

# **Jonah: Hide & Seek from God**

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As we study the book of Jonah, we see Jonah playing the most ridiculous game of hide and seek with God. I mean who plays hide and seek with God? You have to know that you are going to lose; you are not going to win. You can't run from the presence and mission of God and expect to win and for everything to be ok. This is what we find Jonah doing. Then, in second chapter, we find Jonah finally getting to the place where he decides no more running, no more hiding. The question is, what do you do when you get to that place where you realize hide and seek with God is not a good game? Fleeing God is not the best for my life. What do you do when you come to that place?

On Friday, I went into the Calloway County jail to visit a guy that I've been around for many years. He's a student. I've had a lot of contact with him and he's made some poor decisions in his life. He's made several big, poor decisions. Every time I have had to go in and have an intervention with him. Every time, the same conclusion was drawn. He knew he was on the wrong path and was not doing the right thing. He would conclude that he was going to fight this, to repent and do better. On Friday, as I go to the jail because another bad decision has been made, I kind of know what he's going to say. I pick up the phone, look through the glass, and he picks up the phone. I was shocked when he said, "Kory, He wins!" He pointed at my Bible and said, "God wins! I completely surrender!" It was this complete change from anything I've ever seen before in his life. Before, it was always, "I know I'm doing wrong, I'm going to try harder." This time, it was "I'm going to repent and stop trying. I'm going to trust completely. I've surrendered." That is exactly where we find Jonah in Jonah chapter 2. He's at the place where he finally sees that he cannot run any longer. He can't do it in his own power. He surrendered. When you find yourself losing in the game of hide and seek with God, what do you do? You surrender. You don't repent and try harder, you repent and trust completely.

## **The Mission**

So far we have seen Jonah, as the prophet of God, get called to go to Nineveh. He was to declare God's love to the nations. But Jonah didn't like that plan. To be honest, he didn't think the nations deserved God's love. Instead of going to Nineveh, he flees the presence and the mission of God. What we need to see is that Jonah is doing what Israel did. The story of Jonah really echoes this bigger story of Israel. If you remember, God called Israel to be a people. He called Abraham and told him that He would make a great nation through him, and in him all the nations of the earth would be blessed. The mission of Israel was to go to the world and tell them how much God loves them.

In Isaiah, we see this echoed. Their mission is to be a light to the nations. They were to let the Gentiles know who God is. Of course, we see Israel not liking that mission. Israel got to thinking that they deserve God's love and they didn't really care about their neighbor; they didn't care about the nations. We see Jonah, the picture of Israel here, doing exactly what Israel did. He doesn't care about the nations, he doesn't care about others. He thinks only he deserves God's love, so he runs from the presence and mission of God.

What we must see is this is really our story. We, in the same way, in and of ourselves, rebel and run from the presence and the mission of God. To be honest, we think we deserve his love, but our neighbor doesn't. Often, we flee the presence and the mission of God. I want us to see that when we get to that place and realize we can't do it anymore, we don't need to try harder. We need to repent and trust completely. What we will see from Jonah 2 is not that we need to muster up some more strength, what we need is to pass through death and to get a resurrection. It's only through a resurrection that we will live in the presence of God and live in the mission of God.

## **Scripture:**

### **Jonah 1:17**

*"And the LORD appointed a great fish to swallow up Jonah. And Jonah was in the belly of the fish three days and three nights."*

### **Jonah 2**

*"Then Jonah prayed to the LORD his God from the belly of the fish, saying,*

*"I called out to the LORD, out of my distress,  
and he answered me;*

*out of the belly of Sheol I cried,  
and you heard my voice.*

*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.*

*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  
at the roots of the mountains.*

*I went down to the land  
whose bars closed upon me forever;  
yet you brought up my life from the pit,  
O LORD my God.*

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

*Those who pay regard to vain idols  
forsake their hope of steadfast love.*

*But I with the voice of thanksgiving  
will sacrifice to you;  
what I have vowed I will pay.  
Salvation belongs to the LORD!"*  
*And the Lord spoke to the fish and it  
vomited Jonah out upon dry land."*

## **God's Pursuit**

The first thing I want you to see in the text is God's pursuit. Jonah is fleeing the presence of God and he's fleeing the mission of God. He's running away, and what does God do? He doesn't leave him to run, but instead He pursues after him. How does he pursue Jonah? The first thing he did was to pursue him in a storm. He caused a storm to come so that some men would throw Jonah overboard. They throw him overboard and Jonah assumes that this is the end of him; this is death. God has brought judgment upon his rebellion and he thinks that it's over for him. You can imagine Jonah as he's sinking in the sea, he knows this is over, he thinks he is dead. This is what he deserves because he's been running. Then, he sees this huge fish come. I mean it's bad if you're going to drown to death, but it's even worse if you get eaten by a fish in the process! You have to picture Jonah. He's thinking this is horrible, I've been running and here's the judgment. A storm comes, he gets thrown into the sea, and now he's fish food. He gets swallowed by a fish and assumes he's dead.

## **Discipline of Grace**

What we know is the very judgment of God on his life is actually God's grace at the same time on his life. Here we see a loving Father pursuing a wayward son. We see him bringing this discipline on his life, this judgment on his life. We can assume Jonah thinks God's got it out for him. He thinks I'm done, I'm dead; this is the end of my road. But it's actually God's salvation that is coming to Jonah in the form of judgment, in the form of discipline. The reason why God is pursuing Jonah in this way, in this discipline of grace, is because he wants to rescue Jonah.

God does the exact same thing for a lot of us who have been fleeing from His presence. For some of you, God is bringing a storm right now upon your life and you're interpreting that as God doesn't love me, He doesn't want what's best for me. For some of you, you are being swallowed whole by death. Your interpretation is that God doesn't love you. All the while, that discipline is actually His loving grace as a Father to bring you back to Him.

## **Illustration**

I remember when Crider was about 2 ½. We were leaving church one Sunday and Katie had Finley and I was responsible for Crider. As I leave, I'm talking to everyone, not really watching Crider that closely. I look up and I see the door opening and I see him running across the parking lot. So I immediately run out and I see a car coming very fast toward Crider. So, immediately, as a dad, I pursue him. I run as fast as I possibly can and I yell as loudly as I can, "STOP!!" At that moment, I grab him and yank him up and run him to the other side. I put him down and Crider looks at me and he bursts into tears. He's just weeping. He says, "Daddy, you scared me! Why did you do that?" I looked at his face and I said, "No, I saved you!" I let him in on what was really going on. What Crider saw in my pursuit was daddy doesn't love me, he's mean to me, daddy is yelling, daddy's grabbing and pulling me somewhere. In reality, daddy was loving him and rescuing him and saving him. That's exactly what God does here with Jonah.

It's God's love that is bringing this storm and bringing the fish upon Jonah's life. I wonder if some of you are where Jonah is. You've been fleeing God's presence, you've been fleeing his mission and you're wondering why your whole world is crumbling. You're wondering why my neighbor can get away with all kinds of stuff but every time I do it I get caught, I always fall; this doesn't work out for me. You're thinking God must not love me. It's because God does love you. He knows that you're never going to be satisfied while fleeing from His presence and His mission. He's going to bring the storm, he's going to bring the fish, and he's going to wreck your life so you get to the point where you are at the end of yourself. When you get to the end of yourself, you find God. This is loving discipline and judgment. And it's actually grace through judgment that God is bringing

upon Jonah's life. So, maybe for some of you, your dreams are falling apart, your world is falling apart. It's really God doing that. He doesn't want your dreams to come true. He wants you to lose your dreams and find His dreams. He is making your world not work out, because he doesn't want your world to work out. Your world is only here for a few years and it's gone. He wants you to turn to His kingdom and His mission for the world because it's so much grander. For some of you, you are interpreting all of the things around you as God doesn't love me. In reality, God is lovingly pursuing you.

## **Jonah's Surrender**

As we see God pursuing Jonah in a storm, and a fish, next we see Jonah's surrender. Jonah finally comes to the point where he absolutely surrendered to God. We see this prayer that Jonah prays to God. As you read the language, you get the feeling that Jonah is absolutely hopeless and the reason he is hopeless is because God has made him hopeless. Because his hopelessness is the only place he is going to find hope. God brings Jonah to the end of himself so he can finally turn and trust in God; the one he needed to trust in all along. In Jonah's mind, this fish represents death. He's in the belly of Sheol. Sheol is the land of the dead. He's done for; he's in God's judgment, the waves are pouring over him. He's cast out by the hand of God. Seaweed is wrapped around his neck. He's in this terrible situation and he knows it's over for him. Everything is done. The moment he realizes that he can't do anything is the moment he realizes that God, who is bringing this judgment, is the exact same God he needs to turn to for grace. It's in this moment that Jonah has this turning moment. Jonah says, "I was fleeing from your presence, yet I will again look upon your temple." It's this picture of repentance that Jonah was going in this direction away from the Lord and everything was going bad. Jonah was going down, down, down. He finally hits rock bottom; there's nowhere else to go. The path that he has explored has ended. He has nowhere else to turn. But he says yet, there is only one hope left and that is hope in God. He turns from his running and his pursuits and he turns to God. He says, I look upon your temple, I'm calling upon you, I'm crying out to you. He had gotten to the end of himself. The end of Jonah is where Jonah finds the One he needed all along, and that is to be in the presence

and the mission of God. At this point, Jonah finally surrenders. He finally hits rock bottom and he realizes there is no place to go but up.

I wonder if some of you are at this point. You're at rock bottom. You have been trying many things and they are all ending in the same direction; down, down, down, and you are at the very bottom. You have no hope. You think there is no one to go to, no one to help, you're at the end of your rope. It could be that God has put you there so that you would do the same thing that Jonah did. You need to take the white flag out and start waving it and surrender to God. You need to acknowledge that running from God's presence and mission doesn't work. You realize that you need to turn to the only hope, which is God, the only hope, which is the gospel. That's what you need.

## **Jonah's Rescue**

We see the amazing rescue of God in Jonah's surrender. We see that God rescues Jonah. God pursues Jonah, Jonah surrenders, and then God rescues Jonah. It's this amazing picture. I want to read what Jonah says, "I went down to the land whose bars closed upon me forever." He's down in death. He's in judgment. There's no way out. He is completely doomed and then he says, "Yet you brought up my life from the pit, Oh Lord my God. When my life was fainting away, I remembered the Lord. Salvation belongs to the Lord." Do you see this? It was at the moment that he realized he was absolutely done. He had nowhere else to go, yet when he turned to the Lord, something happened. Jonah said, you didn't let me stay in your judgment, you rescued me. I was in the pit because of my rebellion and my sin though you reached down and you brought me up out of the pit. We see this amazing rescue story of God! When Jonah turned back to the Lord, God turns his judgment to grace. The judgment turns into the rescue of God.

## **God's Grace**

What I want us to see is that we should be shocked that this happened to Jonah's life. Inside the fish, Jonah is getting exactly what he deserved. He deserves judgment and he deserves death. He's been rebelling against a holy and righteous God. He's exactly where he should be, in the wrath of God, in the judgment of God, and in death. Romans tells us that "the

wages of sin is death.” He sinned, he deserves to die. He is exactly where he should be. But Jonah says, “Yet you brought up my life from the pit.” This “yet” should shock us because Jonah gets what he doesn’t deserve. He deserves to die in the fish, but what he gets is vomited out on dry land. He gets what he doesn’t deserve. The reason he gets what he doesn’t deserve is because someone else took his place. Someone else took his punishment. The unfaithfulness of Jonah was replaced by the faithfulness of another.

I want us to see this story of Jonah and how it points to a greater story. It points to a greater event; the miracle of Jonah points to a greater miracle that we all desperately need. When Jesus was walking on this earth, his opposition was often the Pharisees. They didn’t like Jesus because Jesus liked people that they didn’t like. He liked the outcasts. He would go and minister to the sinners and the tax collectors and the prostitutes and those on the fringes of society. They didn’t like it. They didn’t think those people deserved God’s grace. Jesus was on mission for everyone and the Pharisees didn’t like it. They would interact with Jesus and would say that he was demon possessed. They said Jesus, show us a sign. Prove you are the Messiah. Show us some miracles. Jesus said that an evil and adulterous generation demands a sign and the only sign I’m going to give you is the sign of Jonah. Jesus takes these Pharisees back to this exact event that we just read about. Jesus said here’s your sign, here’s your miracle. Just as Jonah was in the belly of the fish three days and three nights, so must the son of man be in the heart of the earth three days and three nights. Jesus is taking them back to that miracle to show them the miracle that is about to happen on the cross.

Why was there a fish, why is it three days, why is this happening? Interacting with commentaries, they all want to tell why it’s possible for a man to survive in a fish’s belly. They would give historical examples of other men who survived in a fish’s belly. To me, they have missed the point. The point is not to say how it scientifically happened; it’s a miracle! God did this! People don’t usually survive being eaten by a fish. Jonah did and it’s a miracle. It’s the same God who spoke out words and created the world. That same God can produce a miracle that a man survives in a fish three days. It’s the same God who spoke to a dead body and raised it from the tomb. It’s a miracle and it’s pointing to a greater miracle. We



must see the connection to the Jonah event and the miracle of Christ and gospel. See, in the fish, we see a man getting exactly what he deserved. He's a rebellious sinner against God and he's getting the wrath and judgment of God. What we see in the tomb is another man getting exactly what he did not deserve. He never sinned, He never rebelled, yet He's sitting in the same judgment. In the fish, we see a rebellious Jonah running from the presence of God. In the tomb, we see another man, Jesus Christ, who never once turned from the presence of God. He perfectly fulfilled the will of God. He perfectly lived before the presence of God. He's getting what he doesn't deserve. In the fish, we see a man running from the mission of God to the nations, and in the tomb we see a body broken to fulfill the mission for the nations. You see, in the fish what we see is ourselves. We all forsook His presence. We all forsook His mission. We all should get what we deserve, but we didn't. We got grace because another man, Jesus Christ, who did live in His presence, who did fulfill His mission, took our place. He bore our punishment. He bore our sins. In the fish, we see ourselves. In the tomb, we see the only man in human history who did obey God. He's taking the place of every other human being who did not; the faithful one taking the place of the faithless. In the tomb, we see Jesus Christ taking God's judgment for us so that you and I and Jonah can walk through the same judgment, and instead of dying, we bypass death and we get a resurrection. That's the gospel. This is what this story of Jonah is ultimately pointing to. Here's a man in a fish who didn't get what he deserved. He should have died. The only basis he was able to cry out for forgiveness is because of another who is coming down that road and is going to take his place. The same is true for us. We all fail; we all do. We've all sinned and fallen short of His glory. None of us has completed His mission. There's been another who took our place so that we can be united with His death and we can also be united with His resurrection.

## **Jonah's Resurrection**

What we see at the end of this story is Jonah's resurrection. It's the amazing part where it says God steps into this fish, and instead of Jonah dying in the belly of the fish, God speaks to the fish and it vomits Jonah out onto dry land. Jonah doesn't get judgment because of his rebellion and sin, instead he gets resurrection. He gets new life. He gets a second

chance because of the gospel and because of another who took his place in the heart of the earth and defeated sin and death, and gave him and us a resurrection from the dead. Here we see the story of how people get back to God in the story of Jonah. We don't get back to God by trying harder and doing better. If you try in your flesh to fulfill the mission and live in His presence, you will fail. Jonah, the prophet of God failed and you will do the same. We don't need to try harder, we need to repent and trust completely in the gospel and in what Jesus did on the cross. It is my death and my judgment. And when Jesus walked out of the tomb, it is my resurrection.

Now, as a resurrected person in Christ, united with Him, it's me living in the presence of God in Him. It's me fulfilling the mission of God in Him. We can't do this apart from the gospel. We can't do this apart from Christ and being united with Him. It's only in Him that we live in His presence. It's only in Him that we live in the mission of God. When Jesus interacts with some Pharisees who are trying very hard to be connected with God and to obey God, He doesn't tell them that they are doing a good job, but need to try harder. He doesn't offer more teaching or more steps. He tells them that they don't need to try harder, but instead, they need a Jonah event in their life. You need to realize that just like Jonah, you deserve the righteous judgment of God. You belong in the fish, you belong in death, and you need a Jonah event to realize that another also died in your place, was buried three days, and rose again to new life. He was resurrected. What you need is to understand that you need a Jonah event. You need to understand that you also deserve the wrath of God and it's only because Christ, who took your place. Instead of getting His wrath and judgment, you can find grace and mercy and resurrection. You can have new life. You can be spit out just like Jonah. You can rise from the dead just like Christ was resurrected from the dead. Some of you are fleeing the presence of God. You are fleeing the mission of God and you need to know that all the while, God is pursuing you. He's bringing all these events to get your attention to bring you to a place of surrender. This place where you realize you can't do it. You don't need to try harder, you need to go into death with Christ and come out the other side with resurrection in His life. It's only in His life that you get a new heart and a new spirit. It's not you mustering up strength to do what God wants, it's you united with Christ, living in Christ, doing what God has called you to do. That's

what the gospel is. It's not when you find yourself fleeing that you turn and try harder. No, you repent and trust completely. You trust that the only way you can fulfill the mission of God and live in His presence, the only way He can love me is because there was another who was faithful when I was not. There was another who loved the nations when I didn't. I rebelled; He didn't. But He took my rebellion for me and He conquered it at the cross. No longer am I a rebel, but now I have been resurrected to a new life. Now I am united with Him. Being united with Him, with a new heart and spirit in Him, I'm living in God's presence. In Him, I'm fulfilling God's mission for the world because I had a resurrection, and because I had the gospel applied to my life.

Have you had that Jonah event where you went through death and you didn't get what you deserved, but instead you got grace? You got resurrection through believing and trusting in Christ completely. You got a new life and now you are living in His presence and are on mission with Him. For some of you, you are already thinking that you aren't where you are supposed to be, but I can really clean it up. No you can't. You will fail, you always fail. There's only one person who didn't fail and who doesn't fail and that is Jesus. The only way you can live in God's presence and complete His mission is if you lose your life and you gain His life. That's the gospel. It's not a gospel of repenting, just try really hard...no, it's repent and trust completely. Find yourself in the midst of God's judgment, find His death to be your death, and His resurrection to be your resurrection, and it's then and only then that you will live in His presence and fulfill His mission.