

- This morning we continue through the Book of Jonah in chapter 2 in a series we are calling “Rediscovering God”, why? Because Jonah is a prophet in ancient Israel who was raised with the knowledge of God, but who turns out to have created a god of his own making. He needed to be retaught who God is, and who he truly is.
- And his prayer from the depths of his despair becomes our lesson. And through it, we learn... or perhaps re-learn, about the grace of God and the difference it makes in our lives.

**Jonah 2 NIV** From inside the fish Jonah prayed to the Lord his God.<sup>2</sup> He 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.<sup>3</sup> You 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.<sup>4</sup> I said, ‘I have been banished from your sight; yet I will look again toward your holy temple.’<sup>5</sup> The engulfing waters threatened me, the deep surrounded me; seaweed was wrapped around my head.<sup>6</sup> To 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.<sup>7</sup> “When my life was ebbing away, I remembered you, Lord, and my prayer rose to you, to your holy temple.<sup>8</sup> “Those who cling to worthless idols turn away from God’s love for them.<sup>9</sup> But 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.’”<sup>10</sup> And the Lord commanded the fish, and it vomited Jonah onto dry land.

- When CS Lewis was asked what the difference was between Christianity and all other religions, he replied, “Oh, that’s easy. It’s grace!”
- Indeed, it is estimated that there are roughly 4,200 religions in the world, and the difference between Christianity and all the rest can be summarized in that one little word.
- The word grace is used widely by Christians as a shorthand way to describe how God works in people's lives.
- Yet because the word grace is so familiar it can feel like an abstract concept and we often don’t experience its life-changing power. The results are be subtle but real:
  - Some of us serve... but with little joy...irritation
  - some of us... struggle with addictions... you thought just going to church following guidelines would help but...
  - Others your growth has plateaued
  - Some are not yet Christians and

- Is there hope? Yes. We need an education in grace.

**Titus 2:11-12 NIV** For the grace of God has appeared that offers salvation to all people. <sup>12</sup> It teaches us to say “No” to ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright and godly lives in this present age

- And this is exactly what Jonah got in the belly of a great fish.
- And that is why Charles Spurgeon referred to the belly of the fish as God’s college for Jonah. It's the place where he finally learned what he needed. Its where he got his education in grace.
- Jonah is a prophet in ancient Israel. His role was to represent God to his people. But when God called him to preach a message of mercy to his enemies, he ran in the opposite direction. He ran from God. And it took a storm to stop him. Upon recognizing his sin and responsibility, he tells the sailors of his ship to throw him into the sea. But Instead of entering his doom, he unknowingly enrolled in God’s college for an education in grace. God provided a great fish to preserve his life and it was there he learned his most valuable lesson.

- In chapter 2, God shows grace to Jonah by hearing his prayer, rescuing him from death and sending back on mission. What did he learn? And what does this teach us about grace?

1. **Grace Surprises Us (Jonah 2:1-6a)**

- a. How? How was God's favor surprising to Jonah? And why should it be surprising to us? Well, there are two ways in which God's grace surprises us:

**b. Grace arrives in desperate places**

- i. The depths of the seas are the last place we expect God's grace. And yet... he provided a great fish to preserve his Jonah's life. And it is in this place, as desperate and difficult as it may have been, became absolutely formative. Its where he gets his education.

**Jonah 2:2-3** From inside the fish Jonah prayed to the Lord his God.<sup>2</sup> He 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

- ii. See, God orchestrated this circumstance to teach Jonah what he needed to learn.
- iii. And though we don't like to admit it, some of the greatest lessons we learn in life come from some of the greatest hardships. Events or circumstances which may have been so bitter but later come to bring lessons which we could have never foreseen. (Write in the line FROM INSIDE...)
- iv. But Even in the depths, God heard his prayer.
  1. Sometimes it takes the depths for us to pray!
- v. And the encouragement is that there is no situation so bad, or desperate that God's grace cannot operate!
- vi. **The Grace of God turns places of desperation into places of deliverance**
- vii. It's what some writers call God's sever mercies.
- viii. Events or circumstances which at the time seem so unbearable... and yet yield some of the greatest fruit in

our lives. But this chapter is not only about how grace arrives in desperate places....

**c. Grace arrives for desperate people**

- i. Prideful Jonah understands that his desperate *situation* was the result of his desperate *condition*. He acknowledges that the events of the storms were God's righteous response to his sin

**Jonah 2:3** <sup>3</sup>You 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.

- ii. Jonah was blind to the grace of God. It was through his failure that he began to see it.
- i. After all, Jonah's physical situation revealed his spiritual condition. It took his descent into the sea to finally come to terms with the depths of his need. The real deliverance for Jonah was not from the sea, but from his sin.

**Jonah 2:4-6a** I said, 'I have been banished from your sight; yet I will look again toward your holy temple.' <sup>5</sup>The engulfing waters threatened me, the deep surrounded me; seaweed was wrapped around my head. <sup>6</sup>To the roots of the mountains I sank down; the earth beneath barred me in forever.

- ii. He shows that he is learning about grace as he comes to terms with the depth of his need!
  - iii. Without God's help he is "barred in forever"
  - iv. **And this is all what makes God's response surprising. Despite Jonah's great sin, God hears his prayer!**
- a. See, if grace is not changing you, it may be because you are not surprised by it! And when we cease to be surprised **by** grace is when we stop growing **in** grace!
  - b. God's grace is a gift. But how are we changed by a gift?
    - a. Look, not every free gift will change your life!
    - b. I'm sure you all have a free pen as a gift from your bank. And I can almost guarantee *it hasn't changed your life*.
    - c. Why not? Well, it doesn't cost much, you could probably get one yourself, and it's not indispensable.

- d. If someone showed up at your door and said, “I you're your tax bill for you!” How would you respond?
- e. Well, it depends on how great the need is! What if you discovered you owed *\$500k in taxes!* You be in awe!
- c. See, we need to remember how desperate we truly are to appreciate how amazing grace really is.

**Pascal** “Grace is indeed required to turn a man into a saint. Whoever doubts this does not truly know what a man is, or a saint is.”

- d. What he means is you don't really understand grace until you see how great your need is, and how remarkable the cure is!
- e. The Bible says that we are all condemned in sin. We are all “barred in forever”. But do we know that? Do you see yourself as desperately lost with grace? Or do you think you are good?
- f. Here, in the depths, Jonah learns that grace arrives in desperate places... and more importantly, for desperate people
- g. **Grace surprises us.** But the education does not end there.

## **2. Grace Saves Us (Jonah 2:6b-7)**

- a. In the belly of the fish, Jonah shows that he is learning about grace when he acknowledges two things
  - i. *First*, that he sinned. But *second*, he cannot fix it!
  - ii. You know grace is at work on your heart when you acknowledge both!
  - iii. This second one is just as important as the first! Otherwise, you have man-centered religion. Religious people acknowledge sin but think that they can cleanse themselves of their sin!
- b. Notice... as he confesses his despair to a gracious God, where does he look for deliverance?

**Jonah 2:6b** But you, Lord my God, brought my life up from the pit.

- a. We live in a culture in which there are false saviors everywhere! WE buy into that so easily!
- b. But He realizes he cannot save himself!
- c. Not only that, but he is also absolutely confident that God can.

- d. **But what is the reason?** How could a sinner be so confident!
- e. Notice in Jonah's prayer he refers not once but twice to the temple. Earlier in verse 4, he said that is where he was going to look in his prayer, and the temple is what gave him confidence

**Jonah 2:7** "When my life was ebbing away, I remembered you, Lord, and my prayer rose to you, to your holy temple."

- f. Why the temple? Because the temple is the place where sacrifices could be made for sin. How could sinful people be brought near to a holy and perfect God? It was only through the death of a substitute on their behalf, paying the price they owed. The Israelite, in going to the temple would say "They died so that I did not have to!"
- g. As Christians, we look to what the temple was pointing towards: Jesus.
- h. On the day Jesus went to the cross, he absorbed the debt we owe on our behalf so that we might be saved.
- i. Grace changes you as you realize that we have a debt we could never pay, but God paid it on our behalf and unimaginable cost to himself! And you pr
- j. See, it is often in a desperate place that we not only learn about our need, but also that we cannot, indeed no one, can meet that need! You cannot provide it!
- k. This was the education of Jonah and so it is for us. Charles Spurgeon puts this way. In speaking of Jonah's spiritual education and our he says:

**Spurgeon** "We have learned it somewhere in the same college as that in which Jonah learned. He had to go into the whale's belly to learn it, and when he came out he said, "Salvation is of the LORD," and we too, in sharp afflictions, and pains, and griefs have had to learn it, and have it burned into us, and we never believed it more thoroughly in our lives than we do now, that if a sinner is saved, it is God's work that saves him, and God must have all the glory of it."

- a. It was temple that gave Jonah confidence of his salvation. And in a greater way, it is Jesus who gives us the confidence of our salvation!

- a. The Lord hears the prayer of the most stubborn and reluctant of sinners!
- b. The cross is your guarantee that you will be forgiven...
- b. I have no confidence in myself. But I have every confidence in God. How? Do you know that God is gracious? Look at the cross!
  - a. It is never too late to turn back to God.
  - b. He will always provide the second chance you need!
- c. God's grace is not an abstract concept! His grace is shown in the saving event of the cross! And the cross is the reason we can expect God's favor and help in all other areas.
- d. If forgiveness is our greatest need, and God has graciously met this need, how much more will he meet our lesser needs?
- e. It is as I am confronted with both my sin, my inability to cleanse myself from sin and then that God forgives me of my sin at the greatest cost to himself... that I am changed!
- f. But... experiencing grace is not a one-time event!

### 3. Grace Sends Us (Jonah 2:8-10)

- a. It is on the basis of knowing this surprising, saving grace that Jonah begins to dedicate himself to the work and of God.

**Jonah 2:8-9** "Those who cling to worthless idols turn away from God's love for them. <sup>9</sup>But 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.'"

- g. At the climax of his prayer, he speaks of God's grace (key word, sometimes translated as steadfast love.) It is seeing God's grace in salvation is what motivates him for mission!
- h. And by the grace of God, Jonah is *sent* back out on his mission.

**Jonah 2:10** And the Lord commanded the fish, and it vomited Jonah onto dry land.

- a. As he thinks about his salvation and God's mission, he acknowledges what will hinder people from receiving grace!
  - a. Nothing else will do... not "Worthless idols"

- b. And idol is anything that we substitute for God. But they are worthless because they will never provide what they seem to promise. And They stop us from repenting
- b. Or, to put it another way, Idols will block you from receiving grace! Why? Because you are looking elsewhere!
- b. And so... the big question is: will Jonah continue to learn these lessons of grace? Or, as he does the work, will he forget?
- c. Here is where the story of Jonah is a bit sobering. Despite his declaration of salvation, he quickly relapses into pride, anger.
  - i. Once he goes to the wicked city of Nineveh, preaches, and sees God extend grace to *them*, he explodes in anger!
  - ii. Why? He still has his idol of self. His pride, his self-righteousness is what he clings to, not the grace of God!
  - iii. Even though he condemns the idols of others, His own idols keep him from grasping the grace of God.
- d. You see, Jonah's repentance is only partial
- e. Despite the breakthrough he experiences here, we learn that grace does not *continue* to be his teacher! Where might this be true for us? After all, one commentator writes "All of us are more like Jonah than we are different from him".
- f. Idols will blind us and keep us from learning from and leaning on the grace of God. We see this warning in the NT **Hebrews 12:15 See to it that no one falls short of the grace of God, and that no root of bitterness springs up to cause trouble and defile many.**
- g. How do we fall short of grace? By not receiving it! If someone falls short of the grace of God it is not because it wasn't available, it's because they rejected it.
- h. Our encouragement today, is to be continually reliant and dependent on grace. It's not a one-time event, it's a lifestyle.
  - i. Many Christians believe they are saved by grace but sanctified by works! (Irritation with others... dryness..)

- i. Yet Grace is not only about how you start! It's about how you continue. If we are going to reflect the grace of God, we must be constantly reliant on the grace of God.
- j. After all, it's hard to give away what you don't have! (my story)
- k. But unlike my stingy Boss, God lays out a feast of grace before us each day and encourages us to dine! He enrolls into his college of grace for us to learn!
- l. One day a cameraman was filming a churchwoman for a documentary, while she cared for the wretched and poor of India. As she was cleaning the sores of a leper the cameraman bluntly said "I wouldn't do that for a million \$"
- m. The woman turned and looked at him and said, "Neither would I!" And continued to care the diseased. She wasn't motivated by earning. She was motivated by grace!
- n. Today, look at what you have by grace!
  - i. Grace means the **pressure to perform is off**
  - ii. Grace means the **need to compare is relieved!**
  - iii. Grace means the **fear of rejection is removed!**
  - iv. Grace means the **weight of guilt is lifted!**
  - v. Grace means the **lack of motivation is reversed!**
  - vi. Grace means the **search for acceptance is over!**
  - vii. Grace means the **longing for security is fulfilled!**
  - viii. **Grace means you get God! And get him forever!**
- o. Because, in the Bible, grace is not a thing, that could possibly run out. **Grace is a person.** He has given himself for you
- p. Each and every day! The gospel of grace is our tutor! The Holy Spirit bring these things to our minds and hearts!
- q. In the College of God's grace, you never graduate! And that is a good thing. It means you will continually be transformed!
  - i. **Recognize** the idols that blind you
  - ii. **Receive** God's grace through Jesus as a gift
- r. As we do, we will **reflect** God's grace to the watching world!