|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| A picture containing object, thing, clock  Description generated with very high confidence | A Fish Called Grace |
| MATT BLACK, Wed, July 26, 2017 |
| [livinghopechurch.net](http://www.livinghopechurch.net/) | Jonah 2:1-10, “Into the Storm” series |

Introduction: Open your Bible to Jonah. We are continuing a series in Jonah called “Into the Storm.” Tonight’s study is entitled: “A Fish Called Grace.”

**Trying to Get Rid of Difficulty**

So much of our life, we are asking God to get us out of a difficulty. We want the difficulty to end. That’s our prayer. Jesus’ prayer for you is not that the difficulty would end, but that you would be conformed to His image. We are going to learn that often the trial God is sending you a part of his great grace for you. How else are you going to experience his grace unless you are emptied of your own power? God uses trials to drain us of our own solutions and strength so Jesus might have all the glory!

**Jonah 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.” Here we meet a fish called grace! Our difficulties and trials in life are an expression of the grace of God.

Let me put it this way: **Jonah turned and ran from the presence of the Lord, but the Lord would not turn from Jonah**. Instead he sent a fish after Jonah.

**Mucus and Meditation**

Jonah is in a bizarre place. He’s not praying at all in chapter 1. God puts him in a situation where he has to pray. I think we could entitle Jonah chapter two, “Mucus and Meditation.”

God’s gracious nature toward Jonah is intent on turning this stubborn man to a tender man. If you work your way through the prayer, you see Jonah’s heart changing.

Here’s a truth: prayer is important because it transforms and softens our heart.

1. That fish brought the grace of **difficulty** (2:1-2).

**Finally Jonah is Praying**

If there was anything for Jonah to celebrate while he sat in the belly of the fish, it was this:

“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” (Jon 2:2).

God heard him. And God answered him. What an overwhelming peace must have shrouded the rebellious prophet, even while he was cowering in despair in the middle of nowhere.

**In Desperate Need of the Grace of Difficulty**

There are times when we are running from God, and we are in desperate need of the grace of difficulty. **Difficulty is a grace, a gift from God**. We need a fish called grace to swallow us!

Maybe God sees I am directing my life. I’m blind to it. I’ve got my self-righteous justifications, but truth be told, I need God to take away my self-reliance with the grace of difficulty.

There is no Christian on planet earth that doesn’t at times get eyes on self and somehow run from the manifest presence of God. I need God’s grace of difficulty for this reason. There’s none of us who are free from the need of the glorious rescue of God’s grace.

God’s right here—right in there with you. And He will not ignore your call for help. I'll be honest, I almost get butterflies in my stomach when I see Jonah, running from God and out of sorts in this impossible snare of a consequence, praying “to the Lord his God from the stomach of the fish” (**2:1**). As far as we can tell, praying is not something he had done since we first met him pulling out of Jerusalem on his way to Joppa. Throughout the whole storm sequence of chapter 1, everybody is praying except Jonah. In chapter 2, every single word of Jonah's is a prayer.

**Trials Lead Us to the Fish’s Belly to Learn to Pray**

There's something about forgoing the privilege of prayer that almost always leads us into the fish's belly. And yet being in the fish's belly is bound to lead us back to it. In fact, I'm convinced that's one of the main things it's designed to do. But if we aren't careful, we can allow it to have the opposite effect. Whether from the extraordinary discomfort, the overwhelming shame, the hopeless frustration, or any combination of emotions, we face the cruel temptation to hole up in our hardship and consider ourselves abandoned. Forgotten. Unforgiven. Unforgiveable.

Yet here we see Jonah—a spiritual leader of Israel who had hightailed it to Tarshish in front of God and everybody (as well as endless generations of Bible readers)—seizing on this opportunity to do business with God, to turn and look into His face from the thick darkness of his current condition, to cry out to Him in the midst of his despair, knowing that the Lord was his only hope of rescue.

**Pain is for Your Redemption**

Jonah could have resigned himself to despair, and yet he didn't. He chose to cry out to the Lord “from the stomach of the fish” (**2:1**). There’s no better place than here to **surrender** – no better time than now.

**A Mirror for Your Weakness**

God has brought you here to redeem you, my friend, not to destroy you. And your restoration and renewal need not wait another second. He’s brought you here to bring a mirror to you. He wants to show you your weakness.

Listen to St. Paul, “So to keep me from becoming conceited because of the surpassing greatness of the revelations, a thorn was given me in the flesh, a messenger of Satan to harass me, to keep me from becoming conceited. 8 Three times I pleaded with the Lord about this, that it should leave me. 9 But he said to me, “My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.” Therefore I will boast all the more gladly of my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may rest upon me. 10 For the sake of Christ, then, I am content with weaknesses, insults, hardships, persecutions, and calamities. For when I am weak, then I am strong” (**2 Cor 12:7-10**).

1. That fish brought the grace of **danger** (2:3-7).

Who was it that cast Jonah into the deep? **Jonah 2:3-4**, “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. 4 Then I said, ‘I am driven away from your sight; yet I shall again look upon your holy temple.’” We see the change. God cast him into the deep. Jonah realizes the righteousness of God in doing that, and realizes God is holy, different from sinners. God never has an unrighteous thought.

I love Revelation 15:3 in the KJV, “Great and marvelous are Thy works, Lord God Almighty! Just and true are Thy ways, Thou King of saints!”

God will do go to us in our trials. But realize, God is working through your trials, and it’s dangerous. **God is willing to do whatever it takes to sanctify you**.

**When the Deep Surrounds You**

**Jonah 2:5-6**, “The waters closed in over me to take my life; the deep surrounded me; Weeds [seaweed] were wrapped about my head 6 at the roots of the mountains. I went down to the land whose bars closed upon me forever; yet you brought up my life from the pit, O Lord my God.”

Jonah describes the see as a prison “whose bars closed upon [him] forever” (2:6). And then suddenly he turns as he says, “When my life was fainting away, I remembered the Lord, and my prayer came to you, into your holy temple” (2:7).

**Danger Awakens Us the Deeper Life**

It took serious danger for Jonah to be awakened out of his blindness and temporary rebellion. I love what C.S. Lewis wrote in *The Problem of Pain*. He said, “Pain is God’s megaphone.” For the first chapter, Jonah was running from God. He was even asleep for a while in the storm. Isn’t that how it is for us. Then God uses danger and pain to awaken us to a deeper life.

I need the “deeper life.” I love those who participated in the Keswick conferences and theology of the 1800s – people like Amy Carmichael, Hudson Taylor, George Mueller and Andrew Murray. They were used of God to call attention to a sleeping church.

Keith Green, a musician from the 1980s wrote a song about the church being “Asleep in the Light.” That’s what we are sometimes – asleep in the light.

**Danger is a Grace**

Danger is a grace for the child of God. God’s purpose in danger is to show you how powerless you are. Danger awakens you to your need for God. We are powerless to please God in our flesh. Jesus said, “It is the Spirit who gives life; the flesh is no help at all. The words that I have spoken to you are spirit and life” (**Jn 6:63**).

1. That fish brought the grace of **deliverance** (2:8).

Jonah met a fish called grace. The grace of deliverance came when that fish rescued him from himself and all his idols.

**Jonah 2:8**, “Those who pay regard to vain idols forsake their hope of steadfast love.” Jonah acknowledged that his hope had been misdirected. He had to forsake his idols before directed rightly again. Here we see the vanity of our idolatry.

**False Messiahs**

We try to turn the gifts God gave to comfort us into our own personal messiahs.

* We live for **power** – we want to control the situations in life. We’ll even use ministry or church to gain prominence and place and power.
* We live for **popularity** – we please people and let others control us. We allow the sin of co-dependence. We desire prominence and acceptance from humans instead of God. Listen, the only person you cannot live without is God.
* We live for **pleasure** – what do you flee to when you are hurting? That’s your messiah. That’s your Christ and king. That’s your savior.
* We live for **possessions** and material things. Listen cars, homes and gizmos will not fill your cavernous heart.

**The World’s Trap of Idol Worship**

St. John tells us not to live for false saviors. “Do not love the world or the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. 16 For all that is in the world—the desires of the flesh and the desires of the eyes and pride of life—is not from the Father but is from the world. 17 And the world is passing away along with its desires, but whoever does the will of God abides forever” (**1 Jn 2:15-17**). The core of the world’s philosophy is to get you to worship idols – to trap you into trusting a small “g” god instead of the true and living God.

**Distress Reveals the Powerlessness of Idols to Save You**

Distress will always reveal the impotence of your idol to give you life, help and hope. In those moments of distress your idol has no power to rescue you.

**Idol Making Factories**

John Calvin said, “Our hearts are idol making factories.” So true. We try to deify the creation while we forget the Creator. We try to find meaning and power and life somewhere in the creation (outside of the self-existent God). All things get their life and breath and being from God. How can those other things be sufficient saviors?

I love what Jeremiah 10 has to say about idolatry. It’s one of those sarcastic passages. Yes there is healthy sarcasm in the Bible. The idols that people worship are called by Jeremiah “scarecrows in a cucumber patch.” It’s a putdown. He says you paint them with gold and you have to carry them around. And you have to nail them to a platform, lest they fall over.

**Jeremiah 10:5**, “‘Their idols are like scarecrows in a cucumber field, and they cannot speak; they have to be carried, for they cannot walk…”

And then he says, “There is none like you, O Lord; you are great, and your name is great in might. 7 Who would not fear you, O King of the nations? … there is none like you.”

You are the creator of the heavens and the earth. What a contrast.

**Is There a Scarecrow in Your Life?**

Is there a scarecrow in the cucumber patch of your life? Are you seeking life from a scarecrow? Are you trying to get satisfaction from your marriage? You should seek to be the greatest blessing to your **spouse** and be blessed by your spouse. But your spouse, as wonderful as they are, is not the Savior.

Could there be something that you’ve built with your own hands, that has now replaced the God who made you?

What’s your identity and purpose in life? Is it your job, your family, your hobby, your bank account, your escapism, or is it “to glorify God and love him”?

**The Fish Rescued Jonah from Himself**

Jonah met a fish called grace. The grace of deliverance came when that fish rescued him from himself and all his idols.

1. That fish brought the grace of **destination** (2:9-10).

God’s grace will get you where you need to go. It’s often not where you want to go.

**Jonah 2:9-10**, “But I with the voice of thanksgiving will sacrifice to you; what I have vowed I will pay. **Salvation belongs to the Lord**!” 10 And the Lord spoke to the fish, and it vomited Jonah out upon the dry land.”

**Jonah’s Most Important Destination**

Salvation is truly of the Lord. To realize the distance of grace, we have to go back to **Jonah 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.”

Jonah’s most important destination wasn’t Nineveh. It was to be in the center of God’s will in His manifest presence. He learned to pray, “Thy Kingdom come, Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven” (**Mt 6:10**). **Jonah was now running back to the manifest presence of the Lord**. Not only this, but Jonah’s prayer pictures the Person and Work of Jesus Christ.

**A Greater Jonah**

And Jonah became a picture of the Gospel. That’s where we need to be. Our focus should not be on Jonah or Nineveh, but on the Greater Jonah, Jesus Christ. Look over at **Matthew 12:40-41**, “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.”

There is, we see, a Greater Jonah. And this Jonah is in distress not because he was a rebel but because he was obedient. This one was distressed by the plan and purpose of God. Peter makes this clear in **Acts 2:23**, “this Jesus, delivered up according to the definite plan and foreknowledge of God…” yet he was “…crucified and killed by the hands of lawless men.”

Can I just say, even the most hideous fish are fish that deliver God’s grace for you. Jesus was distressed because of the redemptive plan of God.

You are Christ’s body in this earth. He is with you. No distress can come upon you except by the sovereign plan of God. There are absolutely no accidents in life.

Let’s close by reading the last part of **Romans 8:19-29**, “For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is to be revealed to us. 19 For the creation waits with eager longing for the revealing of the sons of God. 20 For the creation was subjected to futility, not willingly, but because of him who subjected it, in hope 21 that the creation itself will be set free from its bondage to corruption and obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God. 22 For we know that the whole creation has been groaning together in the pains of childbirth until now. 23 And not only the creation, but we ourselves, who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies. 24 For in this hope we were saved. Now hope that is seen is not hope. For who hopes for what he sees? 25 But if we hope for what we do not see, we wait for it with patience.

26 Likewise the Spirit helps us in our weakness. For we do not know what to pray for as we ought, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us with groanings too deep for words. 27 And he who searches hearts knows what is the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for the saints according to the will of God. 28 And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose. 29 For those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, in order that he might be the firstborn among many brothers. 30 And those whom he predestined he also called, and those whom he called he also justified, and those whom he justified he also glorified.

31 What then shall we say to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us? 32 He who did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all, how will he not also with him graciously give us all things? 33 Who shall bring any charge against God's elect? It is God who justifies. 34 Who is to condemn? Christ Jesus is the one who died—more than that, who was raised—who is at the right hand of God, who indeed is interceding for us. 35 Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or danger, or sword? 36 As it is written,

“For your sake we are being killed all the day long;

we are regarded as sheep to be slaughtered.”

37 No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. 38 For I am sure that neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers, 39 nor height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.”

All of these things happening to us are God pointing us to our Savior who loves us! Amen!