



“Raised to Life”
Jonah 1:17-2:10

Idea: God’s mercy can and will reach down to the very depths of despair to raise up those who will repent of sin.

Intro: Many years ago, a man was driving an old Ford down a lonely road when it suddenly chugged to a stop. He was at a loss about what to do since he did not know much about cars. But he got out, put the hood up and began to tap here and there, jiggle this wire and that when he heard the roar of a car coming toward him. As it got closer, he saw it was a brand-new Lincoln. Thankfully, the driver was nice enough to pull over. He stepped out, walked up, and said, “What seems to be the trouble?” “Oh,” he said, “I cannot get this old Ford to go.” “Well,” replied the Good Samaritan, “let me see.” So, he began to tinker inside and asked, “Do you have a screwdriver?” He adjusted something, then got inside and started it right up. “Say, thanks a lot! That is great. Who are you?” Putting his coat back on, the man said, “Well, I am Henry Ford. I ought to know a little bit about that car we made.”

Billy Graham shared that story in his book, *World Aflame*. During his preaching ministry as an evangelist, Dr. Graham met thousands of people whose lives had chugged to a stop. Many times, what brought the halt to a person’s life was something unexpected and outside one’s control like cancer, the death of a loved one, or the sudden loss of a job. In moments like that, despair takes over and the person feels incapable of moving forward. It seems as if he or she is sinking and beyond the hope of rescue. Other times, the chugged stop is of one’s own doing. It is the result of poor life choices. It is the web of lies that have finally caught up with you. It is the secrets and deception that have been uncovered and revealed. It is the outright rebellion as you run from God and do your own thing. Whatever the situation, in seasons like this, when it feels like you are sinking deeper and deeper, it is good to remember that the God who “*made the sea and the dry land*” is able to reach down to where you are and pull you up.

Jonah finds himself in this situation. The prophet is in rebellion against God. He has gone down to Joppa, chartered a ship, and gone down into it to flee to Tarshish from the presence of the Lord. As the ship sails away, God hurls a great storm after it. He is going to get the attention of his wayward prophet. As the storm is raging outside, Jonah is asleep inside the cabin below the deck. The sailors are scared to death as the ship threatens to rip apart, but God’s man is numb to the whole affair. When he is awakened by the captain, the storm is not surprising to him. He knows it was sent by God and the result of his choices. He also knows how to quiet it down. The solution he offered was his own life. If the sailors would throw him over board, the storm

would cease. After attempting their own action plan, the sailors followed Jonah's instruction and cast him into the sea. Immediately, the sea ceased its raging.

Today, we pick up the story as Jonah sinks into the deep. Thus far, he has refused to pray and repent of sin. His rebellion has hurled him into the sea. As he sinks into its depths, his eyes are finally opened to the storms he has created in his life, and he calls out to the Lord. He prays and owns his sin. In that moment, God raises him to life out of the pit of death.

Read Jonah 1:17-2:10.

Inquiry: For some reason, the story of Jonah being swallowed by a fish and being vomited onto dry land after three days is troubling for some people. In fact, they will dismiss the whole book because in this scientific age they cannot accept such an idea. Could it be that we have become too smart for our own good? Personally, I have no problem with a great fish swallowing Jonah. Have you seen the size of some of the animals swimming around in the ocean? They are huge! But it is more than that. I have no problem with the story because it is clearly a miracle. By definition, miracles are outside the normal course of nature. Therefore, Jonah is swallowed and survives three days in the fish because God miraculously appointed for it to happen.

The issue at hand from the Bible's perspective is not whether or not a fish could swallow Jonah. The issue is about what was taking place inside the fish over those three days. The story is book-ended by the fish's activity. It swallows and vomits up the prophet. Between those two actions, we read of Jonah's confession, repentance, and restoration. This poetic description is presented in stages. In verses one and two, Jonah prays for the first time in the story, but his prayer is coming from the belly of the fish. It does not happen immediately. After being cast into the sea at his request, he begins to sink. The waves of the Mediterranean overtake him. He sinks down to the depths, and he knows he is about to die. Drowning has got to be one of the worst death experiences imaginable. It is in this moment of despair that Jonah acknowledges his predicament and calls out to God (2:2). Warren Wiersbe correctly points out that his prayer was born out of affliction rather than affection. "He cried out to God because he was in danger, not because he delighted in the Lord." Nevertheless, this was a good place to begin calling out.

Despair opened the eyes and the ears of the prophet. The numbness that had characterized his life dissipated, and he once again became sensitive to the Lord. In his despair, Jonah recognized the waves and the depth of the sea as God's judgment for his sin (2:3). He never asked why these things were happening to him. He knew why he was sinking down to his death. In this moment, Jonah remembered the Lord and prayed (2:7). He remembered God's Word, which is indicative in the poem as it contains elements of other psalms (Ps 18:6; 118:5; 120:1). In faith he called out "*to the LORD his God,*" knowing He could raise him up and save his life (2:1, 4). Jonah prayed to the one, true God. The sailors had prayed in vain to worthless idols. Their gods were unable to hear and act on their behalf. Jonah, however, prayed to the God who "*made the sea and the dry land.*" He prayed to the God of salvation (2:9).

Unfortunately, Jonah's experience is all too often the experience of many Christians. For whatever reason, they get their eyes off of the Lord and choose to do their own thing. They choose to walk and live in sin rather than in the presence of the Lord. Like Jonah, their rebellion takes them down and away from the Lord. Sometimes they can stray so far, it may not even seem that the life of God resides in them anymore or that God would forgive and restore them. What God wants us to see today from chapter two is that He specializes in the impossible and improbable. God's mercy can and will reach down to the very depths of despair to raise up those who will repent of sin. It may feel like you are a million miles away from the Lord and dead to the things of God, but you are only one prayer away. The Lord desires to step in and rescue. You can be raised to life again.

There are three truths we need to remember.

1. God desires to restore life to sinners.

One of the biggest lies Satan likes to tell us is that it is too late. He wants us to believe that God's grace is limited and His mercy short. He wants us to think that our sin is outside the purview of Christ's forgiveness. You see when we think there is no hope of change, then we give in to the sinful lifestyle we have created. We succumb to the consequences of our actions.

Why do we believe such lies? Why do we allow the Enemy to paint God as unloving, unkind, and limited in His reach? Let's remember the Lord and what the Bible says about Him.

God is love. – 1 John 4:8, 16

In this is love, not that we have loved God but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins. – 1 John 4:10

For God so love the world, that he gave his only Son...
– John 3:16

Our God is a God of love, and He desires to restore sinners. Is this not what we see in Peter's life? Peter boasted that even if everyone deserted Jesus, he would not (John 13:37). Then after Jesus was arrested and put on trial before the Sanhedrin, Peter denied knowing Christ three different times. In that final denial, the rooster crowed just as Jesus foretold, and Peter remembered His words. He looked eyes with the Lord and felt the shame of his denial. Can you imagine the disappointment the Lord felt? Here was one of His top disciples, one of the inner three, and he absolutely walked away in His moment of greatest need. Yet, after the resurrection, Jesus loved Peter. He graciously restored him to service (John 21:15-19).

Today, it does not matter how far you have walked away from the Lord. It does not matter how messed up your life may be. It does not matter how terrible you feel about yourself or the amount of shame you carry. Jesus loves you, and He desires to restore life to sinners. This was true in Jonah's life. God could have easily killed him in the sea. The fish could have enjoyed him as a meal. Instead, what we see is that God showed mercy by preserving his life.

2. Life begins when the sinner acknowledges God's Lordship and owns his or her sin.

Death was Jonah's future. He was in the belly of Sheol, the place of death when he called out (2:2). Up until this point in the story, Jonah recognized God's authority and power. He described Him to the sailors as "*the LORD, the God of heaven, who made the sea and the dry land*" (1:9). Mentally, he knew this to be true, but in his heart, Jonah wanted to be his own lord. He wanted to escape and do his own thing. He also wanted to rationalize his decisions. After all, was his decision to flee not justified? Those wicked and cruel Ninevehites did not deserve God's mercy!

Due to his choices, the life of God that Jonah once enjoyed quickly faded into obscurity. He was so far from God and lifeless that the sailors never recognized him as a Jew, much less a prophet. He was dead inside. He never prayed, and he kept on running. However, that all changed when he came to the point of acknowledging God's Lordship over his life and owning his sin. He prayed to the LORD his God (2:1-2). He owned the sin for which God had cast him into the deep over (2:3).

If you are broken today because of sinful choices you have made, then I want you to know that God desires to restore and heal the broken spaces in your life. In order for Him to do that, you first have to stop running and come home. You must surrender afresh and anew to His Lordship. You have to own your sin through confession and repentance.

⁹*If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.* ¹⁰*If we say we have not sinned, we make him a liar, and his word is not in us.*

– 1 John 1:9-10

Confession and repentance necessitate a return to the Lord. In our sin, we would prefer the Lord just graciously proclaim ongoing, universal forgiveness over our lives and allow us to live how we want. That, however, is not what He does. God's justice and goodness will not allow it. He cannot gloss over sin because He knows its damaging effects. If you wanted to be raised to new life today, it begins with you acknowledging God's Lordship over you and your repentance of sin.

3. Life is found exclusively in the God of the Bible.

Read John 2:7-9.

Salvation belongs to the Lord. The sailors had called upon their gods. Surely, they did everything possible to arouse and spur them into action. They needed help, but the idols were silent and lifeless. Leslie Allen offers strong insight into this truth. He says, "The contrast in chapter 1 between the ineffectual prayer each to his own god and the answered prayer to Yahweh, sovereign over the sea, is echoed in the declaration and denial of verses 7-8." The sailors denied the sovereignty the Lord and prayed to their vain idols who could not save. Jonah, on the other hand, remembered the Lord and prayed. He answered and saved the prophet and the sailors.

The Bible verse that God used to bring me to faith is 1 John 5:12. It reads, "*Whoever has the Son has life; whoever does not have the Son of God does not have life.*" As a freshman in college, I was one of the most religious people I knew. I was very involved in church. I worked hard at being a Christian. The only problem was that I was not a Christian. I had never trusted in Jesus as Lord and Savior, receiving His forgiveness for my sin. Therefore, I had no spiritual life because I did not know the Son of God. That all changed on April 24, 1997. Like the sailors in this story, I called upon the Lord and was saved. I found life in Jesus and no other.

Conclusion: God is in the business of raising broken people out of the muck and mire of life. He delights in raising them to life in Him. He does that in salvation. Today, if you have never surrendered your life to Jesus and trusted Him as your Lord and Savior, what is keeping you from doing that? Like the sailors, turn from your sin and place your faith in Jesus. He will change your life.

God also raises Christians who are walking at a guilty distance to new life. Like Jonah, we can rebel and run. When we do so, our decisions only take us down. If you are on the run today, I hope you will hit rock bottom and wake up. I hope you will turn and remember the Lord. Call out to Him like Jonah did. He stands ready to raise you up out of your mess and brokenness.

What is keeping you from rising and coming to Jesus?

Good news: God loves you. He created you and desires to know you.

Bad news: You are a sinner in rebellion against your Creator.

Best news: God has done everything necessary to justly deal with your sin and bring forgiveness and restoration to your life. Today, He calls you to turn from your sin and self and turn to Him as Savior and Lord. Have you received forgiveness in Christ?