

Strange Place, Saving Grace

Jonah 1:17-2:10

If we read the first chapter of Jonah as a stand-alone text, we would most certainly misinterpret it.

It might read that God was angry at Jonah for disobeying, which is correct, but it would leave out the rationale for God's anger; the salvation of Nineveh.

God is jealous for his glory because of his great love. No other god can save. This means it is imperative that people hear the gospel of God's grace.

Jonah fled God's mission because he did not want to evangelize foreigners, especially Ninevites. But this is exactly what he ends up doing; declaring to the sailors that God is the God of the storm. The sailors believe Jonah's message as a glimpse of God's grace to Nineveh.

Jonah's story demonstrates God's sovereignty in all our lives. Jonah is a famous and popular Hebrew prophet called to minister among Gentiles. In effect, God calls Jonah to live a different kind of life than Jonah had dreamt or expected. And Jonah is never happy about this divine interference.

Few of us end up living the life we dreamed or expected. Too many of us remain angry about God's sovereign providence in our lives. Throughout the series, we are praying that our lives end up differently than the book of Jonah concludes with the prophet's request to die rather than live in God's plan.

First: Finding God's Grace 1:17

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.

Appointed is used several times in the book to demonstrate God's presence in Jonah's life.

It often takes hindsight for our sight to be 20/20. All of us have endured excruciating moment only to later understand the good God mined from our pain.

The fish was not appointed to punish Jonah but to save him. It was also pedagogical in that it taught Jonah about God's grace.

Obviously, the fish saved Jonah's life by swallowing him, but we don't know if Jonah wanted to be saved.

- a) I deserve God's punishment

- b) I would rather die than obey God

Then again, the fish story was just a temporary reprieve and not a long term solution to his predicament.

- a) Jonah went down to Joppa
- b) Jonah went down into the ship
- c) Jonah went down into the depths of the ship
- d) Jonah went down into the depths of the sea

At each step we might have said, “This is as far down as Jonah can go.” But we would have been wrong on each occasion.

There was a ‘fatal flaw’ in Jonah that only an omniscient God could see.

Abraham, Joseph, David, and Peter all struggled with life choices caused by heart issues known only to God

You and I can also attest to God’s unrelenting scalpel and a God who is unwilling to stop for anything other than heart change

Far too often, we are like Israel who offers lip service but heart rebellion.

It is the Christian blueprint for life that up is down and God’s grace is most prevalent when we reach the bottom of ourselves.

As with so many other biblical characters, God has to isolate Jonah in order to change Jonah

And it is here that we find Jonah using one of the most joyful words in the OT.

Jonah 2:9 – “*Salvation belongs to the LORD!*”

Salvation = feminine passive participle of *Yeshua* – God’s name.

Second: Defining God’s Grace

JI Packer – *Knowing God* – “Grace is not simply a theological term. It is not an abstraction. It is a life-changing power.” There are three essential aspects -

- a) Moral ill-desert. V 3

Our era teaches us that our basic problem is a lack of self-esteem, that we have too much shame and that our moral standards are individually determined.

Scripture teaches us that we are all sinners, deserving of God's eternal judgement.

V 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*

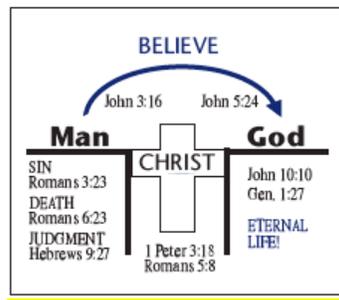
Jonah acknowledges his sin and God's just judgement

b) Spiritual impotence

We cannot fix ourselves. We cannot make ourselves presentable to God. We cannot bridge the gulf between us and God.

The diagram in this image is SO wrong. It is theologically wrong and as a result, it practically wrong. No one crosses the bridge to God.

Put diagram on screen -



Put the arrow on man's side of the chasm and scratch it out on God's side of the chasm.

No hard work, no morality, no trying will get us to God.

V 3 – *You cast me into the deep*

V 4 – Then I said, *'I am driven away from your sight.*

This is actually good news because as long as we think we can make ourselves righteous, we will continue to vainly try. But it is impossible.

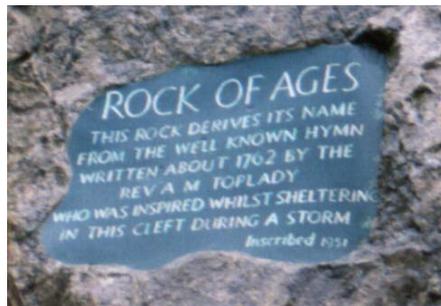
V 8 - *Those who pay regard to vain idols forsake their hope of steadfast love.*

Jonah knows this and rejects the idea that he can help himself

Vs 5-6 - *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;*

*Not the labors of my hands
Can fulfil thy law's demands
Could my zeal no respite know,
Could my tears forever flow,
All for sin could not atone.
Thou must save, and thou alone.
Augustus Toplady*

Legend says that Toplady wrote the hymn during a stormy incident in England. While traveling along the gorge in Burrington Combe, he was caught in a fierce storm and took shelter in a gap in the gorge, where he wrote the original lyrics. Some disagree on whether the event actually occurred; nevertheless, the rock is now marked with a plaque that reads: "Rock of Ages: This rock derives its name from the well known hymn written about 1762 by the Rev A M Toplady who was inspired whilst sheltering in this cleft during a storm."



c) Amazing Grace 6

V 6 - *you brought up my life from the pit,*

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

God had already gotten Jonah's attention –

1:12 - *“Pick me up and hurl me into the sea; then the sea will quiet down for you, for I know it is because of me that this great tempest has come upon you.”*

2:1-2 - *Then Jonah prayed to the LORD his God from the belly of the fish, ² 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.*

Jonah knows God is merciful

4:2 - *And he prayed to the LORD and said, “O 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, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love, and relenting from disaster.*

God’s work in Jonah is representative of God’s work in the sailors, in Nineveh and the world.

V 4 - *Then I said, ‘I am driven away from your sight; yet I shall again look upon your holy temple.’*

Jonah lived in a day when God’s presence filled the Holy of Holies in the Temple in Jerusalem and the sin of the people was put away for another year

We live in a day in which Jesus has come, the fulfilment of the Tabernacle. He has come among us and become the living way by which we access God.

Third: Shouting God’s Grace. 9

This is a strange place to experience God’s grace, but you’ve also experienced God’s grace in some strange places – and for the same reason Jonah does.

Jonah praises God and claims God as the God of salvation before he is vomited by the fish.

It’s when he is at his worst that he acknowledges God as the best.

V 9 - *But I with the voice of thanksgiving will sacrifice to you; what I have vowed I will pay. Salvation belongs to the LORD!”*

It is all of God or it is none of God.

God is no co-pilot.

“I will wait until I get better...” will never cry out to God and will never save.

But when Jonah confesses that salvation is in God’s jurisdiction - - -

2:0 - *And the LORD spoke to the fish, and it vomited Jonah out upon the dry land.*

Side Note: It's interesting that the storm obeyed God. The sailors obeyed what they learned about God and repented. The fish obeyed God and swallowed and vomited Jonah. Later, a gourd will obey God and a worm will obey God. But Jonah, God's prophet, disobeyed God.

Conclusion:

Jonah is one of the most significant types of Jesus in the Old Testament.

Matthew 12:38-41 - *Then some of the scribes and Pharisees answered him, saying, "Teacher, we wish to see a sign from you." 39 But he answered them, "An evil and adulterous generation seeks for a sign, but no sign will be given to it except the sign of the prophet Jonah. 40 For just as Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of the great fish, so will the Son of Man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth. 41 The men of Nineveh will rise up at the judgment with this generation and condemn it, for they repented at the preaching of Jonah, and behold, something greater than Jonah is here.*

- 1 – Jesus was entombed for 3 days just as Jonah.
- 2 – The resurrection validated Jesus's preaching just as Jonah's preaching was validated by rescue from the fish.
- 3 – Nineveh's repentance will judge the Pharisees' lack of repentance.

Community Groups:

- 1 – If asked, how do you tell the story of Jonah?
- 2 – What is the function of the fish?
- 3 – What does sending the fish to swallow Jonah teach us about God?
- 3 – Why did God want Jonah to go to Nineveh?
- 4 – Why didn't Jonah want to go to Nineveh?
- 5 – How is God's work in Jonah a microcosm of his work in Israel?
- 6 – How is God's work in Jonah a microcosm of his work in Nineveh?
- 7 – What evidence do we have that Jonah was dissatisfied with the different kind of life God chose for him?
- 8 – What was God trying to accomplish in God's life?
- 9 – Why is grace only for the humble?
- 10 - In what 'strange places' have you found God's grace?
- 11 – What does it mean that "salvation" in Jonah 2:10 is derived from God's name?
- 12 – Why can we not cross the bridge to God? What scriptures support that notion?
- 13 – How is Jonah unlike Jesus?
- 14 – How is Jesus like Jonah?

15 – Why will the people of Nineveh rise up in judgement against those who heard Jesus preach?