

JONAH #2 – THE INTERVENTIONS OF GOD ON A LIFE:

We are continuing this morning with our four-part series on Jonah. Jonah is unique among prophetic books. Rather than a list of prophecies, it is about a single mission in a man's life. Last week we looked at the call of God on Jonah's life and how Jonah turned away from that call. We discovered that he had a callous disregard for the spiritual welfare of the people in Nineveh.

He had tasted grace and came to faith in God. He was walking with God, but he would not sacrifice so that others would know God as well. We talked about the 'Jonah spirit', a spirit that would not even consider the message of God going to those in Nineveh.

This morning, we learn about the hand of God on a life, the intervention of God in a life. **¹⁷Now the Lord provided a huge fish to swallow Jonah, and Jonah was in the belly of the fish three days and three nights. Jonah 1: 17.**

In this verse we have the event that has gotten all the press when it comes to this book. We will learn however, that this is not the main event. This is not the central core issue or theme; however, it certainly grabs your attention. The Hebrew word used is correctly translated by the NIV, it's not specific, it doesn't say whale. Nowhere in the Hebrew text does it say, Jonah was swallowed by a whale, just a big fish, a great fish. If we had to speculate, it could have been a sperm whale. We don't know for sure, but it has caused a lot of controversy, namely from people who don't think it happened.

The reason is that fish don't swallow people whole. Even if one did you couldn't live inside of it for three days. So, the thinking is that this could not have happened, therefore, it's not historical and at best it's literary fiction good for spiritual insight but it's not history. I don't think so! As we talked about last week, the book is written as history. That is clearly the author's intent, it bears every sign of a historical work. If you were going to write a literary tale, you would take this fish story and you would run with it. Jonah almost mentions it in passing, he was swallowed by a fish and then he moves right on.

Now as believers we would say that's easy. It was a God thing. It's a miracle. The very definition of a miracle is the suspension of natural laws and the intervention of supernatural law. So, it's no big deal. We don't have to lose hair and sleep over. We don't have to worry about how this could have happened. You don't have to find a natural explanation for Jonah and the fish. It was a miracle!

God intervened supernaturally into this particular situation. If you believe in an all-powerful God capable of miracles, then this is not actually that big of a deal. Take note of the words of G. Campbell-Morgan. **"If you focus on the great fish, you will miss the great God".**

So, let's move on to what's significant and it's two-fold. First that God provided the fish for Jonah. Second that Jonah was inside the fish for three days and three nights. Here's why that is significant. That a fish was provided shows once again that God is in charge. God's hand is

on his life. He’s a God who cares. He is a God who can and will intervene. He will not let you go, he will do whatever it takes. He doesn’t always do it according to our plans or preferences but make no mistake God is alive, active and involved in the world today!

He knows everything going on in your life. He’s far more intimately connected with you than you could ever imagine. The bible says, “God provided the fish for Jonah”. He rescued him when things were not going that well for Jonah. You may think that the fish swallowing him was a bad thing. That God was punishing Jonah. No, it was a rescue!

God was leading a search and rescue operation for Jonah! The fish was a good thing. People tend to think that being swallowed by the fish was a punishment from God for running away from him. That’s not the case. In fact, it would be a horrible misreading of the text. The fish was the rescue. God was racing to Jonah’s side.

The second issue also worth noting, he was in the belly of the fish for three days and three nights. Here is a good example of where background information is so critical. That was not just seventy-two hours to the Hebrew mind. For the Hebrew mind, that phrase three days and three nights held enormous significance. It meant that Jonah went and knocked on the door of death. This was a phrase you would use to say that you had journeyed to Sheol, the place of the dead. Jonah went that close to having his whole life end. Three days and three nights in that predicament. I believe it was literally three days and three nights.

What happened next? ¹ From inside the fish Jonah prayed to the Lord his God. Jonah 2:1. He prayed. Do you remember in the first chapter how the captain of the boat tried to get Jonah to pray. At that time, Jonah didn’t want anything to do with God. Suddenly in the belly of the fish, God was a popular subject for him, Jonah turned quickly to God, and he prayed. It’s funny how that works in our life isn’t it?

Let me ask you a question? Are you more prone to go to God when things are good or when things are bad? When is it in your life that you pray with the greatest level of intensity and urgency? When are you most dependent on God? When are you most willing to Trust? When are you most willing to abandon all the things you are clinging to that stand between you and God? When are you most eager to listen to him? On the shore or in the fish?

One of the things that being stuck in the belly of the fish did for Jonah was get him back on track. You know what? Being inside of a fish will do that. God can use the belly of the fish, whatever it’s looking like for you, to make you look his way and draw you to his side.

God is not simply in the search and rescue business; he is in the soul making business. His rescue of you will always consider your spiritual formation. So, it was with Jonah. God will do what he must to get us to turn to him and that was his agenda with Jonah, and it worked.

Look at verse two of this prayer. ² **He 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. Jonah 2: 2.** This was a terrifying experience for Jonah, but God was in the process of

reaching out to Jonah and rescuing him. He knew that God was listening and answering him. Jonah knew God was doing something with him. Jonah had been drowning and the fish rescued him.

⁵ The engulfing waters threatened me, the deep surrounded me; seaweed was wrapped around my head. ⁶ To 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. Jonah 2:5-6 Jonah had been on a downward spiral for some time. Long before he hit the water. First, he ran away from God. Then he hid below decks on the ship. Then he descended into the depths of the sea. Further and further down and then he prayed. When he prayed God responded.

That’s another enormous lesson. I don’t know where you are at spiritually this morning. I don’t know what’s going on in your heart and life. I don’t know how far away you feel that you’ve dropped from God. I don’t know if you are running away from God right now? The good news is that no matter where you are or how far you’ve run, how far you’ve descended, God will listen to your prayer, and he will come running.

Well, there was more on Jonah’s prayer agenda. That was gratitude. There was a deep recognition of God’s sovereignty. **³ You 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. Jonah 2:3.** Catch the language, wasn’t it the sailors that threw Jonah into the sea. Here Jonah says God did it. He says the waves and breakers that swept over him, they were God’s waves and breakers. You see the enormous insight that Jonah is gaining. Everything that is happening in my life, has somehow got God’s hand behind it. Jonah has hope for his future.

⁴ I said, ‘I have been banished from your sight, yet I will look again toward your holy temple.’ Jonah 2:4. Jonah had hope for a renewed relationship with God. He could see that connecting thread to God. He had hope for continued living and hope for restoration. That was not all that Jonah was discovering. He was beginning to learn something about the heart and mission of God, that God had called him on, to begin with. He was learning something about grace.

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. Jonah 2: 7-8. It was this Grace that Jonah was tasting right now! Jonah never stopped believing about God or thinking about God. He just stopped drinking from Grace and being in fellowship with God. He stopped being obedient.

So, what does this generate in Jonah. A personal growth moment? No. Something more. **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.’” Jonah 2:9.** You see what happens to Jonah. Firstly, he will burst out in praise to his God and worship the Lord God almighty that has delivered him. Have you ever been touched by God in such a way that you just want to cry out in praise? You don’t even have the words for it.

Secondly, Jonah also felt compelled to make a sacrifice, which is one of the things that is so common in the Old Testament. When you were particularly grateful to God for something, you would do what was considered a thanksgiving offering. It was very common. It was a huge Old Testament custom, and Jonah says I’m going to make a sacrifice. Jonah was thankful to God not just for rescuing him. Although Jonah knows God has saved him, he still wants to give a thanksgiving offering, for who God is.

Then thirdly, he says, I will make good on my vow, I will go to Nineveh. I will do what you asked me to do, no more running. Did you notice suddenly at the end of this verse it hits him? “Salvation comes from the Lord”. This is the God who saves. I don’t think Jonah had got that God really wanted to save Nineveh. He certainly knew that God had saved him.

Those are the characteristics that Jonah demonstrates, and it took God’s intervention in his life, Jonah’s experience in the storm and his days inside a great fish to rediscover the wonders of God’s love for the lost. When he says in verse 9, “**Salvation comes from the Lord**”, he wasn’t learning anything new, he was rediscovering the heart, truth and wonder of the gospel.

Finally, what happened? I’m afraid it’s not very glamorous. ¹⁰ **And the Lord commanded the fish, and it vomited Jonah onto dry land. Jonah 2:10.** That’s exactly what happened. The Hebrew phrase is very graphic. It’s not used that often in the Old Testament. It’s used to portray something repulsive and vulgar. It’s kind of a fitting end to this chapter, isn’t it?

Jonah received Grace but don’t for one minute think that Jonah’s actions were being condoned by God. Part of Jonah’s spiritual life was repulsive to God and that part was vomited onto land, to mark a new beginning in his life.