

GOD CAN DELIVER YOU! *JONAH 2:1-10*

The story of Jonah is told in two acts. Jonah 2 is the second scene of the first act. Chapter one records the first scene of the first act, in which we see Jonah's disobedience. The Lord sent Jonah to Nineveh, the capital of Assyria, to decry its great evil. Jonah responded with evil of his own. He went to the seaport city of Joppa and boarded a ship to Tarshish, the opposite direction of Nineveh. As the ship set sail, Jonah went to sleep, confident he had escaped the Lord. But the Lord hurled a perfect storm onto the sea that nearly demolished the ship. Even the experienced mariners were afraid. The captain called a prayer meeting. Everyone was to call upon his god for help. But as he went through the ship issuing this call to prayer, he was shocked to find that stranger he picked up at Joppa fast asleep. It did not take them long to discover Jonah was the source of the problem. Yet the mariners did everything they could to spare his life. But the more they tried to save him; the more the storm raged. They finally had no choice but to throw Jonah overboard. As Jonah plummeted into the storm-tossed sea, God prepared a fish to swallow him alive.

Jonah 2 records Jonah's deliverance. In verse 1, Jonah prayed to the Lord from the belly of the fish. In verse 10, the Lord commanded the fish to vomit Jonah onto the dry land. Sandwiched in between these two verses is a psalm in which Jonah gives thanks to the Lord for answering his prayer for deliverance. Some challenge the unity of the book of Jonah, questioning how a psalm fits in the middle of a historical narrative. From a literary perspective, it may seem odd. From a spiritual perspective, the place of this psalm is obvious. God the Holy Spirit moved Jonah to place this psalm of thanksgiving here to leave on record a word of hope, comfort, and encouragement for every other Jonah: There is nothing you are into that God cannot deliver you out of. God can deliver you!

King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon erected a golden image of himself and commanded all his subjects to bow in worship before it. Three Hebrew slaves refused to bow down. When the king heard it, he threatened them: bow or burn! And he asked them what God could deliver them out of his hands. Daniel 3:16-18 reports: "Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego answered and said to the king, 'O Nebuchadnezzar, we have no need to answer you in this matter. If that is the case, our God whom we serve is able to deliver us from the burning fiery furnace, and He will deliver us from your hand, O king. But if not, let it be known to you, O king, that we do not serve your gods, nor will we worship the gold image which you have set up.'" The testimony of the three Hebrew boys is the thanksgiving of Jonah 2 and the truth I proclaim to you: God can deliver you.

- **You may be in a raging storm, but God can deliver you.**
- **You may be in the belly of a fish, but God can deliver you.**
- **You may be in a horrible pit, but God can deliver you.**
- **You may be surrounded by trouble, but God can deliver.**
- **You can be at rock bottom, but God can deliver you.**

Jonah 2 gives five factors of divine deliverance.

I. GOD CAN DELIVER YOU, IF YOU PRAY.

Verses 1-2 read: "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.'"

Consider the dynamics of this prayer.

Who prayed? Jonah. Disobedient Jonah. Rebellious Jonah. Wrong-way Jonah. Hard-hearted Jonah. Throw-me-over-board Jonah. Jonah is the least likely candidate for an answered prayer. Yet Jonah prayed and the Lord answered him. Maybe you are struggling with fear. You are afraid to talk to God. You cannot be any more scared than Jonah was. Yet Jonah prayed. Maybe you are struggling with guilt, thinking God would never hear you after what you have done. You cannot be any guiltier than Jonah was. Yet Jonah prayed. Maybe you are struggling with pride. You say, "I got myself in this; I can get myself out of it." You cannot be more prideful than Jonah was. Yet Jonah prayed.

God may have placed you in that ordeal to teach you to pray. In Jonah 1, the desperate sailors could not get the sleepy prophet to pray. Jonah slept while they prayed. Even after they woke him up, identified him as the problem, and confronted him with his sin, Jonah still did not pray. That was before they threw him overboard. That was before he started drowning in the storm-tossed sea. That was before his life started fainting away. Then Jonah prayed. God knows how to make you pray.

To whom did Jonah pray? He prayed "to the Lord his God." In spite of Jonah's sinful rebellion, the Lord was still his God. If Jesus is your Savior and Lord, you belong to God and can call on him no matter what you have done. A family chose to adopt a troubled teenager. Before the adoption went through, she betrayed their trust. They all changed their minds, except the father. Finally, they reminded him the girl was not really his daughter. He replied, "I know. But I told her she was. And I'm going to keep my word." That is how God deals with us. God does not go back on his word to us when we go back on our word to him.

Where did Jonah pray? Jonah prayed: "from the belly of the fish." Prayer goes a long way. It does not matter what situation you find yourself in, pray.

- **You can be in the belly of a fish like Jonah...**
- **You can be in a lion's den like Daniel...**
- **You can be in a cave like David...**
- **You can be in enemy territory like Samson...**
- **You can be on your sickbed like Hezekiah...**
- **You can be on a rooftop like Peter...**
- **You can be in jail like Paul and Silas...**

Why did Jonah pray? Jonah prayed: "I called out to the Lord, out of my distress." Distress is a tight place, which aptly describes Jonah's dilemma. But Jonah prayed and the Lord answered him. The Lord can do the same for you. Psalm 50:15 says: "and call upon me in the day of trouble; I will deliver you, and you shall glorify me." Jonah's distress was not because of the world or the devil or his enemies. Jonah was in distress because he was in rebellion against God. Yet he prayed and the Lord answered. This is the mercy of God and the nature of prayer. God does not answer prayer because of how good we are. God answers prayer because of how good he is.

II. GOD CAN DELIVER YOU, WHEN IT SEEMS THERE IS NO HOPE.

Verse 2 read: “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.” Sheol is a transliteration of a Hebrew term that refers to death, the grave, or the afterlife. The KJV translates it “hell.” The ESV transliterates the word to indicate we are not sure which meaning is intended. Whatever the exact meaning, the point is clear. Jonah had a near-death experience in the water. He was as close to death, hell, and grave as one can get without actually going. But Jonah says, “Out of the belly of Sheol I cried, and you heard my voice.” Jonah was in a seemingly hopeless situation, but God delivered him.

**HAVE YOU ANY RIVERS YOU THAT SEEM UNCROSSABLE?
HAVE YOU ANY MOUNTAINS YOU CANNOT TUNNEL THROUGH?
GOD SPECIALIZES IN THINGS THOUGHT IMPOSSIBLE
AND HE CAN DO WHAT NO OTHER POWER CAN DO.**

Jeremiah 32:17 says, “Ah, Lord God! It is you who has made the heavens and the earth by your great power and by your outstretched arm! Nothing is too hard for you.” Jeremiah 32:27 says, “Behold, I am the Lord, the God of all flesh. Is anything too hard for me?” Luke 1:37 says, “For nothing will be impossible with God.” Luke 18:27 says, “What is impossible with men is possible with God.” God can deliver you, when it seems there is no hope. This point is developed in verses 3-6, where Jonah recounts his near-death experience. These verses give two reasons why you can hope in God even when the situation seems hopeless.

A. GOD CAN REACH YOU NO MATTER HOW FAR YOU GO.

Jonah describes his experience in the water in verse 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.” Jonah identifies God as the one who threw him into the water: “You cast me into the deep.” Jonah 1:15 says the sailors threw him overboard. But there was an infinitely greater reality at work. Humanly speaking, the sailors threw him in the water. But ultimately the sovereign hand of God threw him in. The divine torment continued in the water. Jonah says, “All your waves and your billows passed over me.”

God was behind it all. Jonah knew why. Verse 4 says, “Then I said, ‘I am driven away from your sight.’” Isn’t that ironic? Three times in chapter one, we are told Jonah fled from the presence of the Lord. But now the one who tried to get away from God feels like God is trying to get rid of him. Jonah interpreted his experience in the water to be an act of divine banishment. It was as if God was saying, “Jonah, you want to get away from me? I’ll send you to the deepest parts of the sea.” Jonah

was cast out of the Lord's sight. But verse 4b says: "yet I shall again look upon your holy temple." This is heavenly temple in glory, not the earthly temple in Jerusalem. Though Jonah was being cast out of the Lord's sight, he looked to the Lord in prayer. God can reach you no matter how far you go. Isaiah 45:22 says, "Turn to me and be saved, all the ends of the earth! For I am God, and there is no other."

B. GOD CAN REACH YOU NO MATTER HOW LOW YOU SINK.

Verse 5-6 says, "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." Jonah is describing the underworld in terms of a Palestinian city surrounded by a wall and protected by gates and doors that would be bolted shut. Jonah was sinking so low that he felt the earth itself was kicking him out, slamming the door, and shutting him out forever. There seemed to be no hope. But verse 6c says, "Yet you brought **up** my life from the pit, O Lord my God." This is the turning point in the story. Every since Jonah fled from the presence of the Lord, everything has gone down. He went down to Joppa. He went down into the ship. He laid down and went to sleep. He went down into the water. It was a free-fall from there. Jonah kept sinking until he hit rock bottom. Then the Lord reached out and brought him up by appointing a fish to swallow him alive. God can reach you no matter how low you sink.

**I WAS SINKING DEEP IN SIN, FAR FROM THE PEACEFUL SHORE
VERY DEEPLY STAINED WITHIN, SINKING TO RISE NO MORE
BUT THE MASTER OF THE SEA, HEARD MY DESPAIRING CRY
AND FROM THE WATERS LIFTED ME, NOW SAFE AM I**

III. GOD CAN DELIVER YOU, BEFORE IT'S TOO LATE.

Verse 7 summarizes verses 3-6. Jonah says, "When my life was fainting away, I remembered the Lord, and my prayer came to you, into your holy temple." This is another poetic summary of Jonah's near-death experience. His life was fainting away. He was about to die. But Jonah did two things: he remembered the Lord and he prayed. One wonders what Jonah was thinking when he try to flee the presence of the Lord? Jonah tells us in this verse. He forgot the Lord. Is that your problem? Could that be the reason you are going through what you are going through? Have you forgotten the Lord? Psalm 50:22-23 says, "Mark this, then, you who forget God, lest I tear you apart, and there be none to deliver! The one who offers thanksgiving as his sacrifice glorifies me; to one who orders his way rightly I will show the salvation of God!" Jonah forgot the Lord. It got him into trouble. His life was fainting away. Then Jonah remembered the Lord and prayed. This is a word of warning and a word of comfort. The word of warning is this:

- **Don't wait until your life is fainting away, before you remember the Lord.**
- **Don't make God corner you, before you return to him.**

- **Don't be like the prodigal son, and lose everything, before you recognize you need the Lord.**

Psalm 103:1-2 says: "Bless the Lord, O my soul, and all that is within me, bless his holy name! Bless the Lord, O my soul, and forget not all his benefits." The word of comfort is this: If your life is fainting away, it's not too late for God to deliver you.

Three friends went to the beach. One couldn't swim, the second was an average swimmer, and the third was an expert swimmer. Each swam out according to their ability. But the one who couldn't swim went out too far and began to drown. The average swimmer watched helplessly. His friend was too far out for him to save him. But the expert swimmer stood next to him, watching the friend struggle in the water. Finally, when the man could struggle no more, it looked as if he would surely drown. Then the expert swimmer dove in and saved him. When it was over, the two friends had words for the expert. "Why did you not jump in sooner?" they asked. He replied that if he had gone in while the no-swimmer struggled, he would have risked both of them going under. So he had to wait until the struggling was over.

Sometimes God waits until we stop struggling, before he steps in. But God's timing is perfect. God can deliver you, before it's too late.

IV. GOD CAN DELIVER YOU, BUT YOU MUST TRUST HIM ALONE.

Verse 8-9 says, "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!" There are two ways to live. You can pay regard to vain idols. Idols are worthless because they cannot save, help, or deliver you. Psalm 115:5-7 describes worthless idols: "They have mouths, but do not speak; eyes, but do not see. They have ears, but do not hear; noses, but do not smell. They have hands, but do not feel; feet, but do not walk; and they do not make a sound in their throat." Idol gods are dead. Psalm 115:8 says, "Those who make them become like them; so do all who trust in him." Idolatry is not limited to the erecting of statue to worship. An idol is anything you allow to become more important to you than God. It can be a person, place, or thing. But it is worthless for salvation.

When Mahmud of Ghazni invaded India, his conquering forces entered a celebrated temple to destroy it. Mahmud was entreated by a priest to spare a certain idol, but he refused. Instead, he rained repeated blows upon it. Suddenly the image burst open, and a stream of precious stones cascaded from its hollow interior.

With every idol you destroy, you gain more than you lose! Every idol that is demolished reveals treasures of grace and removes hindrances to prayer. This is what teaches in verse 8: "Those who pay regard to vain idols forsake their hope of steadfast love." Jonah chose God in verse 9: "But I will sacrifice to you with a voice of thanksgiving; I will pay what I have vowed." God is worthy of our worship and God

is worthy of our obedience. Here's why: "Salvation is of the Lord." This statement is more than just a personal testimony. It is the message of the Bible in a nutshell. God is the source of salvation. God chooses those he will save. God provides the means of salvation. And it is all to his glory. Ephesians 2:8-9 says: "By grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast."

V. GOD CAN DELIVER YOU, BECAUSE HE IS IN CHARGE OF EVERYTHING.

Verse 10 shifts from the psalm of thanksgiving back to the historical narrative: "And the Lord spoke to the fish, and it vomited Jonah out upon the dry land." God is in charge of everything.

- **God controls nature.**
- **God controls nations.**
- **God controls history.**
- **God controls circumstances.**
- **God controls life and death.**
- **God controls every living thing in the animal world.**

Jonah 1:17 says the Lord appointed a fish to swallow Jonah. Now the Lord commands the fish to spit Jonah out. And the fish obeyed. The fish not only spit Jonah out; he spit him out on dry land. If God can speak to this fish and it obeys him, can he not speak to your situation and deliver you. Indeed, God is able.

2 Corinthians 9:8 says, "And God is able to make all grace abound to you..."

Ephesians 3:20 says, "Now to him who is able to do far more abundantly than all that we ask or think..."

2 Timothy 1:12 says, "I am convinced that he is able to guard until that Day what has been entrusted to me."

Hebrews 7:25 says, "He is able to save to the uttermost those who draw near to God through him."

Jude 24 says, "Now to him who is able to keep you from stumbling..."

**LIKE A SHIP THAT'S TOSSED A DRIVEN, BATTERED BY AN ANGRY SEA
WHEN THE STORMS OF LIFE ARE RAGING, AND THE FURY FALLS ON ME
I WONDER WHAT I HAVE DONE, TO MAKE THIS RACE SO HARD TO RUN
THEN I SAY TO MYSELF, TAKE COURAGE, THE LORD WILL MAKE AWAY SOMEHOW**

**TRY TO DO MY BEST IN SERVICE, TRY TO LIVE THE BEST I CAN
WHEN I CHOOSE TO DO THE RIGHT THING, EVIL'S ON EVERY HAND
I LOOK UP AND WONDER WHY GOOD FORTUNE SEEMS TO PASS ME BY
THEN I SAY TO MY SOUL, BE PATIENT, THE LORD WILL MAKE AWAY SOMEHOW**

**OFTEN THERE'S MISUNDERSTANDING OUT OF ALL THE GOOD I DO
GO TO FRIENDS FOR CONSOLATION AND I FIND THEM COMPLAINING TO
SO MANY NIGHTS I TOSS IN PAIN, WONDERING WHAT THE DAY WILL BRING
BUT I SAY TO MY HEART, DON'T WORRY, THE LORD WILL MAKE AWAY SOMEHOW**