

Jonah 2

“Tapped out”

Greeting/Introduction:

Growing up I loved to wrestle. As a young child I can remember wrestling certain members of my family: my dad, my uncle, my cousin. For those of you who may not be familiar with what wrestling is you need to know that it is not like Boxing or UFC or even the very “realistic” WWE. There is no punching or kicking involved. There is not using chairs, breaking tables, or jumping off the high ropes like Ric Flair. The way Google defines wrestling is that it is, “A combat sport involving grappling-type techniques such as clinch fighting, throws and takedowns, joint locks, pins and other grappling holds.”¹ The purpose of wrestling is for each wrestler to do their best to pin their opponent and keep them there. You can lose the match by being pinned to the mat or put in an unbreakable hold. There is a third way to win the match called “tapping out.” Tapping out is probably the most satisfying way to win and it is the most humiliating way to lose. Tapping out according to one source “is a method for both wrestlers to indicate that they are forfeiting the match due to the pain caused by the submission hold they are currently in and their belief that escape from the hold is impossible.”² I believe today in Jonah 2 that Jonah has essentially tapped out. If you remember from last week God came to Jonah commanding him to go to Nineveh and call out against them. At this moment the wrestling match between Jonah and God had begun and it wasn’t close. Jonah hates the people of Nineveh and he has no cares to see them saved. So instead of submitting to God’s calling he left on a boat to Tarshish which was 1400 to 2000 miles in the opposite direction. But God would not be denied. He sent a great storm that endangers the sailors on the boat and though they exhausted all their options the only one that would ease the storm is if they threw Jonah overboard; which they did. At the conclusion of chapter 1 it says, “The LORD appointed a great fish to swallow up Jonah.” At this point Jonah is stuck, he cannot escape, he is in an impossible hold, he is— in lack of a better word, pinned. And what does Jonah do? He taps out. He forfeits. He realizes he is outmatched and instead of turning from the LORD and running he is now turning to the LORD in prayer. From Jonah’s prayer we can gather three observations from the text. (1) Prayer draws Jonah out of distress. (2) Prayer draws Jonah out of sudden death. (3) Prayer draws Jonah out of the deep.

(Read Passage/Pray)

1. Prayer draws Jonah out of distress. (v.1-4)

In chapter 1 Jonah was a poor example to follow as he ran from the LORD. However, in chapter 2 Jonah is no longer running from God but now he is running to God in prayer. From these first few verses you can tell that Jonah was well versed and committed to knowing the scriptures. Here he is in the belly of a fish no bible to read and no one to keep him company. Where does he find rest? In the scriptures! In the first four verses of this passage Jonah quotes three different

¹ <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wrestling>

² <https://www.quora.com/What-does-it-mean-to-tap-out-in-wrestling>

Psalms in his prayer (Psalm 18:6, Psalm 42:7, Psalm 31:22). Through this prayer of distress four observations in v.1-4 are made.

A. Jonah's distress revealed God's response (v.2)

Verse 2 tells us that God responded to Jonah by listening and answering His call of distress. Think about how comforting that would be to Jonah. As Jonah sat in the belly of the fish you must realize he is all alone. He cannot see because he has no light. He cannot hear the rumblings of crowds and people because he is in the depths of the ocean. He has no messenger pigeons or cell phone to call his mom or dad. He is all alone and the only One he can turn to in this moment is the very One he spent all of chapter 1 rebelling against. Yet, knowing his rebellion and failure he offers up a prayer to the LORD and verse two says that the LORD heard Him—and the LORD answered Him. Let us not forget in our greatest hours of need we have a God who listens to us even after we have gone astray from His will. God is patient. God is loving. And he responds to our prayers by listening and answering us in our distress.

B. Jonah's distress revealed God's sovereignty (v.3)

If it were not for the distress of Jonah we may never get to see this aspect of the story. In chapter 1:12 Jonah "Pick me up and hurl me into the sea; then the sea will quiet down." And verse 15 says, "So they picked up Jonah and hurled him into the sea and the sea ceased from its raging." But here in chapter 2:3 Jonah admits that it was God who threw him overboard. In last week's sermon Andrew made a point to show the sovereignty of God through His works in nature and this week, Jonah unfolds yet another truth about God's sovereignty and that is he ordains all things to work according to His will. It may have been Jonah who told the sailors to cast him overboard and the sailors may have actively done it but God orchestrated it all according to the purpose of His will. Charles Spurgeon put it this way,

"All things are ordained of God and are settled by Him, according to His wise and holy predestination. Whatever happens here happens not by chance, but according to the counsel of the Most High! The acts and deeds of men below, though left wholly to their own wills, are the counterpart of that which is written in the purpose of heaven."³

Now rather than begin to unpack such a weighty thought let me give you the perspective of God's sovereignty and its need today: God's rule and control is needed because we are much like Jonah. We are fearful. We are rebellious. And We are prideful. Left to our own devices God's mission could not, nor would it move forward. However, in his kindness and grace he has invited us to be a part of His mission to save sinners. Ephesians 2:10 tells us that, "We are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them." In other words, God has an intended purpose for you in reaching the lost and he has aligned the good works before us

³ <https://www.goodreads.com/work/quotes/26858003-spurgeon-gems?page=2>

and it is our privilege to walk in obedience to that end. Let me then encourage you: if God is calling you to go do not ignore it. Do not run from it. Walk with confidence trusting that the LORD has set you up with good works to walk in.

C. Jonah's distress revealed God's location (v.4a)

The first part of verse 4 Jonah's prayer reveals God's locations. Jonah has been driven away from the sight of the LORD. This is ironic in some sense because Jonah was the one who first attempted to remove himself from the presence of the LORD. God granted that desire to Jonah by temporarily removing Jonah from His sights.

When I was a child I had a tendency to get away from my mom in the store. My goal was to slowly walk away while my mom was paying attention to items on a shelf. If I was able to make it through the aisle without her seeing me; I would then follow her from a distance hiding every time she would look in my direction. I never lost sight of her. But understand, it was not my mother's will for me to hide from her or run away. I chose to run away and hide because I was bored and frankly, I didn't want to be there. Like any mother, my mom was not happy, especially when she caught me.

Once we left the store and went home my mother's instructions were firm and understood. "Go to your room! Don't come out until I say." Now the roles are reversed. Instead of me separating myself from my mom she has separated herself from me until she allows me out of the room to be with her again.

This is exactly what we see happening to Jonah now. Just like I ran away from my mom in the store against her will, Jonah ran away from God against His will. Now, just as I was expelled to my room from my mother's sight so to God expelled Jonah from His. In other words Jonah has been cast out from the sight of the LORD.

D. God's revelation revealed Jonah's confidence (v.4b)

Nonetheless, in the midst of his distress and prayer we see a confidence in Jonah that we have not seen up to this point. In chapter 1 we see Jonah putting his confidence in himself as he ran from the LORD but now his tone has changed. Now Jonah's confidence is found, not out of the presence of the LORD, but in the presence of the LORD. At the end of v.4 he says, "Yet I shall again look upon your holy temple." That is to say that Jonah is confident that he will be in the presence of the LORD once again. He trusts that God would rescue him.

Application:

I think these first four verses reveal two points of application to us:

First, we ought to turn to the LORD and His will before we are distressed. By the time Jonah turned to God he was already committing sin. In fact, it was his sin that caused him to have distress to begin with. A better example to follow would be the prophet Isaiah. As we read last

week Jonah said, “No!” to God sending him to Nineveh and now, because of his disobedience he finds himself in distress. However, in Isaiah 6 the prophet Isaiah received a similar task when God said, “Whom shall I send, and who shall go for us?” And Isaiah responded saying, “Here I am! Send me.” May it be said of you and me that we have a heart like Isaiah. We can have this heart by being obedient to the places God might be sending us. As believers God has sent us all out (according to Matt.28) to go and make disciples by intentionally sharing with lost people the good news of Jesus Christ. That calling is explicit to ALL believers. Therefore, if you are in Christ then you have been called as Jonah was called to go and be a disciple maker.

Where is God sending you?

- Your neighbors?
- Your campus?
- Delta State?
- Your work?

Is he sending you to...

- New Orleans in May?
- Zoe ministries in June?

Its possible he is sending you...

- To permanently move to a place in desperate need of knowing Christ.

Secondly, if you find yourself distressed because you have ignored God’s will and are currently running from your calling to make disciples, then please follow the example of Jonah in chapter 2 and turn back to the LORD. Call out to him in prayer. Don’t believe that your way is best. Believe that God’s will is good and His interest for you are pure. Turn away from putting confidence in your ability to out run God and place all the confidence you have into knowing and trusting God’s will for your life.

2. Prayer draws Jonah out of sudden death. (v.5-7)

If you remember from last week it seemed as if Jonah wanted to die. He thought if he could not out run God then he would just end his life by being thrown overboard. Ironically the same guy who desired to be dead in the first chapter has called out to the LORD for life in the second chapter revealing that he did not actually want to die. In verses 5-7 Jonah is describing this near death experience.

I can remember about 13 or so years ago we went on a family vacation to the Spring River. My brother and I were out in front of the rest of the family so we pulled off on a bank to wait for everyone to catch up. The water was pretty calm leading up to the bank but just on the other side the water current picked up enough to be worried if you were to fall in. In our waiting for the family to round the corner I had gotten out to stand up for a moment before finishing the rest of the trip. Soon after I got out my oldest brother Forrest arrived with our little sister and they joined us on the bank. As I walked over to greet them the rocks of the bank fell out from under me and the current pulled me away. I panicked as I began to drift away from my family. I tried to swim back towards them but the water was too strong. I can remember in my mind giving up

because of fatigue and hopelessness. Then I see my brothers jump in after me and out of the corner of my eye a paddle was extended to me. My brother gave me a lifejacket and the couple canoeing pulled us over to an area where we could stand. I can tell you on that day I thought I was going to die and if it weren't for my brothers and these good Samaritans I just might have.

Well, here Jonah is describing his near death experience as well. The water closed over him, the deep surrounds him. Weeds are wrapped around him and you get this picture that Jonah is grasping for something to save him but the waters strengths keep pulling him further and further away from the surface. Simultaneously it leads him closer and closer to death. But instead what we learn is that Jonah's near death experience revealed God's power to give life.

A. Jonah's near death revealed God's power to give life (v.6)

In v.6 Jonah's prayer says, "Yet you brought up my life from the pit..." Some people take this verse along with the reference to Sheol in v.2 to say that Jonah had actually died and God brought him back to life after the fish spit him out on the land. However, I am not certain that interpretation is true. I do believe that Jonah was still alive because in verse 7 the text says his life was fainting away. But what I find most interesting in these two verses is what it teaches us about God. In chapter 1 God uses his sovereignty over creation to discipline Jonah in the storm. Now in chapter 2 God uses creation to show mercy to Jonah in that as Jonah was fainting away into death. God saved him by sending a giant fish to swallow him whole.

A few years ago a group of students and I went to a Conference called CrossCon. While we were there a missionary located 50 miles from where Nineveh would be today preached out of the book of Jonah. I remember him saying that the book of Jonah could be marked with the theme of God's Sovereignty. From the first chapter to the last we see God doing impossible things with creation. In chapter 1 He controls the weather and he controls the fish. In chapter 3 he softens the heart of a wicked nation and saves them. In chapter 4 he grows a tree over night and causes it to wither the next day and here, in chapter 2, he sustains and provides Jonah with life. If Jonah doesn't teach you anything else allow it to teach you this: God is in control. And he uses these impossible circumstances to draw people to Himself. His end goal is to draw Nineveh to Himself but before He does, God sets His eyes on drawing Jonah near to Himself.

B. Jonah's near death brought him near to God (v.7)

In Jonah's greatest time of need he remembered the LORD. He remembers Yahweh. He remembers that Yahweh delivered Noah and His family from the wrath brought by the flood. He remembers how Yahweh delivered Israel from the hands of Pharaoh. He remembers how Yahweh delivered them out of the wilderness into the promise land. He remembers that God delivered Israel while still under the evil reign of King Jeroboam, a deliverance he himself witnessed in 2 Kings 14. So now, in his hour of need Jonah remembers that Yahweh delivers. So he calls out to the LORD, Yahweh; and according to Jonah the LORD heard and the LORD delivered. It says, "My prayer came to you, into your holy temple." That is to say that Jonah's prayers entered into the presence of the LORD.

Isn't it nice to be heard? Isn't it nice to know that in your hour of need the God of the universe lends his ear to you and listens. Isn't it nice that he delivers? Despite Jonah's sin and rebellion God heard him and God rescued him. May we never forget that God hears us and he rescues us in our need as well.

3. Prayer draws Jonah out of the deep. (v.8-10)

A. Jonah revealed his hope (v.8-9)

At the conclusion of Jonah's prayer he makes a comment regarding those who have no hope. He says, "Those who pay regard to vain idols forsake their hope of steadfast love." Jonah says this like he is talking about other people. But we know from chapter 1 that Jonah is really referring to himself. He forsook the steadfast love of God when he didn't go to Nineveh. He forsook the steadfast love of God when he attempted to run away to Tarshish. He forsook the steadfast love of God by putting others lives in danger and thinking only of himself. He forsook the steadfast love of God when he tried to end his life in the sea. Jonah here is admitting that he is the one who payed regard to vain idols and consequently what he is admitting is that he is the vain idol. Jonah cared about himself, he believed in himself, and trusted in his abilities to escape the current calling on his life. Jonah failed and he finds himself guilty of running from the steadfast love of God.

However, what we learn in this conclusion is that Jonah is realigning himself in the will of God and hoping once again in the steadfast love of the LORD. In v.8 he admits his hope was misdirected and in vain but in v.9 he reveals through his actions that His hope is now found in the LORD again.

B. Jonah revealed his thanksgiving (v.9)

"But I with a voice of thanksgiving will sacrifice to you; what I have vowed I will pay. Salvation belongs to the LORD!" The mercy of the LORD is great is it not? Here Jonah is stuck in the belly of a fish expressing thankfulness because of God's mercy towards him. Jonah abandoned God's will yet God pursued him. God could have killed him with the storm. He could have allowed him to die in the sea. He could have commanded the fish to end Jonah's life and Jonah would have deserved it because of his rebellion. Though Jonah forsook the steadfast love of God; God did not forsake his steadfast love for Jonah. Rather than Jonah receiving the just hand of the LORD he receives his mercy. Psalm 103:8 says, "God is merciful and gracious, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love." Jonah in the belly of the fish has experienced the mercy and grace of the LORD. He has been shown God's patience and he has witnessed that God's love is steadfast. Notice the order in verse 9:

Following the voice of thanksgiving is a sacrifice, a promise, and a proclamation. For the first time in this prayer we get the sense that Jonah has found himself in the same position as the sailors: offering sacrifices and making vows.⁴

⁴ John McArthur Study Bible: John's Notes on v.9 Study Bible App

In those days it was custom for an Israelite to sacrifice an animal at the alter in the temple after sinning against God. Jonah would have to take an animal from a flock and he would take it before God to be sacrificed. The animal would need to be perfect meaning there is no blemishes or defaults on the animal. The sacrifice was not simply giving the animal to God but the animal had to lay down its life because of the sins of Jonah.

After that sacrifice is made Jonah promises to fulfill a vow he made with the LORD. Though we are not told directly, I believe that this vow is to go to Nineveh after he makes the sacrifice to God. I get this idea from Jonah 3:1-3a, “Then the word of the LORD came to Jonah the second time, saying, ‘Arise, go to Nineveh, that great city, and call out against it the message that I tell you. So Jonah arose and went to Nineveh, according to the word of the LORD...”

Isn't this how repentance works? Jonah here displays a 180 turnaround from what we see in chapter 1. He turns from Jonah's will, Jonah's way, and Jonah's sin. And he turns to God's will, God's way, and God's mercy. In chapter 2 Jonah is in the early stages of his repentance. The first step of repentance is to admit sin, declare that you will turn away from it, and then walk in obedience to the LORD (which Jonah will do in chapter 3).

After he declares he will sacrifice and pay the vow he then proclaims that Salvation belongs to the LORD. This is really an admission of God's sovereign hand on salvation. Jonah did nothing to save himself but was actually the cause of his near death experience. God being in control brought Jonah out from his physical death to life. Then he resurrects Jonah from the belly of the fish on to dry ground so that Jonah, filled with thanksgiving, would deliver a message of repentance to a lost and wicked Nineveh.

C. God revealed His heart (v.10)

Connecting to Christ: The Resurrection

At the conclusion of the prayer we now get to see God's heart revealed. After coming to the end of Jonah's prayer God commands the fish to spit Jonah out onto dry land. From the storm, to the sea, to the belly of a fish, now to dry land. You may be wondering how in the world is Jonah still alive? How could anyone survive this and the answer is this: The same power that brought the storm, sent the fish, and commanded the fish to spit Jonah out. That is the same power to preserve and sustain Jonah's life in the fish. When we say God is omnipotent we really mean that all power belongs to Him. Despite all of Jonah's failures and sin God chose to resurrect him from the depths of the ocean to go and preach the message of repentance to a great and wicked nation in Nineveh. This reveals God's heart for the nations. 2 Peter 3:9 says, 9 The Lord is not slow to fulfill his promise as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, not wishing that any should perish, but that all should reach repentance. God preserved Jonah because God planned to use Jonah as a means to bring a wicked nation like Nineveh to repentance.

Church let me give you some good news. A better Jonah has arrived and His name is Jesus. Matthew 12:38-41 says,

38 Then some of the scribes and Pharisees answered him, saying, “Teacher, we wish to see a sign from you.” 39 But he answered them, “An evil and adulterous generation seeks for a sign, but no sign will be given to it except the sign of the prophet Jonah. 40 For just as Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of the great fish, so will the Son of Man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth. 41 The men of Nineveh will rise up at the judgment with this generation and condemn it, for they repented at the preaching of Jonah, and behold, something greater than Jonah is here.

Here is what we see: Jonah ran away from the mission of God. Jesus ran to it. Jonah was engulfed in the belly of a fish for 3 days and 3 nights. Jesus was killed and buried for 3 days and 3 nights. Jonah was resurrected from the depths of the sea. Jesus was resurrected from the dead. Jonah left the dry land and preached a message of repentance to a wicked nation and they repented. Jesus resurrected and gave us His Spirit and now the same message goes to every tribe, tongue, and nation and Christ is with us. What we see in Christ is that he has fulfilled by Himself what Jonah could not fulfill apart from God. What we know is this: the resurrection of Jonah leads to a nation hearing the words from a prophet and repenting from their sins. What we know about Jesus is that His resurrection opens up the door to salvation for anyone who would repent and believe in Him for salvation. Jonah’s resurrection was for the purpose of one nation hearing the good news. Jesus’ resurrection is for the purpose of every nation hearing the good news. Yes, a greater than Jonah is here!

Brothers and sisters, when Jesus said these things to the Pharisees and scribes he was making a point that they had become like Nineveh. They were the wicked nation in need of repentance; and Christ, the greater than Jonah stood before them with a message of repentance. Unlike the Ninevites we do not see the Pharisees and scribes repent. Here they stood face to face with the God of the universe, Jesus Christ. Church the heart of God revealed in Jonah 2 is that he desires to see people who are far from Him because of sin be saved. His desire is to use people like Jonah—people like you—to go and share the message of salvation.

If you have turned your back on the mission of making disciples or you have not realized this is your calling from God then I want to invite you to go to the LORD with repentance and a voice of thanksgiving. Unlike Jonah you won’t get swallowed by a fish... Your sins have been paid for by Christ now therefore you can go walk freely in obedience sharing the good news of salvation with those in your every day rhythms of life or those in other parts of the world. A great way to start this:

- (1) **We have to come to the realization that we live for Christ and not ourselves.** Galatians 2:20 “I have been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.”
- (2) **We must remember that our salvation as well as the salvation of the world belongs to our God.** Romans 1:16, “For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for

salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek.” God uses us as instruments to bring about the salvation in others.

(3) We must desire what God desires: For salvation to come to those who are lost in sin. 1

Timothy 2:4, “[It is God] who desires all people to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth.”

Unlike Jonah let's be people who put Christ first, remember that Christ is the one who saves, and that saving people is an act that belongs to the LORD. God has simply commanded us to share the message and he promises that he will take care of their heart. Let's us be a people who avoid the distress of Jonah by walking in obedience in the will of the LORD.

[Pray]