

The Belly of the Whale Jonah 2

Romans 11:1-21

Romans 11:22-36

Psalm 111: 1-10

This week we are going to be in chapter 2 of the book of Jonah, Last week we talked a bit about the introduction to this little book, the events that were going on surrounding the time of Jonah, and a bit of the history of the kingdoms and areas involved. The big take away from last week, is God's sovereignty in salvation, and how he uses even a rebellious prophet to bring glory to his name. We see this with the account of the sailors on the ship of which Jonah was attempting to flee the mission that God had given him. They saw the power of God, and they saw that there was no hiding nor fleeing from him, that he knew Jonah was on their ship, and that he caused a great storm to come upon them. One of the things that stood out to me in this story, is that the sailors in their pagan superstition believed that this storm was a punishment for something that someone among them must have done, and they cast lots to determine who it was. Something which appears random to us, God used to reveal what was going on. Though things seem circumstantial, or random happenstance to us, there is nothing random and circumstantial with God.

God knew Jonah's reaction, God knew that when he told Jonah, to go to Nineveh that he would instead flee. None of this was a surprise or shock to God, and God used even Jonah's rebellion for his own purpose, showing his power to both Jonah and these sailors. And not only that, 100's of years later, Jesus uses this well known story of the Prophet Jonah, to foretell of his own death and resurrection. Matthew 12:38-42 says, "Then some of the scribes and Pharisees answered, saying, "Teacher, we want to see a sign from you." But he answered and said to them, "An evil and adulterous generation seeks after a sign, and no sign will be given to it except the sign of the prophet Jonah. For Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of a great fish, so will the Son of Man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth. The men of Nineveh will rise up in the judgment with this generation and condemn it, because they repented at the preaching of Jonah, and indeed one greater than Jonah is here. The queen of the South will rise up in the judgment with this generation and condemn it, for she came from the ends of the earth to hear the wisdom of Solomon, and indeed a greater than Solomon is here."

The reaction of the Sailors, and of Nineveh to the God of Israel, it stands as a condemnation against Jonah, and against the people of Israel for God has chosen gentiles, outsiders to be his people. In the account in Matthew, Jesus was condemning the scribes and Pharisees for their unfaithfulness, their unbelief, for Nineveh repented, the Queen of Sheba from the south sought after wisdom from Solomon, and a prophet greater than Jonah was come, and a teacher wiser than Solomon has come, and they rejected him...asking him for a sign, knowing of his reputation of healing the sick and performing miracles, he told them, The only sign will be his own death and resurrection and he uses Jonah's 3 days in the belly of the great fish as an example. A sign they will reject, yet many others will come to believe. The sign of Jonah, the death, burial and resurrection of Christ is the hope of many, but the stumbling block of Israel as the prophet Isaiah wrote, chapter 8 "The Lord of Hosts him you shall hallow, let him be your fear, let him be your dread. He will be as a sanctuary, but a stone of stumbling and a rock of offense to both the houses of Israel, As a trap and a snare to the inhabitants of Jerusalem. And many among them shall stumble they shall fall and be broken, be snared and taken.

Israel was awaiting a mighty king, a warrior, not a lamb. Yet, in his laying down of his own life, in his death burial and resurrection Christ is the mighty king, a warrior, and conqueror for in his death he defeated sin, in his death he defeated Satan, and through his death he has provided everlasting life for his people. This was the sign of Jonah, that Christ would die, and would rise again in 3 days, that he would crush that head of the serpent, conquer death, and the grave, and give ever lasting hope and salvation to his people. Only his people are not the nation of Israel, but it is all those who believe upon him, and as we have seen in the Isaiah, it is not the descendants of Abraham, but it is of the spirit, for Christ has become a stumbling block to them, the very hope that is giving, they very Messiah prophesied, is rejected. As Paul wrote to the Ephesians Jesus is the chief corner stone of which we are all being built up together, verse 19 of chapter 2 “Now, therefore you are no longer strangers and foreigners, but fellow citizens with the saints, and members of the household of God, having been built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the chief cornerstone, in whom the whole building, being fitted together grows into a holy temple of the lord.”

This is the true Israel, this is the descendants of Abraham, as Paul wrote to the Galatians 3:6 “Just as Abraham believed God and it was accounted to him for righteousness, Therefore know only those who are of faith are sons of Abraham. And the scripture foreseeing that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, preached the gospel to Abraham beforehand saying in you all the nations shall be blessed. So then, those who are of faith are blessed with believing Abraham.” that would make Ruth, the Moabite, more a descendant of Abraham then the physical descendants, that would make those who come to believe in Nineveh through Jonah’s witness, true descendants of Abraham, that would make us today who believe, true descendants of Abraham. Not of those who rejected the chief cornerstone, but of those who believe by faith. A lesson that Jonah needs to learn, that God’s people are God’s people, not by ritual or physical descendants, but they are God’s people because God calls them his people. And God calls the unworthy, the sick, and the downtrodden, he has not come to save the self righteous, but the sinners and by his blood to make them righteous. Again, a lesson I think that Jonah needed to learn.

So this morning we are going to be in chapter 2 of this story let us go ahead and read chapter 2, this is the account of the time that Jonah spent in the belly of the fish, Jonah was essentially dead by any recollection of this world, the sailors threw him overboard to his death, but God again having plans for Jonah would not allow him to see death, but instead brought a great fish to swallow him. Just even at the most basic level of understanding there we can see God’s sovereignty, Jonah was not allowed to see death until God had accomplished what he had set out for him. We live each day unknowing our last day, yet we will not see that day until we reach the time that God has appointed it to us. It is an interesting thing to think about really, we worry about our lives, and about the lives of our loved ones...yet we, nor they will pass until the day appointed to them by the Lord. He as determined the day of our birth throughout the timeline of humanity, and he has determined the day of our death, and there is nothing, or no one that can change that reality. Death can seem to us be a shock, or a surprise, but to God there is no surprises, for he has ordained it. Our next breath, the next beat of our heart belongs to God.

So, Jonah is thrown overboard to his death...but it is not his time, just like how there is no obstacle to keep God from reaching his lost sheep, so to does he protect his children until that day appointed to them to die. Essentially, there is nothing that can kill you until that day...if we can only but truly grasp this truth how much more bold we may be in our lives, and how much less anxiety and worry would we have.

In this chapter we have Jonah's prayer, his cry out to God for deliverance. One commentary I was looking at this past week said that this prayer could be broken up into 4 parts, initially is his cry for help, even though he told the sailors to hurl him into the sea, he still prays for deliverance when it happens. It would seem that Jonah has a new and fresh understanding of the God whom he serves, the God who controls the wind and the waves, is also the God who could deliver him from his plight. God could have very well let Jonah drown for his out right rebellion and had been justified in allowing that to happen, but again God shows through his mercy and grace toward sinners in that he provides a supernatural answer to the humanistic impossible situation. The large fish that God commands to swallow up Jonah, is a merciful provision, but that doesn't mean its all good times either, sometimes we must go through a bit of a trial before deliverance, and in the case of Jonah he had 3 days of a hellish existence to cry out to God, and that is what we see in the second part of this prayer is the description of the distress from which he needed deliverance.

On one hand God saved him from drowning and from dying, but now he is caught inside the belly of a large fish, it is sort of an out of the frying pan into the fire sort of situation. Jonah would have had no idea that he would yet survive this, but now instead of drowning in the ocean he may very well die in the darkness of the belly of the fish. Jonah recognized that this was God's judgment upon him, as we see in verse 3 it says, "For you cast me into the deep, into the heart of the sea, and the floods surround me, all your billow and waves pass over me. Then I said, I have been cast out of your sight." Initially this is what he was seeking, he was looking to flee from the Lord, to run and hide, to go in the opposite direction, yet here we see God has given him what he desired...to be cast out of his site, and Jonah realizes the suffering and darkness in that separation from God, and cries out for deliverance. Which is the 3rd part of this prayer, where Jonah describes the Lord's deliverance. Jonah learns the lesson that it is never too late to cry out to God and to seek forgiveness and deliverance.

The very thing that he believed about Nineveh, about the people that God told him to go and call to repentance. By this very experience he is showing Jonah that he is in control of redemption, that he alone is in control of deliverance, and he will redeem those he chooses to redeem, and he will deliver those whom he chooses to deliver. To Jonah the pagan gentiles of Nineveh were a lost cause and he believed it would be better if God were to just destroy them, he wanted to see God's judgment poured out on them and didn't want them to have a chance of redemption...now Jonah has God's judgment poured out upon him, and he cries out to be saved from it, saved from the punishment of his own rebellion. But thank God for his mercy, thank God for his unmerited grace, for without it we would be worse off than Jonah, without his mercy toward sinners we would all be cast, not into the belly of a fish, but into a well of eternal fire. I think that this is one of the great lessons from this, that no one is beyond God's reach, and that God is merciful to the unworthy.

We see in the last part of this prayer from Jonah, the admittance of God's provision of salvation, that it is God who provides, to whom he will. If God so chooses to offer salvation to the pagan gentiles of Nineveh, or if God decides to cast his prophet into the deep, it is all will, for his purpose and as much as we may try to flee from it, or argue against it, God's will, will be done. Even just at the surface level of this story of Jonah, one of the big things we can take away from it, is that if God is calling you, there is no denying or escaping. We don't know the outcomes, we don't know the reasons, but God does and we should always trust him through all things. It is better to submit to God, than to argue against him...as Jonah has proven, this is not a fight that you are going to win...you can either go the easy way, or the hard way.

Sadly it seems, the hard way, is the human way. Often times God allows us to go through things because of our unfaithfulness, or our own rebellion, or even simply to teach us a lesson in the faith. Jonah had a lesson to learn, and as we will see going through this book he has more lessons he needs to learn and in fact it seems he doesn't fully learn this first one. How often do we need reminders? How often do we need to seemingly learn the same thing over and over again. As we go through life, dealing with whatever comes our way, we seem to learn over and over again that we need to rest upon God. As I had mentioned last week, when things are good we seem to be in danger of becoming complacent, that just seems to be human nature...we are such in the moment creatures...so, trials and hardships become necessary to remind us that we must always rest and rely upon God...and there is no where to deep, or to dark for him to reach...not even death can separate us from the love of God as Paul wrote. Salvation belongs to the Lord, Jonah seemingly recommits to the ministry that God called him on, for in verse 9 he says, "I will sacrifice to you with the voice of thanksgiving, I will pay what I have vowed." The Lord's great power enables him to deliver us, and his great mercy leads him to do so.

Salvation comes from him and him alone, and it is he alone whom we must look to for deliverance. Jonah has been humbled by the discipline, and deliverance of the Lord, recognizing his justified death, and his unjustified deliverance...but such is always the Lord's goal when he is dealing with his people...to draw them closer to himself, to bring those who stray back into the flock. And to call his people to repentance and belief. As this chapter ends, we see that the Lord spoke to the fish and it vomited Jonah onto dry land. This deliverance is again, undeserved and gracious and God delivered Jonah right to the shore of where he wanted him to be, again there is no escaping the sovereign will of God. You will accomplish what God has set out for you, whether by obedience, or whale. This whole thing is a condemnation on Israel, as any Israelite who would read this account would see, their own prophet fighting against God every step of the way, and the pagans are the ones quick to repent, and quick to offer sacrifices and vows to the Lord. It took Jonah 3 days in the belly of the fish to come to the same realization the Sailors did the moment the sea calmed.

This should humble any spiritually proud or arrogant person, especially the Israelite's to whom this account was given, not only does it show God's favor to the Gentiles, but it shows by which ease and willingness they believe, it shows that God's chosen are not the physical nation of Israel, but are the people from all over the world whom he gathers to himself. Their own prophet, which is a status held in high regard in Israel, is worse than the pagans here, his pride and arrogance leads him to sin and despair, and he needed deliverance just as much as the pagan Sailors, or even the Ninevites of whom he was to witness. A lesson as we see throughout the new testament that is lost on them, as the religious leaders are full of arrogance and pride as they reject Jesus. Jesus repeated calls them out on it, calls them out on their lack of faith and belief, and the falsehood of their faith, holding on to an idea that they are the chosen of God...yet even in the old testament accounts we see gentile pagans who are the chosen of God...it isn't one people, or one nation, but it is God who makes a nation of believers from all people.

This was a lesson in mercy for Jonah, this was a lesson in graciousness for Israel, and stands for both for us today. God's grace and mercy is giving to the lost, is given to the unworthy, if it was given to the worthy, it would not be grace, it would not be mercy but it would be payment earned. Paul talks about this in his letter to the Roman's which we read this morning, verse 6, "And if by grace, then it is no longer of works, otherwise grace is no longer grace " Grace is given, grace is unmerited, grace is undeserved, it is by the mercy and love of God that he gives us the faith to know him, and it is by his grace that he keeps us, though we fall, though we like Jonah may have moments of failure and unfaithfulness, God is faithful to his promise, that he will not lose one of his sheep.

He is the good shepherd who goes out to find the lost sheep among the wolves and brings them into his fold. And if it was not for this mercy, if it was not for his deliverance we would all be dead in our trespasses and sins. God calls whom he wills, he seeks out his own, and his own hear his voice. Maybe it takes an impossible storm for one to be ready to hear, or a time of famine like Nineveh for one to be open to the things of God, and all of these things is God working in the lives of his people so that they may know him, experience his grace, and ultimately be delivered from their sin and rebellion. And it is all him, he is the one who made the sea and the dry land, he is the one who caused the great storm to come upon the boat, he is the one who brought the great fish, and all of this showed his power not only to Jonah, but to the Gentile Pagans. We truly serve an awesome God, who as I have been saying a lot lately...shakes the world to draw in his people. And this same God, who goes through all of this to reach the one lost sheep, will all the more care for his sheep.