. Gospel people—salvation belongs to the Lord

3. Grace can produce in us three things

- a. Humility—I know I need salvation
- b. Confidence—I believe I deserve to be saved
- c. Both are produced by grace
 - Humility and underserving
 - Confident in Christ
- d. Should also produce passion—a love in our hearts for others who need grace

IMPORTANT: Jonah did not

- He will emerge from the fish, surrender to God's will, but still hating the Ninevites
- Still bitter at God
- Will obey to stay out of the fish
- But not happy about it

IV. A God who wants to teach us a deeper lesson.

- A. Some have learned that it is useless to run from God, but have never learned to love like God does.
- B. Christianity 1.0 and 2.0
 1. I know the stupidity of idolatry and I surrender
 2. I know regeneration of grace and I'm changed (love like God loves)
- C. I am Jonah—get me out of this fish and I will do what you say.
- D. Jesus as Jonah

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. Matthew 12:40 NKJV

1. Jonah 2 sounds like Gethsemane
2. Down to the deep
3. The bars of doom—"My God, my God"
4. Not my will, but Thine

- E. See yourself in Jonah and worship.
- F. See Jesus in Jonah and worship

Conclusion:

1. Are you surrendered?
2. Are you transformed by His grace?

Eating the Seed—Beth Moore

When Beth Moore and her husband, Keith, spent time in war-torn Angola to draw attention to tens of thousands of malnourished people, they were changed forever. “I learned something in one of the rural villages that will mark my teaching and response to the Word of God,” Beth says. “As we stood there, trying to absorb the sights and smells of living death, our new friend, Isak Pretorius, said, ‘One of the most frustrating things is that in villages where they received seed, they often eat the seed rather than planting it and bringing forth the harvest.’ I couldn’t get the statement out of my mind and suddenly had an answer to the question I most often ask God: Why do some people see the results of the Word and others don’t?”

Beth continues: “Why have many of us read books on forgiving people, known the teachings were true and right, cried over them, marked them up with highlighters, yet remain in our bitterness? Because we ate the seed instead of sowing it.”