



## What To Do When You Don't Know What To Do

SERIES: *Jonah*

Have you ever been in the belly of a fish? I know, I know, some of you are thinking, "What you talkin' bout Willis?" Have you ever been in the belly of a fish? Not literally of course, but figuratively.

The belly of a fish is that place that is dark, smelly, and cold. It's a place of confinement, a tight, restrictive place. It's that place where you feel you are alone and you wonder if anyone really cares. It's the place where there is seemingly no hope. It's the place where you have no idea what God is doing and why you are there. It can be a very miserable and terrible place. You feel far from God, you feel like life has suddenly turned on you. You feel rejected or abandoned by God. For Jonah it was the unattractive opposite to everything he had set out for.

Maybe you are in the belly of a fish right now. Is it financial? A mortgage meltdown? Lost your job? Your health, marriage? Your purpose in life? If you are not in the belly of a fish, just wait...you will be!

*"God whispers to us in our pleasures, speaks in our conscience, but shouts in our pains: it is His megaphone to rouse a deaf world."* --C.S. Lewis

The question we'll answer this morning is: What do you do when you are in the belly of a fish...What do you do when you don't know what to do?

**"Then Jonah prayed to the LORD his God from the belly of the fish,"** (2:1).

How does Jonah respond to being in the belly of a fish? He prays.

The belly of a fish is a terrible place to be but it is also a significant place. It's a place of complete surrender, of real and lasting change, a place of new beginnings, and a place where you come to grips with the fact that all you can do is pray. God had to bring Jonah to a place where he couldn't rely on anyone or

anything else.

*"He who has learned how to pray, has learned the greatest secret of a holy and happy life"* --William Law

Let me ask you again, have you ever been in the belly of a fish?

When you step back and look at the book of Jonah as a whole you quickly realize that there are several things significant about his prayer. There are only four chapters and one entire chapter is devoted to Jonah's prayer. The prayer is also in the middle of the book of Jonah. The first real miracle is not that Jonah prays; we all pray when we are desperate, but it is HOW Jonah prays. What we will see is what Jonah prays for is directly in response to who God is. Jonah's prayer is really all about God; it is not self focused at all! (Remember, Jonah is a book about God!) When you read this prayer, what you begin to realize is Jonah expresses five great truths about God and Jonah's response.

### 1. God Hears Our Prayers.

**"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"** (2:2).

The God of the universe hears us! God heard the cries of the sailors. Jonah called out to God from Sheol and God heard him. The word "Sheol" meant womb, belly, a place for the wicked until final judgment, hell. Jonah asked God not necessarily for help; he was afraid of being eternally separated from God's presence. He had no idea that the fish was going to spit him out! For all he knew, this was it! It was time to get right with God because I am about to die! In the midst of the greatest trial and pain of Jonah's life, he knows God will hear his prayer! All throughout Scripture God hears the cries of His people. No matter what your "sheol" is right now, God

hears your cries.

## 2. God is Sovereign.

**“For you cast me into the deep, into the heart of the seas, and the flood surrounded me; all your waves and your billows passed over me” (2:3).**

“For you...” God cast Jonah into the sea; not the sailors. “But God...” (1:4, 1:17). God sent the storm. God used the sailors to do His will. God sent a fish. God is in control. He is sovereign, and Jonah finally accepted this fact. **“The heart of man plans his way, but the LORD establishes (directs) his steps”** (Prov. 16:9).

*“God is consistent, but he is also unpredictable. He is consistent in his nature. You always know where you are with God, but you seldom know what he is going to do next. You cannot find security in what God is doing. There is only security in who God is.”*—Graham Cook, “Embracing Change,” Quiet Waters Compass

So what do you do when you don’t know what to do? You cry out to God; He hears. And you rest in His sovereignty. Have you accepted the fact that God is in control?

## 3. God Gives Real Life.

**“Then I said, 'I am driven away from your sight; yet I shall again look upon your holy temple.' The waters closed in over me to take my life; the deep surrounded me; weeds were wrapped about my head at 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. When my life was fainting away, I remembered the LORD, and my prayer came to you, into your holy temple” (2:4–7).**

Jonah trusted God’s promises. He has been going “down” the entire book of Jonah—“down to Joppa,” “down below into the hold of the ship,” “lain down,” “threw him down into the sea.” And when he’s down he looks up to God’s Temple. The Temple was the place where God dwells, the place where heaven and earth intersect. Then

he finally hits rock bottom. Here we get the Prodigal Son imagery. Could he go down any further?

I’m really addicted to the TV show *Intervention*. It’s really a documentary about addicts—alcoholics, drug addicts, eating disorders, codependents, etc. They find these addicts and follow them around and film their life. It’s really sad. Meanwhile, while they’re following them around, the family is planning an intervention. So the addict comes into a room and the whole family is there. The addict usually says, “What’s going on?” Everyone, with tears in their eyes, says, “Your addiction is killing us. It’s killing you.” (Of course now I’m crying too!) Then usually they will say to the addict, “Are you ready for an intervention? Are you ready to get help?” Most times the addict will say yes. And they film the addict in treatment and rehab. Sometimes the addict will say no. Then at the end of the show there is an epilogue that gives you an update of how the addict is doing. Sometimes it’s great news; the addict has been sober for 6 months. But a lot of times the addict relapses.

The reason I tell you this is there was one particular story that had a scene in it that is seared in my mind. This young man, in his 20’s, who had a terrible upbringing and was now an alcoholic, looks at the camera and says, “This is what it looks like when you have no hope.” And I sat there and thought, “This young man has no hope? How miserable must he be?” And I prayed for him. And good news—he went back to school. Someone saw the show and paid for him to return to college. He was doing great. But it must be terrible when you hit rock bottom like that.

There is one thing I know that is true of all addicts and that is this—in order to get clean and sober, in order to really change, you have to hit rock bottom. Rock bottom is that place where you finally realize that you have no power over your addiction and that you are helpless to control it. Rock bottom is the place where you are tired of trying and finally ready to give over everything to your higher power. Rock bottom is the belly of a fish.

The great thing about hitting rock bottom is that when an addict finally hits it, the only way to look is what? Up. Sometimes it takes the belly of a fish experience to get us to the place of change, the place of repentance, the place of total dependence on God.

For Jonah, hitting rock bottom and being in the

belly of a fish was exactly what he needed. Jonah's greatest fear was his saving grace.

*"The way we learn something is more influential than the something that we learn"*--Eugene Peterson

Have you hit rock bottom in your belly of a fish experience? Just know that it may be exactly what you need.

*"Jonah found the mercy of God in his misery. While he had forsaken God, God had not forsaken him."* --James Boice

#### 4. God is Salvation.

**"Those who pay regard to vain idols forsake their hope of steadfast love. But I with the voice of thanksgiving will sacrifice to you; what I have vowed I will pay. Salvation belongs to the LORD!"** (2:8–9).

What about idols? John Calvin saw the human heart as a relentless efficient factory for producing idols. What was Jonah's idol? Comfort? Self? Intense Patriotism? Prejudice? Idols in our lives rob us of the blessing of God.

What about the Voice of Thanksgiving? The prayer is a prayer of praise and thanksgiving, not lament! "Will sacrifice...what I have vowed I will pay." Jonah finally yielded to God's will. What did he vow to do? Probably go to Nineveh.

What about the key verse, SALVATION belongs to the Lord? No one but the Lord could save Jonah, physically and spiritually. Hope is never lost because Salvation belongs to the Lord! Salvation is possible only because God makes it possible. It is of Him. Jonah finally realizes that he needs God's grace and mercy just like the pagan sailors and the evil Assyrians. Jonah responds to God just like the sailors! Have you responded to God's grace and forgiveness? **"She will bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins"** (Matt. 1:21); **"For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast"** (Eph. 2:8-9).

We've all run from God, but God provided salvation through the death and resurrection of His Son. Will you put your faith and your life into the only One who saves?

#### 5. God Restores.

**"And the LORD spoke to the fish, and it vomited Jonah out upon the dry land"** (2:10).

This is a new Jonah! His ministry is restored. The irony once again is Jonah disobeys God's voice but the fish obeys! And Jonah was humbled. The prophet of God gets vomited onto dry land. What a scene! Who was more relieved—the fish or Jonah? But he will still have lessons to learn.

What do you hope God will restore in your life? A relationship, friendship, ministry, marriage, health? God is in the restoration business.

The question we asked earlier was: What do you do when you are in the belly of a fish? What do you do when you don't know what to do?

The answer: Pray! Pray to the God who hears, who is sovereign, who gives real life, who is salvation, who restores.

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