

PART 3

JONAH

*The Scandal
of Grace*

FOX VALLEY

Seventh-day Adventist
Community Church





Introduction - Jonah 1:17-2:10

But *Now the Lord had arranged for a great fish to swallow Jonah. And Jonah was inside the fish for three days and three nights.

Chapter 2

Jonah's Prayer

1 *Then Jonah prayed to the Lord his God from inside the fish. 2 He said, "I cried out to the Lord in my great trouble, and he answered me. I called to you from the land of the dead, and Lord, you heard me! 3 You threw me into the ocean depths, and I sank down to the heart of the sea. The mighty waters engulfed me; I was buried beneath your wild and stormy waves. 4 Then I said, 'O Lord, you have driven me from your presence. Yet I will look once more toward your holy Temple.' 5 "I sank beneath the waves, and the waters closed over me. Seaweed wrapped itself around my head. 6 I sank down to the very roots of the mountains. I was imprisoned in the earth, whose gates lock shut forever. But you, O Lord my God, snatched me from the jaws of death! 7 As my life was slipping away, I remembered the Lord. And my earnest prayer went out to you in your holy Temple. 8 Those who worship false gods turn their backs on all God's mercies. 9 But I will offer sacrifices to you with songs of praise, and I will fulfil all my vows. For my salvation comes from the Lord alone." 10 Then the Lord ordered the fish to spit Jonah out onto the beach.



Day One

The passage for this week starts with the last verse in chapter one of our English bible. It is one of the most studied and analysed verses in all of the Old Testament Hebrew bible and because of that it is important that we take a closer look at the text. With that being said today's guide will only scrape the surface of study that has gone into Jonah 1:17.

Many scholars throughout history have spent a great deal of time and energy describing the type of large fish that might be capable of swallowing a human and searching for historical accounts where this may have happened. But all verse 17 says is that the Lord arranged or provided (וַיִּשְׂאֵהוּ אֱלֹהִים יָם-בְּרִיחַ) a large fish to swallow Jonah. This verb (וַיִּשְׂאֵהוּ way-man) is used several times in the book of Jonah (God appoints the plant in Chapter 4). In each case God orchestrated the circumstances to teach Jonah something he needed to learn. The root word for the verb (וַיִּשְׂאֵהוּ way-man) is mana (מָנָה). Yes the same word is used to describe what God provided the children of Israel in the desert when they needed food (Exodus 16). The link here is by design. It was a miracle in the desert when God provided food from the sky and it is a miracle when God provides a fish to swallow up Jonah - it's an act beyond human recognition. The detail of the fish swallowing Jonah is peculiar and very low key and its not included to heighten the dramatic quality of the narrative.

Trying to marshal evidence to confirm this Scripture may in fact result in the denigration of the miracle. Searching for historical incidents when people and large animals were swallowed and later recovered from sea creatures shows a posture of defensiveness that is unnecessary, counterproductive, and violates the nature of the biblical account. The major point is that God, through the fish, could sustain this pouting prophet during unbelievable circumstances.

Being in the belly of a fish would not have been a pleasant experience. Yet in Jonah's narrative it saved his life.

Questions

Have you had circumstances in your life that were really difficult to live through yet looking back you can see the important life lessons you had to learn?

What does God's pursuit of Jonah reveal about God?

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How does this fact about God impact you personally?



Day Two

Being swallowed by the fish saved Jonah's life. Yet in the grand scheme of things he was still sinking to the bottom of the world and far from help and hope. He was alive but for how long? The text up until this point has described Jonah as descending. He went down to Joppa, down into the ship, down into the hold off the ship and now down into the depths of the ocean. Jonah rejected and disobeyed God and when that happens radical treatment is needed to bring him back. It wasn't until Jonah was literally at the bottom of the ocean that he could see his fatal flaw and it was only through complete failure that he could begin to see it and change it.

We have all been there, we have all failed miserably at something. It is only when you reach the very bottom, when life falls apart and all your schemes and resources are exhausted that you finally learn to completely depend on God.

As the old saying goes, you never realise that Jesus is all you need until Jesus is all you have. Being at the bottom of the ocean left Jonah alone with God and this is when Jonah finally begins to pray.

Questions

What was Jonah thinking and feeling in the belly of the fish? When have you felt this way?

Why is prayer often our last resort?

Be honest with yourself and rate your prayer life on a scale of 1-10. How can you improve?



Day Three

Over the next three days of this study guide we will be taking a closer look at Jonah's prayer. God's life changing grace is so often an abstract theory to many of us and not a life changing power. This is often the case because we don't acknowledge the crucial truths needed for grace to become a reality.

In verse 3 of this weeks passage Jonah acknowledges that God threw Jonah into the depths of the ocean. This prayer is the only expression we have of Jonah's change of heart that led to his obedience. Jonah is coming to his senses, he is recognising God's divine justice in his situation.

This can be an incredibly difficult concept to come to terms with in the age in which we live. We live in a world that tells us our problems are a lack of self esteem and that we are to determine right and wrong by ourselves. In a society dominated by these beliefs the bible's message that we are guilty sinners comes across as oppressive and evil. When we think like that, God's grace became unnecessary.

Jonah knew he did the wrong thing, yet God is still orchestrating events for him to come to his senses. When he couldn't get any lower Jonah is starting to see God's hand and mercy.

Questions

What elements do you see in Jonah's prayer?

What 'idols' are you still holding onto that is stopping you from seeing God's grace?

How is God currently chasing you with his love and kindness?



Day Four

In the depths of the ocean Jonah realises that he can not only out run God but also he really has no other help but from God. This is confronting to come to terms with because we live in an age where self-help runs supreme. We think that if we follow the right exercise plan, eat the right food, read the right books and listen to podcasts we can fix the slump we are in. In the spiritual sense we believe that hard work and religious observance is what's needed to fix our relationship with God.

In verse 6 Jonah realises that he stands condemned because of his sin and rebellion. But in the belly of that fish Jonah realised that God has snatched him from death.

For reality of grace to sink into heart we must realise that we did the wrong thing and no matter how hard we try to correct our mistakes we are being dragged down by them. It is only through God's costly salvation that we have any hope. This is grace, an undeserved gift.

Questions

Where does Jonah show hope in God's deliverance in spite of his situation?

How does Jonah compare to the mariners in chapter 1?

Read Ephesians 2:1-10. In what sense are we undeserving and helpless when God rescued us? How might knowing this impact the way we relate to God and other people?



Day Five

Twice in Jonah's prayer he looks to God's holy temple (verse 4 and 7). In Exodus 25:22 God tells the people of Israel that he will meet them at the mercy seat, located in God's holy temple. This was a slab over the ark of the covenant in which the ten commandments resided. On the day of atonement the priest sprinkled the blood of the atoning sacrifice for the sins of the people.

Think about this for a minute. The temple was where God dwelled and the ten commandments represent his holy righteousness which no one could ever hope to keep. How can we ever approach God when we know that no matter how hard we try, we can't live up to his moral righteousness? But it is the blood of the atoning sacrifice sprinkled over the mercy seat (over the ten commandments) that shields us from the condemnation of the ten commandments.

It would be centuries later that humanity would have completely understood what this meant. It wasn't the blood of the bulls and goats that protected us from condemnation but the atoning sacrifice of Christ.

In the belly of the fish Jonah knew that it was only through God's grace that he had any chance. Are you starting to see why we only see grace in the valleys? Does this mean that God won't reveal himself in the good times? No I don't believe that. Our hearts won't learn these truths when things are going well. A combination of hard circumstances, biblical insight and prayer can move us towards a wonder and amazement of God's amazing grace.

Questions

What do you think Jonah meant when he declared in verse 9, "Salvation comes from the Lord? Where does Jonah show hope in God's deliverance in spite of his situation?"

Did God's deliverance change Jonah? When has God's deliverance changed you? Was it permanent?

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Why is it that we so often go back to our 'old' way of doing things?

What does it take for you to acknowledge your disobedience?

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