

**Intro:** Garrison. Pastor. Jonah 2. **Pray.**

Jonah week 1 recap. Big picture theme of the book. 2 realities. We run. We rebel. God chases us down. We sin and rebel. God gives grace and invites us back to Him. Not just a book about a big fish. We're going to keep seeing that every week.

Let's start with where we ended last week. Jonah 1:17

*17 <sup>3</sup> And the Lord appointed<sup>4</sup> a great fish to swallow up Jonah. <sup>5</sup>And Jonah was in the belly of the fish three days and three nights.*

So we've got a little bit of a speed bump we've gotta get through before we get into tonight's text. And that's Jonah being swallowed by a fish and living there for 3 days.

For some of us this is no big deal, but for a lot of us chances are this makes us a little bit uncomfortable...or is a reason why it's hard for us to believe the Bible as a whole.

The first thing I'd tell you, is to google Michael Packard. Michael Packard is a lobster diver, who lives off the coast of Cape Cod. Just a year ago, he was on a dive, and was swallowed whole by a whale and survived.

So what I'm here to tell you is that the best defense for the truth of Jonah is a 1000 word article posted by USA today. I'm mostly joking, that's just an anecdotal story. Here's the reality:

**When it comes to the miraculous in the Bible, look to Jesus.**

Here's what I mean. 1. The whole of Christianity hinges on the resurrection. We believe Jesus rose from the dead. We don't have time to get into all the historical arguments for why we think it happened etc, but if you believe that, then of course all the rest of the miraculous events have to be conceivable.

2. Jesus himself refers to Jonah as a historical figure and what happens in the story as historical events. He says this both in Matthew 12 and Luke 11(Matthew 12 here):

*But he answered them, <sup>3</sup>"An evil and <sup>4</sup>adulterous generation seeks for a sign, but no sign will be given to it except the sign of the prophet Jonah. <sup>40</sup> For <sup>2</sup>just as Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of the great fish, <sup>3</sup>so will the Son of Man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth.<sup>41</sup> <sup>4</sup>The men of Nineveh will rise up at the judgment with this generation and <sup>5</sup>condemn it, for <sup>4</sup>they repented at the preaching of Jonah, and behold, <sup>6</sup>something greater than Jonah is here.*

This is the same argument for why we believe many of the miraculous stories in the OT and the authority of the Scriptures. Jesus refers to them as authoritative and believes they actually happened.

With that out of the way, let's take a look at our passage for today. Starting in v. 1:

*Then Jonah prayed to the Lord his God from the belly of the fish,*

So Jonah gets rescued from drowning, swallowed up by a fish, and prays. Now many people would argue that what Jonah is about to do in praying in the belly of the fish is a sign of repentance. That he had a really bad time in chapter one, runs from God, gets caught, and now we're good.

But I think there's a lot of context clues and scholarly research that would indicate the opposite, that he's not actually repenting.

While it seems like he is frustrated/sad/angry/afraid because of the consequences of his sin, the prayer reads in such a way that Jonah doesn't really take any direct ownership over his rebellion.

### **It's not true repentance, but false repentance.**

What I mean by false repentance, it seems like he's grieved by his sin, but if you get into the text is that this is much more of a pity party than repentance. We're going to do a lot of deep diving into the text tonight to see it, but the truth is from the first line we see Jonah's true posture:

*Then Jonah prayed to the Lord his God from the belly of the fish, saying, "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."*

Now, if you're somewhat familiar with the bible, you may find yourself reading these verses and thinking "this kind of sounds like some of the Psalms."

Yeah, there's a reason for that. Nearly his entire prayer in ch. 2 is made up of references to and direct quotes to a different Psalms. As a Jewish prophet, Jonah would've been very familiar with the Psalms.

Chances are he had most or all of them committed to memory. And praying the Psalms was a common Jewish practice. Praying the Psalms to reveal the state of the soul.

So what Jonah does here as he finds himself in the belly of the fish, is he starts to call all these Psalms.

And what's fascinating is although Jonah is quoting Psalms, it's not a 1 for 1. So the first verse here is a reference to Psalm 120.

Which reads: *To the Lord, in my distress, I called.*” Jonah, however, changes the order of the words. He prayed, “I called out to the Lord” He moved God’s name to the end of the phrase and his own action to the front.

Which to us, may seem like nothing. But to a Jewish audience, this is actually a big deal. In Hebrew, the language that this was originally written, What or who comes first in the sentence is the most important acting agent. So the change from ‘To the Lord I called’ to ‘I called to the Lord’ actually changes the whole emphasis of the statement.

Although seemingly small to us in how we write, in Hebrew this is a meaningful and intentional change.

Jonah’s perception is that he is the acting agent here. He’s the most important person in the story. **And we don’t just see this emphasis in the first line. It continues.**

In Jonah’s eyes, he was the one who approached God. Jonah emphasized his “call,” his “cry,” and his “voice.” His action came first and God responded to him, because of him. Jonah is hyper focused on himself for the whole of the prayer.

Interestingly Jonah’s prayer ends the same way it began. He quoted Psalm 3 this time, which reads, “To the Lord belongs salvation.” Again, Jonah changed the order of the words and proclaimed, “Salvation belongs to the Lord.” **God’s name was the last word of Jonah’s prayer.** I love how author and OT scholar. Irene Sun said it:

**Jonah’s prayer captured what was true in his life: Jonah came first, God last.**

Here’s what we see from the very start: Jonah’s heart is about himself, not God.

Get that, you’ll see exactly how and why he’s falsely repenting the rest of the prayer. Let me show you two specific ways false repentance shows up:

*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. 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 [6] 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.*

### **1. False repentance never acknowledges its sin.**

**If Jonah is repentant, where’s the confession?**

If we’re thinking this is supposed to be a repentant-heart-change pivot, where’s the mention of his sin? Remember all the stuff that happened in chapter 1? THE Bible literally uses irony and

satire to emphasize how ridiculously off he is. Remember how it said it in chapter 1. God comes to Jonah and says, go to Nineveh. Then behold, Jonah arose and went the opposite direction to another continent. When God tries to get his attention, he jumps into the sea, most likely to kill himself, not to repent.

So if this is a prayer of repentance, where's the confession? It's not there. **Not a word on his sin.** Not a word on what he's done wrong. Just that he's desperate, that he's worshipping God and will worship God. But nothing on how he got there or why.

In fact, it seems more like he's blaming God. Like God is putting him through a trial because that's what he does to the righteous. *'You cast me into the deep.'* Is that true? Jonah jumped overboard because of his rebellion.

*'I am driven away from your sight'* Again. He's blaming God for this. He wasn't driven from God, he runs from God.

It all doesn't quite read right. Psalms fall into two buckets. Psalms are written as a confession and many are written for thanksgiving. It's the genre, so to speak. Psalms of thanksgiving are written because God delivers his people who were looking to him for deliverance. The genre of Jonah's prayer is thanksgiving and that doesn't fit.

Yes God has rescued him, absolutely, and he should be thankful. But in the midst of his thankfulness he seems to miss all of what's going on and why he's actually there.

Jonah wasn't seeking God for deliverance.. He was on the run. He was rebelling. He never sought him. In fact the unbelieving sailors beg him to pray to God in chapter 1, which he doesn't do. So, this prayer reads like that of a righteous sufferer, saved by God, but in fact, he was not righteous in any way. Theologian Daniel Timmer says it this way:

**“Jonah, although he is unquestionably in dire straits because of his own disobedience, does not even recognize his sin and so utters not a word of confession”**

It's just a continuation of his posture towards God from the very first line in the prayer. And it gets even worse:

*When my life was fainting away, I remembered the Lord, and my prayer came to you, into your holy temple. 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.*

## **2. False repentance plays the victim**

Lastly, we need to see that although Jonah is quoting multiple psalms, it seems that the bulk is coming from Psalm 18. You can see the themes are almost the same. See if you can catch the connections:

Jonah 2	Pslam 18
Jonah 2:2-3 <b>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. 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.</b>	Psalms 18: 4-6 <b>The cords of death encompassed me; the torrents of destruction assailed me the cords of Sheol entangled me; the snares of death confronted me. In my distress I called upon the Lord; to my God I cried for help. From his temple he heard my voice, and my cry to him reached his ears.</b>
Jonah 2:5-6 <b>The waters closed in over me to take my life; the deep surrounded me; weeds were wrapped about my head [6] 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.</b>	Psalms 18:15-17 <b>Then the channels of the sea were seen, and the foundations of the world were laid bare at your rebuke, O Lord, at the blast of the breath of your nostrils. He sent from on high, he took me; he drew me out of many waters. He rescued me from my strong enemy and from those who hated me, for they were too mighty for me.</b>
Jonah 2:7-9 <b>When my life was fainting away, I remembered the Lord, and my prayer came to you, into your holy temple. 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.</b>	Psalms 18:6 From his temple he heard my voice, and my cry to him reached his ears.

Thematically they're almost identical. References to being cast away into the depths, needing rescue. etc

Sounds very similar. Which actually makes a lot of sense when you know the context of Ps 18.

Psalms 18 is David's reflection on being an innocent man pursued by King Saul. We've talked about David plenty recently, but a large piece of David's story was that God appointed him as the new king of Israel, but the *current* king, Saul, didn't like that. So Saul spent years trying to chase David down to kill him to prevent him from taking over as king. David is hiding out in caves praying for God to deliver him because he's innocent.

**Psalms 18 is the psalm of an innocent, righteous, sufferer on the run.**

So think about it, does anything strike you as wrong there? Jonah using the Psalm of an innocent man on the run to lay over the top of his circumstances, interpreting his experience through Davids?

**Jonah is also a man on the run, so that part checks out.** But is Jonah innocent in this story? No. Not even close to innocent. Literally everything so far in the story is Jonah's fault. It's his fault that he ran from God, it's his fault that God had to send a storm to stop him.

And is Jonah on the run because he did something God asked him to do? No again. It's the opposite: he's on the run because he's refusing to do what God asked him to do. Every bit of the difficulty Jonah encounters in his story is because of his own stubbornness. That's a vastly different scenario than the one in the Psalms he is referencing.

Once you know all the context, it begins to seem a little off for Jonah to interpret the language of the Psalms as applying to his own situation, doesn't it? Jonah here is reading himself into the story of the Psalms as the hero, despite the fact that he is anything but the hero in his own story.

From all appearances, Jonah still doesn't see it. He doesn't see where he's off. He doesn't see his own fault in any of this. In FACT he thinks he's an innocent victim.

**Jonah's problem is he's not truly repentant. He's falsely repenting.**

And although we're not stuck in the belly of a fish misquoting some Psalms, we do the same thing. We falsely repent all the time.

Just like Jonah, for one reason or another, we all run from God. Can look a bunch of different ways, you can run from what God has invited us into, things like Bible reading, sacrificing for others, living on mission with your neighbors and coworkers, opening up in group. You can run from God by running to porn and lust. Or lashing out in anger and justifying it because you were right. We sin and we run.

But we have to do something about it. We have to soothe our consciences. That's where false repentance comes in. It can potentially look just like Jonah here. Where he's saying all the right things, even quoting Scripture, but his heart is in the wrong place.

You could call it overcompensating with religiosity. Or putting on a performance. It's dangerous because its so close to being helpful and good, but the heart is wrong. The heart is holding on to a desire to save face and make ourselves look good.

- **Just like Jonah, we care more about the effects of sin, not sin itself.** Easy example. So we hurt someones feelings or sin against them, and maybe the person reacts or we notice that we hurt them. And you rush to apologize, but not because you're grieved you

sin against them, but because you're worried they'll be mad at you. You just don't want anyone to not like you.

We can do that with God too. Where we're more worried about Him being mad at us when we sin than we are heartbroken that we've sinned against our loving Father who desires intimate relationship with us; which sin undermines. We just want the bad feelings to go away, which is another indicator:

- **Just like Jonah we're unclear on what we did wrong.** So when we lash out at a spouse or roommate and they come and talk to us about it. We minimize or justify. Yeah, it was a hard day. Super stressed, going through a lot right now. Really just a victim of my circumstances, it wasn't that big of a deal.
- **Just like Jonah we can have emotions with no meaningful change.** Show up to group after having a rough week. Super sad about your sin. Confess it, maybe have tears. And then someone asks, hey have you considered trying this? What if you put up blockers, or reached out when you're anxious or tempted? Um no. I am very sorry though.
- **Just like Jonah, we're prideful.** We can look just like Jonah. Sitting in the stomach of a fish saying *Those who pay regard to vain idols forsake their hope of steadfast love. But I with the voice of thanksgiving will sacrifice to you.* You probably wouldn't say that when you've sinned. But do you keep score? Like yep I messed up this time but I've seen worse. I've seen worse in my friends, in my spouse, definitely in the world.

All of these indicate a heart that is not really repentant. True repentance is different. The way 2 Cor 7:10 would say it is:

*"Godly sorrow brings repentance that leads to salvation and leaves no regret, but worldly sorrow brings death."*

**False repentance is self centered sorrow that results in no lasting change and ultimately death.**

**True repentance is a Gospel centered sorrow that that results in transformation and life.**

So false repentance cares more about the effects of the sin than the sin itself. But true repentance sees that our sin is an offense against God, others and ourselves. It sees that sin goes against the grain of what we were designed for and how we were supposed to relate to others, namely to love.

False repentance is unclear on what we did wrong. True repentance has Spirit empowered self awareness. There's clarity and heartbreak. True repentance sees sin clearly and grows evermore disgusted with its presence in our lives.

False repentance is emotional with no change. True repentance is not reliant on emotions. Can you have an emotional response to sin? Yes. You should hate it. But ultimately it's about the action. True repentance runs from sin, seeks to find new ways to avoid temptation, seeks help when triggered and confesses sin before the sin has even happened. Yep, I'm feeling tempted in this way. Yep, I'm feeling triggered into some real anxiety. Some real anger and I don't want to take this further.

False repentance is prideful, but true repentance is deeply humbled by our sin and the grace of God. Instead of digging in your feet, justifying, minimizing, thinking you're not as bad as xyz, true repentance is horrified by our sin and is humbled by the truth that our only hope at transformation and salvation is by grace. There's no arguing with God, well I messed up blowing up at my kids again, but I've really gotten better at Scripture memorization, so give me a break this time. No. True repentance knows that we cannot justify ourselves and are laid low by our sin.

True repentance is humble. True repentance is aware. True repentance is active. At the heart of true repentance is this:

### **True repentance is a change in worship.**

To repent means to exchange our idols for God. Before it's a change in what we do, how we talk, how we spend our time, it's a change in who and what we worship.

So like Tim said last week, Jonah's problem was not just an obedience issue. It's a worship issue. And God was after Jonah's heart in all of it. He was rooting out the idols, the god that Jonah really worshiped. And Jonah's true god is himself.

So no, he won't go to Nineveh, because that will possibly put his life in danger, even though the God he claims to know as the Lord of heaven and earth will go with Him. That's not on the radar. If Jonah preaches to Nineveh, God might save them, and he wants them destroyed, and if they're not that means he'll have to forgive and won't be vindicated. In his prayer, it's God responding to what he's doing right. Jonah is first, God is last. It's all about him.

And that's why he's falsely repenting. And that's why you and me do the same. Because it's about us. We love ourselves more than we love God, so we try to check the box or perform and overcompensate. But we're stuck because our hearts have not changed.

PAUSE

So Jonah's sitting in the belly of this fish, assumably in pitch black darkness praying this prayer, heart not changed. And what does God do?

***And the Lord spoke to the fish, and it vomited Jonah out upon the dry land.***



Remember what this whole book is about. Jonah sins, and God is still after Him. Jonah throws himself off the boat, swallowed by a giant fish. That could've and should've been the end of his life. But God miraculously steps in.

Jonah is trying to clean himself up, candy-coating his rebellion by reciting Scripture. It's ugly. And God saves him. He's still after his heart.

Man I really wish we could get this. Think about it. This is a really low point. Like gross levels of hard heartedness and pride. Yet God is after Him and loves Him. He treats you the same! In your sin, in your false repentance, when you run away or numb out, God is coming after you. He's so patient and gracious with us. He's not keeping score of all the sin you did this week. He's not disappointed you missed it again. He loves you.

**He's after your heart. And we know it because of the better Jonah who was to come.**

Just like Jonah was sent to the Ninevites, Jesus was sent on a mission for us. Except He didn't run away, He embraced His mission gladly. Just like Jonah was thrown into the ocean in the midst of the storm to save the sailors, Jesus dove into the sea of God's wrath to save us.

And just as Jonah was in the belly of the fish for 3 days and 3 nights, Jesus was in the belly of the grave for 3 days and 3 nights. Just like God opened the mouth of the fish to save Jonah, Jesus opened the mouth of the grave to save us.

Jonah was guilty, never owned it. Jesus was never guilty, and yet took all sin on himself.

**You can't change on your own.** We're just bent towards the self and false repentance. But Jesus has chased after you. He is chasing after you now. Look to Him and receive his perfect record and His Spirit that transforms sinners.

And that is why and how we actually get from false repentance to true repentance. By remembering and believing in the better Jonah, who lived and died for us even as we sin, run, falsely repent. He came after you at the cost of His life.

You can't change what you worship on your own. You can't truly repent on your own. You need the grace of Jesus to change your heart. And in Christ, that's exactly what He will do and has already begun to do.

**Communion**

**Pray.**