

**THE RUNAWAY PROPHET & THE PURSUING GOD - PART 2:**  
**“JONAH IN THE BELLY OF THE FISH”**  
**JONAH 1:17-2:10**

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**Personal Introduction**

Good morning everyone. I'm Jeff - one of the pastors here at HMCC of Jakarta. And it's my privilege to preach the Word of God for us today!

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**Sermon Series Introduction**

Today, we'll be taking a short break from our sermon series on the Gospel of Matthew. And we'll be continuing our other sermon series on the book of Jonah - and this sermon series is called "The Runaway Prophet & The Pursuing God."

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**Introduction**

Now, let's start with a question: Have you ever gotten something you really wanted... Only to realize that it wasn't what you thought it'd be?

Maybe it was a career decision... A relationship... or maybe something else.

- At the time, it seemed right; it seemed good.
- But instead of leading you somewhere better, it slowly began taking you in the wrong direction.
  - And before long, you're left with regret, wishing you'd chosen differently.

I think most of us can think of moments like that, right? We all have things that we regret...

- And some regrets are small...
- While others are bigger...
  - Where it's not just, "I made a bad decision" but "I did something wrong."
  - And if you could only go back, you wouldn't choose to walk that path again.

Now, that deeper sense of regret for our wrongdoing... That's what we call remorse.

And for God's people, remorse goes even deeper than that.

- It's not just, "I did something wrong" but "I strayed from the Lord."
- And what we thought was right... didn't just lead us the wrong way, but led us further away from God.

And that's actually where Jonah's at in our passage today...

- And what we'll learn is that remorse can actually be a good first step in us returning & growing even closer to the Lord...

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## **Scripture Introduction**

So please turn your Bibles to Jonah 1:17-2:10.

I'd encourage you to have your Bibles open throughout the sermon to help you follow along, especially as we'll be looking at the surrounding verses as well.

To recap what's happened thus far - Jonah's story has been full of twists and turns.

- First, God called Jonah to go to Nineveh to warn the people there of coming judgment.
  - But - twist - rather than obeying God, Jonah got on a ship and went in the opposite direction!
- So then God pursued Jonah by sending a great storm.
  - But then - another twist - instead of him turning back to the Lord, it's the pagan sailors who begin to turn to the Lord.
- And then another twist - When the sailors asked Jonah what they should do to calm this storm... instead of saying, "turn this ship around! I have to go to Nineveh!" He says "pick me up and hurl me into the sea."
  - Jonah had grown apathetic; he'd rather die than obey His Lord by going to Nineveh.

So that's where we are in the story... Jonah is in the middle of his rebellion against the Lord, and he's just been thrown overboard...

Now please follow along as we continue Jonah's story...

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## **Jonah 1:17-2:10 (ESV)**

<sup>17</sup> And the LORD appointed a great fish to swallow up Jonah. And Jonah was in the belly of the fish three days and three nights.

**2** Then Jonah prayed to the LORD his God from the belly of the fish, <sup>2</sup> saying,

"I called out to the LORD, out of my distress,  
and he answered me;  
out of the belly of Sheol I cried,  
and you heard my voice.

<sup>3</sup> For you cast me into the deep,  
into the heart of the seas,  
and the flood surrounded me;

all your breakers and your waves  
passed over me.

<sup>4</sup> Then I said, 'I am driven away  
from your sight;  
yet I shall again look  
upon your holy temple.'

<sup>5</sup> The waters closed in over me to take my life;  
the deep surrounded me;  
weeds were wrapped about my head.

<sup>6</sup> To the roots of the mountains I went down,  
to the land whose bars closed upon me forever.  
Yet you brought up my life from the pit,  
O LORD my God.

<sup>7</sup> When my life was fainting away,  
I remembered the LORD,  
and my prayer came to you,  
into your holy temple.

<sup>8</sup> Those who pay regard to vain idols  
forsake their hope of steadfast love.

<sup>9</sup> But I with the voice of thanksgiving  
will sacrifice to you;  
what I have vowed I will pay.  
Salvation belongs to the LORD!"

<sup>10</sup> And the LORD spoke to the fish, and it vomited Jonah out upon the dry land.

This is God's Word.

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Now, I want us to take a look at the structure of this passage.

- Look at the first verse (chapter 1, verse 17) and the final verse (chapter 2, verse 10).
  - If we only read these two narrative points, it seems like we'll be able to understand Jonah's story just fine - God sent a big fish to swallow up Jonah, Jonah was in the belly of the fish for three days and three nights, and then the Lord commanded the fish to vomit Jonah out onto dry land.
    - That sounds like the full narrative.
    - And you know what? If we read Jonah's story in children's books; that may be all the details we get. And then the story just continues to the next chapter...

- So then the question is: why do we have Jonah's poetic prayer placed right here in the middle of these two narrative points? (And as you can see, it makes up almost the entire passage).
  - That tells us that Jonah's story here is more than just about story progression, it's deeper than that - it's about heart progression.
  - And through his prayer, we can get a glimpse into Jonah's heart and his thoughts as he's sinking and as he's in the belly of the fish.
    - So we definitely don't want to just skip this part.
    - And what we can see that his prayer has two movements:
      - Jonah's heart moves from remorse to remembrance...
      - And then from remembrance to thanksgiving.

So we'll take a look at the passage in those two parts...

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### **Overview**

- I. Remorse to Remembrance
- II. Remembrance to Rejoicing

Please note that in each point, we won't necessarily be going through the verses in order, and we'll be going back and forth a bit (Because Jonah's prayer here is written more like a psalm with poetic language & he'll circle back and repeat certain parts for emphasis).

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### **I. Remorse to Remembrance**

Let's look at verses 2-6 - Through his prayer, Jonah is recounting what was happening to him after he was thrown overboard.

- We see that he was in complete distress.
- Pay attention to the downward movement that he's describing...
  - Verse 3 - At first, he's struggling at the surface of the water with large waves crashing over him.
    - Imagine that as he's just able to survive a wave and catch his breath, another large wave crashes upon him. Pulling him deeper underwater.
  - Verse 5 - He's no longer at the surface and sinking deeper into the sea with the darkness surrounding him (the vast ocean as far as his eyes can see in all directions; his feet not able to touch the ground).
  - Verse 6 - He sinks even deeper and reaches "the roots of the mountains" - he's using figurative language to describe "rock bottom," and seaweeds are now wrapping around his head, entrapping him.
    - And this is it for him now. He's stuck, there's no way of escape, and he's running out of oxygen.

- For Jonah, his life was as good as gone (“the waters closed in over me to take my life”).
  - And verse 6 - It seems as if he’s already in the land of the dead - with its gates and bars closing upon him, keeping him there forever.

Now, as tragic as this sounds, what we should remember here is that this was the result of exactly what Jonah wanted...

- He wanted to be thrown overboard, and he’d rather die than obey the Lord and go to Nineveh.
- But here we see that as soon as he hits the water, he completely regrets it. He doesn’t want to die anymore; he wants to live.

And it’s in this moment where he’s hit rock bottom, running out of air, and his life fainting away... that he realizes something...

Verse 7 - “When my life was fainting away, I remembered the Lord.”

- This was a turning point for Jonah - When everything else seems lost and he cannot save himself, he remembers the one who’s always been there & the one who can save - The Lord.

And as he remembers the Lord, he remembers how he foolishly tried to run away from Him...

Look at verse 4 - “Then I said, ‘I am driven away from your sight’”

- The language Jonah is using here refers to the Lord’s discipline.
- The same language is used in the book of Genesis to describe how Adam and Eve were driven away from the Garden of Eden for their rebellion.
- In the same way, Jonah is aware that what he deserves for his rebellion is to be driven away from the Lord’s sight.

So it’s through this time of distress... Jonah was finally able to see how running away from the Lord was so foolish and only leads him to a downward spiral.

But we need to make an important distinction here - physically speaking, Jonah was in a worse place than before (he’s at the bottom of the ocean instead of on the ship). But spiritually speaking, there’s actually good progress here because he’s no longer in rebellion against the Lord, but in the process of turning back to Him.

- And this is actually a good place to be in...

<pause>

So let’s take a bit of a pause here to think about our own lives...

Most of us here would say that we want to obey the Lord - We don't want to run away from God's presence, we want to be closer to Him (that's why we're gathered here right now!). We want to grow in our understanding of who He is and rely on Him more and more.

And that's a great desire! We should protect that desire...

But at the same time, we should be aware that there's a competing desire that's in our hearts...

- Along with that God-centered desire, we also have sinful, self-centered desires.
- And - like Jonah (back in Chapter 1) - as much as we want to obey God...
  - We can have this tendency to pick and choose what we obey & when to obey...

And so there can be a disconnect between what we believe and how we actually function...

- Theologically, what we believe is "Jesus Christ is my Lord and Savior; God is my Heavenly Father and I will obey Him."
- But practically we may be functioning as... "God is my Heavenly Father and I'll obey Him... But only when it's easy and if it doesn't mess with my schedule or my personal plans, and if it matches with my life goals..."
  - But then what happens when God asks us to do something that's different from our personal desires?

Like Jonah, what makes obeying God difficult is not when we don't know God's will; It's when we do know it, but we just don't like it...

- For Jonah, it was basically, "God... Yes, I'll proclaim your message to others but... only if I like the message and if I agree with who to share it with. The Ninevites?! Our enemies?! No way, I'm out."
  - It becomes conditional for him - on his own terms, not God's.
  - And we do the same thing...
- We know that God wants us to spend time with Him in His Word and to talk to Him in prayer - He desires a relationship with His children (But we say, "Lord, not today. Today, I'm too busy or too tired or I have something else that I prefer to do").
- Or we know that God wants us to disciple our brothers and sisters and to point one another to Him, but we say, "Lord, I'm not sure if I can even gather with them on Sundays, let alone the other days. I actually need to focus on my own things right now..."
  - And so it seems like what's on God's heart is not what's often in our hearts.
    - And we can have differing desires and priorities.
  - I'll be the first person to say, I have similar struggles (so we're on the same boat here).

We should ask ourselves: Where in your life do you already know what God wants... but you're choosing something else?

- For some of us, it may be obvious and something is coming to mind right now.
- For others, maybe we need more time for reflection later.

I'd like to encourage us to reflect on this - Where in your life do you already know what God wants... but you're choosing something else?

- And what Jonah shows us is that we should also ask ourselves: If I keep this up, where am I heading? Closer to God or further away from Him? (Closer to what God wants me to do in accordance with His Word... or further away from it?)
  - And we may find that there are parts of our lives where we are growing closer to God. Praise God for that! We should be encouraged by that!
  - But upon further reflection, we may also find that there are other parts of our lives that are drawing us further away from Him... (And we should take that seriously).

And like Jonah, we can know that something is off because we're feeling some sort of distress from the consequence of our actions...

- And we're finding out from getting what we want that it's not what we want...
- If we've been neglecting time with God in His Word and prayer (so we can do other things), maybe we're finding ourselves more anxious these days or more uneasy or unsettled.
- Or if we've been neglecting time with God's people, maybe one consequence is that we're feeling more distant - Feeling less present, less known by others, less engaged with our brothers and sisters.

As we reflect on these things, we shouldn't just stop on reflection. But I'd encourage us to turn to prayer - Like Jonah, make your remorse known to the Lord.

- "Lord, I'm in distress - I feel distant or disconnected - I feel regret and am so sorry that I've been choosing to do things that are leading me away from you..."
- That's a great step in returning closer to the Lord...

So first, "Remorse to Remembrance." And second, "Remembrance to Rejoicing."

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## **II. Remembrance to Rejoicing**

Let's look at verse 7 again - Jonah says, "I remembered the LORD."

- If you look down to your Bibles, notice how "the LORD" is written in all capital letters.
- Whenever you see that (L-O-R-D all capitalized), that means that the word used in the original language is YHWH - which is God's covenantal name with the Israelites.
- So Jonah is not merely remembering a random person or a random "little g" god, he's remembering YHWH - the God of Heaven, who made the sea and the dry land.

And he's *remembering...* Which means he's recalling things about God that he already knows (he doesn't need to learn them from scratch).

And throughout his prayer, we see that Jonah is recalling God's character... Who He is...

- And from what he describes, we can hold on to 2 truths:

- God is sovereign & God is good.

First, God is sovereign...

- Look at verse 2 - Jonah says, "You cast me into the deep."
  - If we go back to chapter one, we see that it was the sailors who threw Jonah into the sea (and it was only because Jonah himself had told them to, right?).
  - So why is he now saying, "You [Lord] cast me into the sea"? Because in the grand scheme of things, he understands that God is the one who is sovereign and in control of it all.
    - God was the one who sent the wind which caused the storm, and He was the one who sent the waves to bring Jonah down in the ocean.
      - That's why - in verse 3 - Jonah called the waves "your waves" (The Lord's waves; the waves that are under His sovereign command).
    - It was part of God's grand purpose to intentionally pursue after Jonah in this way, so that he would see the error of His ways and turn back to Him.

Which shows us that God is not only sovereign, but He is good.

- If God was only sovereign but not good, Jonah would be in trouble here.
- But praise the Lord that He is both sovereign and good. And out of the abundance of His grace and mercy, He allowed Jonah to go through this distress... Not to destroy him, but to restore him. That's why the Lord then appointed a large fish to save Jonah from drowning. And gave him time to repent.
- And even in the deepest darkness, Jonah knows that the Lord is with Him and that out of the Lord's goodness, He hears his prayers...
  - That's why Jonah said, "I called out to the Lord, out of my distress, and he answered me; out of the belly of Sheol (or the grave) I cried, and you heard my voice."

And because His God is good and sovereign, Jonah is confident that he will be saved... That somehow, he would be delivered from the belly of the fish...

- Look at verse 4 - it's written in future tense, "I shall again look upon your holy temple."
- Look at verse 9 - which is also in future tense, I with the voice of thanksgiving will sacrifice to you; what I have vowed I will pay."
  - Jonah is looking forward to a time when he will be in the temple in Jerusalem again, where the Lord's presence dwells, and where he vows to make a sacrifice there in order to properly honor and thank the Lord for His faithfulness.

And this hope that he has in His Lord caused his prayer to crescendo with language of praise and thanksgiving - "Salvation belongs to the Lord!"

<pause>

Isn't it just amazing the work that the Lord is doing in Jonah's Heart? From rebellion to remorse to remembrance to rejoicing...

And the amazing thing is... remember where Jonah was at... At this point, he's not actually out on dry land yet. He's still in the belly of the fish. Imagine you're Jonah - that's not a comfortable place to be in - It must've been pitch black in there and gross and slimy and smelly...

- Yet even in the midst of this, he's able to rejoice!
- It's not that his situation has improved very much, but his outlook has (he remembers who His Lord is and that's so comforting for him).

And we know from verse 10 that his hope in the Lord was not in vain and the Lord spoke to the fish to vomit Jonah out onto dry land, and Jonah would be back safe on solid ground.

<pause>

To be clear, our takeaway from this should not be that the Lord will always save us physically from harm.

- If anything, I think Jonah shows us that sometimes, the way that God saves us is not in a way that we'd want or even expect. Sometimes it's actually through a storm or near-drowning, or through some form of distress.

But what Jonah shows us is that we can rejoice even while we're still in the belly of the fish, even amidst discomfort and uncertainty and stress.

So think of what's been stressing you recently or the difficulties that we've been having. In these moments, we may be tempted to think...

- "I'll rejoice when things get better"
- "I'll trust God when I see the outcome"
- "I'll give thanks when I'm out of this situation"

But perhaps we need to focus less on the circumstances themselves, and fix our eyes on our Lord...

- And the amazing thing is that on this side of redemptive history, we actually know our God more fully and more intimately than Jonah ever did.
  - Jonah knows that the lord is good and sovereign.
  - But we know this good and sovereign God as our Heavenly father...
    - And think of the implications of that for our lives...
      - What does it mean for us that our Heavenly father is constantly watching over His children?
      - And what does it mean for us that the Holy Spirit now dwells within us?
        - God's presence is always with us and around us and in us (that is deep intimacy, not just with anyone but with YHWH)

- the one true God who is in control and is working for our good).

<pause>

But at this time, if you're currently feeling distant from the Lord and are currently struggling, I don't want you to be discouraged.

The Christian life of sanctification and growing closer to the Lord is actually not a linear progression (where we continue to grow and mature without taking a step back). But sometimes we take one step back to take two steps forward.

Just like Jonah, we're all works in progress.

Just take a peek at Jonah 4:2-3...

For context - This takes place after Jonah is vomited out of the fish and after he preaches to the Ninevites. And perhaps to Jonah's surprise, the Ninevites actually repented and then the Lord shows them mercy.

You'd assume that Jonah would be praising God just as he's doing here. But take a look at his prayer... He says...

"O Lord, is not this what I said when I was yet in my country? That is why I made haste to flee to Tarshish; for I knew that you are a gracious God and merciful, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love, and relenting from disaster.

Therefore now, O Lord, please take my life from me, for it is better for me to die than to live."

Isn't this so shocking?

It seems like Jonah is taking a step back again - He'd rather die than live because what ended up happening is not the outcome that he desired.

Now, what does this tell us? Does this mean that Jonah's remorse in Chapter 2 is not genuine? No, I believe it's still genuine. This just shows us that our hearts take time to be more and more aligned with God's.

This shows us that there's still work that needs to be done in Jonah's heart (just as there's still work to be done in ours).

- It seems like Jonah understood that it was wrong for him to run away from the Lord.
- But he hasn't really gotten to the core issue yet: Why did he run from the Lord in the first place?

- We'll cover this more when we get to Chapter 4. But for now, this is helpful for us as we think about our Christian journey.
- Sanctification is going to be a lifelong journey of ups and downs. It's going to be a repetition of: remorse and repentance and turning back to the Lord again and again.

And I just want to share that I've been so encouraged by our church - As we've walked life-on-life together, going through various stages of life together, as we go through ups and downs together...

- I've seen times where members struggle to be in the Word but then continue to strive to be in the Word and prayer and now they're reading God's Word more regularly and even reading other Christian books.
- I've seen members go through difficult times personally or at work, and now they're the ones who are helping others who are going through similar struggles.
- And even now, I know members who are in the midst of struggles with work, marriage, and health. And still they're looking to the Lord and to the hope that we have in Him.
- And that's so encouraging to see...
  - May we continue to be a church like this - who reminds one another that our joy is not in our circumstances but in the Lord who continues to be sovereign and good despite our circumstances.

### **Conclusion**

As we conclude, I want us to fix our eyes on Jesus.

Interestingly, Jesus referred back to Jonah during his ministry (we read the verses earlier. Let me read it for us again).

### **Matthew 12:38-40**

<sup>38</sup> Then some of the scribes and Pharisees answered him, saying, "Teacher, we wish to see a sign from you."<sup>39</sup> But he answered them, "An evil and adulterous generation seeks for a sign, but no sign will be given to it except the sign of the prophet Jonah. <sup>40</sup> For just as Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of the great fish, so will the Son of Man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth.

Jonah points to Jesus.

And Jesus is the better Jonah...

- Jonah disobeyed God, but Jesus obeyed God even to the point of death.
- Jonah was in the belly of the fish for 3 days and 3 nights because of his own sins, but Jesus was in the tomb for 3 days and 3 nights because of his people's sins.
- Jonah ran away because he didn't want the Ninevites to be saved, Jesus came from Heaven to Earth because he wants his people to be saved.

And now we can be more confident than ever before that salvation truly belongs to the Lord!

- Because Jesus did not remain dead but - just as Jonah was back on dry land in 3 days - Jesus was resurrected and raised back to life in 3 days.

And this all points to the hope that we have in Christ...

- Though we will all physically die one day, we will not remain dead. And just as Jesus was raised to life, those who believe in him will be raised and have eternal life in Heaven!
- There is no greater assurance than this!
  - For if we can trust the Lord with our biggest problem of sin and death... Can we not also trust him with all the smaller problems that we currently have as well?

If you've not yet put your faith in Christ, I urge you to respond to Jesus - who faced distress on the cross so that his people wouldn't have to face distress in Hell.

And for us who've already put our faith in Christ, we should remember that we're not yet at our final destination in Heaven...

- While we're on Earth, we will face trials and tribulation. And sometimes we'll feel like we're drowning or we're trapped in the belly of the fish.
- But remember that God is sovereignly at work & the trials we're facing can be used by Him to bring us closer and closer to Him.
  - And there's no better place than being close in our Father's arms.

Let's pray...