

Jonah 1:17-2:10

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 27 February 2011

Preacher: Chris Steward

[0 : 00] We're going to start reading in verse 17 of chapter 1 and go through all of chapter 2. In chapter 2, we have the prayer of Jonah from the belly of the big fish.

! We're not sure if it's a whale. All it says is a big fish. VeggieTales says it was a whale, but that's just VeggieTales. As we read through it, you will hear a man in desperation, a man who is saddened by his choice, and ultimately a man who is praying a prayer of repentance. Jonah is brought face to face with God's sovereignty. Jonah feels the weight of his sin. He rejoices in God's mercy. And he commits to do exactly what God had commanded him to do in the first place.

Going to Nineveh. Now these observations can help us as we live out this Christian life. As we struggle to live and to do the will of God.

And as we, by God's grace, are perfected by his work in and through us. So as we study, let's pray that God would speak and teach us through this prayer of Jonah.

[1 : 14] Let me say this as we dig in. This prayer, as you can see from verse 1, it's a prayer that Jonah prays from the belly of the fish.

But Jonah does not acknowledge the fish. He does not talk about his situation. He talks about God saving him from his desperation, from being close to death.

But he doesn't talk about being in the fish. I think that's clear because when I first read this, I thought, well, the belly of Sheol. There's some language here that he's definitely talking about being in the fish.

But Jonah is praying this prayer, but none of it is talking about being in the fish. So as we go through this, kind of pay attention to that. And I hope that I'm clear enough that I can communicate that to you.

So the first thing that Jonah does in this prayer is that Jonah admits God's sovereignty. Verse 3, For you cast me into the deep, into the heart of the seas and the floods surrounding me.

[2 : 17] All your ways and your billows passed over me. If I was to pick one thing so far in the book of Jonah that has been clear, one thing I would say is the sovereignty of God through chapter 1 and chapter 2.

God's shown his sovereignty in a lot of things. Creation, the sea, the wind. Jamie and I have a rule in our relationship that we try, we've had it for quite some time, probably our whole entire life of knowing each other.

We do not use extreme statements. We do not use never or always. I'm usually guilty of this more than she is. The reason being is, once you say that statement, it just leads to arguing about something silly.

Because really, you can never say always or never. It's just kind of, it's not really a good idea in marriage anyway. Take it from me. But this morning, I have to say, I have to use an extreme statement.

You cannot never, ever, ever, never, never read Jonah and not see the sovereignty of God. You cannot read it and miss the sovereignty of God.

[3 : 35] It is evident in God hurling the wind at Jonah. It is evident at the sea obeying. It is evident at the ship considering to break apart.

And now, in chapter 2, at the end of chapter 1, verse 17, God, the Lord appoints a great fish to swallow Jonah.

In fact, one commentator said with that verse, verse 17 of chapter 1 and verse 10 of chapter 2, where God showing His sovereign rule over creation, over a big fish, he says that He wishes that those two verses were never written.

That the big fish was just done away with. Because these two verses are more questioned and argued than most any verse in Scripture.

Questioned and argued even to the point of dismissing the entire Bible. Because surely a man cannot live in the belly of a fish for three days and three nights.

[4 : 43] Now, I was tempted this week to come to you with scientific proof that a man can live in a big fish.

Something that has happened in history. And I was convicted not to do that because then I would just be using science to prove the Word of God instead of faith accepting that this is the Word of God and it's truth.

And we have to accept the fact that God appointed a great fish, whatever type of fish this is, and in doing so God exercised His sovereignty.

The sovereignty of God is something that Christians like to say. We in church say it, yes, God is sovereign. We believe that. But I don't think we understand it completely.

Even if we say we understand it, I don't think we take it to the end result. For some of you, the sovereignty of God, this topic is a treasure to you.

[5 : 46] You love it. You get excited inside thinking about God being ruler of all. For others of you, it might just be like pennies. They have value.

It's important. But if you see it on the sidewalk, you may or may not pick it up. But I want all of us to leave here this morning with the doctrine of God's sovereignty to be treasures for all of us.

And so with that in mind, I would like to just take a few minutes and define what the sovereignty of God is and then unfold this prayer that Jonah is praying.

So what is the sovereignty of God? First Chronicles 29, verse 11 and 12 says, Yours, O Lord, is the greatness and the power and the glory and the victory and the majesty.

For all that is in the heavens and in the earth is yours. Yours is the kingdom, O Lord, and you are exalted as head above all. Both riches and honor come to you and you rule over all.

[7 : 00] In your hand are power and might. And in your hand it is to make great and give strength to all. Simply put, the sovereignty of God is God is God.

Simple. God is God. He is the most high. He is supreme. He is king of kings. He is lord of lords.

What that means is nothing compares to him.

Angels, demons, greatest presidents, world leaders, disciples, apostles, Lucifer, all are under his authority.

God and the rest. In his book, *The Sovereignty of God*, A.W. Pink says it this way, The sovereignty of God of Scripture is absolute, irresistible, and infinite.

When we say that God is sovereign, we affirm his right to govern the universe, which he has made for his own glory just as he pleases. We affirm that his right is the right of the potter over the clay, that he may mold that clay into whatsoever form he chooses, fashioning out of the same lump one vessel unto honor and another unto dishonor.

[8 : 22] We affirm that he is under no rule or law outside of his own will and nature, and that God is a law unto himself, and that he is under no obligation to give account for his matters to any.

This has to be understood. We have to understand that God is sovereign. Because if we don't, it's almost like the rabbit hole in *Alice in Wonderland*. Because once she fell into that rabbit hole, her world changed.

Her entire perspective changed. And she didn't stop until she reached the bottom, which ended up being an imaginary place. Now, if we don't believe the sovereignty of God, our perspectives change, and we don't end up until we reach the bottom, which is believing in nothing.

And nothing, at least, nothing objective, at the least. Meaning, unchangeable, nothing solid. A.W.

Pink also says, in a word, to deny the sovereignty of God is to enter upon a path which, if followed, to its logical terminus, is to arrive at blank atheism.

In the book of *Jonah*, as I've already mentioned, God shows His sovereignty over creation, but He also shows His sovereignty over His mercy, His grace, His salvation.

[9 : 56] Okay? If a judge shows mercy to a criminal, if the judge says, I'm going to let you go, no charges, you're free to roam, it is the judge's mercy that was given.

He is the author of that mercy. It was His mercy to give, and He chose to give it to the criminal. The same way for God.

God is the author of His mercy, and He is sovereign over that mercy. And He chooses to give mercy to whom He will give mercy. Romans 9.15, Exodus 33.19, I will have mercy on whom I have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I have compassion.

Hard truth. We as human beings do not have right to the mercy of God. We don't have right to that. Otherwise, it would not be mercy at all. It would be payment or wages earned. And the same is for grace. God is sovereign, which means He is sovereign over creation, sovereign over grace, over His mercy, and over His salvation.

[11 : 23] And in this story, we have God providing salvation, showing Jonah mercy by His sovereign hand. So, the sovereignty of God is important.

It's important to understand. It puts perspective for you and for me. Jonah's prayer in chapter 2 is a prayer of repentance.

Acknowledging the sovereignty of God is an important aspect of repentance. Jonah admits God's sovereignty.

I've read you verse 3. For you cast me into the deep, into the heart of the seas, and the floods surrounded me. All your ways and your billows passed over me. You cast me into the deep. Jonah's not saying that he's the one at fault. Jonah's acknowledging that my bad, almost. I'm the one who messed up.

[12 : 31] I was the one thrown overboard. However, you, God, allowed it, or permitted it, to happen, so that you can receive glory. All your ways and your billows passed over me.

He's admitting God's rule over His creation. It's as A.W. Pink, as the potter, rules the clay. Romans 9 reminds us of that.

The reason it's important to admit God's sovereignty is when we realize our place, when we see who God is, how great He is, how supreme He is, we're left in awe and shame of our inadequacies. I would say it's almost like a plumb line. Some people like to say that God is more like a plumb line. And my problem with that is we would try to line up with that plumb line.

And that's not really what the sovereignty of God is. And it's not up here because we don't look at it and see ourselves. I think it's more like a window.

[13 : 39] We look through a window and we see the goodness of God. We see God's greatness, His righteousness, His justice, His holiness. But looking back at us, covering up what we just saw is our, who we really are.

And we have to have that proper perspective. We have to be able to see who God is, but in reality, know who we are. Otherwise, why would we repent?

Historians have said that we look to history so that we don't make the same mistakes. Well, for us, we look to history so that we see what God has done and what He's doing and what He's going to do for you and for me.

And proper perspective is vital to a godly, repentant heart. So Jonah admits God's sovereignty. Second thing that Jonah does is he feels the weight of his sin.

Verse 2 and then verse 4 and verse 6. Verse 2 says, I called out to the Lord out of my distress and He answered me.

[14 : 54] Out of the belly of Sheol I cried and you heard my voice. Down to 6. Then I said, I am driven away from your sight yet I shall again look upon your holy temple.

The waters closed in over me to take my life. The deep surrounded me. Weeds were wrapped about my head and the roots of the mountains. I went down to the land whose bars closed upon me forever.

The author gives us a picture of a man in desperation. a man who felt like he had been eaten by death not by a big fish.

Out of the belly of Sheol I cried. Now when we see a word like belly and we know that he's been swallowed by a fish we automatically say well he's talking about the fish. What he's talking about is deep down the furthest you could go out of the belly of Sheol.

Sheol in the Bible most of the time refers to the realm of the dead or place of the dead. Those that are separated from God. For us this text has this meaning has two meanings for us.

[16 : 11] This word has two meanings. Jonah admits that he's separated from God which he had already admitted in chapter 1 I'm running from the presence of God. I am no longer in God's will.

And second it means that Jonah believed he was going to die. He had reached the point of despair and in his last moments or seconds he cried out to God and God showed mercy and heard him.

See we I think we have a low view of sin and a high view of ourselves. here Jonah after making his mistakes and being disobedient and coming to this point he now has a low view of himself and a high view of sin because of course he admits God's sovereign hand in this situation.

Now let me put it this way if you stole a pen or a notebook from the school bookstore we would all say that's that's not a really big deal just take it back or go pay for it three bucks or whatever it is it's really not that huge but it is a sin and sin is an offense against a holy infinite God so when we sin stealing a pack of gum candy bar a pencil a car this is a big jump we sin against his righteousness which then makes us guilty and deserving of hell see our perspective wants to say no big deal just take it back pay for it you know you slap on the wrist you stole a pencil who hasn't stolen from the workplace or whatever but to

God it's serious sin is way more sinister than we admit when we sin we are telling God that he does not deserve our praise and our respect we're saying to God you are not God I am God and this is important to me even if it's something as small as stealing a pack of gum or a pen and Jonah is face to face in desperation acknowledging the sin that he committed he sees it he has the weight of it pushing him to the bottom of the sea he says I went down in verse six I went down to the land whose bars closed upon me forever he was sinking further and further down he felt he was trapped like bars of a prison butterfly he was imprisoned by death now as a pastor and I know

[19 : 42] Nathan would agree and if you guys have a pastor's heart you would agree I don't want to see any of you in Jonah's spot I don't want to see anybody in Jonah's spot the point of desperation and then you finally cry out to God oh well God is sovereign God is ruler of all maybe I should acknowledge him the truth of the matter though is that sometimes for us it takes a situation like this or situations see I want and I know Nathan feels this way I want to be able to communicate things to you lay it out right in front of you you guys accept it we all accept it we all walk out of here changed redeemed people being sanctified being perfected and go on our merry!

way and everybody is victorious in the life of following Christ doesn't end up that way does it we tend to end up like Jonah and probably in fact I know this is why a book like Jonah is in the Bible not to say look what God can do with a big fish although that's important but to say that you're going to mess up that you're going to be in desperation but God is going to be merciful God is going to provide salvation for you and he's going to prove his goodness and prove his sovereignty and prove his mercy to you even in this repentant prayer of Jonah we see the depravity of man for Jonah waited till he had no hope he waited and then he cries out to

God this prayer is talking about him sinking in the water weeds coming around him you know not only does our does our situation around us our circumstances however hard they are make us make us feel the despair and hopelessness that comes with sin but also the reality of no longer being in God's plan no longer doing what God had commanded us or called us to do that causes desperation and hopelessness as well that's just evidence of God working though God showing himself to us even in this despair verse 4 says I am driven away from your sight yet

I shall again look upon your holy temple now our our sin no matter what it is pack of gum or fleeing to Tarshish separates that fellowship from God being driven away from God from his sight but the second part of that verse there is hope yet I shall again look upon your holy temple Jonah knew God was merciful and knew that he would be rescued on earth or after death we we must never ever ever I'll say an extreme statement we must never ever ever look on sin without serious consideration and weighty thought sin is serious stuff it breaks our fellowship with the heavenly father and

Jonah in this prayer we see evidence of that brings desperation and fear of death point number three we'll see the observation number three here Jonah admits God's sovereignty he forgot my point he feels the weight of his sin and Jonah rejoices in God's mercy verse six second part of verse six verse seven Jonah describes the situation sinking the waters closed in over me to take my life the deep surrounded me seaweed weeds were wrapped about my head at the roots of the mountains I'm sinking further and further down yet you God that yet you brought up my life from the pit oh

[25 : 04] Lord my God when my life was fainting away I remember the Lord and my prayer came to you and to your holy temple to God showed mercy on Jonah by providing a big fish to swallow him up to teach him and to take him in the proper direction direction that is that is less north and south and east and west but in line with what God wanted done and the message that he was to bring to Nineveh see this verse seven end of six verse seven is the turning point of the prayer Jonah who

was in despair describing his situation sinking has been shown mercy albeit miraculously by a big fish swallowing this guy up God reached down and grabbed

Jonah from death he's turned from gloom and from despair in this prayer to worshipping God singing his praises because he who once was dead is now alive he was certain he was certain to die he who was blind can now see God showed mercy to a man who ran from him in complete disobedience that is good news for you and for me that is great news for you and for me God reaching down to a person who was drowning in sin whose selfishness was wrapped around his head who was sinking deeper and deeper into sin and showing mercy to that person see we have evidence in the book of

Jonah that Jonah knew God was merciful he knew it this is in verse 2 of chapter 4 this is his reason why he didn't want to go to Nineveh in the first place oh Lord is not this what I said when I was yet in my country that is why I made haste to flee to Tarshish for I knew that you are a gracious God and merciful but I don't think Jonah really knew I don't think Jonah really got it until God showed Jonah mercy until Jonah was in despair and death did he get it that God is merciful guys you and me before Christ are dead we are drowning in our sin we get it or we have the ability to get it that God is merciful and Jonah gets it now and he rejoices in God's mercy so when we sing songs about mercy when we sing songs about God's great mercy and great salvation we should rejoice not just sing it because it's what we do in church because we've been shown this same mercy that Jonah was shown and what follows Jonah rejoicing in God's mercy is my last point Jonah follows God and commits to do what he had commanded him to do being the recipient of God's mercy doesn't just lead to worship although that's what we were created to do we were created to sing his praises to worship God but we know that worship isn't just an act of song or an act of something you do on Sunday morning but worship is a life worship is living out glorifying!

God in everything that we do! being the recipient of God's mercy doesn't just lead to worship but it also leads to obedience and worshipping God in that obedience so verse nine Jonah closing down his prayer but I with the voice of thanksgiving acknowledging what God had done will sacrifice to you what I have vowed I will pay Jonah commits to do what God commanded at the beginning of the book so what I have vowed I will pay is reference to what God commanded in the first place it's not it's not the vows that that the sailors made at the end of chapter one Jonah is making a vow to say

[30 : 20] God you commanded it I heard it clearly I went the other way I am going to do what you said in the first place I am going to be obedient to you because you have shown me great mercy God's mercy is shown by his actions towards us by saving us by providing a big fish by pulling us up out of the depths of sin by giving us daily pieces of mercy and grace but he also shows us mercy by allowing us to be part of what he is doing by inviting somebody like Jonah to be used by God to go to Nineveh he invites him he gave him a second chance and you and I are invited by God to join in what he is doing he we're we're shown mercy we're shown grace by

God not just in salvation but in life as we try to live this as we try to pursue God I want to close with this look at verse eight it seems to not fit in the text in the context of the rest of the prayer those who pay regard to vain idols forsake their hope of steadfast love it's it's most commentators say that Jonah is speaking to Israel as he's a prophet to Israel and right now Israel at this time is not a God fearing land they're idol worshippers!

and disobedient they have fallen away from being in the favor of the Lord so so how does this fit? Jonah has been shown God's mercy Jonah rejoices in God's mercy he worships he commits to do what God had commanded and then he kind of gets the word of the Lord revved up again Israel listen those who pay regard to vain idols forsake their hope of steadfast love those who are disobedient who follow themselves in their own desires because I didn't want to go to Nineveh I paid regard to vain idols forsake their hope of steadfast love I almost died!

But God showed me mercy most likely he's talking to Israel but guys he's talking to you and me as well Solomon described vanity as chasing smoke you can never grab it you can never get a hold of it and if you contain it you find out that it's worthless the value of it is nothing those who worship stuff other gods feelings things opinions knowledge those who pay regard to vain idols these things those who worship these things those who find their identity will forsake their hope of steadfast love see

[34 : 33] Jonah was shown this steadfast love God showed mercy to him and of course for you and for me the only way we obtain steadfast love is through Jesus Christ do you know what the

name of Jesus means you know what Jesus means means salvation belongs to the Lord verse nine but I with the voice of thanksgiving will sacrifice to you what I have vowed I will pay salvation belongs to the Lord Jesus is the big fish bigger fish better fish he is the way that God showed his ultimate mercy on us God is merciful and only Jesus Christ only Jesus Christ can save you from drowning we can try to help you but we can't do it only

Jesus Christ only he can revive you from your despair only he can take the weeds that are wrapped around your head and remove them Jesus is who you need he is God's mercy hand and he is worthy of your praise pray with me