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Jonah 2 – Part 2

Jonah 2:1-10

[Paul Simon:] They say Jonah he was swallowed by a whale  
but I say there's no truth to that tale.  
I know Jonah he was swallowed by a song.

[Lepine:] This is *inContext* with Michael Easley.

[Easley:] Believe it or not.

[Lepine:] I'm Bob Lepine. I wonder if Paul Simon learned the story of Jonah when he was growing up in his synagogue. You know I presume he went to synagogue school growing up.

[Easley:] Absolutely.

[Lepine:] Right?

[Easley:] Yeah. Yeah.

[Lepine:] So he would have learned about Jonah, although I guess he never saw the Messianic overtones that we've been looking at -

[Easley:] Probably not.

[Lepine:] - as we look at Jonah chapter two, which is where we find ourselves in this study. Jonah, the reluctant prophet called by God to go to Nineveh, he heads in the opposite direction, gets on board a ship, a storm comes and he's tossed overboard. God sends a fish that swallows Jonah and he's in the middle of repenting for not doing what God called him to do in the first place as we pick things up in chapter two. So let's go right there. Here's our teacher Michael Easley.

[Easley:] Verse six, the middle of it:

*"But You [and this is the pivot of the Psalm], but You have brought up my life from the pit, O LORD my God."*

The pit is an image of death. The pit is an image of dying. Sheol. There are a number of Hebrew terms that sort of would hearken the Jewish believer in Yahweh to think about dying and death and the outer part and the bottom of things. The pit is always a picture of death; of being on the cusp of death.

*And You brought up my life*

That's very important imagery. You brought up my life because I was going down and there was no hope. I was only going to drown and die. Verse seven:

*"While I was fainting away,  
I remembered the LORD,  
And my prayer came to You,  
Into Your holy Temple."*

So there's a big shift now. We might think of him almost at the verge of passing out, of drowning, of losing oxygen, depletion. He's probably starting to fall asleep a little bit and as he's fainting away, his image is of the Temple. His image is of worship. His image is of God coming to him and an opportunity in His holy Temple.

Verse eight is a huge shift in the Psalm and again one of the reasons some people have trouble seeing this as a unit or even as a prayer written by Jonah:

*those who regard vain idols  
forsake their faithfulness.*

Now if you go back to chapter one verse, five every man cried to his god.

So in the Phoenician sailors praying to their god and offering sacrifices to their gods and not getting a result, Jonah and his prayer says there are those who offered vain idols; there are those who went after false gods to no avail but I saw You save them. Perhaps that's the connection. I think it is.

*“Those who regard vain idols  
forsake their faithfulness,  
But I sacrificed to You  
With the voice of thanksgiving.  
That which I have vowed I will pay.  
Salvation is from the LORD.”*

Let me give you a little bit of structure. If you have a pen you might want to write these down. I want you to make a little column; on the left “sailors” and on the right “Jonah.” Sailors on the left and Jonah on the right. This is to keep you awake because I know you're getting sleepy.

In chapter one verse four, we have the desperation of the sailors at sea, so just write down the word desperation. In chapter two verses three to six we have Jonah's desperation. In chapter one verse four, the Lord hurled a great wind on the sea; there was a great storm and the ship was about to break up. 1:4, the sailors are in desperation. In chapter two verses three to six, Jonah's in desperation; he's about to drown. Back in chapter one verse five the sailors call on their gods and idols. Look at verse five.

*Then the sailors became afraid and every man cried to his god.*

The parallel to Jonah is in chapter two verse eight; he's not going to trust in idols and gods:

*“Those who regard vain idols  
Forsake their faithfulness.”*

So first of all there's desperation on the sea. Secondly, there is a calling on gods and idols. Thirdly, they both call out to Yahweh. The sailors call out to Yahweh in chapter one verse fourteen. They called on the LORD. Once they saw what happened with Jonah,

once the lot fell to him and they pitched him over they called out to Yahweh. In chapter two, verses two and verse seven, Jonah calls on Yahweh. Look at verse two:

*I cried out*

"I called to You."

Verse seven:

*I remembered [You] . . . my prayer came to You.*

So the sailors in desperation are calling out to Yahweh. Jonah is calling out to Yahweh.

Fourthly we have deliverance or salvation. In chapter one verse fifteen, they picked Jonah up, threw him into the sea, the sea stopped its raging and the men feared the Lord. In chapter two we have verse six and verse nine, both of which Jonah talks about being delivered by Yahweh and by His care.

So we have desperation on the sea, we have gods versus idols, we have the calling out to Yahweh both by the sailors and by Jonah, we have salvation for the sailors, salvation for Jonah and finally we have worship. In chapter one verse sixteen they feared God, they offered a sacrifice and they made vows. This is worship. We also see the same in chapter two verse nine:

*"But I will sacrifice to You  
With the voice of thanksgiving.  
That which I have vowed I will pay.  
Salvation is from the LORD."*

So you have the sailors and Jonah with this wonderful structural advice. You have desperation on the sea; they're both in bad situations. They call on idols. Jonah calls on Yahweh. They both call out to Yahweh for salvation. They both are saved and delivered in the middle of a storm, in the middle of drowning and lastly they both worshiped Yahweh.

So these parallel tracks are running through this very compact book but it's chock full of devices that help remember the story, remember the theology; a kind, sovereign God. He's kind and sovereign to the sailors and he's kind and sovereign Jonah as he's on his way out to drown.

Alright now let's take you back to the text. Number one, God may use extraordinary means to get your attention and my attention. Number two, He also wants a response and that's what we have in the Psalm. We had a response from Him. And lastly, what do we learn from Jonah's response and how it might apply to you and to me?

Number 1 let me suggest that we need to learn a little bit about prayer. Prayer is one of these things we talk a great deal about as Christians but we do very poorly. *Some* of us to very poorly; I'll qualify that. *Some* of you are probably exceptional in your prayer life. Both of these chapters are replete with prayer.

First they call out to the wrong gods, then they call out to the right, One, true God and the whole picture is about prayer. Why don't we pray? Well we don't pray because life goes well. I was sharing a few weeks ago that I was in a church up in the Chicago area and I went through this whole tirade of I really don't trust God when I have money, I don't trust God when I am healthy, I don't trust God when my children are obeying well, I don't trust God when Cindy and I like and love each other and I don't trust God when I like my job. When things are going well, I don't really need God, do you?

Now we may say we do. I watch teenagers and college students today and it seems like they go through a unique torture that I don't remember. Maybe you grow out of it and God is kind and you forget those years, I don't know, but it just seemed like teens and young college men and women are tortured today with emotions and relationships and Facebook.

I mean, I am amazed at how much time teens and college students spend on Facebook. Think about what they're doing on Facebook; they're looking at pictures of themselves and their friends. They are writing really heavy, incredible language like "Wassup?" [Laughter] "How you doin'?" "What time is this? What time is that?"

The text message world is a truncated longing for intimacy and caricatures and misspelled words that are instantly communicated. You take a cell phone away from that son or that daughter and they will go into withdrawals. They will cry when their phone dies. They are being tortured in ways that I did not experience. Do they ever pray?

Prayer is not something we do when things go wrong. Prayer is a relationship with the Sovereign of the universe. These men illustrate exactly human nature.

"You don't pray until there's a storm. You don't pray until you're drowning. You don't pray until you're going to die."

The corollary of this theology is very frightening. Does God allow these things so we will pray? I do not think the goal of prayer is to get an answer. That's man's objective. I think God's objective is to create an intimate relationship with the Sovereign of the universe who loves you more than you can imagine and we are too busy and too worried about our text messaging and our Facebook and our bankbook and our economy and our health and where we're going to retire and what we're going to do and all about our grandkids and He is the Sovereign.

It's pretty interesting isn't it? Maybe you are far better at this than me. I think prayer is a desperate dependence upon God. And when I do not pray I am saying that I can do it on my own. And when I pray - it's not matter of "read your Bible and pray every day and you'll grow, grow, grow." Yeah, but. It's not the activity of reading the Scripture and the activity of going into some physical formation that gets God's attention so He answers us as a divine puppet upside down.

It's a relationship with the Sovereign. It is doing things that I do not understand. And that I may be drowning a times and I may be joyful at times but my life and yours is to be connected to Him, dependent upon Him and restful that He is the Sovereign. He can control everything in the storyline but Jonah. And all Jonah had to do was obey and God was going to use him anyway. It doesn't mean we're not going to get out without getting wet or hurt or having problems.

Now the story of the fish strikes up a number of issues as well. It strikes up, of course, He is sovereign. The vivid language of this “expelled” in verse four, the vivid language (I haven't read verse ten yet) of the fish vomiting up Jonah on dry land, are two words that the Hebrew mind would have heard and caught and I won't say the kind of words that come to mind but I could use some pretty visceral words that would make you go, “Ugh.”

Well, that's kind of what they would think of with the word expelled and vomit. The Hebrew word study on “vomit” is a pretty disgusting word. I don't think there's any good use of vomit in the Old Testament. Now, I will say this, there's nothing worse than being nauseated and not quite knowing what to do, is there? It's like that sea sickness we talked about this morning. Well, isn't it interesting that we're talking about sea sickness and the whale's going to puke up Jonah here in a minute? I think it's quite funny.

Sorry. How does it feel to go through an expelling? It's just horrible isn't it? It's terrible to talk about but when it's over you feel better, don't you?

“Wow, I'm glad that's over with!”

One of my kids refused, they would rather go to the hospital than to throw up. They just hate the whole concept of throwing up. They just think it's the worst thing in the world and I think it's Divine comedy; the poor fish had to hurl up Jonah. It's a pretty interesting picture when you think about it.

You have disobeyed Me and gotten in a boat, and that was dumb to begin with, and then gone to Tarshish instead of Nineveh, and now your pitched in the sea, and now you're in the depth drowning. Let Me show you how bad off you are. I'm going to put you in the stomach of a fish for a few days and that fish is going to wretch you out on the ground because I want you to know what I think of your behavior.

I'm going to take care of you but I want you to understand what I think of your behavior. I think the fish is the happiest guy in the book, frankly, to get rid of Jonah. The LORD commanded him.

“Finally LORD! (Throws up) I'm glad my duty's over with.”

He probably swam away the happiest fish in the ocean.

*And the LORD commanded the fish, and it vomited up Jonah onto dry land.*

That dry land that God is the Sovereign of.

Secondly, it is protection. We see the protection of the sailors, we see protection of Jonah when he is pitched in the water, we see protection of, in a few minutes, as we read the book, we see protection of the people of Nineveh. He is at death's door. He's about to drown. He's gasping for air and God saves him from that.

It is a story of thanksgiving. We have the sailors in chapter one verse sixteen being thankful; offering sacrifice. We have Jonah in chapter two verse nine with a voice of thanksgiving vowing to pay sacrifice to Yahweh for saving him and lastly we have salvation. Verse nine:

*“Salvation is from the LORD.”*

This is a very important term. It's used a number of times in the Psalms. If you look at your cross references you'll be able to track that down yourself. Salvation from the Lord means at least three things. Number one, it wasn't up to Jonah to choose. In other words, salvation wasn't dependent upon Jonah's action. Obviously Jonah went the other way and God still saves him. So what's Jonah saying?

“Salvation is of You because You could have left me in the ocean to drown.”

Secondly, it originates from Yahweh, not from man. Jonah does not ask God to save him by means of the whale or a fish. Jonah tells the men, “Throw me into the sea.”

The men have more faith in Yahweh than it seems Jonah does in Yahweh. This prayer is written after, I believe, Jonah is being saved. Now he does pray to God, and he cries to Him for help and God answers him. I do not think God's salvation of Jonah was contingent upon Jonah's prayer. I think salvation is from God. That's what Jonah is saying.

"I prayed. You happened to have answered my prayer but at the end of the day it was Your choice to save me; not simply or only because I prayed."

And lastly, Jonah is certainly not worthy of being saved. In fact, he is unworthy of being saved because he disobeyed this simple, clear command, "Go tell Nineveh what's going to happen to them." Instead he flat-out disobeys Him and yet God saves him.

EJ Young writes, "The fundamental purpose is to show that Jonah's being cast in the depth of Sheol and brought back to life is an illustration of the death of Messiah for sins not His own and of the Messiah's resurrection."

So this of course, when Jesus talks about the miracle later on in Matthew and Luke, this would be a parallel for the Hebrew and for the Jew that would know the story.

Number one again, prayer is an admission of our desperate dependence.

Number two, prayer needs to be an acknowledgment of sin. We pray for God to help. We pray for God to come through. There's so many people praying for health issues. People pray for my health and I'm appreciative of that. I love to know that and we pray. We love to pray for people who are having struggles with their health, right?

Prayer needs to be an acknowledgment of sin as well. The Bible is full of illustrations about "Do we own our sin?" Are we willing to say, "I am the sinner. Will You forgive me for my sins?" Do you own your sin?

Again, one of the challenges culturally, we've become a people of victimhood. We are all entitlement oriented. We all want to blame somebody else. I get so tired of watching this stuff in the news. Why can't people just say, "Yeah, I killed my wife." Why do they go through lying and lying and lying and we worship the law and we worship all these things. Everyone says, "Everyone knows this person is guilty."

Cindy and I watch the news and go, "How many guys are going to kill their wives this year?"

This is insane and some of these men will get away with it because we've got a culture that has celebrated the right of the victim and that everybody's end is entitled. I love those freedoms and liberties but theologically if people would own their sin it would be a different world.

I remember when President Richard Nixon lied about Watergate. I remember after it all came to light, it was pretty hard to argue with tapes in those days. Today we could probably figure a way to do it, but in those days it was pretty much a smoking gun for Richard Nixon's presidency. I often thought that if Richard Nixon would have said, "I did authorize the wiretap. I shouldn't have done it."

You know what would've happened? Congress would have slapped him on the wrist and they would have built his library. But instead he fought them and we see it with a lot of leaders today. They simply can't say, "It was a weak moment. I made a poor choice. It was my fault."

Cindy and I know a person on the Hill who was caught doing something. It wasn't an egregious sin. It wasn't an immoral sense of an affair or a sexual sin. He was stealing some other people's writing and when he was caught he admitted it. He said, "I am guilty."

I honor him for at least admitting it. It will be very different if he owns his sin than if he denies and tries to get around it. Prayer is an acknowledgment that I am a sinful person and I said all the time and I need God's forgiveness and help.

Thirdly, Jonah deserved death not deliverance. Yahweh was gracious to Jonah to spare his life. Yahweh was gracious to the sailors on the boat to spare their lives and God is gracious to you and me. We do not deserve salvation men and women.

I don't care what church you grew up in, what denomination you were bread and buttered in, I don't care if your parents were founding elders and pastors or whatever they were, we do not deserve salvation. We deserve death. We deserve separation. Jonah is an illustration. Not the Ninevites. Not the Phoenician sailors. Least of which Jonah deserved to be saved.

This is a story tucked away in the Old Testament; the God of justice of the Old Testament. We might say He's bending over backwards and getting His feet wet trying to illustrate that we don't deserve it but it is a miracle of God and of Yahweh that He saves.

Fourth, Yahweh does not punish indiscriminately. We talked about this at the beginning. God doesn't punish enemy nations and sinful people and stubborn prophets at a whim. God is incredibly patient.

Last, then we will conclude, is that I want you to notice this kind, sovereign Yahweh. Again the fish says "yes" to God. Everything we're going to see says "yes" to God except the stubborn prophet. I wish chapter two verses nine and ten were the end of the book. I wish it would stop right there.

*"But I will sacrifice to You  
With the voice of thanksgiving.  
That which I have vowed I will pay.  
Salvation is from the LORD."  
Then the Lord commanded the fish, and it vomited Jonah up onto the dry land.*

The end. I would love it if it ended there but it doesn't, does it? It gets worse. But it is a great provocative reminder of the grace and the patience of this kind Sovereign that He would invoke us and invoke the Jew in the context and use Jonah, this reluctant, stubborn, disobedient prophet to show the world that He is a kind Sovereign. It's one thing to be Sovereign but it's very different to be a kind Sovereign.

[Lepine:] You know that's interesting to think about the kindness of God in sending a fish to save Jonah's life. Certainly it was kind of Him to save his life but three days in the fish Jonah had to go, "Okay, Lord, thank you for sending the fish. Now could I get out of here?"

[Easley:] Yeah.

[Lepine:] You know, we have the picture from the old cartoon days of Jonah being in this big cavernous belly -

[Easley:] Right.

[Lepine:] - of this fish with a little -

[Easley:] with a candle and a desk. [Laughs]

[Lepine:] [Laughing] Yeah, that's right. He was in pretty tight quarters.

[Easley:] Yeah. Yeah. More than likely he was very uncomfortable. You mentioned earlier about scuba diving and how you felt claustrophobic your first time down fifteen feet. Imagine staying there for three days. You do have to wonder if he was in some sort of sleep or, you know, unconsciousness from time to time. Be that as it may, that's not the story.

[Lepine:] That's right.

[Easley:] The story is God's supernatural protection for a disobedient prophet who He is not quite finished with yet.

[Lepine:] And I've always had to wonder as were going to get to chapter three next week and see Jonah arriving in Nineveh with his Divine message, I've had to wonder what the physical effects -

[Easley:] Yeah.

[Lepine:] - of being three days in the fish, how that prepared him visually -

[Easley:] Yeah.

[Lepine:] - to give his message. I wonder how bleached out he was.

[Easley:] Yeah. There are some scientists and some who speculate about the gastric juices and when they may or may not have done. I have an old Larsen cartoon with this ragtag looking figure coming into the house and Jonah's wife saying, "Three days gone; smelling like a fish. What story you have today?"

[Laughter] So who knows but nevertheless, again, I think unfortunately the novelty of this miracle, if I can say that, overshadows the message that God has a superintended design for this prophet that he is not going to escape.

[Lepine:] And as we've he said, in the middle of this book is this pivotal statement, "Salvation is of the LORD." God has called Jonah to be His instrument to go and to preach to the people of Nineveh but the turning of the hearts of the people of Nineveh was not Jonah's responsibility. It was the Lord's responsibility and Jonah realizes that.

He realizes he needs to be obedient to do what God's called him to do but ultimately when Nineveh does repent it is because God has turned the hearts of those people. We need to remember the same as we share the gospel too. We need to be obedient to what God has called us to do to share the Good News of Christ with others. But ultimately when those people respond to the Gospel is not because of our skill or our pretty sounding words. It's because God turns their hearts as well.

Let me remind our listeners that transcripts of these daily programs can be found on our website, [incontextradio.org](http://incontextradio.org). You can listen back to today's program online if you'd like. Of course we have resources available including the four CD set that features these messages from the book of Jonah. You'll find all the information on our website, [incontextradio.org](http://incontextradio.org), or call us at 1-877-3CONTEXT for more information about resources that are available.

And join us back tomorrow we're going to talk to Patrick O'Neil and Keith of the Christian Businessmen's Connection about how they're reaching out to businessmen in communities all across the country. I hope you can be with us tomorrow for *inContext* with Michael Easley.