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**Grace from the Deep**  
**Jonah 2**  
**November 3<sup>rd</sup>, 2013, Jeff Geremo**

We are continuing our study of the prophet Jonah this morning. Last week we established that Jonah was a real live historical figure, not a Veggie Tale cartoon character. We are on chapter two today. And just so that we are up to speed let's summarize where we have been so far in chapter one.

God called Jonah to go to the great city of Nineveh and preach against it because of their wickedness. Jonah had no intention of obeying God so he ran in the opposite direction, as far and fast as he possibly could go, in an attempt to get away from God, as if that were possible. So, he buys a ticket aboard a ship that is heading for Tarshish, which, we're not sure, but is likely the furthest point he could possibly get on the trade route of that area. In other words, he really wanted to get away from God.

Well, as it turns out, God could not be escaped and a sort of cosmic sea chase ensued with God following Jonah's every move. Have you ever had one of those dreams where you are being chased by someone and you are running in slow motion, and every move is an effort? And you are feeling desperate, frantic and helpless, because the person who is chasing you is moving in fast motion. And you wake up breathing heavily with that same desperate feeling until you realize that it was just a dream. That's sort of how Jonah felt here, except it wasn't a dream. It was real. For some reason, Jonah thought that he could escape God. He didn't want to just get out of his responsibilities. He was trying to get far enough to get out of relationship with God.

In the middle of his running God disrupts Jonah's boat ride with a severe storm that gets the attention of the sailors of that ship. They believed that they were going to die and, in their desperation, they end up turning from their false gods and calling out to Yahweh, the God of Jonah — the one true living God who created the heavens and the earth. These pagan sailors, who were far from God, ironically became worshipers of the God that Jonah was running from.

They asked Jonah what to do, and he said that the only thing that will save them is if they threw him overboard, which in the end, they reluctantly did. Jonah's goal when he started this trip was to get away from God. Now, ironically, the way it looks, he is going to meet his Maker face to face.

[2]

The last verse of chapter one says, **<sup>17</sup>Now the LORD had arranged for a great fish to swallow Jonah. And Jonah was inside the fish for three days and three nights.**

In his sovereign grace, God sent a huge fish to swallow Jonah. He's in the belly of the fish, along with seaweed, rotting fish, and whatever else this fish has swallowed in recent days. It's dark and disgusting, and smelly, and for all he knows he is going to die there. I would imagine that this was not one of Jonah's finer days. He was likely not saying, "Oh, this is cool. I get a new experience. I get to ride in the belly of a whale." This was, with out a doubt, a bad day, and likely the lowest point in his life.

But, it was there, in the pit, that Jonah begins his prayer life. Can anyone relate? He calls out to God and God somehow miraculously protects him. And He gives Jonah a sort of time out to think about his actions since he had been running from God. Maybe some of you parents do that with your kids. "Go to your room and think about what just happened, and then we'll talk."

I've heard from people who have been hospitalized for various reasons that they actually ended up being thankful because they were forced to slow down and think, and pray and evaluate their life. And God was able to speak to them in their down time. Ruthie and I are in the middle of that right now. While we are living apart, we have some forced downtime where we are able to do some reevaluating. God is using that time to shape us further. It's hard, but it's good at the same time. We are continually asking God what he wants us to learn during this forced hiatus.

That's what happening here. Jonah has nowhere to go. He is trapped with his thoughts. There is no escape, unless God, in His mercy and grace, decides that He will rescue Jonah. His future is fragile. He knows, perhaps, for the first time in his life, that if there is going to be any hope for him he will need to let God be God. It was then and only then that he surrendered his will to God's.

## Jonah 2

**<sup>1</sup>Then Jonah prayed to the LORD his God from inside the fish. <sup>2</sup>He said, "I cried out to the LORD in my great trouble, and he answered me. I called to you from the land of the dead, and LORD, you heard me! <sup>3</sup>You threw me into the ocean depths, and I sank down to the heart of the sea. The mighty waters engulfed me; I was buried beneath your wild and stormy waves.**

That's the way it is for us sometimes isn't it? When our lives are going well, we sort of pretend that we don't need God. We are oblivious to His presence. Really, what we do quite often, if we are being honest, is we go through our day as if He doesn't even exist.

Or, maybe we religiously do our Christianly duties, so that we can check them off our list in an effort to get God's attention and please Him. I read my Bible. I said grace before I ate. I went to my Life Group or Bible study, I was in church on Sunday. I tithed.

We want God to notice, like a little kid on a swing calling out to her mommy, "Look at me mommy." And all along God says, "My child, you don't have to try to get my attention. I am here with you. It's not **what you can do for me** that I want. It's you. I want a relationship with you. You don't have to prove yourself to me. I am here waiting for you." But we don't get it, so we run, or hide, or sort of go into denial mode and don't notice that God might be trying to get **our** attention. Or, maybe, in desperation we just give up.

And whether or not we have been going through our life with no deference to God, or in some sort of legalistic effort we try to do things to get His attention, we misunderstand His grace. But eventually, hopefully, like Jonah, we come to the end of ourselves and get to that place where there is nowhere to turn to but to God. And getting to the end of ourselves is necessary.

Sometimes it's our bad decisions that brings us there. It could be, that in an effort to try to make something of ourselves, we make some poor financial decisions. We think that we are only valuable if we have a certain amount of money in the bank, or if we drive a certain kind of car, or have a big house, and wear the right kind of clothes, and so in an effort to attain all these things so that we present that kind of image we dig ourselves into a financial hole that we can't get out of. And we feel like Jonah. There is no way out. There is no way to turn but up. Sometimes, it's of no fault of ours that we get to that place. We get that call from the doctor who says those words that we did not want to hear. You've got cancer. Or, someone you love has cancer. And you feel like someone has just thrown you overboard into the deep. It's out of your control. You are at the mercy of God.

Whatever the case, we will all get to those places in our lives where we feel like things are out of our control. It may be of our own doing, like Jonah, or it may be that circumstances took us there. It's that place of desperation where you have tried every other avenue. You have nowhere to turn. So, God gives you that quiet time out, three days in the belly of a whale so you can consider God in the middle of your stinky stuff. You feel like Jonah. It feels like a bad place to be, but it is actually the best thing for you because it's there that you get deeper with God.

**<sup>3</sup>You threw me into the ocean depths, and I sank down to the heart of the sea. The mighty waters engulfed me; I was buried beneath your wild and stormy waves.**

Now, notice that Jonah, at this point is not feeling sorry for himself. He acknowledges the hand of God for the first time.

**<sup>3</sup>You threw me into the ocean depths, and I sank down to the heart of the sea. The mighty waters engulfed me; I was buried beneath your wild and stormy waves.**

Yes, there was a storm and a whale, but Jonah saw in them the hand of God. They were agents of the sovereign Creator. And he seems to actually have a thankful heart. God heard him when he cried out for help. God always hears when we humbly call out to him. Over and over in the Scriptures we see God's people calling out to Him in distress and we see that God answers.

You've probably experienced that in your life too. I know I have many times. Sometimes I'm so daft. I try everything else before I go to God. It's like I think that I need to exhaust all my own resources and then go to Him

when nothing else works. Now, over time, I have been learning to take things to him first, but it has taken a lot of years and pain to get to that place, and I still from time to time fall back into thinking that I need to try to be my own saviour, before running to Him.

What God wants us to do is to take a good, hard, honest look at ourselves. But, sometimes that's hard for us to do. We don't like to go there. It's too painful. God, usually through other people, tries to show us areas where we need to change, and we don't like to hear it. We think we are ok just the way we are, and so in order for us to see the need for change, what needs to happen? We need to come to the end of ourselves, and so sometimes God helps us with that. Not because He is party pooper, but because He loves us too much to let us get complacent in our own sin.

We have a hard time seeing where we fall short. When we are in the middle of our busy lives, rushing around trying to accomplish whatever it is we try to accomplish to justify our existence, we find it hard to take the time to look deep inside. And actually, sometimes, we purposefully keep ourselves so busy so that we won't have to think about those things. The busyness is an excuse to anesthetize our pain. So, God helps us. He lovingly chases us down, and sometimes gives us a forced time out to think about things.

[4]

**4Then I said, 'O LORD, you have driven me from your presence. Yet I will look once more toward your holy Temple.' 5'I sank beneath the waves, and the waters closed over me. Seaweed wrapped itself around my head. 6I sank down to the very roots of the mountains. I was imprisoned in the earth, whose gates lock shut forever. But you, O LORD my God, snatched me from the jaws of death! 7As my life was slipping away, I remembered the LORD. And my earnest prayer went out to you in your holy Temple.**

As I read this some Psalms come to mind. Jonah was very familiar with the Psalms. He would have learned them as a boy. He would have committed many of them to memory. And so, while he was literally down in the depths, some of those Psalms would have come to his mind. We don't have time to look at those now, but Psalm 42 is one that came to my mind when I was reading through this prayer of Jonah.

Many scholars believe that David wrote Psalm 42 either when he was running from King Saul, or when he was running from his son Absalom. Both Saul and his son were trying to kill him. And David, metaphorically cried out to God,

**7"Deep calls to deep in the roar of your waterfalls; all your waves and breakers have swept over me."**

That's how David was feeling. He honestly told God that he felt like God had abandoned him, like he was being crushed metaphorically by the waves and breakers of God's discipline.

With Jonah it was a little different. Jonah literally had waves and breakers crushing him. He literally had seaweed wrapped around his head. He literally sunk to the very roots of the mountains and was imprisoned — in a fish.

But, it is also, here, in the depths of his misery, at the lowest point in his life, that He met God and experienced His saving grace. Jonah didn't deserve to have God save him. He totally disobeyed God and did the very best he could to run from Him. Those sailors that God saved didn't deserve to be saved either. And nor did Nineveh, the very reason that all of this happened, deserve to be saved by God.

All of the saving was done by God's grace, while they were running from him and willingly disobeying. We have learned that we can only be loved if we earn it or somehow deserve it. That is not the kind of God Yahweh is.

**Romans 5:8 (NLT)**

[5]

**8 But God showed his great love for us by sending Christ to die for us while we were still sinners.**

God does not withhold His love from us when we are bad. Did you know that? He is more interested in relationship than He is with performance. He wants children who love him, not slaves. He does not just give us his love when we perform our duties for him. That's how some dog trainers train their dogs. They get them to do a trick and then reward them with a snack, and so every time the dog does some sort of trick or obeys his master the master says, "Good boy" and gives him a biscuit. And if the owner asks them to do something and there is no snack forthcoming, the dog looks at them like, "Hey, where's my biscuit. I deserve it. I obeyed you."

And so we sometimes transfer that kind of thinking to our relationship with God. We read our Bible so that we can get kudos from God, not because we enjoy being with Him. We do our Christian service to get His attention so that He will give us our proverbial snack. And we think that God will only love us or pay attention to us if we jump through His religious hoops. But, that's not how God dispenses His love. **God loved us even while we were still sinners — while we were running from him.** That's the kind of God we have.

We treat people like that though, don't we? We do it all the time. We get even with them by giving them the silent treatment or whatever. Somebody offends us and we withhold our love from them until they prove that they are worthy of it again. We snub them. We ignore them, or we are downright mean to them until they measure up.

God doesn't do that. Christ died for us while we were still sinners. He didn't wait for us to measure up. Even while Jonah was running in the other direction, God pursued him in love. Jonah, in the depths of the seas, from the belly of the fish, during his time out, saw this clearly for the first time, and His eyes were opened to the grace of God.

Whatever it is that you are going through right now, and some of you might be experiencing some of the most difficult times of your life, whatever it is, God wants you to experience His grace in that deep dark place of your soul. He wants you to call out to Him. And He will answer from out of the deep. He wants you to experience His grace. He wants you to bask in His love.

[6]

Now, notice verse 7.

**7As my life was slipping away, I remembered the LORD. And my earnest prayer went out to you in your holy Temple.**

Can anyone relate to this verse? It's pretty normal for us. When do we remember the Lord? When things are falling apart. When we get the phone call from the doctor. When relationships are stressful. When finances are tight. When we lose our job. When we are in that place where we have no place else to turn but to God. All of a sudden we remember God, and those other things that we thought were important are not so significant anymore. We gain true perspective in the foxhole of life. God wants us to learn from those times that we can and should keep Him close even when things are going smoothly.

Verse 8 is, I think, the most interesting verse in this passage.

[7]

**8Those who worship false gods turn their backs on all God's mercies.**

That was how the NLT translates it. The NIV, in my opinion, seems to connect a little better with the intent of the verse.

[8]

**8"Those who cling to worthless idols forfeit the grace that could be theirs.**

I think what is happening here is Jonah's eyes are opened and he sort of says to himself in a moment of introspection, "What if I had gotten what I wanted?" He had been running hard away from God. What if his eyes hadn't been opened? What if he had kept on running until his conscience had gotten so dull that he could not recognize the voice of God anymore? Had Jonah kept going in the direction he was heading he would have forfeited the grace that could have been his.

That is what happens when we run after things that replace God in our lives. We say that we want freedom to do our own thing. We want to make our own decisions without being confined by God, or the Bible, or church. Our society leads us to believe that things, status, fame, and money are more important pursuits than God. Those are the things we are programmed to run after. We make those things our idols. Really, what we want is to be our own gods. We want freedom **from** God to go our own way, which he actually will give us. He will not bully us into pursuing Him first. But, what if he just left us alone without drawing us with his kindness and love? What if he didn't care enough to chase us down? What if he didn't love us enough to allow us to get to the end of our resources so that the only thing we have left to do is call out to him. That would be a very scary place to be. God will let us go our own way, but if we choose to continue down that road we forfeit His grace.

We may just get what we want – freedom from God, but following that path will only lead to destruction. From that dark place, Jonah’s eyes were opened to the grace of God and so he says in verse 9:

**[9]**

**“But I will offer sacrifices to you with songs of praise, and I will fulfill all my vows. For my salvation comes from the LORD alone.”**

God, in his grace, gave Jonah three days in the confines of a deep dark place, from which there was no escape, to meditate on who God is, and who he is in light of that knowledge of God. He acknowledges that God is God and he is not, and that he cannot save himself, and that he will in fact do what the Lord had called him to do.

He could have gotten bitter and angry that God would put him through such pain and anxiety, but instead he praised God because if it wasn’t for that dark, scary, painful place, he might have continued running. And so he is thankful.

You may be going through some tough times right now. You may be in the middle of a scary place where you can’t see a way out and the only thing that you can do is to cling to God. I would encourage you, even though it is not easy or natural, to see that dark place as the place where God will meet you and extend to you his grace.

Call out to Him in your distress. Ask God to help you experience His grace, love, hope, joy, and His very presence in that dark place. It’s in the middle of those deep, dark places of our souls that we can experience God in the most profound ways. Ask Him to show you those areas in your life that you, either purposefully, or unconsciously have set up as more important than God. Tell Him that you want Him to meet you. And then wait for His salvation. God is always faithful. He is always good. I promise you that if you do that, the things that you previously thought were important will fade away to nothing.

There’s an old hymn that we used to sing a lot when I was young called Turn Your Eyes Upon Jesus.

**[10]**

O soul, are you weary and troubled?  
No light in the darkness you see?  
There’s light for a look at the Savior,  
And life more abundant and free!

Turn your eyes upon Jesus,  
Look full in His wonderful face,  
And the things of earth will grow strangely dim,  
In the light of His glory and grace.



*Jonah: The Reluctant Evangelist*  
**GRACE FROM THE DEEP**  
Week of November 3rd, 2013  
Jonah 2

**Objective:** To understand that God wants us to be honest about our fears, pains and struggles and to invite him into them.

**Worship** (5-10 minutes)

1. Spend five minutes in silent prayer asking God to prepare your heart for how he wants to speak to you.
2. Have someone read Psalm 42 meditatively to the group.
3. Sing a song or two of praise and thanksgiving to God.

**Welcome** (5-10 minutes)

Icebreaker: Describe a time when you were afraid.

**Word** (30 - 40 minutes)

1. What stood out for you from the sermon?
2. Review what happened so far in Jonah's story, and why.
3. So he's stuck in the fish. Slowly read his prayer (Jonah chapter 2).
4. This is pretty descriptive language. What are some graphic phrases that describe Jonah's situation?  
What are the emotions here? What's happening at a heart level in Jonah?  
How has his attitude, his relationship with God changed?  
Is there anything else that stands out to you?
5. According to the sermon, God was loving Jonah. Does Jonah share this opinion? How was God loving Jonah?  
How do the words 'time-out' and 'surrender' relate to this?
6. Verse 8 says "Those who cling to worthless idols forfeit the grace that could be theirs." Everyone in this story needed God's grace -- Jonah, the sailors, the Ninevites, (maybe even the whale!!), and we do, too. All of them were far from perfect when God reached out to them in love, and so are we. How does "clinging to worthless idols" interfere with receiving God's grace? What are these worthless idols?

**Work** (30 - 40 minutes)

Sermon quote: "God lovingly chases us down... He gives us that quiet time out, three days in the belly of a whale so we can consider God in the middle of our stuff." He does this because He wants a relationship with us.

1. Have you had any 'whale-belly' experiences, where you came to the end of yourself, and God lovingly gave you a time-out so you could think about your life and call out to Him? What was that like for you? How did you communicate with God? If you feel comfortable doing so, share your experience with the group.
2. Jonah used the language of the Psalms in his prayer. Have someone read Psalm 42 aloud again. Does this resonate with your heart?
3. We don't have to wait until we're in a crises to communicate with God at a deep heart level. God desires honest communication, intimacy, with us.  
Psalm 62:8 says "Trust in Him at all times, O people; pour out your hearts to Him, for God is our refuge."
4. Take some of the phrases from Psalm 42, Psalm 62, or Jonah chapter 2 that resonate with you, and write a short prayer expressing your heart to God. You can use entirely lines from these passages or add some of your own thoughts. It doesn't have to be long.