

An Encouraging Word From Dr. Tim Watson
Series: The God of a Second Chance- A Study in Jonah
"You Can't Keep A Good Man Down"

The pages of history are filled with stories of men and women who have been down and out, and made a comeback. There's something about human nature that likes a story where someone has experienced adversity and setbacks, and yet they made a comeback from that difficulty that may be of their own making, or it may be the circumstances of life. It may be the story of Abraham Lincoln, who was born in extreme poverty, who suffered all of his life with manic depression, and he had his share of political setbacks, and yet he became the 16th president of the United States.

We like comeback stories. Think about the story of Sylvester Stallone's character, Rocky Balboa. Think about Rocky in all the different Rocky movies, and how he always made a comeback. When it comes to people in the Bible, the eighth-century prophet and preacher Jonah lives on in history to illustrate the truth, you cannot keep a good man down. Jonah's story is a great one, because it is a story of a man who disobeyed God, but made a comeback.

Steven Spielberg, the great film director, could turn Jonah's story into a blockbuster film and he could say, "This movie is based on a true story," because Jonah's story is a true story. It's a story that illustrates the truth, you cannot keep a good man down.

Look in your Bible this morning to Jonah 2:1-10, and we will also read into Jonah 3:1. We are continuing in our series of messages from the Old Testament Book of Jonah entitled "**The God of a Second Chance.**"

Perhaps you come this morning needing a second chance, a fresh start, a new beginning in your life. You've come to the right place. The God of the universe, who gave Jonah a second chance, is willing to give you a second chance as well. Our message this morning is entitled "**You Cannot Keep a Good Man Down.**"

The Book of Jonah was written between 782 and 745 BC. Jonah was living in the northern kingdom of Israel, not far from Joppa. Joppa is near the modern-day city of Tel Aviv, Israel. God told Jonah, a prophet, a preacher, to go to the Assyrian Empire, specifically to the city of Nineveh, and tell the people of Nineveh that God loved them, and if they would turn from their evil and wicked ways, God would spare their lives. Nineveh was hundreds of miles from the northern kingdom of Israel where Jonah, this prophet lived. Nineveh is about 300 miles north of Baghdad in the modern country of Iraq.

Did you know the story of Jonah is in the Quran? Did you know that Jonah is viewed as a good prophet by the Muslims? Jonah did not want to go and preach God's message of love to the people of Nineveh because the Assyrians had been enemies of the Israelites, the people to whom Jonah belonged. Instead of obeying God and going to Nineveh, Jonah got on a boat at Joppa, near the modern-day city of Tel Aviv, and he headed for Tarshish, near the modern-day country of Spain.

As Jonah was on this boat out in the middle of the Mediterranean Sea running from God, a horrific storm struck the ship upon which Jonah was a passenger. Jonah and the sailors on this ship were about to drown. In Jonah 1, the Bible tells us the sailors on this ship knew something was wrong. They realized that a passenger on the ship was the cause of this terrible storm. They drew lots, similar to rolling dice.

The lots pointed to Jonah as being the guilty party. When they confronted Jonah, he admitted it was his fault that the storm was about to sink their ship. And they said, "Jonah, what are we going to do with you?" And Jonah replied, "Throw me overboard." And when they threw Jonah overboard, Jonah 1:15 that we looked at last week says an incredible thing occurred. The raging sea grew calm.

That was good news for the sailors on the ship. But on the other hand, it was bad news for our prophet, Jonah. After Jonah was

thrown into the sea, the very last verse of Jonah 1 says this: *The Lord commissioned, literally the Lord provided, a great fish to swallow Jonah, and Jonah was inside the fish for three days and for three nights.* Jonah 1:17

Let's begin reading this morning Jonah 2, beginning at verse one.

1 "From inside the, the fish, Jonah prayed to the Lord his God. 2 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. 3 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.' 4 I said, 'I have been banished from your sight, yet I will look again toward your holy temple.' 5 The engulfing waters threatened me. The deep surrounded me. Seaweed was wrapped around my head. 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, oh Lord, my God. 7 When my life was ebbing away, I remembered you, Lord, and my prayer arose to you, to your holy temple. 8 Those who cling to worthless idols forfeit the grace that could be theirs, 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."10 And the Lord commanded the fish, and it vomited Jonah onto dry land.

And then Jonah 3:1 says, "Then the Word of the Lord came to Jonah a second time." You may come to this service and it may be that you're going through a difficult time. This is a down time for you. All of us experience times when we feel as if we are in the belly of a fish and we are trapped. And we may be in the belly of that fish because we're like Jonah, we have made some poor choices and poor decisions.

Even though Jonah had made some bad choices, while he was in the belly of that large fish, there were some valuable lessons that he learned. It took Jonah three days and three nights to learn those lessons, but what I admire about Jonah, is that although he was

down, you could not keep him down. You can't keep a good man down. One of the main lessons Jonah learned while he was in that black hole, was that he could still pray.

He could still talk to God. He could still communicate with his Heavenly Father. The main lesson I would like you to see from scripture this morning is this:

I. When you are down, you can look up to God in prayer. There are some important questions for us to ask at this point. Here are some questions to consider:

Question Number One:

a.) When did Jonah pray? At many of our churches, we have beautiful places for which to pray: A sanctuary, a chapel, a prayer room, a prayer garden.

Jonah's prayer room was quite different. It was smelly, dark, damp, dingy. It was the belly of a fish in constant motion. Jonah was experiencing the most difficult time in his life, and he called out to the Lord from his prayer room, which was inside the large fish. The question is this: **When did Jonah pray?** We get the answer in Jonah 2:1-2. The Bible says 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." **Jonah prayed when he was in distress.** Jonah prayed when he was in a desperate situation. Isn't it amazing that so many of us are like Jonah? We wait until we are in a fish's belly. We wait until we are in a crisis or a distressing situation, and almost as a last resort, we call out to our god. But aren't you thankful for that part of verse two, where the Bible says Jonah prayed, and this is what he prayed: "In my distress, I called to the Lord, and the Lord answered me."

Here's a lesson for us to learn this morning:

When we are down, we can always look up to God in prayer. Aren't you thankful that regardless of what you're going through,

regardless of how you may have messed up, regardless of how you may have been running from God, you can always call out to Him for help? Jonah says, "In my distress, I called to the Lord, and he answered me." Jonah's experience is a proclamation of hope. Jonah cried out in his distress and found deliverance, and so can we.

The first step in getting out of that pit, the first step in getting out of the fish's belly is to call out to God, to pray. So the first question is this: **When did Jonah pray?** Here's the answer. **When he was in a desperate situation.**

Question Number Two:

b.)To whom did he pray? Even though Jonah had rebelled, he was in a covenant relationship with God. **So here's the answer. Jonah prayed to his personal God.**

It was his God to whom he prayed. Notice in verse 1, it says, "From inside the fish, Jonah prayed to the Lord, his God." So here's the question: **To whom did Jonah pray? Here's the answer: He prayed to his own personal God.**

I am thankful that many years ago, when I was a nine-year-old boy, I entered into a covenant relationship with God through his son Jesus Christ. I did not earn this relationship nor did I deserve it.

I simply accepted the free gift of eternal life, and Jesus came into my life, and I'm happy to say, today, he is my God. I must confess to you that I have had times in my life when I have been out of God's will. I have been running from God's plan for my life. I have had those times when I have not been obedient to my Lord. But I am so thankful that even though I have done things that have disappointed God and even broken his heart, **He has never stopped being my God!**

I may have forsaken Him, but God has never forsaken me. I may have failed Him, but God has never failed me once. Even though there have been times when there has been broken fellowship with

God, there's never been a broken relationship. God has always been there for me.

Let me give you an illustration. If you are a parent, you have a relationship with your children, but there are times when you don't feel there's much fellowship.

In other words, the relationship is there, but the fellowship is not close, it's not intimate. And there are times when our fellowship with God is not what it ought to be, but the relationship is always there. As disobedient as Jonah was, as much as he had gone in the opposite direction of God's will for his life, he still realized that the God of Israel was his God.

Maybe you have been going your own way. You have left God's will, and you've been battered by the storms of life. Maybe you have experienced a dark time in your life. There is good news for you. If you are God's child, He is still your Father. Jonah prayed to the Lord his God, and so can you. When you are down, you can look up to God in prayer. That's what Jonah did. And when did Jonah pray? He prayed when he was in a desperate situation. To whom did he pray? He prayed to his own personal God.

Question Number Three:

c.) What did Jonah pray? What was the content of his prayer to his God inside the belly of that large fish? In studying Jonah's prayer, we make a remarkable discovery. Jonah did not use one original thought or one original request in this prayer to God. What did Jonah do? **Here's the answer. Jonah prayed the word of God.**

What did Jonah pray? He prayed the word of God eight times in these few verses in Jonah 2, he quoted from the book of Psalms. For instance, in Jonah 2:2, Jonah 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." That is Jonah 2:2. Where did Jonah get this thought? Listen carefully to Psalm 18:6. The Psalmist says, "In my distress, I called to the Lord. I cried to my God for help. From

His temple, He heard my voice. My cry came before Him into his ears. " That's Psalm 18:6.

Listen to Psalm 120:1, "I call on the Lord in my distress, and God answers me." Listen to Psalm 86:13, "For great is your love toward me. You have delivered my soul from the depths of the grave." The point is, Jonah knew the word of God. Do you see what is happening in this prayer? Jonah is standing on the promises of God, and he is praying the scriptures.

Jonah went on in his prayer inside the belly of that large fish to say, in Jonah 2:3, "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." That is Jonah 2:3. Where did Jonah get that thought? Compare it to Psalm 42:7. The Psalmist says, "Deep calls to deep in the roar of your waterfalls. All your waves and breakers have swept over me." Do you see it?

Jonah knew the word of God, and he was simply praying scriptures that he had memorized as a young Jewish boy. He didn't have a Bible with him, he didn't have a copy of the scriptures, but in his distress, in the belly of that large fish, he was reminding God of the many promises of scripture. This entire second chapter, verse by verse, goes back to scriptures that he had memorized as a young man.

What if you were put in a situation where you had to fall back on scriptures and Bible verses you had memorized? How would you do? What would you remember? What if you lost your eyesight? What if you lost your hearing? Would you be able to stand on God's promises that you had memorized and hidden in your heart?

I will always remember the Bible verses I learned as a child in vacation Bible school.

For example, "I pledge allegiance to the Bible, God's holy word. I will make it a lamp unto my feet and a light unto my path. I will hide

God's word in my heart that I may not sin against him." That is Psalm 119:11 and Psalm 119:105. Jonah hid God's word in his heart, and when he needed God's word most, when he needed to access God's word when he was down and distressed, in his darkest hour, God's word was there.

Praying the scriptures is a marvelous way to make our petitions to God. Whether you're going through a good time or a difficult time, I want to encourage you to use scriptures, the Bible, to guide your prayer time. The gifted Bible teacher Beth Moore has a book entitled Praying God's Word. It is an excellent book.

You may think, "What do you mean, praying God's word? How do I do that?" Let me give you some examples.

* As parents, we should be praying scriptures over our children and our grandchildren every day. Ephesians 1:17 says this, "God, give them the spirit of wisdom and revelation, so that they may know Jesus Christ better." That's praying the scripture.

* We should pray for our friends and our relationships. Ephesians 3:16, "I pray that out of his glorious riches, he may strengthen you with power through his spirit in your inner being."

* As we pray for our missionaries, we ought to pray Psalm 91:1, "He who dwells in the shelter of the most high God will rest in the shadow of the Almighty." Pray using God's word as your guide.

Pray the Scriptures! Are you burdened this morning? Do you have anxiety? Jesus says, "Come to me, all who are weary and heavy laden, and I will give you rest," in Matthew 11:28.

Are you worried today? **Pray the scriptures.** Cast all your anxieties upon the Lord, because God cares for you, according to Peter 5:7. Are you lonely today? **Pray the scriptures.** Jesus is quoted as saying in Hebrews 13:5, "I will never leave you nor forsake you."

Are you afraid today? Is there something that's making you fearful? **Pray the scriptures.** God says, "Do not fear, for I am with you. Do

not look anxiously about you, for I am your God. I will strengthen you. Surely I will help you. Surely I will uphold you with my righteous right hand." Isaiah 41:10. Are you worried about God meeting your daily needs? **Pray the scriptures.** "And my God shall supply all of your needs according to his riches in glory in Christ Jesus." Philippians 4:19.

Are you in need of forgiveness today? **Pray the scriptures.** If we confess our sins, God is faithful and just to forgive us of our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness, I John 1:9. Are you in need of a relationship with Jesus Christ? Romans 10:9 says this, "If you confess with your mouth Jesus is Lord, and believe in your heart God raised him from the dead, you shall be saved." Are you in need of a relationship with Christ? Romans 10:13 says, "Whoever calls upon the name of the Lord will be saved." The blessings of God come through obedience to God.

Jonah had God's word in his heart all along, but he wasn't willing to obey it. The same applies to us. We can have God's word in our hearts, we can know what it says, and still choose not to obey it. But as soon as Jonah got back into God's will, he was released, he was set from the bonds that had enslaved him. Jonah 2:10, the last verse of this second chapter says that the Lord then commanded this large fish to spit, literally to vomit Jonah back onto dry land.

And then, the next verse in Jonah 3:1 says, "*And then the word of the Lord came to Jonah a second time.*" You can't keep a good man down. You can't keep a good man, a good woman, a good teenager, a good child down, because they will pray to the God of the universe in their distress and God will hear their prayers.