

Jonah: Meeting the God of Mercy

Part 3: “Repentance... Sort Of”

Text: Jonah 2:1-10

By Pastor Ben Froese

¹From inside the fish Jonah prayed to the Lord his God. ²He 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.*

*³You 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.*

*⁴I said, ‘I have been banished
from your sight;
yet I will look again
toward your holy temple.’*

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

*⁶To 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.*

*⁷“When my life was ebbing away,
I remembered you, Lord,
and my prayer rose to you,
to your holy temple.*

*⁸“Those who cling to worthless idols
turn away from God’s love for them.*

*⁹But 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.’”*

¹⁰ And the Lord commanded the fish, and it vomited Jonah onto dry land.

I. Coming to God in a Desperate Place

In chapter 2, Jonah goes “down, down, down” both physically and spiritually. He goes down to the bottom of the sea and now he prays from inside the giant fish.

“It is only when you reach the very bottom, when everything falls apart, when all your schemes and resources are broken and exhausted, that you are finally open to learning how to completely depend on God... If Jonah was to begin finally to ascend, both in the water and in faith, he had to be brought to the very end of himself.”

- Timothy Keller

Jonah turns to God and meets him in his desperate place. And we do too.

Sometimes we end up at the bottom because of our own choices. Sometimes it's because life just knocks us down. And when we're down at the bottom, God is right there to meet us. He invites us to turn to Him.

II. A Prayer of Repentance... Sort Of

Throughout the prayer, Jonah's words echo the psalms. For example, verses 2, 3, and 6 echo Psalm 120:1, Psalm 42:7, and Psalm 40:2a respectively.

*I call on the Lord in my distress,
and he answers me.*

- Psalm 120:1

*Deep calls to deep
in the roar of your waterfalls;
all your waves and breakers
have swept over me.*

- Psalm 42:7

*He lifted me out of the slimy pit,
out of the mud and mire.*

- Psalm 40:2a

“Throughout the prayer Jonah presents himself in language drawn from biblical psalms. This in itself is not terribly significant, but when one compares the beliefs and behaviour's that led to Jonah's present situation, the fact that he is careful to describe his experience in terms used by those who suffer unjustly at the hands of the wicked shows that his understanding of himself and of his circumstances is terribly contorted.”

- Daniel C. Timmer

Jonah also expresses profoundly true theology.

⁸ *“Those who cling to worthless idols
turn away from God’s love for them.”*

Ironically, though, in chapters 3-4 of the book of Jonah the ‘idol-worshippers’ end up turning to God and Jonah ends up angry with God for showing mercy to non-Israelites.

Jonah also seemingly recommits himself to the Lord.

⁹ *“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.’”*

But again, in chapter 4 Jonah once again is angry with God and wishes he were dead.

Jonah shows us that we can use the right language, have the right theology, and seemingly approach God with the right posture but not truly be changed.

III. And yet... God is Rich in Mercy

God is rich in mercy to Jonah regardless. God delivers Jonah through the fish and God chooses to continue to work through him to preach to the people of Nineveh.

God shows his mercy to us by delivering us through Jesus, the ‘greater Jonah’.

For as Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of a huge fish, so the Son of Man will be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth.

- Matthew 12:40

Life Group Discussion and Reflection Questions

Open Up

Have you ever been in a desperate place where you felt like the only thing you could do was pray? How did God meet you in the middle of that?

Dig In

Read Jonah 2:1-10

1. What first stands out to you as you read this text?
2. What are some things that happen as a result of Jonah's prayer? What have you seen happen (or not happen) as a result of your own prayers?
3. How would you define "repentance"? Do you see this prayer as a prayer of repentance? What are the good things we can learn from this prayer and what are some not-so-good things we should avoid?
4. In this prayer, Jonah uses language from the psalms and expresses theologically truthful statements, and yet in some ways he remains unchanged at his core (see especially Jonah 4:1-3, 9). How do followers of Jesus today sometimes say and believe the 'right' things and preserve a good self-image but fail to live with God's love at the centre of their lives? How do we experience real transformation from the inside out?
5. While Jonah's repentance in this chapter may only be 'sort of' repentance, God still delivers Jonah. And more than that, we see in chapter 3 that God continues to use Jonah for His purposes. How does this encourage you?

Prayer

Thank God for the way that he has shown us mercy and delivered us through the person of Jesus. Take prayer requests from those in your group.