

I Will Go

Jonah 2

Pastor Jeremy Cagle, August 18, 2019

Open your Bibles with me to the book of Jonah. Now, that's the book we're in this morning. And while you're turning there, if you're joining us for the first time today, we're in a series that we started a few weeks ago on the book of Jonah called the "Whale of a Tale" series because that's what this book is. It is a whale of a tale. It is one of a kind.

They say the one thing you want in preaching is variety. You don't want to do the same thing every week or you'll put your people to sleep, and you can't get any more different than the book of Jonah. It is a very unusual book in the Bible. For one thing, it has a whale in it. That's very unusual. It has a fish of some kind, and it swallows a man who lives to tell about it. You don't see that very often. He lives inside of it for three days and three nights, which is very, very strange.

In fact, that's so strange that critics like to challenge this and say it never happened. They like to challenge the book of Jonah and say, it's all make believe. But they fail to remember that Jesus affirmed this event in the New Testament. Dwayne, just read that to you. In Matthew 12:40 our Lord said, "For just as Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of the sea monster, so will the Son of Man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth." So, in the mind of Jesus, these two things are connected; the resurrection and the book of Jonah. And to deny one event is to deny the other in our Lord's mind. So, it's very serious stuff. This actually happened.

It also has a renegade prophet in it - that's very unusual. It has a rebellious Hebrew messenger who runs away from God. God tells him to go to Nineveh, he goes to Tarshish. God tells him to do this, he does that. It's unusual because the Lord sends him to the Gentiles. Jews did not go to Gentiles to preach. They left them alone. But all this is to say, Jonah is a very unique book in the Bible. It's one of a kind.

And as we've seen, it falls into a section of the Bible that's known as the Minor Prophets. If you were to look at the table of contents in your Bible, you'll see that the Old Testament is divided up into four sections. You have the law books, the history books, the poetry books, and the prophetic books. And the prophetic books are divided up into Major Prophets and Minor Prophets, and Jonah falls into the Minor Prophets.

And the key verse in the book is found in Jonah 2:9. If you want to look over there with me, this is the key verse in the book of Jonah. This is what it's all about. It says very briefly in Jonah 2:9, "Salvation is from the Lord." That is a key verse in the book of Jonah, "Salvation is from the Lord."

As we're going to see in a moment, Jonah said that from the belly of the whale, he said it from the bottom of the ocean, which means salvation couldn't come from Jonah because he was fish bait. He was as good as dead. He couldn't do anything to save himself. And it didn't come from the sailors either because they're the ones who threw him overboard. So, the only place salvation could come from in this book was from God. Nobody else could save a man in this position but the Lord. Some of your translations there, if you have the ESV, it says, "Salvation belongs to the Lord." And I love that translation because it means he owns it. It is

His personal possession to give to whomever He chooses. And in this book, He gives it to the prophet Jonah and rescues Him from the sea.

In his book, *Grace Abounding to the Chief of Sinners*, John Bunyan, the author of *Pilgrim's Progress*, said that he could relate to this. He knew what this meant because he said when he was saved, he was a mess. He was a very evil man. He was so bad that John Bunyan said a bar lady once told him that she was afraid of him because his cursing was so bad. She said, "I hear cursing all day long and yours is the worst." But he heard a preacher one day tell him about grace. He met someone who told him about the mercy of God and that God could save a sinner like him, and he was converted. And here's what John Bunyan said about that experience. He said,

I learned that my righteousness is in heaven. It's not my good frame of heart that made my righteousness better or my bad frame of heart that made it worse, for my righteousness or my salvation is from the Lord. And He is the same yesterday, today and forever, and so shall my salvation be.

That's what Jonah experienced in this book. His salvation is from the Lord. It's in heaven and since heaven does not change, our salvation does not change. Since the Lord stays the same, so does our hope of eternal life.

In fact, to draw this out a little bit, I've told you before that everything obeys God in the Book of Jonah except Jonah. Everything does what God wants except him. The wind obeys, the sailors obey, the fish obeys, but Jonah doesn't. He is rebellious from beginning to end. There's a few highlights in the story, but that's it. So, salvation had to originate with God. You even see this at the end of the book. He doesn't even want to go to Nineveh. He doesn't even want to tell them about salvation. As far as he's concerned, they could go to hell. And the Lord saves them because He is responsible for salvation.

And as Jonah tells this story, as he talks about the mercy and salvation of God - I've told you before, the book falls into four chapters that go like this. I gave you these last time, but I just want to give them to you, again. Here are the four chapters in the book of Jonah, chapter by chapter. It goes like this, "I won't go, I will go, I'm here and I want to leave." That's the book of Jonah in a nutshell; "I won't go, I will go, I'm here and I want to leave. I don't like this place. I want to burn it to the ground." The book actually ends with Jonah sitting on top of a hill waiting for the Lord to judge the people of Nineveh. That's how the book ends, because he didn't get this. He missed the point of the book. This book is about the mercy of God.

And this morning, what we want to do is we want to look at a time, a brief moment in the book when Jonah does get it just for a second. We want to look at a time when he briefly understood what this was all about. Jonah acted like an evil man in this book but he didn't do it the whole time. There is a good moment in the book in chapter 2 when he says, "I will go" from the belly of the fish, which is interesting.

Jonah chapter 2, this is Jonah's prayer from the heart of the ocean. You see a lot of prayers in the Bible, but this has to be one of the most unusual ones because of where it's from. My wife and I visited the Vancouver Aquarium about a month ago. I said a couple of prayers there because there were like a million people in the aquarium. I don't know if you guys have ever been there before. But the one thing you didn't see is you didn't see anybody floating in there praying. I mean, that's nonsense. That's crazy. That's where Jonah prayed this prayer from.

One author called it his submarine prayer. He said, “Jonah prayed from the depths and the Lord heard him from the heights of heaven.” Which should encourage you because that means you can pray from anywhere. If you could pray from the guts of a fish and God can hear you, you can pray from anywhere. And as we study this, we see that the prayer comes to us in three parts or three stages. So, if you're taking notes, this is our outline for today. This is what the passage is about. In chapter 2, Jonah gives us three parts to his prayer from the belly of the fish. This is something we can relate to, isn't it? We've all sinned before. Jonah chapter 1 (if you want to read that at another time, we studied it the last time we were together), It's just Jonah sinning the whole chapter. Jonah is sinning from start to finish. We've all done that. We've all messed up. And when that happens, what are you supposed to do about it? How do you ask for forgiveness? Well, that's what happens in Jonah chapter 2. That's what this is about. This is Jonah's prayer for forgiveness. This is his way of humbling self before God and repenting. And as he does that, it comes in three parts or three stages.

The first part is this, first thing we see is Jonah's cry. The prayer begins with Jonah's cry to the Lord. When you sin like Jonah did, you can't always fix it right away, can you? You can't always make it better. You want to, but you can't sometimes. Sometimes you're helpless to do that. But you know what you can do? You can cry, can't you? When you sin, you can cry. You can call out to the Lord, and Jonah does that here. And I want you to see that in a moment.

Before we do though, I want you to see the setting for this. If you look in chapter 1:17 with me, right above chapter 2, it gives us a setting for this prayer, the background for it. And it says this in verse 17, it says, “And the Lord appointed a great fish to swallow Jonah, and Jonah was in the stomach of the fish three days and three nights.” Just a few comments about this, but if you remember after he ran from the Lord, after he got onboard a ship to Tarshish, a storm came up in chapter 1 and threatened to destroy the ship. The storm was so bad that the sailors, the men who were familiar with the sea were crying out to their god, throwing the cargo overboard. And they did a little investigating, they cast lots and they found out that Jonah was the one to blame. He was responsible for the storm, so they threw him overboard. They threw him into the sea. And verse 17 says after they did that, “the Lord appointed a great fish to swallow Jonah, and Jonah was in the stomach of the fish three days and three nights.”

There's been a lot of debate as to what that's all about. There's been a lot of discussion as to what kind of fish it was that swallowed Jonah. We did Vacation Bible School this week - I missed the flannel graphs. I keep talking to you guys about flannel graphs. But I see VBS and I just smell glue and popsicle sticks, and I see flannel graphs. I don't know - anybody else have a VBS? No, okay you guys. That's an American thing, I guess. But flannel graphs, we always had a big sticker of Jonah we would stick on the board. But we don't really know what kind of fish it was. That's kind of the interesting thing about the passage. The Hebrew word is *dag*, which simply means “fish” or a “large fish.” Some have called it a shark or a whale. Whales aren't very common to the Mediterranean Sea, but some types of sharks are. Whales can go in there, but sharks are more common. So, it could have been one of those. The ancients call it a sea serpent. We don't talk about sea serpents much today, but that's what they said swallowed Jonah. Jesus called it a sea monster in Matthew 12:40 which we just read. So, that's what He said it was. But whatever it was, the idea here was it was big. We know that much. It was large enough to swallow a man whole and leave him unharmed.

I did some research on this and the mouth of the average sperm whale is 20 feet long, 15 feet high and 9 feet wide, which is the size of most rooms in your average house. So, if you imagine sitting in a living room of your house, that's the mouth of a sperm whale. And the teeth are placed in such a way that a man could slide down in there without being killed, ripped to shreds. And we also know that whales breathe oxygen, they breathe air. So, there could have been air there for him to breathe. And you can look up accounts of men and horses being swallowed by whales and things like that and living through it.

But if you notice, the interesting thing about this in verse 17 is that Jonah doesn't go into all that here. He doesn't give us all the gory details. If this was a made up account, verse 17 would be like several chapters long. He would embellish the story. There's no embellishment here. He just mentions it in one verse, moves on because his focus is on the Lord, not the fish. His focus is on God and not this animal.

And then here's what Jonah says about God. Here's how he starts off his prayer from the belly of the fish. In chapter 2 it says, "Then Jonah prayed to the Lord his God from the stomach of the fish, and he said, 'I called out of my distress to the Lord, and He answered me. I cried for help from the depth of Sheol and You heard my voice.'" If you notice, verse 1 just tells you where this prayer begins. It says, "Jonah prayed to the Lord his God from the stomach of the fish."

I got to tell you guys this story, but years ago, I was a youth minister in Tennessee and we had a Tennessee farmer doing Bible trivia night with the kids. Now, if you want an interesting experience, get a Tennessee farmer to do Bible trivia. And he was asking the students the question, he said, "Whose brothers pushed him in the whale?" (and the word is supposed to be "well") – "Whose brothers pushed him in the whale?" And one of the kids said, "Jonah." The answer's Joseph's brothers. Anyway, well, that is true to some degree at least in the sense that the Lord pushed Jonah in the whale. The Lord saved him with the whale. And here it says, "Jonah prayed from the stomach of the whale." If you can imagine that. Now, this doesn't mean that he wrote it all down from the stomach of the fish. He didn't pull out his pen and paper and iPad and blog about it from in there. Imagine like, "These are the coolest Facebook pictures ever." He didn't do that. He did that later. Later, he wrote all this down. But it does mean that this is what was running through his mind from inside the fish. This is he was thinking about, and it says, the first thing he does is, "I called out of my distress to the Lord and He answered me."

And that's kind of a very much an understatement because you can imagine if you were in this situation, distress probably wouldn't be enough of a word for what you were going through. The Hebrew word "called" here means to "gasp" or to "speak with deep emotion, to call out passionately." Jonah was terrified. You see some of the kids' cartoons about Jonah and he's singing in the belly of the whale and having a good time, this is not what was going on here. And it also says, it says, "I cried for help from the depth of Sheol and you heard my voice." That's another way of saying the same thing - Jonah repeated for emphasis.

But he called out to the Lord from inside the fish for help because no one could help him but God. Do you guys get that? It makes sense? He had no other alternative. Sailors couldn't help him, they can't hear him. They're somewhere up on the ship, he's down in the ocean. Wouldn't do any good calling out to them. The other fish can't hear him, so that's not going to help. His fellow Jews are in Israel, Jonah's somewhere in the Mediterranean Sea. The only person Jonah could cry out to was God, and that's what he does.

The interesting thing about this is this is the first time in the book Jonah does that. There's no other time in chapter 1 where Jonah cries out to God. You remember the ship is tearing apart, it's failing and the sailors are crying out to their gods. You remember that? Jonah doesn't do that there. This is the first time he cries out to the Lord. The Puritan Thomas Watson once said, "When a man is flat on his back, then he looks up to God." That's what Jonah did here. The Lord had to put him flat on his back to get him to look up and to get his attention.

And just to show you how bad this was, verse 2, if you notice, it uses an interesting word. It says, "I cried for help from the depth of Sheol." Sheol was a place in the Bible that had a dark history to it. It referred to some bad things. Some of your translations or some different translations in other passages render this word as death or the grave. It's often called "Hades" or in some translations, it's the word "hell." The King James Version has about this verse, it says, "Out of the belly of hell, I cried and Thou heardest my voice." It's a terrifying thing to think of praying from the belly of hell. And that's where Jonah was.

It would have been dark in the belly of the fish, there'd be no light. And it would've been hot like hell would have been. It would have been smelly, full of rot and decay, and it would have been lonely. Jonah was the only one down there. As a matter of fact, the last thing he remembers is sinning from God, running from God, being tossed overboard into the sea, and the next thing he knows, he wakes up in this place. So, in his mind he might've thought he was in hell, in Sheol. So, he did the only thing he could do, he did the only thing that makes sense in a situation like that - he prayed.

I don't have to tell you that when you're in a place like this, when you're in a spot like Jonah was in, a place full of darkness, a place full of misery on account of your sin, this is all you can do. You can pray, you can cry out to God. You might not be able to fix it right away, you might not be able to make it better, but you can pray. Your friends may be far away from you, other people may be far away from you, and you may not be able to find a way out of the situation, but there is nothing stopping you from praying.

To say it another way, the way out of hell is not up, but down, down on your knees, down on your face, down on the ground crying, "God have mercy on me, a sinner." We all can do that. I don't care what you have done or where you are, you can say, "God have mercy on me, a sinner." A poor man can say that and a rich man can say that. Money has nothing to do with it. A strong man can do it and a weak man can do it. And you can say this from anywhere. You can say that prayer from a hospital bed, you can say that prayer from the funeral home. And you can say it any time of the day; morning, noon, and night. You can pray anywhere in the world. But the point is this is how you repent before the Lord. This is how you make it right - you pray. You get down on your knees and pray. You know the interesting thing about this, this kind of reminds me of the thief on the cross. You remember that story? Thief on the cross, he's nailed on the cross. He turns to Jesus and says, "I want to be with You in paradise." You know what Jesus doesn't say to that guy? He doesn't say, "Boy, I really wish you could come down and go on a mission trip to Africa, then you could go to heaven." He doesn't say that. He doesn't say, "You could give a bunch of money to charity or go to church a thousand times." He says, "Just trust in Me." That's all the thief could do. That's all Jonah could do right here. He prayed and that was enough for God.

Verse 2 says, "The Lord answered me." It says, "He heard my voice," because God will always hear the prayer of a man like this. D. L. Moody used to tell the story of a guy who was leaving church one night, a lost man, when he said, "I'm going to go home to pray, and I

won't even go to sleep tonight until I ask the Lord Jesus to take away my sins.” But as he was walking home, the man was convicted and he said, “Why can't I do that here? Why do I have to wait until I get home?” And so he started to pray, but he didn't know how. So, he kept going and he went a little further and he was convicted again and he said, “Why can't I do it here? Why do I have to get home?” Then he went a little further, convicted again, said the same thing until finally, he knelt down on the street and he prayed, “Lord have mercy on me.” And the Lord heard his prayer and saved him right in the street. That's what Jonah did. That's what you can do this morning if you're in sin. You can pray a prayer of repentance right here. You don't have to leave, you don't have to go home. Jonah could do it in the heart of the ocean, you could do it right here in the heart of Chilliwack. You can pray right now and the Lord will hear your prayer.

Which leads to the next point in our passage. It leads to the next part of Jonah's prayer from the belly of the fish. The first one is Jonah's cry. He cried out to the Lord. He cried out for mercy because that's all he could do. There was no other choice. He had no other option. He couldn't go out and do a bunch of good works. He couldn't go out and fix his life. All he could do was pray. And the Lord heard him and answered his cry for mercy. Which leads us to the second part to Jonah's prayer here from the belly of the fish. And that's Jonah's confession. The first part is Jonah's cry, the second part is Jonah's confession of his sin. It was his sin that got him in this mess. It was his sin that got him in the fish in the first place. And so the only way to get out was to confess his sin to the Lord. I told you, you can't go up until you go down on your knees before the Lord. That's what Jonah does here. And he does it this way - and let me read verses 1 through 4 with you just to get the setting. It says,

1 Then Jonah prayed to the Lord his God from the stomach of the fish, 2 and he said, “I called out of my distress to the Lord, and He answered me. I cried for help from the depth of Sheol; You heard my voice. 3 For You had cast me into the deep, into the heart of the seas, and the current engulfed me. All Your breakers and billows passed over me. 4 So I said, ‘I have been expelled from Your sight. Nevertheless I will look again toward Your holy temple.’”

That doesn't sound like much of a confession here or much of an apology, but if you understand what Jonah's saying here, he says, “Lord, You put me into the ocean, You threw me into the sea. The sailors didn't do it. Ultimately, Lord, You did it, and it's all my fault. I'm the one responsible for this mess. And so Lord, please forgive me.”

To explain this a little bit in verse 3, Jonah says that God cast him there. That's the word he uses. It says, “For you had cast me into the deep.” Earlier in chapter 1, it says that the Lord hurled a great storm into the sea. That's chapter 1:4. That word “hurled” is a similar word to this. And the idea is that in chapter 1:4, the Lord hurled a storm. And here in chapter 2, the Lord hurled Jonah. The Lord threw the storm at the ship like a ball. And now, He throws Jonah into the deep or the lowest part of the ocean.

Verse 3 says, he goes into the heart of the seas. Not the outskirts of the sea, but the heart of it, the very center of it. It says, “The current engulfed me and Your breakers and billows passed over me.” That phrase “passed over me” is interesting because it means the breakers and billows or the waves went over his head. I don't know about you guys, but I don't mind seeing the waves from up above looking down. I don't want to see them over my head. That's what he says here, which is terrifying.

And in light of all this, he says in verse 4, “So I said, ‘I have been expelled from Your sight. Nevertheless I will look again toward Your holy temple.’” The temple was the place where the Jews prayed in the Old Testament. That's where they would go to offer sacrifice and repent of their sin publicly. And so this was Jonah's way of saying, “As soon as I get out of here, as soon as I get out of the ocean, I'm going to do that. I'm going to publicly confess my sin.” Jonah repented in the whale. He made things right with God in the fish, but he couldn't sacrifice there. So, the first chance he got, that's what he was going to do.

Which is saying something, because I think we can identify this. But one of the hardest things for people to do when they're in sin is to repent. Isn't it? Is to say, “I am sorry.” We would rather say anything but that. One of the hardest things for people to do is to say, “I am the one to blame.” Sometimes, I spend hours talking to people, and that's all I want to hear. Not, “I'm sorry” to me, but to the Lord. And we're all guilty of this. We say, “It's my parents fault, it's my spouse's fault. It's the environment's fault. It's the economy's fault.” But it's a hard time saying, “It's my fault.” Now, the ancient people even had an expression for this in Latin that went like this, they said *mea culpa*, which literally means “my bad, my mistake, my oops!” And they said people back then had a hard time saying it. So, this has been going on since the beginning of time. Do you remember? What was the sin Adam and Eve did in the garden? What was the first sin humans ever committed? Blame shifting. “He made me do it, she made me do it. “It was the woman You gave me, God, You made me sin.” It's a hard time saying, “I'm wrong.” Two boys were fighting once when their mom broke it up and she said, “Now I want you to forgive each other before going to bed. I want you to say, ‘I'm sorry.’” To which the oldest brother replied, “Well, okay mom, I'll do that. But if he's alive in the morning, you better tell him to watch out.” You guys don't have little kids anymore. Some of you do - you guys relate to that story. We're all guilty of that, but this is where repentance begins. This is where it starts. This is how you make things right with God when you sin, is by saying, “I'm sorry.” “*Mea culpa*, my bad, my mistake. My parents didn't make me do it, I did it. My spouse didn't make me sin, I sinned. Lord, will you forgive me?”

To say it another way, if you want to be right with God, your cry had better have a confession in it. Your cry had better have a confession in it. Some people pray or cry but they don't confess. They pray to the Lord but they never say, “I'm sorry,” and therefore, God doesn't hear that. Their prayers are no good in the sight of heaven. If you remember the Pharisee did that in Jesus' parable in Luke 18. I just want to read that to you. But if you just want to write this down, in Luke 18:11-14, it says, “The Pharisee stood and was praying to himself, ‘God, I thank you that I am not like other people.’” That is a horrible way to start off a prayer. That is a terrible way to pray. “God, I thank you that I'm not like those bad people over there.” And he has a list of them: “swindlers, unjust, adulterers or even like this tax collector.” He's even picking out people in the temple. “I fast twice a week, I pay tithes of all that I get.” He goes on and says, “But the tax collector, standing some distance away, was even unwilling to lift up his eyes to heaven, but was beating his breast, saying, ‘God, be merciful to me, the sinner!’” And Jesus says, “I tell you, this man, went to his house justified rather than the other; for everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, but he who humbles himself will be exalted.” God will always hear the prayer of a man who beats his breasts and says, “Have mercy on me.” But he won't hear the prayer of a man who says, “I, I, I, I, I” like the Pharisee. He will always hear the prayer of a humble man.

It's been said that God sends no one away except those who are full of themselves. And that's exactly what you see here. That's what's going on in the Book of Jonah. God only sent Jonah away when he was full of himself, but the moment he repented, the moment he humbled

himself, God accepted him again. The moment he said, “I’m wrong, Lord, have mercy on me,” God let it go, and He pardoned his sin. And He will do the same thing for you this morning. They say, no matter how many steps you take away from God, it’s one step back. That’s the arithmetic of heaven. And so you just need to take one step back.

I’m going through a Bible study with one of my kids right now. And one of the questions in it is what is repentance? What does it mean to confess your sins? And the answer is repentance means to turn and go the other way. So, I illustrate this with one of my sons by having him walk one way and then repent, turn and walk the other way. It’s as simple as that. Sin is this way, God is this way, and when you repent, you choose to go toward God and away from sin. That’s how we are forgiven. That’s how we’re saved. And that’s what Jonah did from the bottom of the sea. This was not about works, this was about his heart. He couldn’t do any works in the fish. And the encouraging thing is you can pray this prayer from wherever you’re at this morning as well.

Which leads us to one more point to look at today, one more part to Jonah’s prayer from the belly of the fish. Just to review these other ones - the first one is Jonah’s cry. That’s how he begins his prayer - with a cry from the heart of the sea. It’s all he could do, is cry. Second, it leads to his confession. Second part to Jonah’s prayer from the belly of the fish is a confession of his sin. It was his sin that got him in the fish in the first place. So, Jonah addresses his sin here.

Which leads to one more part to this prayer, and that is this, Jonah’s deliverance. It starts off with a cry, goes to his confession, and finally, as a result of that, we see his deliverance from the fish. After talking about some pretty hard stuff in the first couple of verses (his sin and all that it created in his life), Jonah spends the majority of this chapter talking about the good things and the deliverance of God. And you see this in verses 5 through 10, if you want to read that with me. Verse 5 says,

5 Water encompassed me to the point of death. The great deep engulfed me, weeds were wrapped around my head. 6 I descended to the roots of the mountains. The earth with its bars was around me forever, but You have brought up my life from the pit, O Lord my God. 7 While I was fainting away, I remembered the Lord, and my prayer came to You, into Your holy temple. 8 Those who regard vain idols forsake their faithfulness, 9 but I will sacrifice to You with the voice of thanksgiving. That which I have vowed I will pay. Salvation is from the Lord.” (And verse 10 says) Then the Lord commanded the fish and it vomited Jonah up onto the dry land.

Now there’s a lot in here and we can’t get to everything just for the sake of time. But just to point out a few things in this section, the ancient people thought if you fell into the sea, you were gone. You were as good as dead. They knew so little about it. And so Jonah alludes to that in the first couple of verses, when he says, “Water encompassed me,” in verse 5, “to the point of death. The great deep engulfed me.” He says in there that, “I descended to the roots of the mountains.”

“Roots of the mountains” would have been the very bottom of the ocean where the mountains start. And that doesn’t mean Jonah literally went down there. I looked it up, and the deepest part of the Mediterranean Sea is like 15,000 feet down, and people can’t live at that depth, nowhere near that. So, this is kind of a metaphoric way of just saying, “I went really far down.”

And because of this, verse 6 says, “The earth with its bars was around me.” In other words, “I was locked in, I couldn't get out.” Jonah might have never been on a boat before, and chances are he couldn't swim. Most Jews did not go sailing. It wasn't something they did. And so he couldn't swim, probably. And verse 7 says, “As a result, I was fainting away.” That word means exactly what our English word means. It means he blacked out. It terrified him, it scared him to death, and he fainted. And as he did, he prayed, as he was fainting, and the Lord heard him and He answered his prayer.

And as He answered the prayer, a couple things here. One thing that verse 10 says, eventually the Lord sent the fish and then commanded the fish and it vomited him up on dry land. Verse 9 says, “salvation is from the Lord.” That's the verse we looked at earlier. Salvation belongs to our God. It also says in here in verse 6, “But you brought up my life from the pit.” That's another way of saying that. And then the fish eventually vomited Jonah up. The Lord commanded the fish to swallow Jonah and now He commands it to release him. The Lord commanded the fish to save him and now the Lord commands him to vomit him onto dry land. Someone asked me the other day - we were talking about something. I said, “I'm not a prophet, I'm a pastor. I don't know the future.” And they said, “Well, don't you wish you were a prophet?” And after studying this passage, “I said, no. No, thank you.” I don't like boats too much, I'd get a little seasick. This would have been awful - and then to be spit up like this. If you think about it, it would have done Jonah no good if the Lord didn't command the fish to spit him up. I mean, what good would it have done if the Lord left him in the fish? So, in a sense, God saves him twice here. He saves him from the ocean and then He saves him from the fish.

Not to be gross here, but we've all vomited before. So, we know what this is like. Jonah would have been covered in fish guts as a result of this. There's no telling what would've been in there. He would've smelled like something from the deep. Some scholars said his skin would have been bleached by acid from the fish's stomach. I don't know how that works, but it could be that he would have looked almost like a ghost. He was in there three days and three nights, which might explain one of the reasons why the Ninevites listened to him. He might've had the appearance of something just other worldly about him.

But he was alive and that's the point here. Jonah was delivered from the sea for “salvation is from the Lord”. He says in here that an idol couldn't do that, which is why verse 8 says, “Those who regard vain idols forsake their faithfulness.” That means they forsake their hope of salvation. When you trust in a wooden statue or some kind of carved image - the carved image can't do this, only God can for “salvation is from the Lord”.

The commentator Matthew Henry had a great thought on this when he said, “This story proves that you can pray to God from anywhere.” Isn't that good? He says, “Jonah's prayer was heard in the highest heavens even though it was prayed in the lowest depths.” Jonah's prayer was heard up here even though Jonah prayed down here, way down here. This was the lowest prayer anybody ever prayed in the Bible geographically, and maybe even spiritually. God heard him in heaven even though Jonah prayed from Sheol, because God can hear you anywhere. Whatever you're going through this morning; trials, temptations, frustrations, the Lord can hear your prayers. No matter how bad it is, no matter how discouraging, God will always hear the prayer of someone who repents.

And maybe some of you need to be encouraged with that today, maybe some of you need to be reminded of Jonah's story because you feel like this. You feel way, way down like you're

in the depths of Sheol. Jonah had done something pretty terrible, if you think about it. He's a prophet. He's supposed to be faithful. He's supposed to do what God says, and now he does all this and he's in this mess. And maybe some of you can identify with that. And you need to be reminded that God can hear you up here when you are down here. He can hear you anywhere even from a place like this. You just have to repent, you have to turn and go the other way from your sin. Do that and the Lord will hear you. No matter where you are, do that and He will save you from the belly of the fish.

Maybe some of you are not weighed down right now, but you're heading there, you can feel it. You're not in the depths yet, but you will be soon because you're running away from God, you're fleeing from His presence. And if that's the case, you need to remember these lessons from Jonah as well. The Lord will always hear the prayer of a man who says, "I'm sorry." It says here in verse 9 for "salvation is from the Lord."

During the Napoleonic Wars, wars with Napoleon in Europe, a soldier was hit by a cannonball and he was mortally wounded. And as he laid suffering in his bed waiting to die, he kept telling everyone who would hear him, that, "Napoleon will save me. Napoleon will save me. When he gets here, he'll know what to do." And as time went on, it was obvious Napoleon wasn't coming. And as he lay in his bed dying, and the end was coming near, it was obvious the general would not show up. And so the young man grew desperate and he said at the top of his voice, "I don't care where you are, I don't care how far away, if you can hear me, Napoleon, save me, please save me." And the general never did. The young man died because the most powerful man on earth could not save him, and the most powerful ruler on earth could not deliver him from death.

But I want to tell you this morning, you're in the right place because you serve a God who can. Amen? You serve the Lord of heaven and earth and He can deliver you from death. He can save you from anything. If you call on Him, He can forgive your sin and bring you out of the depths of Sheol if you would believe. Will you do that today? Will you cry out to Him and ask Him for mercy? Let's pray and thank the Lord for a book like Jonah.

Father, we thank you Lord for the lessons of the prophet Jonah this morning. And we thank you Lord for the lessons of a man who went so far down and yet You still heard him. Lord, I don't know where everyone's at this morning, I don't know where they're at in their spiritual life. I don't know where they're at in just life in general, but I'm guessing maybe some of our people here this morning are feeling like Jonah, they're just in the pits. And if they are, Lord, I pray this prayer would encourage them just to remember that You care for those who are in the pits. You listen to those who are in a place like this. Father, would You draw some to repentance this morning? Would You draw some back into Your presence? Would You turn them away from sin? Turn them to Christ who is the ultimate Saviour for sin.

And for those who are walking with You this morning, I pray that this would encourage them as well. Lord, thank you that Jonah did turn and do the right thing, and may we all be encouraged to copy his example this morning.

Thank you, Father, that You are a compassionate God like this. Thank you that You are merciful, and may we go out and show mercy to others as a result of what we've learned today. I pray this in Jesus' name, amen.