

The following is a rough transcript, not in its final form and may be updated.

An Uncomfortable Uber Jonah 1:17-2:10

Intro: Jonah was commissioned by God to go to Nineveh (Israel's enemy) and warn them of the divine judgment that was coming their way if they do not repent. God told Jonah to go east but Jonah went west. He was trying to get as far from Nineveh as he possibly could. In running away from God's will, Jonah's life was going downhill fast. Worse than that, his disobedience put the lives of everyone around him at risk as well. God gave Jonah opportunities to repent and return but he was deadest on making his own way. Then God stepped in with some gentle persuasion.

The Lord sent a great wind to disrupt Jonah's peaceful slumbers and it caused such a mighty tempest on the sea that the experienced sailors feared for their lives. When they discovered Jonah's occupation (prophet) and the God he worshipped, they were even more terrified. "How do we survive this storm?" they asked. Jonah replied, "Throw me into the sea!" They refused at first but in the end, they could do nothing else so over the side Jonah went! With the end of vs16, you would think that this would be the end of the story. The rebellious prophet has been thrown into the sea to his death, the pagan sailors have turned to the Lord in worship; the story seems complete.

But it's not, not by a long shot. The Lord's goal in all this is not to see Jonah die but to see him delivered! God wasn't trying to kill Jonah; He was calling Jonah back to Himself and the special mission He had given to him. The Lord in His relentless mercy is still pursuing this rebellious man! And so the story continues

17 – When Jonah was turning his back on God, it didn't seem bother him at all that he was abandoning his God. But now, when Jonah is thrown overboard to his death, he finds himself in the unenviable position of apparently being abandoned by God, and he didn't like this one bit. In the water and then in the great fish, he learned what hell was like, and it was there in the depths of this misery that he repented and turned to God again.

Jonah wasn't really abandoned by God, but he felt like he was. But it's in

this extremely uncomfortable position that the hand of the Lord is most evident. There's a spiritual principle on display here. God can take the worst situation of our lives, something we look at with dread and horror, and use it to bring us into a position of service and blessing. In the OT, water was a picture of swallowing up and death; yet it was also closely linked with the presence of the Spirit of God. At the start of the creation story the waters of the deep are symbolic of the void, nothingness, the abyss. But we can't stop there because then the Spirit of God moved over the face of the waters bringing order and life. In God's Word, no sign is ever purely negative. The signs that denote death also contain the promise of life.

What is true of the water is also true of the great fish. On the one hand, it was a symbol of total abandonment, of hell. Jonah will even speak of it in those terms. On the other hand, though completely unknown to Jonah, it was the very means that God would use to deliver him from the deep and return him to the place of willful service and blessing. This great fish was not just used by God to get Jonah's attention, although it did that. It was also used to preserve Jonah's life AND put him back on the right road of service. Jonah urgently needed to head back toward Nineveh and there was no ship, or bus or caravan or wagon train or any other vehicle around to take him there. So, the God of heaven and earth prepared a special vehicle to carry him as a special passenger. God called Jonah an Uber!

It's sad that the great fish in the story of Jonah has captured so much attention because this has detracted from all the other valuable lessons in this book. People become so obsessed with what is going on inside the great fish that they completely miss seeing the drama going on inside of Jonah! Still, this creature plays a very important role in the story so it does need to be addressed. So, what of it? Was it a fish, a whale or something else? Was this a miracle or a natural occurrence? How do we handle the fantastic nature of this story?

For the Christian, accepting this story at face value is simple. If you believe in the God of the Bible you will have little difficulty believing that such a miracle is possible. If the God of the Bible can raise Jesus Christ up from the dead, He can certainly cause a great monster of the deep to appear alongside a ship when His rebellious prophet is thrown overboard and can cause it to swallow him. On the other hand, all the evidence in the world is meaningless to those who don't believe in miracles. If miracles don't

happen, then this story didn't happen. It doesn't even help to point out that being swallowed by a fish isn't actually a miracle, as that will be seen as a myth, not a fact.

First off, in the Israelite vernacular in which Jonah was written, there was no distinction between a warm-blooded mammal and a cold-blooded fish. If it lived in the ocean, it was a fish; if it was large, it was a great fish.

Regardless, there are species of both fish and whales that could easily swallow an adult human. Sperm whales feed mainly on squid, even giant squid which are often much larger than a man. Could a man survive in a whale's stomach? Experts say it is possible, although it would be very uncomfortable. There'd be air to breathe (fish breath). It's needed to keep the whale afloat. But, it would be warm and stuffy (104-108°F). There would also be some unpleasant contact with the animal's gastric juices that could adversely affect the skin, but these juices wouldn't digest living tissue; otherwise they would digest the walls of the whale's own stomach.

Keep in mind that it is possible that this great fish wasn't any type of animal modern science is aware of today. The text tells us that this great fish was prepared by the Lord specifically to swallow Jonah so as to preserve his life in the depths of the sea and transport him back towards Nineveh. This creature had been commissioned by its Creator for this task much like another fish, centuries later, was commissioned to swallow a coin and keep it in its mouth until it could be caught by Peter and provide money for the temple tax required of Jesus and His disciples ([Mt 17:24-27](#)).

The text also tells us that Jonah was in the belly of the fish for 3 days and 3 nights. The obvious question, one that is rarely asked, is: how did Jonah know how long that Uber ride took? The wrist watch hadn't been invented, although a Timex would have been apropos, "It takes a licking and keeps on ticking!" Even if he had one, Jonah couldn't have used it to tell the time; it was pitch black in there! The only way Jonah could've known this information is if God had told him when He spoke to Jonah again. I'm sure Jonah wasn't much concerned about the time frame but there must have been a reason God wanted this little tidbit of information recorded in His Word.

The Book of Jonah is thought to be the first of the 17 Prophetical books of the OT to be written. It is also the only one of the 17 books of the prophets

that makes no mention whatsoever of either Israel or Judah. It's a book that's entirely focused on the bitter enemy of Israel, the nation of Assyria and its great city Nineveh. Even stranger, while the book does predict the destruction of Nineveh, its primary goal seems to be aimed at Assyria's repentance and conversion.

Despite all this, Jewish scholars have always included Jonah in their accepted canon of Scripture. They've always held it up as one of the holy books of Israel and Judah. And. Although there are some timely lessons in the book for Jonah's contemporaries in Israel, this short blurb about a time-frame is most significant in the NT era!

Again, if we focus only on what happened inside the great fish then we'll miss seeing what happened inside Jonah and that would be a mistake. So, as we turn to Jonah's prayer from inside the fish, we discover a truly great miracle. Although Jonah was brought to the depths of misery in the fish, he still found the mercy of God amidst his misery. He discovered that though he had forsaken God, God had not forsaken him, though it may have seemed like He had. In short, Jonah found salvation even before the fish coughed him up on the land.

2:1-10 – Jonah's prayer takes up 8 of 10 verses in **ch2**. Since the book's only 4 chapters long, this prayer's obviously important. In **vs2**, Jonah summarizes his distress and deliverance. In **vs3-6**, Jonah looks back and describes his trial in terrifying detail. It was Jonah's sin that separated him from God but it was the consequences of that sin that made him feel like he was banished from God's presence (**4**). He was up to his neck in trouble and his head was wrapped in a turban worn only by those about to sink into a watery grave (**5c**). He was locked into this prison of death with no way of escape. Jonah had no hope of saving himself (**6a**).

This prayer has 4 characteristics of all true prayer. 1) Honesty - this prayer is blatantly honest. Too often, we are dishonest in our prayers. We come to the Lord while overlooking some circumstance He has caused, ignoring some sin He has highlighted or trying to obtain some request He has already clearly rejected. He's told us what He wants us to do but we don't like it. So, we persist in prayer hoping we can get Him to change His mind. How many of our prayers are futile attempts to get God to let us do something He's already clearly forbidden. If we continue to reject His will and then reap the fruits of disobedience, we then try to rationalize our

adverse situation.

Believers should be the greatest realists in the world. But they're usually not, especially when they're disobeying God or running away from His will. Instead of being honest about their misery, they try to explain it away. "I guess things like this just happen." Jonah didn't do this. Instead, he acknowledged his trouble—he had been cast into the deep, the floods had covered him, to all appearances he was cast out of God's sight, he had gone down to the bottoms of the mountains of the earth and, barring a miracle, the earth was about him forever.

Jonah not only acknowledged his misery; he acknowledged that it was God who had caused it. "You cast me into the deep." Not circumstances! Not the sailors! It was "Your billows and Your waves." Sure, the sailors had a part in throwing Jonah overboard. But that's a minor technicality, and Jonah's done with technicalities. They don't matter. He was in desperate straits and God was the one who was causing them. In a way, this increased the terror of his situation; the fact that God had *caused* it! As a Judge, God had summoned Jonah to trial, witnessed against him, declared him guilty and sentenced him to an immediate death —this was a terror almost beyond words!

Yet, there's also a sense in which the acknowledgment of God's presence, even in judgment, is a comfort. For it's better to fall into the hands of God, even in judgment, than to be separated from Him. At the end of [2 Samuel](#), David sinned in numbering the people of Israel. So God gave David 3 choices, 1 of which was God's judgment. David could choose 7 yrs of famine, 3 months of defeat before his enemies, or 3 days of pestilence. He chose door #3 because he said, "Let us fall into the hand of the LORD, for His mercies are great; but do not let me fall into the hand of man" ([2 Sam 24:14](#)). It turned out to be a wise decision. God is a God of judgment, but His judgment is tempered by the mercy that is so prominent a theme in Jonah.

2) Penance - an old-fashioned word that means confession, self-abasement, or mortification showing sorrow for and repentance of sin. This is a step beyond honesty, for it's possible to be honest about your situation, acknowledge that God has caused it, and yet be unrepentant about it. We can accept that God caused it but still get angry. We know Jonah's penance was real in 2 ways. 1st) He acknowledged that everything that had

happened to him was his own fault. He deserved it. That's the meaning of v8. An idol is anything that takes God's place. So Jonah's saying that whenever a believer puts something else in the place of God (turning from Him) he also turns from God's mercy. God is not less merciful, but the believer has rejected that mercy and therefore deserves all that comes on him. 2nd) Jonah didn't ask God for anything. If he had, we might suspect that his repentance had a hidden motive. In reality he asked for nothing. He was genuinely sorry for his disobedience.

3) Thanksgiving. Note: Jonah was still in the belly of the fish in the middle of the sea awaiting death so what was he thankful for? The answer isn't found in physical deliverance but in spiritual deliverance. True, Jonah had no hope of deliverance from the fish. But he had found the grace of God again and for this he was profoundly thankful. Jonah wasn't thankful for being delivered from the fish; that hadn't happened yet. He wasn't thankful that God was going to deliver him; he had no idea God was going to do it. What he was thankful for was that God had turned him from rebellion and had caused him to call on the name of the Lord once again. He was thankful for salvation. He was thankful for the abiding grace of God.

Jonah rediscovers this grace of God at the very moment his situation is hopeless and to all appearances nothing more is to be expected. His rebellion and actions were outside of grace. Adverse events occurred without any sign of favorable divine intervention, only signs of judgment. Now, when he accepts his condemnation and acknowledges to God that he was guilty and that God was just, he sees that at no point did God stop showing him grace. Here's where the greatest miracles are performed: when a person acknowledges their sin and confesses it before God. Then, as a consequence, God is able to restore the broken Creator-creature relationship.

4) Sacrifice and Vows This is the most significant characteristic of Jonah's prayer. Jonah is now ready to take his place alongside the ungodly. Earlier he had said, "I'm a Jew, and I don't want to preach to pagans." Now he's ready to take his place beside them as one who needs God's mercy. We see this in the parallel between v9 and v16 of ch1. The sailors, who were pagans, approached God the only way He could be approached—through 1) the blood of an innocent victim sacrificed for sin and 2) through a personal commitment expressed in a vow. Jonah, the prophet of the Lord,

also approached through a sacrifice (promise of) and made a vow. Despite his earlier protestations, Jonah came to God, not as a Jew deserving special privileges or concessions, but as a sinful human being who was just like every other sinful human being - needing God's grace.

It's the same for us all. If you come to God claiming privileges, boasting of your own achievements and expecting God to accept you or acknowledge you on the basis of your own merit, you have no hope of salvation. The Bible explicitly says God doesn't accept human effort ([Eph 2:8-9](#)). But, if you come to God admitting that you deserve His just wrath and condemnation, and if you place your faith in His Son, Jesus Christ, who willingly was made a sacrifice for you, making a personal commitment to Him then He saves you and brings you into an experience of God's grace.

No one's ever truly repented till they recognize that there's nothing in them that can commend them to God. No one's ever been saved who hasn't come to God on the basis of the sacrifice that He alone has provided. In fact, Salvation is of the Lord, meaning, Salvation is possible only because God makes it possible. This thought was a blessing to Jonah; but if it was a comfort to him, it should be even more of a comfort to us who live this side of the cross.

Thus far in our study of Jonah we have stressed that the story of the rebellious prophet is our story. But we should not miss the point that in another sense it is also the story of our Lord, who went down to hell for us bearing our sin and then was raised from the dead to bring many sons with him into glory. In other words, Jonah is a story of salvation. In fact, it's the theme of the whole Bible. Salvation is always God's story! We've run from God, all of us. But no one need perish because God has provided the way into eternal life Himself through the death of His Son. Have you seen this truth? Have you responded to it with a personal commitment like Jonah did?

Jonah's uncomfortable Uber and his deliverance from it speaks to the power of God operating in his life. But, as miraculous as it was, it pales in comparison to the greatest display of divine power. Usually, when a NT writer wants to emphasize or illustrate the power of God, they inevitably point to the resurrection of Jesus. It's the miracle of miracles, the ultimate example of power. Death is the final human experience that's unavoidable and common to all. It spells the end of dreams, achievements and hope. Yet

in Jesus, death was soundly defeated. Now, these bodies that were destined to be worm dirt will be transformed into something as unimaginable to us as a butterfly is to a caterpillar. What kind of power does it take to do that? Whatever it is, it's only found in God but it has been wielded by Him for our benefit ([Eph 1:18-20a](#)).

Do we fully understand the implications of what Paul is saying here? The power of God, the same power that raised Jesus Christ up, making Him victorious over death, hell and the grave, is the same power He makes available to His people today. It's the power that stands behind the preaching of the gospel. It's the very strength of God that is available to support, encourage and equip us in our daily lives. It's the power we employ in our fight against the forces of evil.

On this Resurrection Sunday, as we remember what was accomplished for our salvation, let us not forget that this same miraculous, divine power is at work in our lives today. God's power is available but are we using it? 😊