

## Uncomfortable Reality

### Jonah 2

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The story of Jonah is familiar to most of us. It is easily summarized by saying:

God asked Jonah to do something.

Jonah said no and ran away.

God sent a storm, while Jonah was on a ship.

Jonah went overboard and was swallowed by a big fish.

At least that's the first part of the story. What follows becomes a bit more detailed and perhaps less dramatic, but by no means less important. The complete story of Jonah is 4-chapters long.

Take a moment and read these chapters on your own. If you are at home with your family – have everyone read a section or chapter. My focus this morning will be chapter two and an *Uncomfortable Reality*.

When Jonah found himself in the belly of this fish the very first thing, he does... is pray.

*Jonah prayed to the Lord his God from the belly of the fish.*

As much as Jonah has disobeyed and run from God, God is the first being that he turns to when he's in trouble. He rejects God; turns away from God. And at the first sign of danger he turns back to God!

Isn't that the way it is sometimes? We refuse something that God asks of us. And we find many reasons why we might refuse:

The timing just isn't right, God.

It's not a part of my plan, Lord.

I know what's best for me!

I could never do what you are asking, I'm just not qualified, God.

So we reject God's plan for ourselves and then  
we find that we need help;

We're caught up in some tragedy;

Perhaps we've dug hole for ourselves – like Jonah did – and we don't know  
how to get out of it;

Or circumstances around us have landed us in dire straits.

And we pray.

Granted, sometimes, we turn to God as a last resort when nothing else seems to be  
working.

But, other times, God is our first resort ~

a first step in getting out of whatever trouble we are in.

a first step in assurance that we're not in this alone – God is with us.

And that's exactly what God wants of us ~ to turn to Him. Not as a plan B or C;  
not after we've tried all the alternatives we can think of... but to go to Him first.

Jonah, for all his faults and pride and mixed-up priorities, does what is right and turns to  
God first.

*“I called out to the LORD in my distress, and he answered me.*

*From the belly of the underworld I cried out for help;*

This tension between Jonah and God never really goes away. It's always there. Jonah  
seems to be in a constant state of duress and angst when it comes to God. By the end of  
chapter four you'll read that Jonah is just as unhappy as he was at the beginning. Go  
ahead and read the four chapters in your Bible and see what happens at the end of the  
story.

But, let's step back from that just for a moment and see what we do know so far:

The book of Jonah begins with these words in chapter one: **A- mit – tai**

*“The Lord's word came to Jonah, Amittai's son: “Get up and go to Nineveh, that great  
city, and cry out against it, for their evil has come to my attention.””*

Jonah is the son of Amittai (a name which in Hebrew means **truth**).

The Ninevites are greatly evil.

God calls on Jonah to go speak to the Ninevites.

To change their evil ways in the name of God Almighty.

Now, there is no lead-in telling us that Jonah is already a prophet of God.

There's no foreshadowing telling us that Jonah claims the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob as his God. Although we know Jonah is Hebrew.

Our story just jumps right in! both feet, water over your head, no floatie or life vest – just jump right into the deep end of the pool Jonah:

Go and tell the people of Nineveh to repent!

Now, the Ninevites were a violent people. Deadly and ruthless. They had brutalized the Israelites many times over. There's no open armed, kill the fatted calf, break out the wine kind of reception expected for Jonah.

This is going to be tough going. For one thing he has a long journey to get to Nineveh. And he's convinced himself the people are going to reject him or maybe ~ kill him. And truth be told he can't stand Nineveh or the Ninevites. Perhaps he is thinking this is an impossible task God is sending him on.

*Sorry God, I could never do what you are asking, I'm just not qualified.*

I believe God does this intentionally! He picks someone to do a task – knowing they don't have the strength, the courage, the intelligence or wherewithal to do it on their own.

God knows when he asks us to do something that seems so far beyond what we could do, we're often tempted to run the other way.

While I certainly don't know the mind of God, I do believe that this is intentional because God wants us to rely wholly and completely on him. We can't do it without God. Jonah can't do it without God.

And rather than to provide comfort for Jonah this uncomfortable reality just seems to antagonize him even further.

While he eventually does God's bidding it is entirely possible that Jonah keeps this tension, this anxiety within, because of his great hatred for the Ninevites and all they've done to the Israelites.

Maybe he is appalled that God is asking him to show the people of Nineveh grace. His hatred for them is too strong to willingly share God's good news with them. He wants to see a '*Sodom and Gomorrah ending*' to that great city ~ burned down by fire and brimstone by God's own command.

He wants revenge upon these people.

I am reminded of Nelson Mandela story:

After Mr. Mandela was elected as the President of South Africa, he was having lunch with his security guards at a restaurant. They had placed their orders and were chatting while waiting for their meal.

Mr. Mandela noticed a man sitting across from their table, so he told one of his guards to invite the man to join them for lunch.

The man accepted the invitation and came over to their table, but then just sat there quietly the whole time. After the food arrived everyone relished the delicious meal. The man started eating also, but his hands were noticeably trembling.

He said nothing while eating his meal. He kept his head down and looked at no one. When he finished, he got up quietly, waved a hand at Mr. Mandela without looking, and left.

The guards thought this was very unusual behavior and after the man was gone they began to talk amongst themselves about how sick he must have been – with hands trembling, looking down and not speaking.

But Mr. Mandela shook his head and said no. That's not it. This man was a jailor where I was held prisoner for almost 30 years. He was the worst of all the jailors:  
Torturing and beating me, keeping my food away from me, abusing me.  
There were times when I would ask for water and he would urinate on my head.

So, when Mr. Mandela invited him over, he thought Mandela would seek revenge. And would treat him the very same way, with abuse and torture. He was trembling because he was afraid.

Yet, Mandela believes that the burning feeling of revenge will only cause destruction; whereas patience, tolerance, and grace are the tools that can help develop compassion and humanity among us. That can build bridges and tear down walls. That can provide healing and repair great wounds.

This is just the lesson God is trying to teach Jonah.  
And certainly how I want to carry myself if I ever find myself in a similar spot.

Jonah prays to God and tells Him – if you answer my prayers:  
I will offer a sacrifice to God, with a voice of thanks.  
I will pay God – in whatever God wants of him.

It's not all that different from how we sometimes pray to God.  
God if you let me live, and cure this disease, I will be forever yours.  
God, if you get me through the night, I will pray every day and go to church every Sunday.  
God, if you do this... I will do that.

And God delivered Jonah out of the fish. The fish *vomited* Jonah out. All the translations I read use the word vomit except for one which said 'spewed'.

*Then the LORD spoke to the fish, and it vomited Jonah onto the dry land.*

God could have told the fish to let Jonah out gently; or let him wash out of his belly with the undulating waves of the sea. But instead – 'it *vomited* Jonah onto the dry land'

There is nothing pretty about vomit. It's messy and smelly. Perhaps God intended Jonah to know just how messy things were going to be in Nineveh.

Or Jonah's 3-days in the fish were foreshadowing.

Jonah lived, died, was buried three days in the muck and mire and messiness of a fish's belly, and then rose to deliver God's good news to sinners.

This foreshadows Jesus living, dying, being buried in a grave for three days,  
Then rising to deliver the Good News.

By Christ's grace and our faith we know we will one day rise from the grave.  
And just as death could not hold down the Son of God,  
death will not hold us down.

Death does not have the final word over the followers of Christ, God does.  
And we too will have new life in and through Christ, by the grace of God.  
Isn't that Good News!