

Rock Bottom Has a Purpose: Jonah 2:1-10 Explained

Jonah 2:1-10

Then Jonah prayed unto the LORD his God out of the fish's belly, 2 And said, I cried by reason of mine affliction unto the LORD, and he heard me; out of the belly of hell cried I, and thou heardest my voice. 3 For thou hadst cast me into the deep, in the midst of the seas; and the floods compassed me about: all thy billows and thy waves passed over me. 4 Then I said, I am cast out of thy sight; yet I will look again toward thy holy temple. 5 The waters compassed me about, even to the soul: the depth closed me round about, the weeds were wrapped about my head. 6 I went down to the bottoms of the mountains; the earth with her bars was about me for ever: yet hast thou brought up my life from corruption, O LORD my God. 7 When my soul fainted within me I remembered the LORD: and my prayer came in unto thee, into thine holy temple. 8 They that observe lying vanities forsake their own mercy. 9 But I will sacrifice unto thee with the voice of thanksgiving; I will pay that that I have vowed. Salvation is of the LORD. 10 And the LORD spake unto the fish, and it vomited out Jonah upon the dry land.

INTRODUCTION

Have you ever been somewhere you never imagined you would be? Maybe not inside the belly of a great fish. But somewhere emotionally. Spiritually. Financially. Physically. You look around and think, "**How did I get here?**"

Imagine waking up in complete darkness. You can't see your hand in front of your face. The air is damp. Everything smells like death. The walls around you move. You hear water crashing. You're tossed back and forth. You can barely breathe. Everywhere you touch is slimy. You're alive, but it doesn't feel like living. That's where Jonah is.

Not because God hated him. But because God refused to let him keep running. You could say that Jonah has hit rock bottom. Jonah would have rather died than continue to live. Sometimes God has a purpose, even at rock bottom.

I. SOMETIMES WE CREATE OUR OWN ROCK BOTTOM

Jonah 2:1

Then Jonah prayed unto the LORD his God out of the fish's belly.

Isn't it interesting that Jonah finally prays after all of this? God called Jonah to do something in the first chapter of this book. Jonah ran. God warned. Jonah boarded a ship. God sent a storm. Jonah still didn't pray. The sailors prayed. The captain prayed. Everyone on the ship prayed except God's prophet. He was angry. He was stubborn. He wasn't going to pray.

Only after Jonah reaches the bottom does he finally cry out. And we've all been that way before. Stubborn. Angry. Sometimes we ask, "Why did God let this happen?" Sometimes the better question is, "How many times did God try to get my attention before this happened?"

Imagine a GPS telling you, "Turn around." You ignore it. "Turn around." You ignore it again. Eventually you find yourself on a dead-end road, miles from where you wanted to be. Was the GPS trying to ruin your trip? No. It was trying to keep you from getting lost.

Jonah didn't accidentally end up in the fish. Every step toward the fish began with one decision to run from God. Yet, God has a purpose, even at rock bottom.

II. GOD HEARS PRAYERS FROM THE LOWEST PLACES

Jonah 2:2-7

And said, I cried by reason of mine affliction unto the LORD, and he heard me; out of the belly of hell cried I, and thou heardest my voice. 3 For thou hadst cast me into the deep, in the midst of the seas; and the floods compassed me about: all thy billows and thy waves passed over me. 4 Then I said, I am cast out of thy sight; yet I will look again toward thy holy temple. 5 The waters compassed me about, even to the soul: the depth closed me round about, the weeds were wrapped about my head. 6 I went down to the bottoms of the mountains; the earth with her bars was about me for ever: yet hast thou brought up my life from corruption, O LORD my God. 7 When my soul fainted within me I remembered the LORD: and my prayer came in unto thee, into thine holy temple.

One of my favorite truths in this chapter is where Jonah prays. Not in the Temple. Not on a mountain. Not surrounded by worshippers. Inside a great fish. And, did God hear Jonah's prayer? Yes, God did hear Jonah's prayers even inside the belly of a whale.

If God could hear Jonah there, where can He hear you? Jonah says, "Out of the belly of hell cried I." What a description. Again, "Out of the belly of hell cried I." So, being inside the belly of a whale is what hell will be like for all those who call God a liar every second of their life.

He isn't saying he literally entered the eternal place of punishment. Jonah didn't actually go to the literal hell in the center of the earth. Jesus did, though. And Jonah is a picture of what happened to Jesus Christ.

Matthew 12:40

For as Jonas was three days and three nights in the whale's belly; so shall the Son of man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth.

Now, Jonah went, the Bible says, down to the bottoms of the mountains. Jesus Christ went deeper than that and further than Jonah. Many preachers, who I 100% disagree with, will say that Matthew 12:40 means that the body of Jesus was buried in the tomb. The heart of the earth is not buried in a tomb. Jesus went deeper than Jonah. The soul of Jesus went to hell after He died on the cross. Acts 2:31 says, "His soul was not left in hell."

Jonah is describing how hopeless it felt in the belly of the whale. But Jesus Christ went through more than Jonah. Imagine how helpless Jesus Christ felt alone in hell. Have you ever felt like

that? Like life was closing in? Like there was no way out? Listen to Jonah's words: "The waters compassed me about. The weeds were wrapped about my head." Can you picture it?

He's sinking beneath the waves. Seaweed tangles around him. His lungs burn. The sunlight disappears. Everything grows darker. Complete darkness. It's scary. It's not good. Then, a giant fish swallows him.

Most people think the fish was God's punishment. I think the fish was God's rescue. Without the fish, Jonah dies. The fish rescued Jonah. Sometimes the very thing we call our greatest problem is actually God's way of preserving our life. A hospital bed. A lost job. A broken relationship. A failure that humbles us. None of those things are enjoyable.

But sometimes they're the very things God uses to bring us back to Himself. God has a purpose, even at rock bottom.

III. ROCK BOTTOM CHANGES YOUR PERSPECTIVE

Jonah 2:7-9

When my soul fainted within me I remembered the LORD: and my prayer came in unto thee, into thine holy temple. 8 They that observe lying vanities forsake their own mercy. 9 But I will sacrifice unto thee with the voice of thanksgiving; I will pay that that I have vowed. Salvation is of the LORD.

Notice how different Jonah sounds now. The man who ran from God is now running back to God. Rock bottom didn't change God. Rock bottom changed Jonah. Notice what happens.

First, Jonah remembers the Lord. Notice Jonah's words. "When my soul fainted within me, I remembered the LORD." We shouldn't wait until we're at the end of ourselves before we remember God. Jonah had remembered Tarshish. He remembered the ship. He remembered the fare. He remembered his own plan. But he had forgotten the One who called him.

Sometimes God allows every other plan to fall apart so we'll finally remember the only One who never fails. How many people ignore God while life is going well? Then sickness comes. A marriage falls apart. A job is lost. The doctor calls. Suddenly, they remember God. Wouldn't it be far better to remember Him before we reach the bottom?

Yet God's mercy is so great that He still listened when Jonah finally called. God has a purpose, even at rock bottom.

Second, Jonah stopped trusting empty things. Jonah says, **"They that observe lying vanities forsake their own mercy."** What are "lying vanities"? They're empty things that promise satisfaction but never deliver. Jonah thought, "I can run from God." That was a lying vanity. He thought, "I can make my own plans." That was a lying vanity. He thought, "I can escape God's calling." That was a lying vanity.

A lying vanity is anything we trust instead of God. Money can become a lying vanity. Success can become a lying vanity. Popularity can become a lying vanity. Even our own intelligence can become a lying vanity. They all whisper, *"You'll be fine without God."* But they're lying.

And Jonah says something heartbreaking: **"forsake their own mercy."** Notice he doesn't say God stopped being merciful. He says **they forsook their own mercy.** Imagine a man dying of thirst while standing beside a fresh spring. Someone says, "Drink!" He refuses. The water is right there. The mercy is available. But he walks away from it.

Who abandoned whom? Not the spring. The man abandoned the spring. God's mercy was available to Jonah all along. Jonah was the one running from it. God is merciful.

Third, Jonah renewed his commitment to God right there. Jonah says, **"But I will sacrifice unto thee with the voice of thanksgiving; I will pay that that I have vowed."** What does that mean? Jonah isn't trying to earn God's rescue. He's promising that if God delivers him, he will do what he should have done from the beginning.

The phrase **"I will pay that that I have vowed"** means: **"Lord, I will keep my promise."** God had called Jonah to go to Nineveh. Instead, he boarded a ship to Tarshish. He made a commitment to serve God as His prophet. Then he ran from that calling. Now, from inside the fish, Jonah says, *"I'm done running. If You give me another chance, I'll obey."*

Imagine a son telling his father, "I know I disobeyed. I know I ran away. But if you'll let me come home, I'll do what I should have done in the first place." That's Jonah's heart. Rock bottom often produces something comfort never can: a willing heart. God has a purpose, even at rock bottom.

Finally, Jonah learned the greatest lesson of all. Then comes one of the greatest statements in the entire Bible. **"Salvation is of the LORD."** Don't rush past that sentence. Jonah had exhausted every option. He couldn't swim to shore. He couldn't fight the sea. He couldn't command the fish. He couldn't save himself. **"HE COULDN'T SAVE HIMSELF."**

His only hope was God. That's true for every one of us. Whether we're talking about physical deliverance or the salvation of our souls: no one saves themselves. You cannot earn it. You cannot deserve it. You cannot buy it. You cannot work for it. **Salvation belongs to the Lord.**

Imagine a man trapped beneath a collapsed building. He can't lift the concrete. He can't dig himself out. Someone else has to come and rescue him. That's us. We don't rescue ourselves. God rescues us. Jonah finally understood what he should have known all along. His rescue wasn't going to come from a ship, or sailors, or swimming, or his own wisdom.

His rescue would come from God alone. **Salvation is of the LORD.** And that's still true today. God has a purpose, even at rock bottom.

IV. GOD ISN'T FINISHED WITH YOU

Jonah 2:10

And the LORD spake unto the fish, and it vomited out Jonah upon the dry land.

Think about that. The fish obeyed immediately. God spoke to the fish and the fish obeyed. Earlier in the book, the wind obeyed. The sea obeyed. The storm obeyed. The fish obeyed. The only thing refusing to obey was Jonah because God gave Jonah a choice. Jonah, at that time, absolutely 100% refused to obey God. Yet God wasn't finished with him.

Same thing for children growing up. Maybe they refuse to obey. But we aren't finished with them. Maybe it takes some time. We continue to love them.

Imagine a potter working at a wheel. The clay collapses. Does the potter throw it away? No. He wets it. Shapes it again. Starts over. The clay may think, "I'm ruined." The potter says, "I'm not finished." That's Jonah. We cannot give up on people so easily. Maybe it will take some time.

Jonah probably thought his ministry was over. His life was over. His usefulness was over. Jonah was trying to quit. Sometimes we try to quit. God said, "No. Now you're ready." When you get to the point where you want to quit, maybe that's the exact time you're ready for the challenge. We see this to be true in Jonah. God has a purpose, even at rock bottom.

In those times you want to quit, God will save you and give you strength. Remember this.

CONCLUSION

Imagine Jonah standing on that beach. Covered in seawater. Weak. Probably shaken. The fish disappears into the sea. The sun rises. He takes his first deep breath of fresh air. Think about what almost happened.

If God had given Jonah what he deserved, he would have drowned. Instead, God gave him another chance. Maybe today you feel like you're at rock bottom. Perhaps it's because of choices you've made. Perhaps it's because life has crushed you. Either way, hear this truth: **Rock bottom is not the end when God is involved.**

Sometimes the place where you think your life is over is the very place where God begins rebuilding it.

Because the God who met Jonah in the darkness still meets people in the darkness today. So if you're at rock bottom don't keep looking down. Look up. Because **God has a purpose, even at rock bottom.**

Let's pray.