



FISH TALE

SERMON STUDY - 4.13.2025

Leader Corner

Making Sense of Suffering

Jonah 2:1-10

Jesus is all over the book of Jonah. From obvious parallels like a 3-day span of death, burial, and resurrection that even Jesus himself points out (Mt. 12:40-41) and plot-based similarities like panic -and sleeping- during a storm at sea (Jon. 1:4-5 cf. Mk. 4:37-38), to meta-themes like offering repentance and salvation to adversarial Gentiles who don't deserve it, it's hard to miss the allusions. But Jonah isn't only a picture of *Jesus*; he also resembles *Peter* quite a bit too, rejecting and fleeing from God, only to be reinstated and restored by the Lord for the mission. The point is, yes, the Book of Jonah has many things to say about obedience, suffering, and salvation, but perhaps more frequently than other Old Testament books, every chapter of Jonah is bursting with connections and foreshadowing to Jesus, the Apostles, and the mission of the Church. Don't miss it. In this study, we'll learn from Jonah's prayer in the belly of the fish.

Main Idea: Honestly consider what you do when circumstances are out of our control.

Main Practice: Explore the motivations and content of prayer in the midst of suffering.

Main Teaching: Jonah 2:1-10

As You Begin...: What do you think it's like being inside a big fish? Share some physical and mental feelings or emotions that you think describe that experience.

Connect with Prayer & Praise

Have someone in your group read the following Scripture aloud:

"O Lord, how many are my foes! Many are rising against me; many are saying of my soul, "There is no salvation for him in God." But you, O Lord, are a shield about me, my glory, and the lifter of my head. I cried aloud to the Lord, and he answered me from his holy hill. I lay down and slept; I woke again, for the Lord sustained me. I will not be afraid of many thousands of people who have set themselves against me all around. Arise, O Lord! Save me, O my God! For you strike all my enemies on the cheek; you break the teeth of the wicked. Salvation belongs to the Lord; your blessing be on your people!" - Psalm 3, ESV

with Practice

At the end of all this, Jonah is right back where he started: on the shores with a mission. This kind of journey (flight, crisis, deliverance, return) can change a person...for positive or negative. This week, if someone in your group is experiencing a crisis and praying the sort of prayers we discussed today, remember once God puts you back on the shore, there's work to do. Don't let the crisis go to waste. Let it change you for the better. Like God restoring Jonah and like Jesus restoring Peter, encourage each other to get up. God's not done with you yet. And now, your great test may lead to a greater testimony that leads a whole nation of unbelievers to the Lord.

for Further Study

If you're in trouble and think you're about to die, you might start reciting whatever scriptures you can remember. Maybe that's what Jonah is doing in Chapter 2, because his prayer is mostly a combination of a bunch of different Psalms. For deeper study, read through some of what Jonah is borrowing from.

-Jon 2:2, 7 – cf. Ps 18:4-6; Ps 120:1, Ps 130:1-2

-Jon 2:3, 5 – cf. Ps 42:7; Ps 69:1-2

-Jon 2:4 – cf. Ps 31:22

-Jon 2:6 – cf. Ps 30:3

-Jon 2:8 – cf. Ps 31:6-7

-Jon 2:9 – cf. Ps 50:23; Ps 3:8

with Principle

1. As a group, read Jonah 2:1-10 together and discuss the key, biblically-based teaching points you recall from the weekend's sermon. What stood out?

This study accepts this story as a real event (as opposed to parable). Meaning, if Jonah *really* was swallowed by a fish, he's probably going to react the same way you would: *frantically trying to save himself*. Imagine Jonah's thought process in between Chapter 1 and Chapter 2:

Step 1: Get out of the fish (*Okay, how? It's dark, I can't see, I'm trapped, I can't move, I'm disoriented, I don't even know where the exits are on this fish, or if that would even work...?*)

Step 2: Swim to the surface (*I'm a Hebrew from the desert, can I even swim?*)

Step 3: I'm still in the middle of the ocean (*Oof!*)

The point is...this is a situation totally beyond his control. There is *nothing* he can do to save himself.

2. Have you had a day like that, or a season of days like that? In what ways does Jonah's situation connect with a situation you've been through, where you not only *felt* overwhelmed and hopeless, but also actually *were* overwhelmed, in great distress, difficulty, and absolutely *nothing* that was happening was in your control? And as you think about those situations, how have you tried to get out of them (or at least improve them) yourself, in your own power, with your own plans? How does that usually go?

We try so hard to control things ourselves, and that's often when God will give us a situation that forces us to realize how out of control we really are. So you're Jonah... what else can you do? You pray. Let's get into this prayer.

3. Verse 1 says Jonah prayed to God from the belly of the fish. Given the context, Jonah probably believed God was angry at him. Can you think of a time when you thought God might be angry, frustrated, or disappointed with you for your disobedience, and is it harder to pray if we think God feels that way toward us? Why?

4. Jonah also says he prays "to the Lord his God." This is the same God who just started a storm, stopped a storm, and appointed a fish to swallow Jonah, so let's not blow by this important point about prayer: do we adequately realize *who* we're talking to? Much is (rightly) made of the humble humanity of Jesus who desires a personal relationship and views us as friends (John 15:14-15), but to what extent should our prayers also be impacted by understanding that we're talking to *the sovereign all-powerful creator of the entire Universe* who commands storms and fish? What would you say 'proper reverence' looks/sounds like in prayer?

5. What do you notice about the tone and content of Jonah's prayer? What's this prayer about?

In Jonah 1, the pagan sailors became aware of their sin (1:14). In Jonah 3, as you'll read next week, the pagan Ninevites become aware of their sin, confess, and repent. But here, many Bible scholars have noticed that Jonah doesn't seem to acknowledge, confess, and repent, even though he refused his commission and fled from the presence of the Lord. Jonah's prayer is full of awesome praise, truth, and thanksgiving! ...but given that we know *why* he's in this predicament, it seems to be conspicuously missing the beautiful words of confession and repentance.

6. What do you think? Does Jonah repent here? Do you get the sense this is a true moment of repentance for him, or is this mostly an expression of gratitude for his deliverance from physical death? Does it matter?

7. We raise this topic to ask: is there a hole in *your* prayer life? Is contrition missing? Are you all thanks, all request, and no confession? Why or why not?

8. The Lord spoke to Jonah ...and Jonah disobeyed. The Lord spoke to the fish ...and the fish obeyed. The fish is holier than the prophet! But... Jonah makes it back to the shore as the fish vomits him up onto dry land. As we close, why do you think God saved Jonah?