

Transcript* - Jonah: Embracing Second Chances – John Enabnit – 3/2/2025

I'm John Enabnit. I'm one of the pastors here. And I'm going to welcome those of you that are in the house and our online worshipers. God bless all of you. Hey, before I launch into my message, a couple of real quick things. First of all, our good friend Dave Duncan is here.

This weekend, as he is a couple of times a year, and Dave is going to be hosting a very special seminar at 1230. Both Jake and I, John Clanton, and I will be there. So, we'd love to see you all, as well. And, Dave, I don't know if you know this, but, over 200 years ago, Benjamin Franklin famously said that the only things in life that are certain are death and taxes.

If he were living today, he'd have to add shipping and handling because you you can't get away from that. So just in a personal way, raise your hand if you know, unless things unless Jesus comes, how many of you think you're probably going to die one day? Chuck, you didn't raise your hand. Do you know something I don't know?

So this is a good seminar, today, and I think you'll benefit greatly from it. It's at 1230 in, the south lobby classroom, and Dave is going to be on the stage a little later in the service, and he'll, give you more info about that. The second thing is that, Lord willing, a year from now, March of 2026, I'm going to be leading a tour group to Israel, and I fully am confident that things will settle down and it'll be a wonderful trip.

But if you'd like to learn more about the proposed trip to Israel, I tell you what, it's a once in a lifetime unforgettable experience. I'm having an info meeting at the end of this month, the last Sunday, March 30th. And you'll hear more about that later. So. Okay, enough of that. Let's let's just quiet our hearts before the Lord for a moment.

And would you buy your hearts and heads with me in prayer?

Father, in your presence today, there is fullness of joy. And we thank you for that. Lord, we thank you that we can draw near to you because you have first draw near to us. And in these moments that we have to break forth the word. I pray, father, that there would be an uncommon, blessing from your Holy Spirit to touch every heart and every soul in this room.

May you do your great work in each of us. Lord, we ask this in Jesus name and if you agree with this prayer, say Amen. Hey, this is a personal question, but I need some audience feedback. Okay, the question is, have you at any time in your life as well as a child, you know, some time before you got your driver's license, how many of you, ran away from home at least once?

Can I just see a show of hands? Keep keep your hands up. Ran away from home at least once. You mean that's all? Just about 20, 25 people. You know. You know where liars go, right? Broadway, Christian

church. That's where they go. Those. Those with their hands up. Those are the rebels in our midst. Right there. I think we run away for a variety of reasons.

And I'm assuming that when you ran away, you got past the end of your driveway. I don't think it counts if you stay on your own yard. Okay. But I came across some notes that kids had written to their parents when they were running away when they were small children. And the reason I think they were pretty young is because most of these notes were written in crayon.

And, and the one, the one, kid said, by the time you read this, I might be leaving, might spelled MIT. If you want to see me again, I will be at the first McDonald's you come to when you leave our house. I love you. I. I don't know if they were running away or they just wanted some French fries.

Here's another one. Mom, I'm going to run away when you and dad are sleeping. I am saying goodbye forever. P.S. I will be back tonight.

Dear Mom and Dad, I ran away. I will be back soon. Love, Joey. And then he adds, it's all mom's fault and. And one little, one more. The little kid. And you know, it's a little kid because he wrote in really crude lettering a note to himself in big red crayon. And it's a memo to himself. It says, run away tomorrow.

And then, in large capital letters crudely written, don't forget to run away tomorrow. So apparently there was a chance he might forget.

Okay, another question this time. Don't raise your hands. How many of you in your lifetime have ever run away from God? It's not in. It's not that. You pack your bags and went somewhere. It's that in your mind, in your heart, in your spirit. You decided to leave God in some form or another and most of the time when we do that is because we believe that God is calling us to do something that we don't want to do, and so we alter our theology to cause ourselves to believe that God really doesn't care, or that God God will just overlook.

And maybe we even change our lifestyle. Maybe there's a lifestyle change that you wanted to get involved in that you knew would be displeasing to the Lord. So you you decided to arbitrarily run away from the Lord. And and for that matter, it's possible that in even in a church service that maybe you're still running. You're not alone, because I think a lot of people are running from God.

And I believe that we all try to get away from God for basically the same reason, because we don't want to be told what to do, because we believe that God is challenging us in a certain area of our lives, and we are not willing to comply with what the Lord wants. Which brings us to the most famous runaway story in the Bible, to the book of Jonah.

And, we're going to be talking about this prophet today, this man of God, this preacher Jonah. And, if you got your Bibles, you can open them to Jonah chapter one. We're going to go through all four chapters quickly today, but but I think most of us think we know the story of Jonah. But I wonder if we do.

Because if you ask the average person, he'll tell you that. Well, yeah. The stories about Jonah and the whale and the whale is named Monstro. And Jonah's dad is a paddle, and he wants he's running away because he wants to become a real boy. That's that's the story of Jonah, according to most people. But of course, if you don't know, I will tell you right now that the the word whale never once shows up in the book of Jonah.

It doesn't, it doesn't even use that word. And that Jonah had a whale of a time and a whale. All those kinds of things. Here's here's actually the scoop, the straight story from Jonah, chapter one, verse one. The word of the Lord came to Jonah, son of Amitai. Go to the great city of Nineveh and preach against it, because his wickedness has come up before me.

Well, Jonah doesn't want to do that. God says, I want you to go this way. But Jonah goes that way. God says, I want you to go to Nineveh. Well, Jonah instead gets on a ship that's bound for Tarshish. And the way the story unfolds, God is pursuing Jonah and sends a great storm to get Jonah's attention in.

The storm is so ferocious that the ship upon which he's a passenger is about to break up, and Jonah knows that he's the cause. So he pleads with the sailors who are pagan, by the way, they don't know the Lord. He pleads with with them to throw him overboard so that they can be saved while they don't want to.

But finally they do that. And what's cool about this story is that these pagan sailors repent. They turn from their wicked ways, and they actually start worshiping the God of Israel. Just an amazing story. And Jonah now is over the side of the boat, and he's he's in the water. And suddenly the storm abates. The winds die down, the waves calm and lost at sea.

Jonah thinks he's going to die. That's that's how the story begins. Now, Jonah has four chapters and I have four talking points today. Here's my first one is that you can run from God, but you can't outrun God. You can run from him, but you can't outrun him. I, I want you to pretend if it's possible. Pretend like you've never heard this story before.

Listen to this with a fresh set of ears, like you're hearing it for the first time. Verse 17 of that chapter of chapter one says, now the Lord provided a huge fish to swallow Jonah. And Jonah was in the belly of the fish. How long? Church? Three days and three nights. So he here's the picture that is painted in Jonah one.

God gets the attention of this fish and says, hey, fish! And the fish says, yes, Lord. And God says, fish, I want you to go and pick up Jonah. This is very important. Listen carefully. Swallow, but don't chew. Okay?

And I will tell you where to deposit Jonah later in the fish says, okay, Lord. It says that God provided commissioned a particular fish. I'm. I'm kind of by the belief that God created one fish, a one of a kind sea creature specifically designed to accommodate a human being for three days and three nights. And by the way, I grew up believing this story.

I grew up believing that if it's in the Bible that God is not going to lie to us, because if he'll lie about this, then he'll lie about anything. This is truth, okay? And I want to just pause and say, I don't want you to do so. Hung up on the authenticity of this particular aspect of the story, because if you get hung up on whether a person could actually survive three days and three nights in a fish, then you're you are going to miss my friend.

The main point of the story. But by the way, I saw a video just a few days ago, coincidentally, of a kayaker who was in his in his kayak. He was just a, a half mile off the coast, I believe it was Chile in South America. And, and he's kayaking in another kayak, or has his GoPro camera on his helmet, and suddenly a humpback whale comes and swallows that first kayak or whole kayak and kayak are all together and they disappear from sight.

He disappears from sight in about maybe five 10s later, the kayaker just shoots up out of the water again. That the whale just got that he up chopped him.

That had to be the longest seven seconds of his life. I think. You see, most people think the story of Jonah is about Jonah getting swallowed by a fish. But you know, the fish is only in three verses. The other 45 verses really tell us the story, because this is a story about running away from God. And it's our story is all.

So at some level, all of our lives intersect with Jonah. And I don't want you to miss the overall point, because, my friend, I am telling you that God is up to something in your life. I'm convinced that individually, God is trying to do something wonderful and marvelous and great in each of our lives, and you can run from him, but you will never outrun God.

My second talking point is that when you hit bottom, you will discover a great God, a great God. If we could associate one word in this narrative with God, the good word, I think, would be great. When Jonah runs away, God sends a great storm. The pagan sailors are converted to the Lord through a great fear, and some of your Bibles will say that God commissioned a great fish to swallow.

Jonah. So God is doing something great in this story. On the other hand, Jonah is messing up. He just messes everything up. If the word that we would associate with God would be great, the word that you

could apply to Jonah would be down, because everything about him is in a downward spiral. He goes down to Joppa instead of going over ten in a boat, he goes down to Tarshish.

Or at least he's on his way. And once he's on the ship, he goes down into the belly of the ship in order to sleep, and then he's cast overboard and goes down into the ocean. And then, as you know the story, he swallowed by the fish and goes down into the belly of the fish. And when Jonah finds himself in the belly of this fish in this sea, Jonah has truly hit bottom.

So guess what Jonah does when he's there in the fish? He prays from the belly of this fish. He cries out to the Lord, and we have Jonah's own statement of what happened in chapter two, verse two. In my distress I call to the Lord, and he answered me from deep in the realm of the dead. I called for help.

And you, God, listen to my cry. This is a strange story. You've got this guy praying from the guts of a huge fish. Now, something to keep in mind is that this is probably the first time in a long time that Jonah has had an honest conversation with God. When's the last time you had an honest conversation with the Lord?

See, when you're running away, that's the last thing that you want. You don't want to come clean. You don't want to be transparent before God. So you hide and you hinder. Now why do you think Jonah prayed in the fish? Why would he do that? Well, because. What else are you going to do? Amen. I mean, he had nowhere else to turn.

God is. God has brought him down, down, down, down to the place of desperation. And it's there that this man named Jonah discovers God. And it's when you hit bottom that you finally look up and see that God is a man. Verse five. Then golfing waters threatened me. The deep surrounded me. Seaweed was wrapped around my head when my life was ebbing away.

I remembered you, Lord. Say I remembered you, Lord. I remembered you, Lord. And my prayer rose to you. I will tell you that Jonah hitting bottom, rock bottom like he did, was probably one of the best things that ever happened to him, because it finally brought him back to God. Which brings me to my third talking point, which is that God gives us a second chance.

He gives us a second chance. Hallelujah. Now Jonah has flagrantly disobeyed God. He's done exactly the opposite of everything God has told him to do. He's run from God, and yet God gives him a second chance. I'm not going to stand here today and promise you that if you run from God, if God has an assignment on your life in some form or fashion, God will not necessarily give you a second chance to get it right.

But I believe that he's a gracious God in in all likelihood, he will. And when Jonah cries out to the Lord, God delivers him. This is an odd book. It's an odd story I have to tell you, and what happens next is truly goofy. Verse ten, and the Lord commanded the fish, and it vomited Jonah onto dry land.

Vomited. Oh, this is like a junior high version of this story, right? But even here, I think we can all see the graciousness of God, because, frankly, there was another way he might have exited that fish, if you know what I mean.

Which way would you have chosen?

So we've got the first two chapters basically covered, but the real story begins, I think, in chapters three and four, because in chapter three, God gives this prophet the exact same command that he gave him in chapter one, verse one. In this time Jonah does obey. He does go to Nineveh. He goes to preach. Now the Bible doesn't communicate that he obeyed or preached with any particular enthusiasm.

Obedience is just literal God. God says, Go to Nineveh and preach, and he goes to Nineveh. And he does what God asks. Now this is a big deal. It's a big deal that God would care about Nineveh, because this was a very large and influential and important city. But it so happens that the Ninevites were the arch enemies of the nation of Israel, the dynamite said, and a well-earned reputation for being a particularly cruel and barbaric people.

And their barbarism is not something that we would normally talk about. And I don't have time. But trust my words when I tell you, as I researched this message, that what they did to their enemies was just horrible. And this is the man. This is the city that Jonah is asking Jonah to go and preach to his enemies, to the enemies of Israel, would be like asking a messianic Jew to go and preach to the Nazis in World War Two.

In Berlin, or for a black man to go and preach in the Deep South, in the heart, in the height of the Civil War. But that's what Jonah does. He shows up in a proclaims the message that God gives him. Chapter three, verse four says, 40 more days and Nineveh will be overthrown. This idea of being overthrown, it's the same word in this verse that's used to describe how God treated Sodom and Gomorrah.

Back in Genesis 19, when fire and sulfur rained down from heaven and destroyed those two cities for their wickedness. God says, you've got 40 days to get your act together, or else. And in a surprising plot twist, the people of Nineveh respond to Jonah's preaching. They respond in a big way. A mentor friend of mine, Harold Taggart, who's gone to be with the Lord, told me one time long ago that that the the people of Nineveh worshiped a fish god that was one of their gods.

And so when the word got around the city that this prophet had actually been spewed out of the mouth of a great fish on dry land, they'd got their attention because they worshiped a fish god. And not only that, but if I don't know this for a fact, but if you have spent three days in the gastric juices of a fish, I'm guessing your skin is probably going to be lily white and and maybe have a you might have a very striking appearance.

In any event, they believe Jonah's words from the king on down to every last citizen, and they declare a time of fasting, and they put on sackcloth to show their repentance. In verse ten says, When God saw what they did and how they turned from their evil ways, he relented and did not bring on them the destruction he had threatened.

Well, this is just shocking what God does. He has compassion on them. He he doesn't treat them the way their sin deserves to be treated. Somehow. Now, miraculously, the slate is wiped clean for these undeserving people and Nineveh is saved. It's saved. Listen to me, church. God hates evil and he is not indifferent toward evil. For every evil that's committed in this day, there will be a time of reckoning.

It's not only true for Nineveh, it's true for every single person who has ever sinned. Every person who has turned away from God. A reckoning is coming. Every evil will be accounted for. Every injustice will be answered. But here in Nineveh, marvelously the people repent and turn from their sin. And of course, realize this is hundreds of years before the time of Christ.

And for our sake and for our benefit, God, in his love and his mercy, has sent His Son Jesus, who lived a perfectly sinless life and hung upon that cross, and absorbed the punishment in the judgment that you and I deserve. That is the mercy of God for you and me. Amen. And I'm going to tell you, and you need to listen to me very carefully.

If you're not a Christian today, you are in the very same position that the Ninevites were before they repented. There is a day of judgment coming when we will all stand before the Lord. And don't presume on God's mercy. Don't assume because you're a good and moral and upright person that God is obligated to save you. Well, I'm good.

I'm a good person. I hear a lot. Lot of people say that. You see that? That minimizes your sin and belittles God. If you've been running from God, there is one way and just one way to come back to him, and that's through His Son, Jesus Christ. And so the people of Nineveh, all 120,000 of them, they responded in dramatic fashion to Jonah's probably less than enthusiastic preaching.

And God saved them. Not because they deserved it, not because they earned it, but because his grace is amazing. Can I ask you a personal question? How did you become a Christian? Assuming that you are kin, can you trace your spiritual journey backwards from today? Back to the time you first trusted in Christ? I was fortunate, I was more fortunate than many, I think, because I was born into a Christian home where my mom and dad loved Jesus and shared the gospel with me.

I didn't ask to be born in a Christian home. I know not all of us in the room were born into that circumstance. I didn't ask for my dad to be a preacher, but he was. And so, because I suppose he was a preacher, I. I've been in church all of my life. I mean, starting from six days old was the first time I was in church, and I've rarely missed since then.

And when I was about 12, I responded to the gospel and trusted Christ and was baptized. And there were some of the kids at my friends that were also in the same churches that I'd been in in my childhood. And it wasn't that I was better than them or more moral than them, but they didn't become Christians, and I did.

So I tend to think that my salvation has a lot more to do about God than it does about me. That's just the way it unfolds. God saved me despite myself. Sure, a church, I'll tell you. He really is the God of the second chance. And I would caution you, though, if you've never made that that spiritual journey in your own life to don't presume on the mercy of God, or don't belittle God by saying, well, he has to save you.

He's obligated to save me. But I'll tell you this number four God's mission is unstoppable. His mission is unstoppable. In Jonah three, Jonah receives the word from God to go and preach a message of repentance to the people of Nineveh. The people repent. There's a huge revival, as we've already read. And, this is I tell you, this is one of the great moves of God in human history, this spiritual awakening to these people.

And if this story ended there, if it just stopped right here, it would be so cool, wouldn't that? It would be so great. You know, now, when all of this unfolds, says Jonah, say, man, isn't God good? I mean, he he had mercy on the people of Nineveh. The people who were formerly my enemies are now my friends.

I'm so glad about this. But it doesn't happen that way. In fact, in chapter four, verse one. But to Jonah, this the narrative of repentance seemed very wrong. And he became what? He became angry. Why? Why would he get angry about 120,000 people getting saved? Why? Why is he so unhappy? Isn't it? Isn't this amazing? Because Jonah understands that God's Word is a gift to sinners.

But Jonah wanted no part of that. That's why he ran away. He he had wanted no part of these undeserving sinners receiving God's mercy. And this is what he says. This is his lament to the Lord in verse two, I knew that you are a gracious and compassionate God, slow to anger and abounding in love. A God who relents from sending calamity.

I knew it, Lord. I just knew what would happen. This prophet Jonah, he's just really something. He's been rescued by the mercy of God. His people, Israel, have been rescued by the mercy of God. God chose Israel not because they were special. He chose them because he chose them. That's why. And he's angry at God. He's angry at the whole set up for the people of Nineveh responding the way they did.

Isn't that just amazing? In fact, Jonah is so sick of this that he just wants to die. He doesn't want to live in a world where God just shows indiscriminate mercy toward people who are undeserving.

I wonder if his ten temper tantrum resonates with anybody in this room. And in a congregation like this, I think it's quite likely that at least some of us, if not all of us in our past 12 people, have had people in our lives who would have angered us, people that we have envied, people maybe, who have wounded us, maybe those that we have looked down on.

I mean, this becomes personal for all of us, I think. Is there is there someone that you're prejudiced against regarding the gospel? Is there a people group maybe that you really think are undeserving of God's mercy, or is there an individual who has cheated you, or maybe betrayed you, and you just cannot bring yourself to love that person.

You just don't find it in your heart? If so, how do you think God views them? Do you think that God doesn't care about their eternal soul because you don't care about their eternal soul? Is there someone in your mind that you think is less deserving of the Lord's love and grace and mercy than you are? I came across this little poem.

It's just a short one. I'll read it for you. It's apropos. I believe. I dreamed death came to me. One night in heaven's gates flew open wide with kindly grace. Saint Peter came and ushered me inside. There, to my astonishment, were people I had known on earth. Some I had labeled as unfit. In some of little worth indignant words flew to my lips.

Words I could not set free. For every face showed stunned surprise. No one expected me.

Jonah expected that his enemies should be God's enemies to. But they weren't. And he wanted to die because he couldn't stomach the thought of God's mercy being extended to a people group that he could not have cared less about. I think Jonah got to this place in his life because he had lost sight of the goodness of God and the glory of God, because Jonah's worldview had become oriented around himself rather than around God, Jonah came to the point of believing in his life that the universe and God existed for him, and for his family and for his nation, and that was it.

He had never yielded himself to what God would want to do with anyone else. And consequently, he became very judgmental because let me tell you how you become judgmental. It's by being a good person who never surrenders to what God would want to do in the lives of people who are not, quote unquote, as good as you are.

You become judgmental by being a good person on your own, but having no compassion on those who are less than you. Are you forget that God has showered his mercy and his grace and his favor on you, as undeserving as you might be. You are not sitting in a church service today because you're so wonderful. Did you know that you turned your neighbor and say, you're not so great?

In case you didn't know, just tell your neighbor that.

You are not here today because you are just too cool for school.

In this story, I'm. I'm struck by how the biggest obstacle to Nineveh repenting was not even of his own sin. God was ready to forgive them. No, the greatest obstacle was Jonah's sin. His unwillingness to go, his unwillingness to portray God's favor to those people that he didn't care for. And and I have to tell you, if we're going to be honest this morning, and why should we be less than honest?

I feel so many times in this. I know that God is gracious and compassionate. I'm glad he's been gracious and compassionate on me, but I have to remind myself that this God of ours wants to be the very same for every last person on the planet, for every life, for the people. You can't stand. You know, he's like Jonah said, God, I knew, I knew the kind of God you are.

I know you're gracious and compassionate. I know you're slow to anger. I know you're abundant. I knew all that, Lord. That's why I didn't want to go, because I knew exactly what would happen. And doggone it, that's what happened. So today, as I get ready to land the plane, I want you to think about someone or someone's in your own life who might be, at this moment, far from God.

It could be a family member. It could be a former friend. It could be a coworker, a neighbor. I don't know someone who has hurt you. Perhaps someone who has betrayed you could be an ex spouse. Did you know that God actually wants to be compassionate toward that person? That he actually wants to extend mercy to that individual?

Let's not run from the reality of what God wants to do in their lives. Let's declare in whatever way we can that he is good and gracious and compassionate, because that's the kind of God that he is. If you've experienced it, then for heaven's sake, you should want everyone to experience that as well, no matter who they might be.

And all the people said, let's bow for prayer. I'll ask the ushers to prepare right now for the Lord's Supper.

Let me, as we just have this private moment right now, let me just say to those of you, to anyone here who has never truly, if you're online right now or if you're in the room right now, if you've never truly trusted in Christ, oh, my friend, God pleads with you for salvation. He he earnestly wants you to come to Christ to trust in His Son.

Let today be the day of your salvation. There will be some prayer folks at the front of the room after the service concludes, and they would love to have a conversation with you about what it means to accept Jesus father in heaven. I pray now that you might cover us, that you might bless us, that you might open our eyes to see this world as you see this world, that we might help others to see you as you reveal yourself in your Word and through your Son Jesus.

And I pray this in his name. And all God's people said

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