

Topic	Those Who Cling Forfeit The Grace
Reference	Jonah 2:1 – 3:3
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The Title is taken from this verse

8 “Those who cling to worthless idols turn away from God’s love for them.

To forfeit means to be deprived of a right or a privilege due to an act of wrongdoing and hence this is a warning to us, lest our actions cause us to lose the grace of God. Indeed the book of Jonah is often studied because of its lessons on obedience or rather disobedience. Obedience brings favors, disobedience results in ruin. Obedience and disobedience both come with consequences as far as our God is concerned.

Some people when they read the story of Jonah being swallowed by the big fish, they dismiss it outright because of questions to which they find no answers. How can a big fish swallow a grown man? A fish throat is not big enough to allow the passage of a human body and even if could how could a man survive three days inside the fish commonly thought to be a whale but the Bible does not specify that it was a whale, so they reject the story of Jonah as a fable. They often also reject the whole Bible because of such stories between its covers and by extension they end up rejecting God and his existence because they cannot overcome such mental obstacles like the story of a big fish swallowing a man.

The Bible was not written to teach us about science, although I am confident that this book will stand up all scrutiny of science. This is the word of God given to us to show us how to live a purposeful and meaningful life in the context of an intimate relationship with the person of God and it is therefore such a great pity that some people forfeit this privilege all because of some scientific questions to which they find no answers.

My secular work impart involves teaching government employees how to use their minds creatively and I often tell my students that ***just because you don’t have an answer to a question it does not mean that the question has no answer. It simply means that you don’t know everything.***

Now the book of Jonah goes beyond just the issue of obedience as I pointed out at the beginning, it also transcends the question of how the big fish could swallow a man. Beneath and beyond these verses are precious lessons about God in His nature and also about how we ought to respond to him and the sooner we know we learn these lessons the better and wiser we will be.

Now to get started right at the beginning in verse 1 we find Jonah inside the fish and in desperation he prays to God. As a matter of fact the bulk of our text today is on this particular

prayer stretching 9 verses long out of 13 verses. He pleads with God because he has nowhere else to go. He went down to Joppa as we learned in chapter 1 verse 3 and then he went further down below deck in the ship from chapter 1 verse 5 and now he is finally down and out in the belly of the fish from chapter 1 verse 17. Down, down and down he goes.

The words of his prayer somehow seem to emanate from deep within his soul, from the deep recess of his heart as he cried out to God. We find Jonah praying desperately inside the fish, his situation was desperate and even hopeless. In verse 2 he says that he is in distress. He knows that he is going to die because also in verse 2 he says **From deep in the realm of the dead**. Now in the King James Version this phrase is translated as "out of the belly of hell". To be sure Jonah is not yet dead but he is facing death for in verse 7 he laments "**When my life was ebbing away**". Death is knocking at his door. His desperate situation is further described in other verses

3 You hurled me into the depths, into the very heart of the seas, and the currents swirled about me; all your waves and breakers swept over me.

5 The engulfing waters threatened me, the deep surrounded me; seaweed was wrapped around my head.

6 To the roots of the mountains I sank down; the earth beneath barred me in forever.

Now all these verses sounded rather poetic. In fact Jonah chapter 2 was written as a psalm. One small point of interest to note here is that the Hebrew writers especially in the Old Testament they often use a poetic technique known as parallelism in which they repeat their thoughts or their feelings and a good example of parallelism is in the famous verse in Psalm 119:115

Your word is a lamp for my feet, a light on my path.

So a lamp for my feet is a parallel of light on my path. There are actually two sets of parallel words here, light and lamp and feet and path.

Parallelisms in the Jonah 2

- **(v3)** the currents swirled about me, waves and breakers swept over me
- **(v5)** The engulfing waters threatened me the deep surrounded me
- **(v6)** To the roots of the mountains I sank down the earth beneath barred me in forever

Life of Jonah:

Jonah was a prophet who lived in the 8th Century BC and he ministered in the Northern Kingdom of Israelites. He is mentioned in 2-Kings 14:25 which covers the reign of this king, Jeroboam the second of the Northern Kingdom. There were two kingdoms, Israel to the north and Judah to south and Jeroboam the second ruled from 786 to 746 BC.

Jonah was a man of God, preaching and speaking the word of God and being a prophet he obviously knew who God was and what he was like. He had a relationship with God and he had faith in God. In fact he was doing very well carrying out his duties and work as a servant of God. Everything was fine in his life until the situation changed abruptly. His days were smooth and easy until he suddenly came to this crossroad in his life and then things went downhill.

The story of Jonah in chapters 1 and 2 can be very similar to our own; the narratives of Jonah running away from God can be very relevant to us. Here we have a prophet of God, a man of faith who couldn't face a drastic change in his situation. God took him out of his comfort zone and he couldn't cope with the change in the status quo. He did not want to go to Nineveh, the capital of the Assyrian Empire because the Assyrians were cruel and ruthless people. The trip there would have been fraught with all kinds of dangers but later in chapter 4 the real reason behind his reluctance to go will be revealed. Anyway we may wonder, this is a prophet what happened to Jonah's faith in God? Obviously the faith that he thought he had wasn't there or rather wasn't enough to allow him to deal with the new situation and so he ran away. Whatever confidence he had in God collapsed completely in the face of a new reality. Jonah is often being described as the reluctant prophet and the question before us is therefore if or when we are faced similarly with a drastic change in our situation, will the level of our faith carry us through?

Often the storms of life are not so much retributions from God because of our disobedience as much they are opportunities for redemption and restoration.

The surprising thing about Jonah in Jonah 2 is that his situation can be very similar to our own. The text today can be very relevant to us and so the first major lesson for us today is:

1. Don't be too sure of your faith.

Now I am not talking about salvation here. Our salvation is guaranteed on the basis of John 1 verse 12,

12 Yet to all who did receive him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God—

I am talking about the level of our trust in God. Don't be too sure of yourself. When your situation changes for the worse, when the storms of life rage, will you be able to handle the winds and the waves or will you run away like Jonah.

How will you respond when your faith when a storm of life hit you?

The storms of life come generally in three categories.

- Relationship
- Money
- Health

Family is the one where most relationship problems come from and if you are above 50 then the issue of health would threaten you in greater measure. From the Book of Jonah we get a sense that God sometimes allows or even engineers the storms in our life and when that happens it is your level of faith that counts. You will learn that your money would intellect your abilities and even your motivation will not achieve for you any measure of peace or answers. So the first major lesson from Jonah 2 is that we need to find and then grow our faith in God to deepen our trust in God so that we can sail through the storms of life.

² He said: “In my distress I called to the Lord, and he answered me. From deep in the realm of the dead I called for help, and you listened to my cry.

Why would God want to answer him or listen to his cry as he is a reluctant prophet who ran away. God should have let him die in the fish but God did answer him and God did listen to his cry which Jonah proclaimed right at the beginning of his prayer. Why did God do that?

The answer is in verse 9. Towards the end of his prayer when Jonah said, ‘**Salvation comes from the Lord.**’ And this is the key that will unlock the whole passage. This is the pivot or the fulcrum around which the entire Book will turn. If we summarize the entire Bible in just five words,

‘Salvation comes from the Lord.’”

This is echoed in Psalm 3:8 **Salvation belongs to the Lord.** Also in Psalm 37:39 **The salvation of righteous comes from the Lord.**

What does it mean that salvation comes from God?

Now the converse of this might be easier to grasp. It simply means that you cannot save yourself. We can built ourselves with comfortable and successful life here on earth but there is nothing you can do about your life in the hereafter. A drowning man cannot save himself. Jonah in the belly of the fish could not save himself. Actually the picture of Jonah inside the fish is symbolic of our situation that we cannot save ourselves for salvation comes from God, he is the only one who saves. Scripture from Genesis right to Revelation, at its core is about God reaching out to man to save him and he does that because of this important attribute of His and that is grace. Our God is a gracious God. When we think of salvation, how salvation comes from God we think of His grace.

God’s Grace:

Bible paints a clear picture of what our gracious God is like, we can understand grace if we survey the Bible and we have to make sure that we accurately understand God’s grace because it will affect our faith also.

Colossians 1:6

In the same way, the gospel is bearing fruit...— just as it has been doing among you since the day you heard it and truly understood God's grace.

Now bearing fruit here refers to something organic, something that is growing. It is a nice metaphor to describe spiritual transformation. Paul says that it has been happening since the day you heard the gospel but more interestingly he also says since the day you truly understand God's grace. In other words spiritual transformation effectively begins after you have fully grasped the meaning of God's grace.

Grace is Unmerited Favor from an Unobligated Giver

When Jonah finally was able to say salvation comes from the Lord, it released him spiritually. It was a breakthrough for him. He realized that his desperate situation inside the belly of the fish was merited. He deserved it for he had been a disobedient servant of God. More importantly he now recognized that anything that God might do to save him would be unmerited. He didn't deserve any favors from God and God was not obligated to do anything to save him, but yet God did exactly that. It was a crucial lesson in grace and also in faith for the reluctant prophet. So now Jonah was ready to go to Nineveh. Early on, he was so reluctant. Now God was ready to allow him a second chance. God could now use him for greater things to lend him a higher purpose in his life.

The storms in life are not so much retributions from God but also as much as they are opportunities for redemption and restoration.

In the case of Jonah we might also add for rededication. So God sent Jonah to Nineveh as evident from the end of our text,

1 Then the word of the Lord came to Jonah a second time: 2 "Go to the great city of Nineveh and proclaim to it the message I give you." 3 Jonah obeyed the word of the Lord and went to Nineveh.

But not before God had the fish cough Jonah out from the last verse in chapter 2

10 And the Lord commanded the fish, and it vomited Jonah onto dry land.

So this ended Jonah's ordeal but he marked a new beginning of his spiritual journey. Dry land must have felt very good for him and having fully understood, having truly understood God's grace it was now ready to start bearing fruits. Now for people in general in the light of what we have discussed, I am talking about Christians and non-Christians alike, this idea of grace as unmerited favor from an unobligated giver is not something easy to understand, much less to accept. Because many people simply cannot see themselves extending grace in a situation like that so they cannot understand or accept the idea of a God of grace because they themselves cannot extend grace. You mean God doing something for me when he does not have to, when I don't deserve it. And so based on this we can generally classify people into two categories.

1. The irreligious.
2. The religious.

The irreligious don't see the need for God in their lives. They are likely to even deny the existence of God and this group includes the atheist and the free thinkers and it also includes the agnostics, people who don't disbelieve the existence of God but they maintain that God is a noble entity. They don't know who God is, nor do they understand what he is doing. The irreligious essentially says, everything is good in my life. I am basically an okay person even a moral person. I don't harm others; I try to get along in life as best as I can so I don't have a need for God.

The religious group is different. Those in this group belong to the world of organized religions. They firmly believe in that God exist and not only does he exist this God will also meet out rewards and punishments in the afterlife and so they try their best to please their god, to do as much good as they can and they live by this list of dos and don'ts, so that they might get merited favors from this god, so that this god might be obligated to reward them. In short it is a doctrine of salvation comes from me.

Now to be sure people in both groups, they are generally good people and furthermore many do not strictly into one group or the other, they may identify themselves under one group but they may shift between the two poles depending on how much they adhere to the rules and hence the religious person can sometimes behave like an irreligious person and vice versa even an atheist if he is in deep trouble, he might cry, Oh my God.

The third group

Many Christians show traits of the irreligious, the term Christian is only a label on them, because they live their lives as if God does not matter and many-many more Christians display the behavior of the religious because the practice of their faith can only be described as very ritualistic or legalistic.

The third group of people rightly so are the **redeemed people of God**. These are Christians who truly understand the concept of God's grace. Those have been truly touched by God's grace realized that like Jonah in the belly of the fish that their sins and their disobedience have condemned them and there is absolutely nothing they can do to save themselves. They realize that the God of grace and unobligated giver in extending salvation to them is offering them unmerited favor and when that happens spiritual transformation will take place and the fruits will be more visible in their lives. God's grace changes his people. One thing they become more humble because they are aware that they were condemned sinners given a second chance. They will become less judgmental because they acknowledge that they are no different from the next person. They also become more forgiving because they remember that God has forgiven them, and these are some of the characteristics of a true believer that the fruit of the spirit if you like. God's grace has a profound effect on Christians if they internalize it.

If we truly understand God's grace it will launch our faith on the new and more dynamic trajectory. It will raise our plane of faith from one level to a much higher one and this is the second major lesson from Jonah chapter 2 that we ought to examine if we truly understand God's grace.

Jonah response to grace was that he was ready to go to Nineveh but that was after he was vomited out of a fish but while he was still inside the fish he said this in verse 6

But you, Lord my God, brought my life up from the pit.

Now the word pit here, of course if you remember, the metaphor of the mountains and the earth in the same verse, it is part of that metaphor. He used it to describe his situation. God saved him from the pit and this verse is actually a reflection of the key verse in verse 9 that salvation comes from the lord.

Sometimes the word pit is used in psalms to describe the place of the dead or hades. In Revelation chapter 20, the pit is a bottomless abyss for Satan and if that is a same pit referred to here in our text then it kind of settles the question of whether Jonah went to heaven or hell. If God saved Jonah from the pit, of course Jonah is now in heaven. But more interestingly Jonah also said other things that might require further interpretation. He said in verse 4.

4 I said, 'I have been banished from your sight; yet I will look again toward your holy temple.'

Also in verse 7

7 "When my life was ebbing away, I remembered you, Lord, and my prayer rose to you, to your holy temple.

We see twice the mention of Holy Temple. Furthermore he promised in verse 9

9 But I, with shouts of grateful praise, will sacrifice to you. What I have vowed I will make good.

Now the word sacrifice here is surely connected to the holy temple. Why these three references to the holy temple? It must be important. What has all this got to do with God's temple and the sacrifice and this brings us to the conclusion of Jonah chapter 2.

Holy temple was built by King Solomon and it existed at the time of Jonah. Holy temple was a dwelling place of God back in the time of the prophets and in the Old Testament. It was the physical place where God's people would come to commune with him but this was before of course the days, the current age of the Holy Spirit which started in Acts chapter 2, but the trouble is before a person could come and commune with God there was the issue of sin. With all the sins in him big and small sins, he just couldn't come into the presence of a holy and righteous God and hence the sacrifice. He had to bring an animal for sacrifice which was done on the outer platform to the right of the entrance to the holy place. When animal was placed on the altar

he was supposed to place his hand on the head of the animal to symbolize the transfer of his sins to the animal which would then be slaughtered and burned. All this was a rather bloody and gruesome act of sacrifice, blood everywhere around the temple. It was God's way of stressing the seriousness of sin. Before a trice Holy God sin is no small matter, it was God's way of telling his people, look there is a severe penalty for sin. Sin has serious consequences; because of your sins this innocent animal has to die. It is paying the penalty on the behalf of you. All this of course is purely symbolic. It was actually pointer to a future event which is the cross. 800 years after Jonah wrote this book, Jesus the Lamb of God was sacrificed on the cross as he bore our sins as our substitute. This was the ultimate act of grace by God for all mankind. The ultimate unmerited favors to us from an obligated giver.

In Jonah chapter 2 God extend grace to Jonah when he saved him from inside the belly of the fish or from the pit. 800 years later through the death of Jesus on the cross, God again extended his grace this time to all who receive Jesus and believe in his name to save us from the pit. So the word sacrifice here in verse 6 is yet another key to the text because it provides the vital link to God's ultimate salvation plan to the cross and hence when we study Jonah chapter 2 we get the sense that this is really a foreshadow of the gospel or a foretelling of how our gracious God would extend his salvation also to us. So at the foot of the cross, we really acknowledged that salvation comes from the Lord as what Jonah also proclaims in his prayer.

8 *“Those who cling to worthless idols turn away from God's love for them.*

It is a warning verse for us. The idols referred to here may not be something physical. If you don't worship the almighty God then you are likely to be worshiping some form of idols in your life. It may be money, career or even golf or even your looks or even your children. Be very careful about what or whom your worship because you might end up forfeiting the grace of God. That is why Jesus warn us in

Matthew 7:21a

Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, ...

Main Lessons from Jonah 2

- 1) Deepen your faith in God; draw closer to him so that when storms of life hit you, when your situation changes for the worst you will be prepared.
- 2) Truly understand God's grace so that your spiritual transformation can be speeded up so that you will start to bear fruits for Christ.