**Pastor Tim’s Message Notes from 4-25-2021
A Whale of a Prayer**

The other day, my family was playing a new boardgame together. And it was a game about various habitats. It was a trivia game with questions about all different habitats, from the jungles to the prairies to the deserts and several others, including the ocean.

And one question that stood out to me was about what percentage of living creatures lived in the ocean or waters. It was 80%. To think about all the different plants and animals that God has made that live on land and that is only 20% of the total is pretty amazing.

It is like a whole new world under the waters. But the Lord is sovereign over not only the land, but also the waters. And this is clearly illustrated in the story of Jonah.

Last week you may recall how instead of repenting of his sin of rebellion and disobedience to the LORD, Jonah chooses assisted suicide. He asked that the sailors would throw him overboard in order to the LORD to calm the violent storm that He had brought.

But despite the LORD calming the storm after Jonah was thrown overboard, God still sovereignly chose to rescue Jonah from what appeared to be certain death.

Let us now turn back to the text of Jonah and pick up in Jonah 1:17-2:10.

**17Now the Lord provided a huge fish to swallow Jonah, and Jonah was in the belly of the fish three days and three nights. 2 1 [**[**a**](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Jonah+1-2&version=NIV#fen-NIV-22550a)**]From inside the fish Jonah prayed to the Lord his God. 2He said:**

**“In my distress I called to the Lord, and he answered me. From deep in the realm of the dead I called for help, and you listened to my cry.
3You hurled me into the depths, into the very heart of the seas, and the currents swirled about me; all your waves and breakers swept over me.
4I said, ‘I have been banished from your sight; yet I will look again toward your holy temple.’
5The engulfing waters threatened me,[**[**b**](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Jonah+1-2&version=NIV#fen-NIV-22554b)**] the deep surrounded me; seaweed was wrapped around my head.
6To the roots of the mountains I sank down; the earth beneath barred me in forever. But you, Lord my God, brought my life up from the pit.**

**7“When my life was ebbing away, I remembered you, Lord, and my prayer rose to you, to your holy temple.**

**8“Those who cling to worthless idols turn away from God’s love for them.
9But I, with shouts of grateful praise, will sacrifice to you. What I have vowed I will make good. I will say, ‘Salvation comes from the Lord.’”**

**10And the Lord commanded the fish, and it vomited Jonah onto dry land.**

This story that we are highlighting today is probably rather familiar to many of us. Jonah and the whale, it is typically called.

While the word used in Jonah is simply ‘a huge fish,’ it is certainly possible that it could be referring to a whale. There are whales that are approximately 100 feet in length. There are also fish that are quite large, around 40 feet in length.

Sadly, there are people that dismiss this story simply because they do not believe in God’s power to do miraculous things. But the God who caused the great wind on the sea is the same God who can command a large sea creature to rescue Jonah by swallowing him and then spitting him or vomiting him up onto dry land. This is nothing for God to do, for the God who created all things from nothing and who is sovereign over everything. This was nothing for God.

In our journey through the book of Jonah, today’s section begins when Jonah is at his lowest point. He had run from God’s calling. He even became a passenger on a ship that was going away from God’s direction for Jonah. He has refused to repent of his pride and selfishness that has prevented him from responding to God’s calling.

And now, Jonah was sinking in the ocean. He was feeling like he was sinking to the root of the mountains below the water.

But God! Don’t you just love that phrase?

But God, in His grace, rescues Jonah.

For it is at this critical spot in the book that Jonah’s life begins to turn around. In his lowest place, both spiritually as well as physically - God spares Jonah’s life.

And there, in the belly is this great fish, Jonah prayed to the LORD. *He recalled how the waters were sweeping over him and out of the depths the LORD spared his life.*

The words of Jonah are similar to many of the psalms that we find in Scripture. Likely Jonah, as a devout Jew, was very familiar with the psalms and God has come to the aid of the psalmist time and time again.

Jonah’s words express a similar thanksgiving that the God who saved him was now hearing his prayers.

And Jonah, in his prayer to the LORD, says **“What I have vowed I will make good. I will say, ‘Salvation comes from the Lord.’”**

**It was after this prayer of rededicating himself to God that the LORD commands the fish and the fish then vomits Jonah onto dry land.**

*As big as this large fish was, Jonah’s prayer of recommitment to the LORD was far larger insignificant to God.*

He had been willfully running from God. Willfully rebelling against God. But it is as He realizes that even in His rock-bottom state, the LORD still loved him and was still good and merciful to Him, Jonah recommits himself.

This recommitment of Jonah was true repentance from his willful rebellion to God’s instruction for him.

It reminds me of how people can often pray to the Lord in our lowest state and say, **“God, from now on I am fully Yours. Just help get me out of the mess I brought on myself. You have shown me mercy. If you get me through this, I am Yours completely.**

Maybe we have prayed prayers like that ourselves.

Any prayer of surrender to the LORD is beautiful to God.

As the story concludes, Jonah is now on shore, still thousands of miles from Nineveh but with a renewed commitment to God. And from there we will pick up next week. But before we conclude, I would like for us to consider 3 big takeaways for us today.

**First, we must celebrate God’s rescue in your life**. All of us have sinned and fallen short. All of us are in need of the Savior’s grace. And, whether we ran like Jonah or not, it was while we were yet sinner’s that Christ died for us.

It was not by our own effects that we were rescued, but by the grace of God.

So please take time today and this week to thank God for rescuing you from your sins. Rescuing you from spiritual death. Jesus is our great Savior and we are to be an ever-thankful people.

**Second, again we are to remember God’s sovereignty**. He is the Creator and His largest creatures as creatures nonetheless. All of God’s creation can be held in the palm of his hand.

And this same God who is sovereign over all His creatures, chose to form us in His image and value us above all of His other creatures.

So stand in awe of God, friends, for His sovereignty and His love for you.

**And third and finally, do not cling to a worthless idol.**

In Jonah’s prayer, I doubt that he had himself in mind when he states **‘those who cling to worthless idols turn away from God’s love for them.”**

But the sobering truth, sisters and brothers, is that an idol can be anything. It does not have to be something that was crafted out of stone or wood and is seen as a god.

Jonah himself had an idol in his thinking. The LORD loved all people, including the sinful Ninevites. Jonah’s idol was his desire that God should not offer mercy to those whom he saw as evil.

So as Christians, let us ask the Lord if there are any idols we have in our hearts. It can even be concepts of God that are simply false. The Lord desires for us to have freedom from any lives that we may believe.

So ask Him in prayer and spend time in His Word and He will lovingly reveal to us if there are any idols that we have in our minds so that we can be free from them.

Finally, Jesus said that as Jonah was 3 days and 3 nights in the belly of the huge fish, so the Son of Man will be 3 days and 3 nights in the earth.

Jesus, in offering his life as a sacrifice for sins, would do far more than experience the trauma of a near-death experience like Jonah. Jesus would actually physically suffer and physically die for each of us. But as Jonah was brought back to the surface by the power and grace of God, the power of grace of God brought Jesus back outside of his now empty tomb.

And no matter what habitat we are in, Jesus’ sacrifice was more than enough for us. Thanks be to God!

Let’s pray…