

## But GOD: Part 4

*"But God brought my life up...." Jonah 2*

September 22, 2024

**INTRO.:** Thank you, Larry, for sharing your testimony! How many have been encouraged and challenged through the testimonies over the past four Sundays? How many here have stumbled in their walk with God? How many have even walked away for a while until God brought you back. How many have experienced a "But GOD" time when God clearly did something that jarred you, woke you up from your spiritual wandering or slumbering? How many are grateful that God doesn't just let us go in our wanderings but goes after us? How many are grateful that when we sin the Holy Spirit, who indwells every believer, convicts us of our sin? This morning our "But GOD" encounter comes from the book of Jonah. What characters come to mind when Jonah is mentioned? Right away many talk about the giant fish that swallowed Jonah. Yet, there are only two verses in the whole book that speak about the big fish. This isn't a book about a big fish. The main character in the book isn't even Jonah. Who is the main character? It is God, called Yahweh in the Old Testament. It is about the only true God, the God who is so holy and pure that they didn't even dare pronounce His name.

Let me begin by giving you a little background. Jonah was a prophet, one who was ordained by God, to proclaim God's message. The book begins with God giving Jonah a mission.

**Jonah 1:1-2** The word of the LORD came to Jonah son of Amittai: "Go to the great city of Nineveh and preach against it, because its wickedness has come up before me."

What do we know about Nineveh? It was a fairly large city that was part of the Assyrian empire that dominated the ancient world from about 885 – 625 BC. The Israelites were forced to pay tribute to the ruler of the empire. The Assyrians were well known for their extreme cruelty. Archaeologists have uncovered large stone wall panels of grisly post-battle scenes which were erected in palaces so that they could be seen daily. (Erika Bleibtreu, "Grisly Assyrian Record of Torture and Death") They had parades of heads, requiring friends of the deceased to carry them on poles. They skinned prisoners alive and even burned the young alive. Those who survived became slaves, laboring on Assyrian building projects.

These are the people God told Jonah to go to and preach against. As you can imagine, Jonah was not in favor of God's commission. As you read further in the book, Jonah was concerned that the people of Nineveh might actually listen to the message and repent and that God, would actually forgive them. Jonah knew this about God as recorded in chapter 4:

**Jonah 4:2** "Isn't this what I said, LORD, when I was still at home? That is what I tried to forestall by fleeing to Tarshish. I knew that you are a gracious and compassionate God, slow to anger and abounding in love, a God who relents from sending calamity."

So, Jonah's solution was to hop on a boat, headed to Tarshish, to flee from the Lord. Why doesn't this make sense? Can any one of us truly outrun God? It's like Adam and Eve trying to hide from God in the Garden of Eden. Nineveh was north and east of Jonah's location, Tarshish was south and west. Tarshish was 2500 miles in the opposite direction!! I won't go into great detail but God sent a storm ("hurled a great wind") and Jonah admitted that he was running from the God of heaven who made the land and the sea. Did Jonah hear what he was saying to the sailors. He admits he is running from the God who made the land and the sea. Where is Jonah? He is in a boat, on the sea, that God created. Sin NEVER makes sense!! The sailors had heard of this God and they were terrified. Jonah told them the only solution was to throw him overboard. I ask, "Was that really the only solution?" How about having the sailors turn the boat around and go back to Joppa? Jonah was willing to die rather than go to Nineveh. This reminds me of the quote:

"Sin will take you farther than you want go, keep you longer than you want to stay and cost you more than you want to pay."

Immediately after throwing Jonah overboard the sea grows calm. The sailors offered a sacrifice to the Lord and made vows to Him. They were radically changed by this encounter with God. God provides a giant fish who swallows Jonah, but miraculously doesn't digest Jonah. This brings us to chapter 2 which is a psalm (a form of Hebrew poetry) that describes Jonah's prayer to Yahweh and Yahweh's response.

We will look at four things this morning: **Jonah's Prayer**, **God's Power**, **Jonah's Praise**, and **God's Provision**. Let's read this together and see if you can pick out each of these points.

**Jonah 2:1–10** From inside the fish Jonah prayed to the LORD his God. He said: "In my distress I called to the LORD, and he answered me. From the depths of the grave I called for help, and you listened to my cry. You hurled me into the deep, into the very heart of the seas, and the currents swirled about me; all your waves and breakers swept over me. I said, 'I have been banished from your sight; yet I will look again toward your holy temple.' The engulfing waters threatened me, the deep surrounded me; seaweed was wrapped around my head. To the roots of the mountains I sank down; the earth beneath barred me in forever. But you brought my life up from the pit, O LORD my God. "When my life was ebbing away, I remembered you, LORD, and my prayer rose to you, to your holy temple. "Those who cling to worthless idols forfeit the grace that could be theirs. But I, with a song of thanksgiving, will sacrifice to you. What I have vowed I will make good. Salvation comes from the LORD." And the LORD commanded the fish, and it vomited Jonah onto dry land.

### **JONAH'S PRAYER**

From inside the fish Jonah prays to the Lord. What was Jonah expecting when he was thrown overboard? He expected to die! Read down through this psalm. It is a constant recounting of Jonah going down.

"from the realm of the dead"

"the currents swirled around me"

"all Your waves and breakers swept over me"

"the engulfing waters threatened me"

"the deep surrounded me"

"seaweed was wrapped around my head"

"to the roots of the mountains I sank down"

"the earth beneath barred me in forever"

"my life was ebbing away"

Jonah is describing his journey to death. There was no way he was going to survive this vicious storm. The last phrase, "my life was ebbing away," highlights Jonah's utter helplessness to do anything to stop his drowning. It is in the midst of this that he cries out to God.

**Jonah 2:1** "In my distress I called to the LORD, and he answered me. From the depths of the grave I called for help, and you listened to my cry.

In his prayer Jonah is honest before God. He recognizes that God is the One who is sovereign. He is the One who hurled him into the depths, the very heart of the seas. There is some debate as to Jonah's repentance because of what we read in chapter 4. In that chapter he expresses his displeasure in God relenting of His destruction of Nineveh since they repented. What I want to concentrate on is the fact that Jonah recognized that there was nowhere else for him to turn. He didn't blame the sailors for throwing him overboard, it was all of God's doing. It was God's discipline for Jonah's disobedience.

James Montgomery Boice, "Jonah acknowledged his misery and he acknowledged that it was God who caused it. This increased the terror of the situation. He was far from land with no path of escape. And it was God who caused it. (the God of the land and the sea)... It is better to fall into the hands of God, even in judgment, than to be apart from Him."

Jonah ran as far away from God as he could. But we cannot run far enough or fast enough to escape God.

Sin drives us from God.

Sin drives us from the Bible, the Word of God. John Bunyan, author of Pilgrim's Progress, said, "Either this book will keep you from sin, or sin will keep you from this book."

Sin drives us from gathering with God's people, the church.

**Hebrews 10:23–25** Let us hold (present tense) unswervingly to the hope we profess, for he who promised is faithful. **24** And let us consider (present tense) how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds. **25** Let us not give up (present tense) meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but let us encourage (present tense) one another—and all the more as you see the Day approaching.

Where are you with God currently? You may be able to fool people for a while, but you can be sure that it will come out eventually. Thank God that He has given all those who know Christ as their Savior and Lord, the Holy Spirit to convict of sin.

To whom did Jonah eventually turn?

Jonah 2:7 "When my life was ebbing away, I remembered you, LORD, and my prayer rose to you, to your holy temple.

James Bruckner: "When Jonah says, 'I remembered you, Lord,' this is more than simply recalling something to mind. In the OT remembering has theological connotations. Remembering Yahweh is Israel's foremost responsibility, but Jonah did not remember Yahweh until his life was almost gone."

### **GOD'S POWER**

God's power is seen throughout the book of Jonah. We see God's power over nature: He hurled the wind and when the sailors threw Jonah overboard, He calmed the sea. He provided a huge fish to swallow Jonah but not digest him. He commanded the fish to vomit Jonah onto dry ground. In chapter 4 He also provided a plant to provide shade for Jonah, a worm to chew the plant so that it died, and a scorching east wind.

God was the One who brought the judgment down on Jonah and He is the only One who could provide deliverance. As Jonah was sinking down into the sea leading to his sure death he cried out to God and God responded.

**Jonah 2:6** To the roots of the mountains I sank down; the earth beneath barred me in forever. **But you brought my life up from the pit**, O LORD my God.

"*pit*:" (or grave) this word often parallels in Hebrew poetry the term Sheol which referred to a place of the dead. Sheol was used as an expression for being in the grave in various Old Testament Scripture references (Psalm 18:6; 30:3; 49:14; Isaiah 28:15). Jonah is indicating that he is at the very brink of death.

"*But you (God)*:" This is the turning point of Jonah's prayer. This is a reference to God's miraculous intervention. God used a great fish to deliver Jonah from drowning.

Jonah was convinced that he had been "banished" from God's sight. Once he hit the water Jonah knew there was no turning back. Only a work of God could change that! Without God there was no turning point of Jonah's prayer and life. Is it not the same in our lives? It begins with salvation where God makes dead people alive.

**Ephesians 2:1** As for you, you were dead in your transgressions and sins,

**Ephesians 2:4-5** But because of his great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, **5** made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions—it is by grace you have been saved.

"*have been saved*:" this is in the perfect tense (action in the past with ongoing results) passive (being done by someone else; namely God)

Jonah could take no credit for His deliverance and neither can we.

**Ephesians 2:8-9** For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God—not by works, so that no one can boast.

"*have been saved*:" this is in the perfect tense (action in the past with ongoing results) passive (being done by someone else; namely God)

We can also take no credit, after coming to faith in Christ, for recognizing our need to confess our sin when we disobey God. The Holy Spirit is the One who convicts of sin, as we were reminded of in the testimony shared this morning. It is also God who restores our fellowship with Him upon our confession of sin.

**1 John 1:9** If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness.

"**But GOD**:" to God be the glory!

We see Jonah's prayer, God's power, and

### **JONAH'S PRAISE**

Jonah is recognizing that all glory must go to God for his deliverance.

Jonah 2:8 "Those who cling to worthless idols forfeit the grace that could be theirs.

Worshipping idols was a constant problem of the Israelites in the Old Testament. When Moses went up Mount Sinai and God gave him the two tablets with the commandments inscribed on them by the finger of God, what were the people doing down below? Here is the account:

**Exodus 32:2-6** Aaron answered them, "Take off the gold earrings that your wives, your sons and your daughters are wearing, and bring them to me." **3** So all the people took off their earrings and brought them to Aaron. **4** He took what they handed him and made it into an idol cast in the shape of a calf, fashioning it with a tool. Then they said, "These are your gods, O Israel, who brought you up out of Egypt." **5** When Aaron saw this, he built an altar in front of the calf and announced, "Tomorrow there will be a festival to the LORD." **6** So the next day the people rose early and sacrificed burnt offerings and presented fellowship offerings. Afterward they sat down to eat and drink and got up to indulge in revelry.

Anything or anyone put before God is an idol. God is the only One that is to be worshipped. Jonah describes idols as being worthless.

"*worthless*:" synonyms for this word include: lies, deceit, futility, and it is used especially to refer to false prophets. (James Bruckner)

These "idols" get in the way of a relationship with God. God will not accept second place in our lives. Today "idols" get in the way of people coming to faith: these can include success, other people, lust, pleasure, possessions, and the list could go on. Idols can get in the way of a believer's relationship with God. We need to constantly check our heart.

Jonah 2:9 But I, with a song of thanksgiving, will sacrifice to you. What I have vowed I will make good. Salvation comes from the LORD."

"*But I*:" Jonah is making a contrast between those who worship idols and himself.

James Bruckner: "This expression is usually followed by a declaration of trust or righteousness; it is always preceded by contrasting the wickedness of the masses or lack of trust. Jonah is willing to return to his prophetic post at the temple. The thanksgiving sacrifice was a celebration and meal at the temple, where individuals delivered by God gave public testimony to Yahweh's act of deliverance."

**Psalms 13:5** But I trust in your unfailing love; my heart rejoices in your salvation.

**Psalms 31:14** But I trust in you, O LORD; I say, "You are my God."

**Psalms 55:16** But I call to God, and the LORD saves me.

This doesn't mean that Jonah had it all together. You can look at chapter 4 to show that he is continuing to struggle with God's willingness to forgive the Ninevites. Any who know Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord should have a life full of praise to God. Where would you be without Jesus?

"*Salvation comes from the Lord*:" The words salvation and deliverance are the same word in Hebrew. God is the great deliverer!! Are you thankful for your salvation?

We see Jonah's prayer, God's Power, Jonah's Praise, and finally:

### **GOD'S PROVISION**

Jonah 2:10 And the LORD commanded the fish, and it vomited Jonah onto dry land.

God provided a giant fish, He provided that Jonah wouldn't be digested by the fish, and now He commanded the fish and it vomited Jonah onto dry ground. Whenever God commanded an animal or any nonhuman subject there is no resistance. Notice the response when Jesus calmed the storm.

**Luke 8:22–25** One day Jesus said to his disciples, “Let’s go over to the other side of the lake.” So they got into a boat and set out. **23** As they sailed, he fell asleep. A squall came down on the lake, so that the boat was being swamped, and they were in great danger. **24** The disciples went and woke him, saying, “Master, Master, we’re going to drown!” He got up and rebuked the wind and the raging waters; the storm subsided, and all was calm. **25** “Where is your faith?” he asked his disciples. In fear and amazement they asked one another, “Who is this? He commands even the winds and the water, and they obey him.”

Nothing or no one is a match for God’s authority and power. There is an interesting twist to the story of Jonah. Elsewhere in the Old Testament, vomiting is usually a metaphor of judgment. In the book of Leviticus (18:25, 28; 20:22) spewing out was judgment from God for their disobedience.

Here, God, providing a fish to swallow Jonah, and then having the fish vomit out Jonah, are the means God uses for Jonah’s protection and deliverance. In this provision God is giving Jonah another opportunity to obey Him and go to Nineveh to preach God’s message. Did God need to do this? Of course not! Were there no other prophets God could of used? Of course He could have used someone else!

Are you grateful for God’s provision of salvation for you? Jesus came to earth to live, die, and raise again in obedience to the Father but He also came willingly.

Are you grateful that God chooses to use you for His kingdom purposes? He doesn’t have to use any one of us. It is a privilege to serve the King of Kings and Lord of Lords. We get to come alongside what God is doing. This is also a reminder that all the glory goes to God when He works in and through us to further His kingdom. He created us for this very purpose.

**Ephesians 2:10** For we are God’s workmanship (His masterpiece), created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.

### **SO WHAT???**

This changed everything: “But you, Lord my God, brought my life up from the pit.” Jonah 2:6b

If you want a wonderful experience, take your New Testament and use a concordance to look up the two little words, “but God.” See how many times human resources have been brought to an utter end; despair has gripped the heart and pessimism and gloom has settled upon a people; and there is nothing that can be done. Then see how the Spirit of God writes in luminous letters, “But God,” and the whole situation changes into victory.

*Source: Ray C. Stedman, Man of Faith. Christianity Today, Vol. 30, no. 5.*

\*Have I come to know the salvation that God has provided through Jesus Christ? Have I realized how hopeless I am without Jesus? But God...

\*Have I wandered from God and need to come back to Him? Don’t wait another moment? But God...

\*Am I taking time to be in God’s Word, TO BE under solid biblical teaching, and in fellowship with other believers? But God...

\*Do I take time every day to praise God? What will I praise God for this week? Write it down daily and share it with others. Maybe you can do a group text with a few others to share daily praises. But God...

\*When it comes to those who have yet to come to faith in Jesus, am I living and sharing the gospel through my words and through how I live my life? As a friend of mine was known to say, “Give them heaven.” Tell them about Jesus. Show Jesus to others by how you live. But God... Sign up for Project Love. Invite others to the Fall Festival. Volunteer to help with a ministry in the church.

