

Jonah 2 – Running Back to God

1. God responds to Jonah's call

- a. Jonah is nearly dead
- b. God allows Jonah to nearly die
- c. God delivers Jonah when he cries out

2. Jonah responds to God's grace

- a. Worthless idols can do nothing
- b. Continuing sacrifice is the right response
- c. Salvation is God's – It belongs to Him alone.

**** PICTURE – ROCKCLIMBING**

III – call for help – am oldie but a goodie!

A man is rock climbing and falls off a cliff, but manages to catch a branch on his way down. He starts to slip and cries out: "If there's anyone up there, please help me!"

He hears a voice reply: "This is God. Let go of the branch and I will save you"

The man replies: "Is there anyone else up there?"

III – In April 2003 a rock climber by the name of Aron Ralston became trapped in a Canyon in Utah when a 100 kilogram boulder crushed his hand, and pinned him to the canyon wall. For six days, he struggled to free himself while fighting dehydration and hypothermia. He was trapped. He faced certain death. Finally, he chose to do something that would later astonish the world. Using a "multitool", like a pocket knife, he cut off his own right hand, then climbed to freedom. He said "When I amputated, I felt every bit of it. It hurt to break the bone, and it certainly hurt to cut the nerve. But cutting the muscle was not as bad."

I don't know about you, but that sounds painful to me. But necessary. He was motivated by his will to survive. There was no-one to help him, so he had to save himself.

The problem with life is that you can't always save yourself. In Jonah chapter 2, Jonah is nearly dead and he can't save himself.

When we left Jonah in chapter 1, he had a death wish. He was running away from God because he refused to go to Ninevah and warn them to follow God or die. The Ninevites were his enemies. And he didn't want God to save them. Jonah wanted to see them destroyed. So instead of obeying God, Jonah flees to Tarshish, in the opposite direction. God sends a huge storm and Jonah tells the sailors to throw him overboard. Jonah would rather die than go to Ninevah. And so Jonah is thrown overboard and is drowning. He is about to die, and no-one is able to save him, not even himself.

When Jonah is as good as dead, he remembers the Lord and calls out to him for help. God provides a large fish to swallow Jonah, and he's inside this large fish for three days and three nights before the fish spews him out onto shore.

Jonah is nearly DEAD and God rescues him. Listen to the words and phrases Jonah uses to describe what he goes through:

**** 4 VERSES**

(verse 2) "from the depth of the grave I called for help"

(verse 4) "I have been banished from your sight"

(verse 6) "to the roots of the mountain I sank down; the earth beneath barred me in *forever*".

and (verse 7) "When my life was ebbing away".

Jonah is as good as dead. He's sinking to his death. And God is allowing it to happen. He's allowing Jonah to run away even to the point of death.

**** PICTURE – MOTH**

III – There's a story of a little boy who sees a moth emerging out of a cocoon. He sees the moth struggle to push its way out of the cocoon. And he decides to help it. So he carefully peels back the outside of the cocoon to help the moth crawl out. Finally, the moth emerges and falls to ground and eventually dies. It can't fly. Why? Because of the boy. You see, when a moth emerges out of a cocoon, as it pushes its way out, it forces the blood to flow to the wings so they work properly. Without that struggle, without that pressure, the wings won't develop, the moth won't fly, and it will die. Sometimes, struggle is important before rescue. There is a reason for it.

You see, God doesn't put some magic protective shield around Jonah. He doesn't wrap him up in cotton wool. He allows him to be **human**. He allows him the free choice to run away. He allows him to make mistakes. He allows him to nearly get himself killed. He allows him to go through the struggles. And when he's deep at the bottom of the ocean, drowning in the water, at the roots of the mountains, seaweed wrapped around his head, when there is no-one else around, when there is no-one who can help him, **THEN** he cries out to God. And **the moment he cries out**, God rescues him.

When we are at rock bottom, when we turn away from God, when we run the opposite direction from him, **there is no point when God says "You're on your own"**. God is **always** prepared to rescue us when we call to him. Often in life we will find ourselves in situations where we have been disobedient to God. Times when we have sinned against Him and ended up in a real mess. But God is always prepared to bring us back. He will **allow** us make our own choices. He will **allow** us to be disobedient, even though he doesn't like it. He will **allow** us to make mistakes and to struggle through our bad decisions. But whenever we are prepared to call out to him for help, he is always there to rescue us.

Because no matter what we have done or how far we have run from God, God is a God of grace. And what that means is that he is prepared to help us when we **do not deserve it**.

Jonah recognises God's grace. Jonah recognises he doesn't deserve to be saved. But through all the struggles, he's able to call out to God because he knows that God still loves him. He knows that God is able to rescue him. And he knows no other gods can.

Have a look at verse 8:

**** VERSE**

"Those who cling to worthless idols forfeit the grace that could be theirs."

Jonah knows the futility of worthless idols. Whether it's the sailors from the boat praying to non-existent gods to save them from the storm, or the Ninevites who worship useless idols. If people do not worship the one true God, then their prayers are useless and they forfeit the grace that God offers them to be saved.

Jonah responds to God's grace with a song of thanksgiving, and the promise of sacrifice:

**** VERSE**

Verse 9: "What I have vowed I will make good."

Jonah is making a promise here to God. His response is to offer a promise that is **continuous**. Not a one-off thank you. But an ongoing commitment to sacrifice and thanksgiving. Jonah makes a vow, a promise, a guarantee.

This is the way we need to respond to God's grace – in a way that is ongoing and continuous.

**** PICTURE – HOUSE**

III – If you buy a house today in Sydney, most people would probably have to sign up for a 20 or 30 year mortgage. If you take out a \$400,000 loan, or more, then you'll be paying that off every week for a long time. It's a measured and continuous payment. The bank calculates how much you need to pay off the principal amount and the interest. Whatever you borrow, you have to pay it back with interest or you lose your house. And many people across Sydney are losing their houses at the moment, because they can't afford the repayments.

God's grace is not like that. God's grace is *infinite*. We cannot measure it. Jonah's rescue from death is not something he can pay back. Jesus' death on the cross for **us** is something you cannot measure and pay back in instalments. An infinite gift doesn't require payment. It requires an infinite response. That means that our response to God must be with everything we have, and nothing less. Not just an hour or two here or there. But our whole life. And it's not like a loan we can pay off. It's a gift we respond to.

Often we tend to "do" ministry or "go" to church or bible study. We have these parts of our life where we commit to God. But it needs to be different – we need to have a life response, not a "part" response. Church, Bible study, ministry, prayer, reading the bible – they're all part of a *life* response to what God has done for us. You see, God's grace is unending. That's what our response should be. There should be no limits for our thankfulness to God and our response of commitment. If we truly understand God's grace, the only appropriate response is to respond with a *whole life* of thanksgiving and service. Not efforts to pay back an unpayable loan. But a life response of thanks. Jonah's vow is a response that is to be continuous, not a one-off event.

But perhaps the most interesting part in this chapter is that final part of verse 9:

**** VERSE**

"Salvation comes from the Lord"

Jonah recognises that God is the one who is able to save him. But more than that – God is the **ONLY** one who is able to save him. Salvation comes from God – God is the only one who can offer it to people. It is *His possession*. Worthless idols can't save. People can't save. **God alone can save**. There is only one who can save Jonah and there's only one who can save the Ninevites – God.

Jonah is so thankful to God that he has saved him. He recognises that God **OWNS** salvation. Yet, as we read on in chapters 3 and 4, it seems Jonah still does not think God should save the Ninevites.

III – Imagine you gave someone a lift in your car, and as they got out they said to you: "Thanks for the lift. By the way, I don't want you to give anyone else a lift. No-one. Just me. And maybe my friends." Whose car is it? Who decides how it's going to be used? God owns salvation. And he chooses to offer it to every person on this earth.

If you have responded to God's grace, have you responded with *token gestures* or have you responded with your *whole life*? And if you have recognised the great grace that God has shown you, **even though you don't deserve it**, have you thought "perhaps I'm not the only one God wants to save"? Have you thought "If God thinks *I'm* worth saving, is there anyone who is **not** worth saving?"

Whatever we have done, God is willing to save us when we call out to him. Do you know people who need to hear that message?

Make your vow to God **today**. If you've received his grace, vow to him **today** that you will respond with nothing less than your life. Vow to him that you will *sacrifice*. Not just time, not just comfort, not just money, not just Sundays, not just 10% – but your **whole life**.

Jesus was THE sacrifice for us. The only sacrifice able to save us from our sin. If you were worth Jesus dying on the cross for your sin – and God thinks you were – then respond to Jesus' sacrifice today. DO NOT stop thanking him. DO NOT stop serving him. DO NOT stop giving up everything for him. And DO NOT stop telling other people about his grace. If you were worth saving, then so is everyone else in this world. This is what Jonah needs to understand about the Ninevites. And this is what we need to understand about the people in our world.

Let's pray.