

**Strong and kind  
In the fish  
Jonah 1:17-2:10**

Have you ever had one of those days?

You know the ones I mean. Initially, you wake up in the morning and you really want to get out of bed. It's one of those days when you have an exciting 24 hours ahead of you. And then it all goes wrong. The house is cold. The kitchen is flooded. The cat has been sick. And then just as you are wondering if it can get any worse, you realise your car has been stolen.

**Jonah was having one of days.**

Admittedly it was his own fault. He has deliberately run away from the mission of God. Instead of heading east to Nineveh, he goes west to the coast and boards a ship to Tarshish.

However, this is when disaster strikes. God sends a huge storm of life-threatening proportions. Jonah then gets interrogated by pagan sailors. As a result, he is thrown overboard into a raging sea. Without doubt, **this is a bad day!**

The question is, **can it get any worse?** At first sight the answer seems to be yes.

Look at what we are told at the end of **chapter 1. Read verse 17.**

It's worth saying that this **creature** is never called a whale in the Bible. It might have been. But in the Bible it is never specifically called a whale. It is simply a **great** or a **huge** fish.

**Why is it in the story?**

In the verse I've just read we're told that the LORD provided it. His intention is for the fish to swallow Jonah and keep him alive inside the creature for three days and three nights.

I know this is a very **unusual** and **dramatic** incident. But here's my tip. Don't waste your time trying to find stories of people who say they have survived something similar. These stories may or may not be true.

But here's the point. **We mustn't make what is possible in a human story the mark of what is possible in the divine story.**

God can do what he likes. We've already seen in **chapter 1** that God controls the **storms** and the **stones**. Well, here we are being told he controls all the creatures in the **sea**.

And yet the question still remains, why did God send the great fish to swallow Jonah?

Is it a way of punishing his disobedient prophet? "See how you like spending three days in the belly of a great fish. Maybe this will bring you to your senses!"

Not according to what we read next. The truth is that the fish is **God's rescue** of Jonah from certain death.

This rescue comes in **response to Jonah's prayer for deliverance.**

Look at chapter 2 verse 1. **Read verses 1 to 7.**

At last the prophet speaks to God. This is the first time in the book he speaks in a heavenward direction. Up until now, we've heard him speak to the pagan sailors but we've never heard his voice in prayer, until now.

**What a place to pray!** Jonah prays as he sinks to the bottom of the sea. Moments from certain death he talks to God as the seaweed is wrapping round his head.

**It's a remarkable turnaround.** The rebellious prophet becomes the repentant prophet. He comes to his senses, he remembers that God is full of compassion and grace, and so cries out to God for help.

As a **response**, the LORD **provides** the great fish.

**It doesn't look like he created a rescuing fish on the spot.** He doesn't snap his divine fingers and hey presto a big fish is made out of nothing. He could have done this. However, it seems that God demonstrates his divine power and knowledge by ensuring this the fish was in exactly the right place at exactly the right time and with exactly the right diet to swallow a dying prophet.

God knows all along what Jonah will do. This doesn't excuse Jonah's sin. It doesn't nullify the need for Jonah's prayer. **However, it does show us how awesome God is!**

It's very obvious that using a ginormous fish to save a drowning man is a very unusual way to bring salvation. However, **this is classic God!**

Again and again in Bible God goes out of his way to use **strange methods to save his people.**

Think about...

- The lambs at the first Passover
- Or the snake on a pole in the desert
- Or the defeat of the city of Jericho

And then ponder **the cross of Christ!**

One man dying on a cross is God's plan to save billions from hell.

Of course it's very unusual. And many in the world today find it hard to believe. **But this is classic God.**

The God of the Bible goes out of his way to use strange methods to save his people.

Before we look at Jonah's commitment to God that he made in the fish, let me say something about how the story so far applies to us.

I want to say something to

- To those who see themselves as hopeless cases
- To those who are waiting until the last minute before committing their lives to Jesus.

**First**, there is no such thing as a hopeless case. No matter how messy your life is – God's salvation provides for your sin. Jonah was in a bad way. God's hand is never too short to save. You need to pray!

**Second**, what about the person who says, "I'll live my life and then just at the end I'll turn to Jesus"?

It can happen. Jonah is saved. One of the criminals who died next to Jesus is saved. Today, you'll be with me in paradise.

However, let me say two things. **First**, you have no idea if you will want to or be capable of turning to Christ at the last moment. **Second**, why would you delay coming to Jesus? Why put off experiencing the joy of knowing Jesus for a less fulfilled life? Let me encourage you to pray!

As we finish let me show you how Jonah finishes his prayer in chapter 2.

Look at verse 8. **Read verses 8 and 9.**

Jonah begins this section by speaking about the link between idols and God's love.

In short, he says, worshipping idols will cut us off from experiencing the secure and satisfying love of God.

An idol is a false god. It is **anyone** or **anything** we set our hearts towards rather than the true and living God. It is any **other thing** or any **other person** that we look to instead of God. People and things that get the attention and love and affection that only God deserves.

Our idols change their shape and form from culture to culture and from age to age, but all of humanity is worshipping something or someone.

**The question is not, do we worship? But what or who do we worship?**

What are we living for? What are we sacrificing for? What are we devoted to? What are we looking to provide our significance, our security, our satisfaction? What are we pinning our hopes on to save us from a dismal and irrelevant existence? Let's get this clear, idols are vain. They are worthless.

They take us away from the *secure, supporting and satisfying* love of the God who is Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

It seems that **Jonah is now in a better place.**

I know he is still inside a great fish and that can't be pleasant. But he is now experiencing the fresh taste of God's goodness and grace.

It's beginning to dawn on him that running away from God doesn't lead to joy and happiness. Instead, it leads to a life that is **deeply fractured** and **doesn't connect with reality**.

However, Jonah is **no longer running** and he is **no longer drowning**. No, he has just experienced the LORD's quick and gracious salvation.

This leads Jonah to make two future commitments:

- To **sacrifice** for the LORD
- To **speak** for the LORD.

**First**, he vows to **sacrifice** for the LORD.

He says, with shouts of grateful praise, I will sacrifice to you.

I will allow your ways to impact my life in a way that I will feel their imprint.

But notice this isn't a reluctant life of sacrifice. This is joyful, willing sacrifice to God.

The New Testament knows of this kind of sacrifice for the Christian.

**Romans 12:1**, "Therefore, I urge you, brothers and sisters, in view of God's mercy to offer your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God, this is your true and proper worship."

I'll do what you ask. I'll trust in your mercy. I'll rely on your mercy to save me. More than this? I will sacrifice for you. I will be a living sacrifice.

**Second**, Jonah vows to **speak** for the LORD

He says, I will **say**, "Salvation comes from the LORD."

There are **two** aspects of his **proclamation**.

- Salvation is required
- Salvation can only come from the LORD, the God of Israel

This is still early days for Jonah. There are lots of unanswered questions. For example, how deep has God's grace travelled in his heart? Will he joyfully do whatever the LORD asks of him? Who will he proclaim salvation to? Anyone? Or only to a certain number of people? We'll only find out the answers as we read on in the weeks to come.

However, for now let me finish by emphasising how important personal gratitude is as we seek to participate in the mission of Christ.

We too are called to **sacrifice** for the LORD and we too are called to **speak** for the LORD.

However, we need **fuel for the journey**.

**A car goes nowhere without petrol.**

Likewise, we go nowhere without deep personal gratitude for what God has done for us in Jesus.

**Gratefulness is the fuel for mission.**

So let's be praying that God will give us a fresh appreciation of his saving grace.

We need his help. We can do nothing on our own.

But with his help we will attempt great things for God.

We will sacrifice and we will speak for Christ.

**Let's pray.**