

2 – Jonah 2:1–10, The Moment of Crisis

Happy MLK weekend everybody...

- As a church we are grateful for leaders in our community who fight for justice and mercy...
- We know that we can't, as a church, just be happy with what's going on in here and turn a deaf ear to what is going on out there.
- Like I've often told you: 39 of 40 miracles. Our vision is to see you empowered to do the work of God out there.
- We've identified 5 areas: HOPUD. Those are not exclusive, just to point out to you that this is where we want to be involved. We want all of our small groups to be involved in one.
- God came to us when we were the outcast; those of us who have experienced that should lead the way in fighting for the outcast now.
- That's in part what this series is about.

Before I get into that, I want to make sure you know about one more thing. This Tuesday we are starting a new thing called "Equip: Leadership Forums." A lot of you have asked, "Is this for me?" So I want to tell you a little more about it.

- We are committed not just to building this audience but building you as leaders.

- So at this forum I'm going to take some topic and develop it for you: this month it is "how to determine your calling;" in the future we'll also be dealing with things like "a Christian response to homosexuality," "how to trust the Bible;" we'll have electives like "Getting a better grasp on the OT," "Calvinism," things like that.
- During the second hour there is a chance for those of you in specific ministries (small groups; counseling, etc) to meet with your leaders to talk about specific ministry skills you can develop, as well as various electives we'll be offering during various seasons.
- So, who should come?
 - Students, young professionals, wondering how to know if God is calling you into ministry
 - Middle-aged men and women wondering how to leverage this next part of their lives, in a maximum way, for the Kingdom of God
 - Businesspeople who are wondering how better to lead in their workplace
 - Leaders simply wanting to understand this idea better, whether it's for themselves or to explain it to others
 - You say, "I'm not in leadership at the Summit. I don't where I'd go the 2nd hour." You don't need to be; we'll have lots of options for you (during that second hour), and if none of them sound appealing to you, you can go home. All of our small group leaders are

meeting in the 2nd hour—that might be something you can check out and jump into.

Open your Bible again to the book of **Jonah**. (Again, Jonah is in with all those books that sound like Star Wars' characters names. I thought that joke was funny; I wanted to use it again).

I grew up in a church that gave invitations to come forward and pray. At the end of every sermon... organ would play, pastor stand down front... sometimes people would come; sometimes they wouldn't. We don't do that a lot here, for a few reasons:

- It tended to create crisis Christians rather than disciples: going through a hard time, I need to make a decision or a vow... what God wants is not a motion of your hands and feet; He wants the growth of your heart; discipleship is the long, gradual path of obedience.
- The other thing, it created this sense that God was only speaking to a handful of people. Four people came forward, so I guess that's whom God spoke to. I think the word of God should speak to EVERYBODY every week (great place to say Amen) so you should all leave with places it has confronted you.

We don't do it every week; but with all that said, we're going to do it today... because some of you are in crisis, like Jonah, and God is trying to get your attention, and you need to make a decision. So, at the end of the message today at

every campus there are going to be prayer counselors available. I know that not everyone God speaks to will need one; but some of you are in a place where you do, and it's time for you to do business with God.

[17] And the LORD appointed a great fish to swallow up Jonah.

- Jonah has been running in disobedience, and God appointed a great fish to swallow him. God sent a storm, the sailors panic, they don't know what to do... Jonah says, "I know..." He's thrown overboard; at just the moment... but God has a few more things planned.
- You say, "Well, why is God doing this?" I'll show you this in a minute, but God hasn't gotten Jonah's attention yet. He's still got work to do in his heart.
- This is not meanness, it's mercy.
- Like I told you last week, this was not God paying Jonah back for his sin; this was God bringing Jonah back from his sin.
- The same thing is happening to some of you; God is trying to get your attention.

[2:1] And Jonah was in the belly of the fish three days and three nights.

- To say the least, this would have been an awful experience.
 - Temperature would have been between 108 and 115 degrees; he couldn't move his arm; gastric juices that would have continually

- washed over him, bleaching his skin; I'm sure it smelled like an outhouse at the state fair.
- (Real quick: some of you are like, "Is this even possible?" No, not without God. The whole thing is a miracle, for sure. It was a miracle that the fish was there when Jonah got thrown overboard; it was a miracle that he stayed alive 3 days; it was a miracle he was vomited onto dry land.
 - I said this last week—if you believe that there is a God who created the world with a word and who was present in Jesus healing the sick and rising from the dead, then the idea of God doing special things at special times on earth an account like this one should not trouble you. This would not even make my "top 10 hardest things to believe in the Bible" list. If He wanted to, He could have furnished the fish with Cable TV and centralized vacuuming system.)

[2:1] Then Jonah prayed to the LORD his God from the belly of the fish,

- After Jonah had been there 3 days, he prayed. He laid there, stubborn and unmoving, for 3 days! This shows you the depth of Jonah's struggle. What God told Nineveh to do was really difficult for Jonah
 - I told you last week that God has asked Jonah to go preach His mercy to the Ninevites, and Jonah didn't want to... they were vicious

people! In their own literature, they boasted about their cruelty

- They boasted about the rape of little girls
- One of their leaders, Ashurnasirpal, recorded what when he conquered a rebellious city, he skinned several of the leaders alive, and then draped their skins all around the city and hung a bunch more around the city like flags to establish his power.¹
- One of Nineveh's primary targets was the Israelites! This is the Jew being asked to go to Berlin in 1942 to preach the love and forgiveness of God.
- Jonah is in a dilemma. One of two things would happen: They would reject his message, and kill him. Or, they would receive it and get mercy.
- Jonah, who was a prophet of God and upstanding in every other way, said "no." I told you a lot of people will obey God up to the place where it touches the core of who they are. And I'm talking to a lot of people here like that.
 - For example, some of you won't obey God in the area of romance. Every other area you'll obey God in, but that's the one area you insist on controlling because it's so important.

¹ In *Surprised by Grace*, Tullian Tchividjian, 93.

- Some of you won't obey God in the area of money; you won't be generous; you won't give up certain luxuries to invest in the mission of God; you won't tithe; because money is the thing that provides meaning and security in your life.
- Some of you won't release your kids to the will of God
- Some of you won't obey God about how much you work; you won't turn it off, even though it's harmful to your family; **if** God is leading your wife to stay home to be with the kids, you think "Well, we can't, because we need the security and pleasure that the almighty dollar provides."
- You won't take your hands off your life and say, "God, send me anywhere!"
- There's a lot of you like this: You obey God in all these areas up to a point it touches your very life and then you say, "No."

[3] For you cast me into the deep, into the heart of the seas, and the flood surrounded me; all your waves and your billows passed over me.

[4] Then I said, 'I am driven away from your sight;

- Question: Did Jonah feel like he'd been forgotten by God? Yes. Had he? No.

- Some of you feel like you've been forgotten by God. You feel like you are in the heart of the sea. The flood has surrounded you.
- But you haven't been forgotten by God. The broken-heart and the financial frustrations and the lost job and the failing health have been appointed by God in your life to bring you back.
- God is relentless in His pursuit of those He loves. He's brought you here.

The waters closed in over me to take my life; the deep surrounded me; weeds were wrapped about my head [6] at the roots of the mountains. I went down to the land whose bars closed upon me forever;

Jonah's repentance was built on a realization of 3 things. All repentance is ultimately built on these 3 things.

1. The futility of life with God

- Jonah was in a place of hopelessness. The weeds, like chains, were wrapping around his head; the bars, like a prison, were closing around him forever.
- That's what it takes for lots of people. A broken marriage. An accident. A bad health report. An addiction you can't shake. A prison sentence.
 - I've heard people criticize decisions in signs like this. Well, you know, you're in a jam, you feel crushed, so you turn to God. But that's not real. You just need a crutch to lean on in a difficult situation, and as soon as things

- return to normal, you'll go back to realizing you don't need God.
 - And a lot of times I agree. If you use God to get you out of a situation, then when the situation has changed, you don't need God.
 - However, a lot of times when life falls apart you simply see how hopeless life is apart from God. You see that noting you boast about you can really hold; you see that what you've built your whole life on can't sustain you.
 - And then, in that moment, you wake up, like out of a dream.
- Again, are you there?
 - For some of you, it may not be a dramatic experience, like this one. Maybe it is just a general deadness in your life; a dull, unhappiness.
 - There is very little joy in your life.
 - Maybe more and more of your life is given to numbing activities:
 - You watch too much TV... not because you're enraptured by the content, but you're captive to the escape it gives you.
 - You spend endless hours on the internet;
 - Escape into pornography.
 - Pleasure of too much food for alcohol.
- Maybe you are finding that certain temptations are starting to just control you. When your soul is starving, you are susceptible to pleasures, much the way that a starving person is susceptible to any kind of food.
- Maybe you're eaten up with envy: you look around at others, and they seem to have been given the things that you wanted. God, did you get the wrong address?
- ***These things are all smoke from a fire***
- Maybe you're older and you find yourself in kind of a growing sense of panic about what you're losing.
 - Talked to a guy this week who said, "You know, you always warn young people of what happens when you choose a path apart from God... With older people it's different. It's what to do when you see the things you've built your life unravel.
 - You've watched your parents age, and wonder what that process is going to be like for you. I heard someone say this week, "it's not dying I'm scared of, it's growing old."
 - You're seeing the thing you built, the company, the organization, be destroyed... and you want to hold on to it.

- You see friends pass away...
- And you're seeing the things you've established your whole life on won't last
- Whatever it is, repentance always begins in a note of despair; you get a glimpse of death. You're going to die and stand before the judgment of God; in that moment, all the accomplishments you achieved; all the praises you received; where you lived; how many friends you had; how good your marriage was, all of it meaningless if you stand condemned to hell. In that moment it all goes up before your eyes like a wisp of smoke.
- Whatever is going on in your life now is God trying to wake you up before that moment!

...yet you brought up my life from the pit, O LORD my God.

- You see, Jonah felt like there was no hope. But there was.
- God was at work. He hadn't put Jonah in a chamber of death; He'd put him in a temporary hospital for his soul.
- Some of you have felt like you're in a place of no hope. No, God is just beginning his greatest work in your life.

[7] When my life was fainting away, I remembered the LORD, and my prayer came to you, into your holy temple.

- Interesting to me. You know, Jonah is celebrating deliverance while he is still in the belly. "You

brought my life up from the pit." He won't be vomited out until vs. 10.

- You see, there is a greater deliverance than deliverance from circumstances. It is deliverance from sin.
- Better to be united with God even in the belly of a whale than on dry land without Him! The real pit is being anywhere apart from God.
- The way a friend of mine says it: "Jesus + Nothing = Everything"; "Everything - Jesus = Nothing"

[8] Those who pay regard to vain idols forfeit the grace that could be theirs.

- This the key verse in Jonah: 24 verses before it; 23 after it. Right in the middle.
- And the first question we have to ask is "who is he talking about?" You see, he uses two concepts in that verse...
 - Idolatry: which makes you think he's talking about the pagan sailors: idols. In chapter 1 they had out their little idols praying for deliverance.
 - But there is also that word "grace." In Hebrew "hesed." Covenant love. It was God's special love for His children, and Israel only thought about that in terms of themselves.
- So, you've got idolatry, which makes you think the pagan sailors, or the Ninevites; but you've also got "hesed" which makes you think Jonah is talking

about himself, since after all, he's the one praying for deliverance.

- Scholars say that in that verse, something remarkable just happened.
 1. Jonah has applied the sin of idolatry to all people, even to himself, as a prophet. Idolatry was the source of his own sin. He thought it would be better to disobey and hold on to the things that he loved than to obey and hold on to God. He valued what he loved—his life, his identity, his racial hatred, more than he valued God. And now he realizes that has kept him from the one great source of life and fulfillment and peace and joy.
 2. God has expressed a desire for covenant love for all nations, not just Israel (*which we'll deal with more next week*).

For now, write this down... Repentance comes (2) the emptiness of idols

- We've learned this before: all sin, ultimately, begins in idolatry. All of it.
- You may have trouble seeing it that way... I don't have any gold statues.
 - But an idol is simply something you love something more than God. Trust more than God. Crave more than God.
 - English word "worship" comes from "worth-ship": when something has such worth in your life that you couldn't imagine living

without it so you build your whole life in pursuit of it.

- Paul says, in Romans 1, that idolatry was behind the first sin in the Garden of Eden. You may have trouble seeing that. They wanted the tree more than God.
- What do you want more than God?
- One of the Hebrew words for worship, or, related to worship (*glory*): *Kabod*: weight. What do you give more weight than God?
- *"To whatever we look for any good thing and for refuge in every need, that is what is meant by 'god'... To whatever you give your heart and entrust your being, that, I say, is really your god."* **Martin Luther**²
- To what do you most look for "good things"?
 - What can you not live without?
 - What are you envious of that others have that you don't have?
 - What do you stay up late at night worrying about losing?
 - What are you bitter about having lost?
 - What is the one thing that you say, "Without that, life is not really even worth living"?
- **REFUGE**: Where do you go for refuge? What brings the greatest source of comfort to you? Where do you turn when life gets tough?

² Luther's *Large Catechism*.

- Friends, family, a bottle, go shopping, a boyfriend.
- These things are usually not in themselves bad things; they're good things we've made into ultimate things. Or, good things that have become *God* things.

You've given your heart to them. You've entrusted your being to them.

And the tragedy, Jonah says, is that when you do that, you forfeit the one thing that would give you everything you look for!

- Jeremiah 2:11-13
- In 4:2, Jonah will use a word for God that we translate as "compassionate." It's the Hebrew word "rehem," from the womb.
 - Like a parent feels about a hurting child. It's watching your child in the hospital or in pain, wishing there were something you could do for them...
 - It's a love you were created for; that you longed for first in your parents. For some of you, your sweetest memory was of your parents; others of you, it's your source of greatest disappointment.

What you loved in them, what you longed for in them, was ultimately found in God.

And when you turn to an idol, you forfeit the grace, the steadfast love, that could be yours.

Most of us have given our lives in pursuit of a god that has left us, or will leave us scared, bitter and unsatisfied. Scared: if we get it, we're terrified about losing it; if we miss out on it, we're bitter; and, when we do obtain it, we'll find it is not what our soul needed it to be.

- Forbes magazine

1 John 4:18: Perfect love casts out fear. God's love is perfect in that it is completely satisfying; accepting of us even in our flaws.

Why do you forsake that love? Why do you go on digging new wells? What are you looking for is not in romance

- The arms we sought in romance were His arms. Lonely, discontented, insecure single people become...
- It's not in an affair
- It's not in being at the top of your class. It's not in getting the highest paying job. It's not at the top of the corporate ladder. It's not in a new hobby. It's not in a drug or a fling with a secretary. It's in the love of God.
- Keller says there are 4 possible responses to disappointed idolatry
 - Blame the idol
 - Blame yourself
 - Blame the world
 - Turn to God: C. S. Lewis, "If I find in myself..."

[9] But I with the voice of thanksgiving will sacrifice to you; what I have vowed I will pay. "Salvation belongs to the LORD!"

Repentance comes from knowing **3. salvation belongs to the Lord**

- This is the message of the whole Bible.
- 3 kinds of people. Irreligious; religious; Christians. Irreligious people don't believe they need salvation. Religious believe salvation belongs to themselves. Gospel people understand salvation belongs to the Lord.
- What Christians for years have called grace: undeserved gift by an unobligated giver.
 - If you give a gift to a child, your child is rebellious and hateful but you still take care of them – they are an undeserving recipient, but you're still an obligated giver. On the other hand, if you got together and gave your small group leader a gift of appreciation just because you love them, that might be an unobligated gift, but they are a deserving recipient. It's when both are true – like when you have a neighbor who is just an absolute jerk...he's rude, he calls the cops on you, he dumps his leaves on your yard...but you take care of him when he's sick – that's an unobligated giver to an undeserving recipient

That experience creates a handful of things in your heart. 2 of which Jonah has; one which he does not.

- First two: **Humility and Confidence**
 - People usually have one or the other.
 - I have humility, because I know how badly I need salvation and am not confident;
 - Or, I'm confident before God because I believe I deserve it and that makes me proud.
 - The gospel is the only thing that gives you both. I have humility because I understand the depth of my need; I have confidence because I understand the depth of His undeserving love.
 - God getting you to a place where you can see that, and feel it, and understand it, can be a pretty painful process, by the way. It will feel like somebody is doing surgery on you and forgot the anesthesia. Jonah has them both because he now gets the gospel. He knows the depth of his need; he knows the depth of his undeserving love.
 - The gospel is the good news that you are simultaneously more wicked and more undeserving of God's love than you ever realized, but more in

possession of it than you ever hoped, because of God's steadfast love...

- The third thing that it is supposed to create in your heart, which you don't see in Jonah, is **passion**... (a love for God; grace and generosity toward others).

But Jonah doesn't get that. He's going to emerge from the belly of the fish fully surrendered to do God's will, but he still hates the Ninevites, and he is still bitter at God. He will obey, because He doesn't want to get sent back to the belly of the fish, but he's not going to be happy about it.

Which is supposed to give you a picture of most religious people. They know it's stupid to run from God; but they've never learned to love like God loves.

(If I could speak this way), there's kind of a Christianity 1.0 and 2.0.

- 1.0 is where you recognize the stupidity of idolatry and you surrender.
- 2.0 is where you recognize greatness of God's grace and that's where you really start to change!

There is a point where you surrender to God because you feel like you have to (most religious people have gotten that); then there's a point where you start to love like God loves. You start to do what God does because you desire what God desires.

God is just after obedience; he's after a whole new kind of obedience

Which is why you **have** to read the book of Jonah in 2 ways:

- One is what we call the existential reading: about you, right now. I am Jonah
- Jesus is Jonah.
 - Jonah was cast out into the sea... Jesus was... 3 days
 - Jonah 2: Do you know what this sounds like? Gethsemane. Jesus prayed just like this: He went down to the deep and had the weeds of sin wrap around his head. The bars of death closed around Him. He said, "My God, My God, why have you forsaken Him?"
 - That should move us to repentance. Because, you see, the truth is, I'll probably never really go through what Jonah went through, because Jesus went through it for me. Looking at that should produce repentance. Romans 2 says it is the "kindness of God" that leads us to repentance.
- Not bare-knuckled repentance, but heart change repentance.
- *Being put in the belly of a whale can coerce your obedience; seeing Jesus went into the really belly of the whale is what creates desire in your heart.*
- So, you should see yourself in Jonah and be warned; you should see Jesus in Jonah and worship.

I've often explained... the goal of every sermon is worship...

God is not just after obedience, He's after a whole new kind of obedience.

Conclusion:

So, 2 questions for you:

- Have you surrendered?
 - Has God brought you to this point?
 - Repentance comes from desperation; realizing the futility of idols; understanding that salvation belongs to the Lord.
 - Kevin L. Bible fell open to 1 John 2:15. How Bible got there? Don't remember bringing it. You're here on purpose.
 - Romans 3:23; 6:23.

Has your heart changed? Do you love God? Love Ninevites? Do you have passion for God and for others? That comes from plunging more deeply into the gospel, not of what you are to do for Him, but of what He's done for you.