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JONAH 1:17-2:9

Jonah Series

[PRAYER] Lord, we're bowing our hearts before you right now because we are confident that you have provided salvation for the world, but we're grateful for that for ourselves. We're humbled by the opportunity to know you personally and honored that we can serve you in our church and our families and our neighborhoods. Lord, we value your word and we're grateful that you've provided it for us. So as we look at it now we ask that you would teach us, that you would guide us. Lord, you know that each one of us comes here today by divine appointment. We ask that you would speak through your word as you speak through worship and speak through the individual conversations we have. Now we ask that you would take your word and apply it to our hearts in ways that will inspire us, convict us, and give us hope for this week. We ask in Jesus' name, amen.

Open your Bibles with me to the book of Jonah. In the book of Jonah we're talking about the basics of following God. Jonah obviously didn't follow God right away, but he had some things to learn. So I've been working through this book.

The next book we're going to work through I'm starting to look at is 1 Samuel. So that's where we're going. We're teaching the Bible verse by verse. So we're going into the passage and trying to look for practical applications for our own lives. I'm doing that each morning no matter where I am.

A couple weeks ago I was at Sea World with my granddaughter and my son and his whole family. We were down there; my son was going down to have vacation down there. He said, "Dad, why don't you come down and play golf with me for a day." So I said, "Okay, I'll come down." So I went down and played golf for one day and went to Sea World and had fun with my granddaughter.

While we were at Sea World we saw the big killer whale thing. They're fazing those out for whatever reason, but it was just a really fun experience. We get to this one exhibit and this is my granddaughter. I said, "I've got to get in there because I'm teaching about Jonah and looking outside from the belly of a fish sounds like an interesting thing to do." So we jumped into this exhibit and got our picture taken as I'm just thinking about the book of Jonah and what God wants us to do in our personal lives.

As you think about the book of Jonah and Jonah himself, I just want to point out that when we run from God then we always encounter three things. I just want to point those out as we get started. We've seen this already in Jonah's life, but it's relevant for our lives too. One – if you

run from God, you end up in a bad place. Two – lives eventually unravel. Three – you’ll hurt those around you (not intentionally, but it just happens).

We saw last time I was with you teaching the sailors were impacted by Jonah’s disobedience. Now I’m not just talking about running to Tarshish. I’m talking about whenever we don’t obey God we don’t do the right thing. When we don’t do what God wants us to do then bad things happen in our lives. So it doesn’t just mean physically running, it just means doing what God wants.

Whenever we disobey God in some way, we don’t do what He wants, we don’t like the thing He’s asked us to do, so like Jonah we say, “Forget it. I’m going to do something else,” we get ourselves into trouble and bad things happen. That’s because God created our world in a particular way. He designed it so that it has governing laws, rules that make things work. He designed it. So if you’re a young person sleeping around, it’s going to affect future relationships. It’s going to damage those relationships, your marriage relationships. It damages your heart. It’s just the way God designed the world. He designed it in a specific way. If you get addicted to drugs, bad things happen.

So there are things that we need to recognize that are painful because God just set up the world in a particular way. If you mismanage your money, then bad things will happen. You won’t like the results.

I’m finding more and more people today are choosing a healthier lifestyle. Why? I think many people are choosing a healthier lifestyle because they’re seeing the pain in other people and the disease and the problems that exist. They’re saying I’m going to live more healthy. Now you can learn from other people’s experiences or you can go to the Bible where 1 Corinthians 6:19 says that *our body is the temple of the Holy Spirit* and we can move that way.

More people are getting out of debt. I saw some statistics recently that the youngest generation that’s growing up now has less debt that they’re incurring than most of their predecessors. Why is that? Because they’re making decisions, they’re seeing what’s happening in people’s lives. They don’t want to be in debt like their parents. Well they can learn that from Romans 8:5 where it talks about don’t owe anybody anything. God has designed His word so that it is relevant and practical to our lives. Here’s a way to live that’s important.

Now Jonah decides he’s going to run from God and you have to ask the question how long does God allow a prodigal to run the other direction? I don’t know the answer to that. Sometimes He steps right into the picture like He does with Jonah here and He does that because He cares about them, He loves them. It’s like a parent who steps into a situation because a child is doing the right thing. What does the child do? “I don’t like it that you’re disciplining me. Why do you do this?” And so sometimes we respond in the same way. But God is stepping into the foolishness of Jonah right here in verse 17.

So look at verse 17 of Jonah 1. It says there – *Now the Lord provided a huge fish to swallow Jonah, and Jonah was in the belly of the fish three days and three nights.*

Do you remember back when I first started teaching through Jonah I tried in the first sermon to make it clear that the hero of the story of Jonah is not Jonah. He's not the hero. The hero is God. It's not the fish. That's not the hero. The hero is God. Jonah is running from God in the first chapter, he's arguing with God in the last chapter, he's praying to God in chapter 2 (that we're going to look at today), he's preaching for God in chapter 3, but it's all about God and what God wants to do. God is the hero of the story.

The story of Jonah is the story about how God wants to see people saved and He goes to great lengths to the ends of the earth to do it. People that they didn't even know – they were in Israel in that little place that they were, but they were in Nineveh far away. God was interested in those people and He wanted to help them get saved because God always wants to save people.

In the New Testament in John 3 in the verse that many of us have memorized – *For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him will not perish but have everlasting life* and eternal life. That is God's desire. He wants to save everyone.

The story of Jonah is a story about a God who is compassionate, a God who cares, and so He steps into the people's lives in Nineveh to bring the message to them and He chooses to do that. So the story is also about a compassionate God who steps into the life of a prodigal, someone who's not living the right life. The person who's not living the right life, I think, is in danger. The most dangerous place to be in the world is to be a Christian not doing what you're supposed to be doing. Because not only will you get the pain that exists out in the world, but God will likely discipline you, which you don't want. You want to be doing the right thing.

So God never gives up on Jonah. He doesn't give up on him when he runs away, He doesn't give up on him when he's pouting in chapter 4, He doesn't give up on him when he's disobedient. Verse 17 illustrates that by telling us that there's this fish that God provided that's going to come and take over Jonah. I'm going to read verse 17 again. It says this – *Now the Lord provided a huge fish to swallow Jonah, and Jonah was in the belly of the fish three days and three nights.*

I don't know about you, but sometimes I just imagine how does God do these things? How does He communicate with the fish or whatever? Are they waiting in line like at a taxi stand and He says, "Okay, next fish up" or something? I'm not sure.

Does He call them up and say, "Okay great fish, I've got a job for you."

"Yes sir," says the fish.

"I want you to go and swallow a guy."

"Sounds yummy. When do I start?"

"Well I've got some more instructions first. You can't kill him. You can't bite him. I want him swallowed whole."

"Well that doesn't sound so yummy, God. What am I going to do with him?"

"I'll let you know. It depends on how he responds."

"Well how long am I going to have him in there?"

"I don't know. It depends on how he responds."

"Okay God, but you've got to remember something."

"What's that?"

“People make me sick.”

“I know. That’s why I chose you.”

I don’t know how God does these things, but He chooses this fish. This fish comes up and he’s right there at the right time, swallows Jonah and God is going to do some great things in Jonah’s life. God could have zapped him, could have wiped him off the face of the earth, could have destroyed him. But He doesn’t do that. He provides this big fish.

I was also pondering this. People run away from the Lord and God’s will often it seems to me. Sometimes I find myself in the position as a counselor working with parents who are saying, “I don’t know what to do with this kid.” It’s hard. It’s painful to know because they love their child, but their child is making bad decisions.

Can you rescue a prodigal too soon? A very important question to ask I think in just a strategic level as we’re working with young people. I think about the Prodigal Son. If you remember, the Prodigal Son story is a story about God using natural consequences to bring someone. God doesn’t step into the picture in a way that we can see in the story of the Prodigal Son. He goes out, he makes friends with his money, he runs out of money, he has no friends, doesn’t have anywhere to work, so he starts eating out of the pigsty. Just the natural consequences of living that life is where you end up. In the midst of that tonight the Bible says he *comes to his senses*. I like those words. He comes to his senses. The light bulb comes on in his heart and he comes back to this father.

In the case of Jonah, God does it differently. God steps into the picture in an unnatural way. This is very unnatural for a fish to come and swallow him up under God’s direction, so it’s a different approach that God has, but the thing is that God is demonstrating that He is compassionate and caring about him.

The key verse in the book of Jonah is in Jonah 4:2. I’m going to zip ahead. That’s a couple weeks from now, but you can see that Jonah is describing God in this way. Jonah says – *He prayed to the Lord, “Isn’t this what I said, Lord, when I was still at home? (This is after the Ninevites repent and they get saved and he’s mad because they get saved.) That is what I tried to forestall by fleeing to Tarshish. I knew that you are (what?) a gracious and compassionate God, slow to anger and abounding in love, a God who relents from sending calamity.”*

This idea that God is compassionate is not new to the Bible here in Jonah. This is what takes place. If you study the Israelites and how they wandered around all the time, you have the continual message that God is compassionate.

Here’s one example of looking back. Nehemiah as he’s writing this book looks back on the travels of the Israelites and God’s compassion as He cares for them. Remember the Israelites often rebelled against the Lord, but Nehemiah is recounting this story and he says – *You, oh God, in your great compassion did not forsake them in the wilderness. The pillar of cloud did not leave them by day to guide them on their way, nor the pillar of fire by night to light them for the way in which they were to go.* The cloud didn’t say, “Okay forget it, I’m outta here,” and keep

going. God was compassionate and stayed on track with them because they needed Him. They needed direction.

God is in the direction of being compassionate to bring us back in. His compassion and His love dominates His character and it's those qualities of compassion and love that drive Him to rescue Jonah from himself by doing this rather challenging thing to him, I think, to get his attention. It's hard. Jonah's doing the wrong thing. So God by being compassionate and loving steps into that situation in order to help Jonah get back on the right track. And God does that. He does that in our lives.

I like the story of the farmer who sold his donkey to a city guy. He tells the city guy, "This donkey will do anything you want if you just take care of him and compassionately love him and you talk to him nicely. You do all those kinds of things, he'll do anything you want."

The city guy is thrilled, pays his money, takes the donkey home, starts working with the donkey, but he comes back a week later and he says to the guy, "I can't believe it. This donkey won't do anything. He won't listen to me. He just sits there. He's lazy. He won't do any work."

The farmer says, "Hmm. That's strange." He goes over to the woodpile and gets this big stick. He comes over to the donkey and smacks him on the behind. The donkey shakes his head and brays and takes a couple steps back.

The city guy says, "What are you doing? You told me to treat him with care and love! Which is what I did. I fed him every day. I gave him water twice a day. I cleaned out his stall three times a day. I talked to him gently. What are you doing? You told me to be compassionate and gentle." The farmer says, "Yes, you have to be compassionate, but first you have to get his attention."

I think that's what God is doing with Jonah. He's getting his attention. Sometimes God does that in our lives. He gets our attention and so we need to be ready. I don't want to wait for the big thing to happen. I want to listen to the whispers that God has for me. I want to be so sensitive to His Spirit that He can whisper and I will respond to what He has to say.

Now we're going to zip ahead in the story three days, although we're just turning to the next chapter. Look at Jonah 2:1 because you have to see that this happens three days later that Jonah is going to start his prayer. Now it's fascinating to me Jonah doesn't start his prayer when he sees the big fish coming with his mouth open. He doesn't start his prayer when he sees himself inside of the fish right away. But he starts praying at this point, three days later.

I don't know. I can't imagine what it's like to be in a fish. I was trying to imagine that at Sea World. These fish are so big. What would it be like to be inside something like that? It's just slimy and seawater and other creatures in there and stinky. It just reminds me how stubborn this guy is. Some people are just really stubborn and he is a stubborn dude.

So chapter 2:1 says – *From inside the fish Jonah prayed to the Lord his God. 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.” There’s no boasting here. There’s no pride. There’s just a sense of I called on God, I prayed, and He responded to me.

I would suggest that as we continue on through Jonah’s prayer we’re going to identify four personal lessons that Jonah learned, straight out of the text. So I’m going to show you the lesson, show you where I got it out of the text so that you can see what I think Jonah’s learning in the midst of this. And in the midst of this I would hope that we would learn the same things. Because these are the things I think God wants us to learn from the book of Jonah.

Number one that I think we’re going to see is that Jonah believes that God put him where he is. Let me read the verses. Verse 3 we continue into his prayer – *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.*

I think it’s very fascinating he doesn’t blame the sailors and he doesn’t blame the storm and he doesn’t blame the fish. He knows what’s going on here and he realizes God is in control of this world; God is in control of everything that’s going on. And so he’s bowing before God and he’s saying, “I’m here because you put me here.” Of course it’s because Jonah made his own mistakes that he got there, but God is in control of what’s going on and Jonah realizes that and so that’s coming out in his prayer as he’s sharing that.

The second truth I want to point out as we come to the next verse is this: There is still a future. There’s not only a future for Jonah, there’s a future for us. But imagine Jonah inside the fish and he is praying and this is what he says in verse 4: *I said, “I have been banished from your sight; yet I will look again toward your holy temple.”* He’s imagining that he’s going to be out there again. He’s going to be serving the Lord. He’s going to be out there seeing what God is doing. He has this hope inside of him.

I would hope today if you’re in a difficult place in your life, you’re challenged in an area that you have hope recognizing that God is in control and that God provides solutions that empower you to serve Him, to live for Him, for good things to happen in your life. There is still a future for Jonah.

The third truth that we see in the prayer is this: This situation is serious. That’s really important. Notice the word starting in verse 5. *The engulfing waters threatened me, the deep surrounded me; seaweed was wrapped around my head. To the roots of the mountains I sank down; the earth beneath barred me in forever.*

The idea is I’m in trouble here. There are some people today who don’t realize what trouble they’re in. They’re living a life that’s not following the Lord and they are in trouble. And so Jonah realizes the seriousness of his current life. He’s doing the wrong thing. He’s in danger. He’s in trouble. He could die inside this great fish.

So the fourth thing that we’re going to see in the next verse is only God can save. He’s our only hope. The next verse, continuing in verse 6 says – *But you, Lord my God, brought my life up from the pit. “When my life was ebbing away, I remembered you, Lord, and my prayer rose to*

you, to your holy temple.” This prayer that Jonah is praying is a very important prayer, it seems to me, in Jonah’s life because Jonah is saying, “Okay, I’m ready Lord to give you myself. I’m ready to do what you want me to do.” It’s a very fervent prayer that he has.

Three guys in a room talk about prayer and how to have the most effective prayer life while the phone repairman is in the back of the room fixing the phone.

One guy says it’s all in the hands. If you fold your hands, you want to have them pointed toward heaven or you want to lift up your hands. It’s in the hands. It shows God you’re really serious about your prayer.

The second guy says it’s not in the hands; it’s in the knees. If you’re down on your knees, that is a fervent prayer.

The third guy says no, it’s when you’re laying prostrate before the Lord, you’re laying flat, that’s the fervent prayer. That’s the most effective kind of prayer, that’s the most serious prayer you can have.

At this point the phone repair man can’t take it any more and he says, “The most powerful prayer I ever prayed was when I was hanging upside down from a pole forty-feet from the ground asking for God to rescue me.” Those are fervent prayers.

That’s the kind of prayer that Jonah is praying at this point. He’s saying, “God, save me. I know that salvation is from you.” That’s the verse that’s coming here, but it’s a prayer that’s really powerful that he’s bringing before the Lord. We can pray that prayer too. We can come before the Lord. That is a strategic prayer.

Verse 8 continues. He comes to this very important place where you’re going to see in verse 8 he contrasts the worldly life with the God-filled life. We come to that place and we say this is bad, this is good. That’s what he says in verse 8. *“Those who cling to worthless idols turn away from God’s love for them.”*

See, it’s God’s love and compassion that’s driving Him toward them. If you serve an idol, whether that be a molded idol of some kind or it’s some kind of thing you value more than you value the Lord, then you’re in danger.

But (he says in verse 9) *I, with shouts of grateful praise, will sacrifice to you.* Finally Jonah is saying, “Lord, I give myself to you. I give you all of my attention. I realize that you are the one who can save me.

I think that’s the advantage sometimes of being in challenging situations. When we find ourselves in challenging situations we can experience a clearer form of thinking than we could before. When we’re under pressure, we can see, wow, I really do need to adjust my life here. I kind of got off base; I’ve drifted away from where I need to be. I’m sure that being inside of the fish was that experience for Jonah where he ended up saying to himself and to the Lord, “Lord, I’ve drifted. I need to get back to where you need to be.” So there’s something about pressure,

suffering, that focuses our attention more clearly on the Lord, or at least can if we allow God to do that.

Now I don't want you to go away from this passage thinking that all pain and all suffering are caused by God. They're not. We see that they're caused by three different things.

One is that they're caused by our own foolish choices. Sometimes our own foolish choices get us into situations. And sometimes they're situations where we're running away from the Lord, like Jonah, or we're running taking the father's inheritance and go squandering it in unwise ways. Those are unwise choices that we make that we end up drifting away from the Lord in one way or another.

The second cause has to do with sin that could be the sin that just exists that's corrupted our world. Bad things happen and so there are floods that take place and there are earthquakes that take place that are a result of living in a fallen world. They may not because of your particular issue, but God uses all of those things.

So the third one is the Lord. He's the one who uses all those things in a way that can draw us more effectively to Him. I don't want you to go away thinking that because you may be suffering today in your life it's because God is punishing you for something. That's not always the case, although we have to ask the question, is God trying to point out something in my life?

Suffering occurs for a number of different reasons and one of those reasons is just so we can shine more brightly in this world that's dark and painful. So when other people see the pain that's affecting us and we shine more brightly, then that is a way for us to share God's message with other people. God is the one who is in control, God is the one who is our salvation, which brings us to the last statement of His prayer where he says – *What I have vowed I will make good. I will say, "Salvation comes from the Lord."* Jonah believes that only God can save. That's an important realization we must come to.

I want you to see it's interesting he doesn't say there *my* salvation comes from the Lord. He certainly could have because his salvation did come from the Lord in the form of a fish and God rescued him. We'll see how God is going to give him a second chance when we look at the passage again next week. But the point is here this salvation is not just personal to Jonah. All salvation comes from the Lord, and God offers that to us in remarkable ways.

If you're in a situation today where you're suffering, whether you're the cause of that suffering or you are a victim of some other person's sin or it's just happening because of something that's going on, you need to know that your salvation is in the Lord. He's the one where you can find your strength and your hope.

God wants to do some amazing things in the midst of the pain. Not necessarily outside of the pain, but right now in the midst of the pain God does amazing things. Many times God can do more in the midst of the pain than when things are going well. There's some good things that can happen on bad days. Jonah is definitely having a bad day here. There are good things that can

happen on bad days. So we want to take advantage of those things that God might use in our lives and appreciate them.

It's the hardest lesson to learn I think for all of us, this idea that salvation is from the Lord. Some people struggle for a lifetime to learn that salvation comes from God. He's the one that provides that.

Now something very important happens to Jonah here. This is the thing that happens to me sometimes in my life and I'm sure it happens to you where he comes to a place in his life in this case because he's in a confined space, trapped, it's not always that. It's for other ways we come to this light bulb moment that comes into our hearts. That's light bulb moment says, "Wow, I need to give myself to the Lord more in this area of my life." I think God does that in different ways. Sometimes He does it through a big fish experience with a guy. Sometimes He does it by showing us a miracle or hearing a testimony or through a worship song and we hear it and we go, "Yes, you know what? I need to give another area of my life to the Lord," "I need to turn my emotions over to Him or my pride over to Him," or "I need to remember to live this part of my life to the Lord again because it's creating anxiety inside of me and I'm just seeing how God can work. I just want to do that."

So the light bulb moment I think is a strategic moment in any of our lives and it should be happening regularly, I think, that we go, "Oh yeah. Today is the day the Lord has made. I want to rejoice in it." Or "yeah, salvation comes from the Lord and I want to give this to the Lord." Or "yeah, I shouldn't be anxious about anything, but I need to pray about everything." That's what God wants to do in each one of us. That light bulb moment does that really neat thing. I believe that God does that often in our lives in the course of our time, in your quiet time or whatever, but He also does it in our time here when we get together in worship.

That's why we have a ministry time. The ministry time is an opportunity for us to come before the Lord in prayer and say, "God, I'm ready. I want to dedicate my life to you in this particular area. I want to change. I want to be the person that you've called me to be today. Lord, take this salvation. Work it into this area of my life." Sometimes in the ministry time we're just praying for other people that we know and we're saying, "Lord, would you bless them and would you work in their lives."

Let's pray.

[PRAYER] Heavenly Father, I thank you for your grace that you give to us, the salvation that comes to us. Lord, I pray that you would help us to listen to the whispers that you want to provide for us and not wait for the big things to change our hearts. Allow us to shine brightly for you and to recognize that your grace is so powerful. Help us to live today in our job where we're working with difficult people or the job that we may not even like. Lord, we ask that you would reveal to us what it means to serve you today in every area of our lives. Bless us, Lord, we ask each one. In Jesus' name, amen.