

Despair and Deliverance in the Deep

Jonah 2:1-10

Reading: Psalm 47

Bethany Baptist Church

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Read **Jonah 1:17 – 2:10**. The *sailors* finally hurled Jonah into the *raging sea*, and Jonah went *down*. From the depths of *disobedience & disaster*, Jonah *prayed*. The *Lord God of heaven* heard His *runaway prophet*, and *delivered* him from *death & disobedience*.

1. When you turn to **Jonah 2**, you are reading a classic *psalm* embedded in the midst of a prophetic *narrative*. A psalm that reflects on *dark circumstances & desperate prayer*.
 - a. The text makes it pretty clear that Jonah *cried out* from the heart of the sea, and then he praised God from the *belly of the great fish!*
 - b. I think that sometime *later*, as Jonah was writing his account, he *composed* this poem to *celebrate* his deliverance.
 - c. I'm sure that his prayers from *death's door & the fish's belly* were far *longer & far more spontaneous* than these **8** verses! 😊

2. Everything about **Jonah 2** communicates the *deadly circumstances* of the prophet's *deep-sea descent*.
 - a. Hebrew poetry, *all poetry*, is more *emotional & much more intense* than simple narrative. That's why we all *connect with the Psalms & love those ancient poems* as much as we do.
 - b. **Chap 2** is the *only psalm* in Jonah's record; everything else is *narrative*. That *draws our attention* into its message.
 - c. **Verse 2** is an *introduction* to the rest of psalm. It tells us that this is a poem of *desperate prayer*, and of the *God who delivers*.

3. I would suggest that God wants you to *pay careful attention* to the lessons of Jonah's psalm!

Taking our cue from Jonah 2:2 - Two things you can count on when you've reached the bottom (i.e. when God's sends you to the bottom!)

- **1st**: You gotta *pray!* (Jonah in distress & Jonah finally cries out.)
- **2nd**: God's gonna *hear!* (Let's go to the Lord, together.)

It was time for Jonah to pray!

4. Even back on the *ship*, in the midst of the *tempest*, we weren't told for sure whether Jonah the prophet ever actually *called on God*...
 - a. The Phoenician sea-captain's cry had been a stinging & ironic **rebuke** (read *quote in 1:6*). *Get up! Cry out!*
 - b. Jonah *did* get up, but if he prayed, we aren't told so in the text.

5. But here, in *midst* of Jonah's story, in the *heart* of the sea, at *roots* of the mountains, at the *gates* of death, Jonah decided it was time to do some *serious praying*!
 - a. Life was just going from *bad to worse* for stubborn Jonah.
 - i. Again, the prophet was going *down...and down*.
 1. *Hurled* out of the moaning, groaning, storm-tossed *ship* & into the *waves*.
 2. *Down* into the **depths of Sheol** (2), *down into the deep*, *down* into the *heart of the sea* (3) *down* to the very roots of the **mountains** (v. 6).
 3. V. 5 Indicates Jonah had descended to the *great deep*. This isn't the normal Hebrew term for *ocean* – it's more of metaphor of *darkness & foreboding*.
 - ii. Jonah wasn't simply *going down*, he was being *hemmed in* – *surrounded*!
 1. V. 3 - The currents *surrounded* him, breakers & billows *engulfed* him.
 2. V. 5 – The water *encompassed* Jonah. Weeds wrapped round his head.

iii. Jonah wasn't simply *going down*, he wasn't simply being *surrounded*, the prophet was about to be *locked-in* forever!

1. There is some really *difficult Hebrew* in the middle of v. 6 (NASB) – ***The earth w/ its bars was around me forever.*** The earth has *bars*? Where?

2. The best explanation of this I read was John Kohlenberger in the *Everyman's Bible Commentary*.

a. This is probably not a reference to the earth as *you & I* know it, but to the *depths* of the earth – the *dark underworld*.

b. So we might read the middle of v. 6 as...
*"I went down to the underworld,
 Its bars (gates) closed behind me forever."*

c. *Down deep, surrounded, locked way* - this is **not** a poem for the *claustrophobic*!

iv. Just to *cut to the chase*, Jonah was at *death's door*.

1. *Drowning* (def'n.) – submerged in *water* such that the *lungs* fill and thus can no longer accept *oxygen* or discharge *carbon dioxide*, leading to *asphyxiation* - to *death*.

a. Jonah was about *drown*. To die.

b. V. 2 – *depth of Sheol* (dwelling of the dead)

c. V. 5 – *at the point of death* (drowning)

d. V. 6 – down in the *pit*

e. V. 7 – *fainting away* (lit. *my soul was...*)

f. (Notice v. 5 says the *weeds were wrapped around my head* – like some eerie, underwater *funeral shroud*.)

2. Beloved, *physical death* had its *spiritual implications* for Jonah as well.

a. V. 4 – *I have been **expelled** from Your sight.*

b. The disobedient prophet is *this close* to losing any chance to *repent* of his sin & *submit* to his *God* & to *fulfill* his ministry.

6. When things were at their *very darkest*, Jonah *prayed* (read v. 2).

a. The psalm's *introduction (2)* tells us that Jonah's *turning to pray* is one of the *two big ideas* in the poem!

b. Jonah's prayer is all thru Jonah's poem: *I called, I cried, I look, I remembered, I pray!* He prayed in the *sea* & inside the *fish!*

c. If you *read carefully*, you can see Jonah's *turning point* in v. 4, echoed in v. 7. (**Follow while I read v.4**). *Nevertheless (2x)...*

i. The Jerusalem *temple* was the focal-point of God's presence with His people Israel. King Solomon had envisioned that when times got tough, the faithful **OT** saints would turn to the temple in prayer. "*Listen to the supplication of Your servant & of Your people Israel, when they pray toward this place; hear in heaven Your dwelling place; **hear & forgive.***" (1 Kings 8:30)

ii. Jonah has been trying awfully hard to put the temple *behind* him, now its time to *look to the temple* in prayer.

7. A century ago, the British minister *J.C. Ryle* penned these probing words on *earnest prayer*: **Do you pray?** *The question is one that none but you can answer. Whether you attend **public worship** or not, your minister knows. Whether you have **family prayers** in your house or not, your relatives know. But whether you **pray in private** or not, is a matter between yourself and God.*

8. **Christian**, your Heavenly Father will *answer your prayer* at any time, but learn a lesson from Jonah: *don't wait* until God brings you to the *bitter end* before you turn to Him. **Do you pray? You gotta pray!**

Beloved, God's gonna hear!

1. Read v. 2. *I cried...You heard!*
2. I'd like us to see *three truths* about *God & prayer* in the Jonah's hymn of deliverance: *God orders, God listens, God answers.*
 - a. 1st - *God orders.*
 - i. What I mean is that God *arranges (orders)* our *circumstances*. The *sovereignty of God* is a huge theme in Jonah.
 - ii. When *calamity* comes, we are reluctant to see *God's hand* in it. We want to *protect* God from any charges of evil! *God doesn't need our help!* ☺
 1. God is certainly not the *author of sin* (Ja 1:13).
 2. Indeed, God is completely *holy & good*.
 3. But God is also completely in *control*.
 4. Is there *mystery* in pulling all that together? *Yes!* But we must *embrace* every aspect of truth God reveals about Himself.
 - iii. Look carefully at v. 3. Who *cast* Jonah in the deep? (Who had *hurled the wind* on the sea? **1:4**)
 1. Whose *breakers* passed over the prophet (3)?
 - iv. When it comes time to pray, you've got to see God *in* your circumstances & *behind* your circumstances. If anything is *outside* of God's *understanding* or *goodness* or *control*, *prayer* becomes pointless & *hope* fades.
 1. Jonah (*still* far from perfect) acknowledged God's *hand* & never cursed Him for letting this happen.
 2. But Jonah *did* pray: **2:1**) to the Lord *his* God; **2:6**) deliverance came from the Lord *my* God

b. 2nd - God *listens*.

- i. Jesus taught that our heavenly Father is attentive to the sincere prayers of His children: “*But you, when you pray, to into your inner room, close your door and pray to your Father who is in secret, and **your Father who sees what is done in secret will reward you.***” (Mt 6:6)
- ii. That’s what Jonah learned in the depths of despair – *I called out of my distress to the Lord, and He answered. From the depths of Sheol I cried for help; you heard my voice.*”

c. 3rd - God *answers prayer*.

- i. Jesus taught that God *answers* our prayers for our *good*: “*Now suppose one of you fathers is asked by his son for a fish; he will not give him a snake instead of a fish, will he? Or if he is asked for an egg, he will not give him a scorpion, will he? If you then, being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask Him?*” (Lk 11:11-13)
 - That’s a reminder for the Christian that God is both our *King* & our *Father*.
- ii. If v. 4 marked Jonah’s *turning point* from *disobedience*, v. 6 marks the *turning point* in his *dark circumstances*, because God answered the *desperate, repenting runaway*.
 1. **V. 4** – *Nevertheless I will look again toward Your holy temple. At last, Jonah prays!*
 2. **V. 6** – ***But You** have brought up my life from the pit, O Lord my God. God answers.*
 3. **V. 7** – *While I was fainting away, I remembered the Lord, and **my prayer came to You**, into your holy temple.*

Jonah's psalm wraps-up with a final lesson on prayer (8-9).

1. *False gods* don't answer prayer. The *Hebrew* term here (8) is simply *vanities*.
 - a. Jonah had *watched & listened* as those desperate pagan sailors had *screamed* to Baal for mercy. The *wind & the waves* just grew worse.
 - b. But the *Lord God of heaven*, who made the *sea* and the *dry land*, *hears & answers* the cries of His children.

2. Such *power & goodness* draw us to *worship!*
 - a. When the sailors finally *trusted* Jehovah, **1:16** tells us they feared, *sacrificed* to Him, and made *vows* to Him. God had saved their *lives & then their souls*.
 - c. When Jonah *repented* of his stubbornness, Jehovah delivered him. Do you remember how? V. 17 – He *appointed a great fish to swallow Jonah*. Jonah went on a *three day pray retreat!*
 - d. The prophet's response (**9**) was just like the sailors': sacrifices made, thanksgiving offered, vows remembered. It is certain that Jonah's vows included the commitment to *go & preach* in the great & wicked city of *Ninevah*.

3. Which brings us to the *center* of Jonah's book. The *theme* of Jonah's story. The *great conclusion* of Jonah's hymn at the end of v. **9**.
 - a. In **chapter 1**, God *saved* a crew of *pagan sailors*.
 - b. In **chapter 3**, God's gonna *save* an entire *pagan city*.
 - c. And *sandwiched* here in the *middle*, God sends a *great fish* to *save* desperate *Jonah* from *death & disobedience*.

4. That's the biggest *encouragement to pray* of all, no matter what your need or circumstances: *salvation is from the Lord!*

...pray...

When God delivered Jonah, Jonah *worshiped*.

A vital part of your *worship* is how you *respond* to God's truth!

Chapter 2 is hymn about *prayer & deliverance*. Christian, do you need to *pray*? I'd urge you to *cry out* to God! Why not start *here & now*!

Salvation is from the Lord. That's the single most important verse in the book of Jonah.

God saves thru the *death & resurrection* of His Son, *Jesus Christ*.

Jesus *died on the cross* to pay for sins. He was *raised to life* to *vanquish* death & *lead* His people.

But *you* must come to Christ by *repentance & faith* (→ death & burial & resurrection).

You must *trust in Christ & be in Christ*.

If you need someone to explain this Good News to you, will you let me speak with you? Come forward & let me share with you while we sing this final hymn.