

## Missions Month 2025, Jonah: The Missionary God, When God Saves, Jonah 2, 2/9/25

We are in our second week of Missions Month walking through the Book of Jonah. And we said last week that one of the primary reasons that we support and send and go on missions globally and are called to share the gospel in our own sphere of influence is because we have a missionary God. God is moved with compassion to pursue a lost world and offer salvation to everyone. That's what the story of Jonah is about. We saw in chapter 1 that God calls a prophet named Jonah on a mission to Nineveh, a massive city filled with idol worshipping, brutal, enemies of Israel, to tell them about God and warn them of God's justice. But Jonah is appalled by God's call and goes the complete opposite direction, boarding a ship to the end of the known world, running from not only God's mission but God himself. Now remember, one of the challenges in the book of Jonah is to wrestle with the reality that all of us are Jonah. We all have seasons of running away from God, of saying no to God's mission call, or struggling to have compassion for people that we don't like or don't think deserve it.

Jonah runs, but God pursues. God gets his attention by sending a massive storm on the sea that threatens to sink the ship and all the sailors on it. Jonah comes to terms with the reality that it is his fault, tells the crew to throw him overboard so that God calms the storm. Jonah assumes he is a dead man walking the plank. Jonah sinks, the storm stops...but something no one would have expected happens. **17 Now the LORD provided a huge fish to swallow Jonah,**

**and Jonah was in the belly of the fish three days and three nights.** And it's here that I left you on a fish-hanger last week. Well by the end of chapter 2 today, the giant fish vomits Jonah after three days onto the shores of Nineveh alive! And before we get into it, we need to address the whale in the room. **Did this really happen?** "I mean talk about a fish story!" you might say. Well there are three possibilities.

**1) A Natural Explanation.** While surviving such an ordeal would be highly unlikely, technically, it would not be impossible for certain types of whales, or possibly a large grouper. Interestingly, the Princeton Theological Review in 1927 wrote about the case of a whaling ship sailor near the Falklands who was swallowed by a whale. Later the whale was harpooned and when it was cut open on deck, the surprised crew found their lost shipmate unconscious, but alive in its belly, bleached by the whale's gastric juices. And the whiteness never left his face, neck and hands.<sup>1</sup>

**2) A Miracle Explanation.** Honestly, I would not even put this in my "top 10 hardest things to believe in the Bible" list. Genesis 1:1? God spoke the worlds into existence with a Word... Luke 2? God born as a baby who heals the sick, raises the dead, is crucified and rises again? The Bible asks the rhetorical question, is anything impossible for God?

**3) A Resurrection Explanation.** A third possibility is that Jonah actually suffocated and died in the great fish and then God later brought him back from the dead. This may be implied in Jonah's prayer. V. 2 **From deep in the realm of the dead I called for help.** And because Jesus

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<sup>1</sup> Princeton Theological Review 25 (1927), p 636 For further examples, see R. K. Harrison, Introduction of the O.T.

compares himself in Matthew 12, he says the sign the people will see is the sign of Jonah, talking about his death and resurrection. Well, whatever the case may be, at the end of Jonah 2, he lives to tell the story. Let's get in the belly of the fish with Jonah.

Jonah 2 <sup>1</sup> *From inside the fish Jonah prayed to the Lord his God.*

<sup>2</sup> *He said: "In my distress I called to the Lord, and he answered me.*

*From deep in the realm of the dead I called for help, and you listened to my cry.*

<sup>3</sup> *You hurled me into the depths, into the very heart of the seas,*

*and the currents swirled about me; all your waves and breakers swept over me.*

<sup>4</sup> *I said, 'I have been banished from your sight; yet I will look again toward your holy temple.'*

<sup>5</sup> *The engulfing waters threatened me, the deep surrounded me; seaweed was wrapped around my head.*

<sup>6</sup> *To the roots of the mountains I sank down; the earth beneath barred me in forever.*

*But you, Lord my God, brought my life up from the pit.*

<sup>7</sup> *"When my life was ebbing away, I remembered you, Lord, and my prayer rose to you, to your holy temple.*

<sup>8</sup> *"Those who cling to worthless idols turn away from God's love for them.*

<sup>9</sup> *But I, with shouts of grateful praise, will sacrifice to you.*

*What I have vowed I will make good. I will say, 'Salvation comes from the Lord.'"*

<sup>10</sup> *And the Lord commanded the fish, and it vomited Jonah onto dry land.*

The fish that Jonah thought would be his end, became the vehicle for a new beginning. What he thought was sent to condemn him to Sheol (the realm of the dead), was exactly what he needed to bring him to salvation. Reflecting on Jonah's prayer, Dr. Tim Keller in his book *Rediscovering Jonah* writes, "With 20/20 hindsight, we can see that the most important lessons we have learned in life are often the result of God's severe mercies.

They are events that were difficult or even excruciating at the time, but later came to yield more good in our lives and we could've foreseen.

The great fish is a perfect example of such a severe mercy."

Can you relate? Oh your prayer might not have been from a chamber in a whale's stomach, but it was from your own desperate place. It is often through severe mercies like the depths of suffering that we experience the depths of our relationship with God, where he changes us, and in our weakness he uses us beyond what we could have imagined. It's also in the severe mercies of God where many people surrender their lives and come to a saving faith in Jesus. One of the more surprising stories in Christianity this year is **Russell Brand's** conversion. If you don't know Russell Brand, he was a British comedian and actor who reached rockstar-like fame in the early 2000s and lived the lifestyle that came with it. But in recent years, he's pivoted to a career in social and political commentary. Now regardless of what you think of his politics, what I've been most curious about is his what seems to be his genuine faith in Jesus. Just this week he was on the Apologetics Canada Podcast with Wesley Huff, I highly recommend you watch the interview on Youtube.

*"I came to Christ only after I had come to everything else. I tried drugs and addiction and approval and fame and prestige and privilege and money and indulgence and hedonism and Epicureanism and rationalism. After the false idols lay broken, a fallen temple of themselves, as I stood among the shards and ashes, there miraculously was the crucifix. There Christ was. And oddly what was required for that moment was this sort of brokenness of myself. I came to Christ in pain, I came to Christ in crisis."<sup>2</sup>*

Severe mercies. Countless Christians can attest to your own version of this. Maybe you have as well. It is often when we reach the bottom when everything falls apart, when our lives get blown up by job loss, bad decisions, break-ups, failures, when your carefully laid plans are shredded, when you are broken and exhausted when we are finally ready to open our eyes and see the face of Jesus there in the pit with us, with his arms wide. As often said you never realize that Jesus is all you need until Jesus is all you have.

What Jonah experienced, and Russell Brand experienced may be dramatic and wild compared to your circumstances of coming to faith if you have, actually at the core, it's not any different from the process that anyone gets saved. And that's what I want to show you today. Jonah 2 provides for us a blueprint for how salvation works. In other words, **what does the Bible teach about how people get saved?** If God has called us on mission to reach lost people, you would agree that we better have a really firm grasp on the answer to this question. And I know for sure that there are people here today that don't know what they think about the answer to this question for themselves.

Now, again this is church so that answer is always Jesus as we said last week. "Just believe in Jesus." or "Ask him into your heart." Well, it depends what we mean by that. Let me give you an example. On Wednesday I was visiting a woman from our church who had surgery and her sister was there. And we got to talking about faith, and she said, oh I'm happy for you that you are a pastor, people need so much help. And I said, yeah that's for sure. So I said, "Do you have a faith background?" And she said, "Oh yes, Jesus is in my heart. He is my friend and my guide." And I

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<sup>2</sup> <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YIKtg27XhNI>

thought, oh that's great, but as we began to talk more and she told me more of what that meant and what she believed, it became obvious, she didn't believe in any of the core doctrines of Christianity, sin, salvation, the resurrection, a personal God. God was merely a force, and Jesus wasn't more than the guiding principle of being a good moral human being. So the answer is more than "Asking Jesus into your heart" isn't it? Well, Jonah 2 gives us the blueprints for how salvation works. There are four foundational realities that we must believe in order to be saved.

### **#1 God's Justice against Sinners**

Jonah knew he was guilty of sinning against God. There was no argument in this prayer, "But God, I'm a good person, I worked hard for you." No, 2:3 he deserved to be hurled into the sea and v.4 banished from God's sight forever. Jonah knew there was divine justice against sinners, of which he was one. This is a foundational reality all of us must believe.

This is a hard message for some in our culture to hear. As one author says, "We live in an age marked by the triumph of the therapeutic."<sup>3</sup> We are told that we are all OK, and the real problem is false shame and religious guilt. We are told that all moral standards are socially constructed and relative so no one has the right to make you feel guilty. Our modern culture makes the offer of the gospel unnecessary in fact, even an insult.

The woman who I was talking to about faith, she said, she didn't want to think that God could be like that, her Jesus loves and accepts everyone. Mod Pizza illustration. What we have is a god after our own image, not the real God. In a society dominated by such beliefs the Bible's persistent message is that we are indeed guilty sinners before a holy and just God. **Romans 3:23 for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.** Of course, if we are honest with ourselves, we know this is true deep down, that we are not OK and the Bible is right. Evil is not a construct, it's real, look around the world! And not just out there in the world, it's in us. And it's only by God's common grace that not everyone sees us in our worst moments, and we aren't as bad as we could be if the right conditions were present.

### **#2 Our Helplessness to Save Ourselves**

<sup>5</sup> *The engulfing waters threatened me, the deep surrounded me; seaweed was wrapped around my head.*

<sup>6</sup> *To the roots of the mountains I sank down; the earth beneath barred me in forever.* Jonah was utterly helpless to save himself and he knew it. This is a apt metaphor for the state of humanity before God. **Ephesians 2:1 Once you were dead because of your disobedience and your many sins.** The core Christian doctrine of Total Depravity. Not only that we are sinners, but that there is no amount of good works, pay off, compromise that can merit our righteousness, earn our salvation. We are all going to die and stand before the judgment of God; in that moment, all the accomplishments you achieved; all the praises you received; where you lived; how many friends you had; how many good things you did, how your kids turned out, how good your marriage

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<sup>3</sup> Tim Keller, Rediscovering Jonah, 74.

was, all of it will be meaningless if you stand condemned and barred from God like Jonah said in his prayer. In that moment it all goes up before your eyes like a puff of smoke, like a vapor!

### **#3 God Alone Provides the Way of Salvation.**

*I have been banished from your sight; yet I will look again toward your holy temple.* He repeats this phrase again in verse 7 looking to the holy temple.

Why is this significant? Because Jonah knew that according to the Old Covenant that Israel had with God, there was only one place on earth, the temple in Jerusalem, where God makes a way for sinners standing condemned to receive mercy, forgiveness and salvation. Specifically there was a place called the mercy seat. This was a slab of gold over the top of the ark of the covenant in which resides the tablets of the 10 Commandments. And on the day of atonement the high priest sprinkled the blood of the innocent, atoning sacrifice of the spotless lamb for the sins of the people on that mercy seat. Jonah's desperate prayer was aimed at the holy temple and he exclaims at the end *'Salvation comes from the Lord.'* Not to his goodness or his ability to do the right thing, but to the mercy seat where God provides salvation. Now, no one in Israel fully understood what this meant, but there's no greater picture than the gospel of Jesus. Centuries later, it would be revealed in the New Covenant of Jesus Christ, that he is the pure spotless innocent lamb that was sacrificed for the sins of mankind whose blood makes us clean. This is why the Apostle Peter, much like Jonah, declared in *Acts 4:12, And there is salvation in no one else,*

*for there is no other name [Jesus] under heaven given among men by which we must be saved.*

There is only one place in the world where God makes a way of salvation- the person of Jesus Christ.

### **#4 Embrace His Salvation by faith alone**

V.6 *But you, Lord my God, brought my life up from the pit.* Jonah holy cast himself on the mercy of God and the provision God made for him.

<sup>8</sup> *"Those who cling to worthless idols turn away from God's love for them.* An idol in those days were false saviors, false gods that people looked to for rescue. But Jonah isn't just preaching about pagans, he's speaking from his experience. Jonah became aware of his own idolatry. He was clinging to a false god- maybe of nationalism and being secure in being Jewish. But he realized that this was worthless, and it was keeping him from receiving God's grace and love until he trusted by faith in God's provision. It's when we turn from false saviors like our good works, our money, our reputation, and embrace by faith Jesus alone that we receive salvation.

The belly of a fish is a bad place to live, it is a great place to learn. Friends, maybe you have found yourself in a desperate place. Maybe you are approaching your circumstances as if they are an unfortunate series of events, when maybe they are God's severe mercy, a vessel to turn you to salvation.

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Just like in Jonah...God did not come to make bad men good, or good men better. He came to make dead people alive. What about you? A gift available, come down front after the service. Talk with you, pray for you.